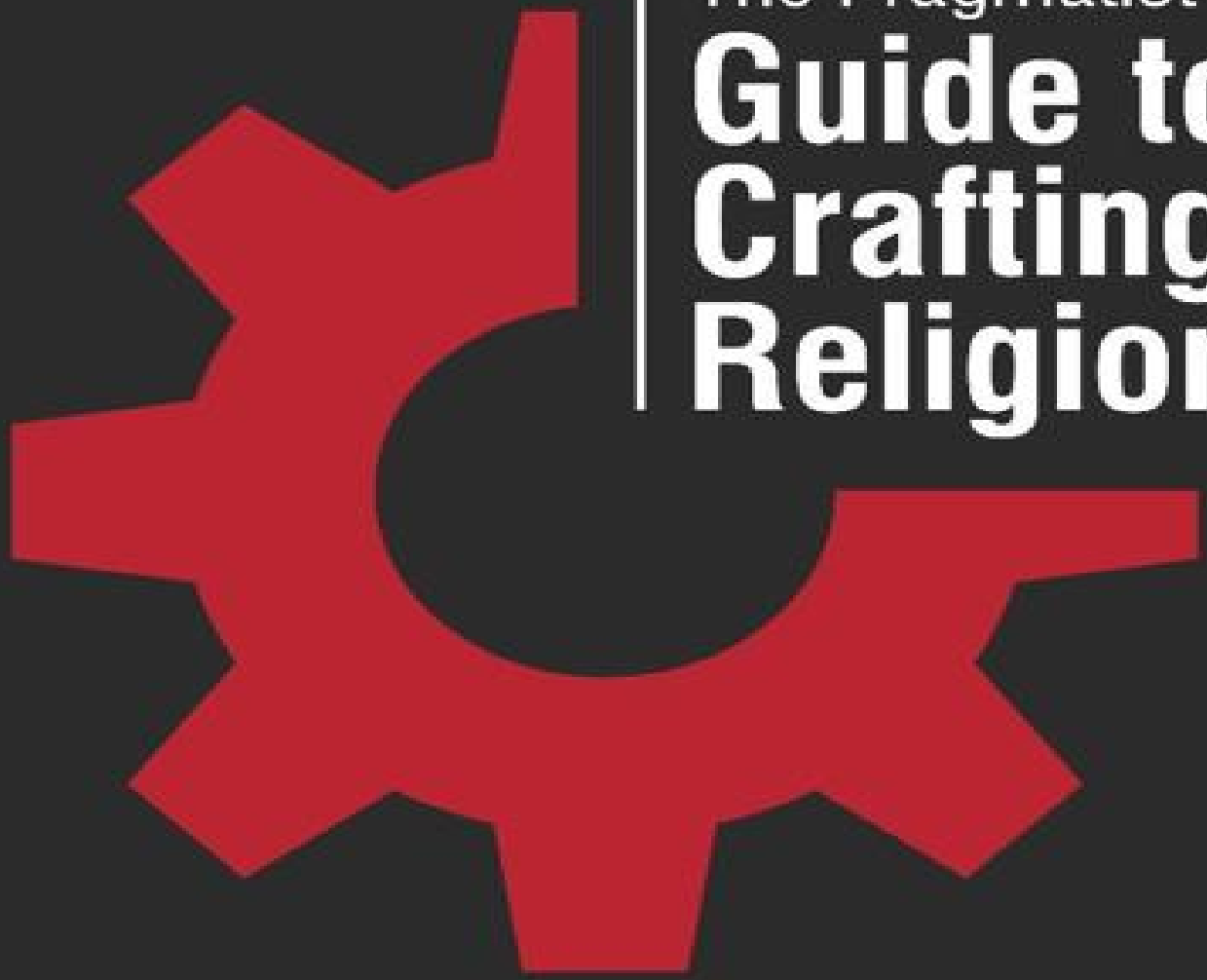

The Pragmatist's Guide to Crafting Religion

A playbook for sculpting cultures
that overcome demographic collapse &
facilitate long-term human flourishing

Simone & Malcolm Collins

THE PRAGMATIST'S GUIDE TO CRAFTING RELIGION

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A PLAYBOOK FOR SCULPTING CULTURES THAT OVERCOME DEMOGRAPHIC COLLAPSE & FACILITATE LONG-TERM HUMAN FLOURISHING

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Special Thanks to Our Most Impactful Editors:

Lillian Tara

Ben Hoffman

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PREFACE

This book is dedicated to “radiant beings who shall succeed us on the earth.”

As Winwood Reade wrote in 1872:

> “You blessed ones who shall inherit that future age of which we can only dream; you pure and radiant beings who shall succeed us on the earth; when you turn back your eyes on us poor savages, grubbing in the ground for our daily bread, eating flesh and blood, dwelling in vile bodies which degrade us every day to a level with the beasts, tortured by pains, and by animal propensities, buried in gloomy superstitions, ignorant of Nature which yet holds us in her bonds; when you read of us in books, when you think of what we are, and compare us with yourselves, remember that it is to us you owe the foundation of your happiness and grandeur, to us who now in our libraries and laboratories and star-towers and dissecting-rooms and work-shops are preparing the materials of the human growth. And as for ourselves, if we are sometimes inclined to regret that our lot is cast in these unhappy days, let us remember how much more fortunate we are than those who lived before us a few centuries ago. The working man enjoys more luxuries to-day than did the King of England in the Anglo-Saxon times; and at his command are intellectual delights, which but a little while ago the most learned in the land could not obtain. All this we owe to the labors of other men. Let us therefore remember them with gratitude;

let us follow their glorious example by adding something new to the knowledge of mankind; let us pay to the future the debt which we owe to the past.

All men indeed cannot be poets, inventors, or philanthropists; but all men can join in that gigantic and god-like work, the progress of creation. Whoever improves his own nature improves the universe of which he is a part. He who strives to subdue his evil passions—vile remnants of the old four-footed life—and who cultivates the social affections: he who endeavors to better his condition, and to make his children wiser and happier than himself; whatever may be his motives, he will not have lived in vain.”

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WARNING

This book will be wildly offensive to most people.

At its core, *The Pragmatist's Guide to Crafting Religion* is a meditation on how we can intentionally construct a culture/religion that will be "evolutionarily successful" and spread. Within it, you will find a heavily annotated playbook for constructing a cultural/religious framework optimized to preserve (rather than erase) the individual traditions, values, and worldviews of those who join while maximizing autonomy and individual efficacy. We will be completely transparent as to the motivation behind every decision made in its fabrication.

This book is written from a secular perspective to be relevant and useful to those who want to build a family culture that is intergenerationally durable. That said, the tools and tactics described in the coming pages can be used with equal alacrity to strengthen and reinforce an existing religious framework.

In this book we make generalizations about cultural and religious groups, as it is impossible to write a book on culture and religion without doing so. We also take a strong pronatalist perspective because outside of cases of conquest or conversion, most of the time when a culture "wins" over other cultures, it prevails by producing more kids who remain within that culture. If this is not what you were looking for when buying the book, please email us (at Hello@Pragmatist.Guide) and ask for a refund. Regardless, all proceeds from this series go to the Pragmatist Foundation, a nonprofit

which is presently focused on building a better form of secondary school (middle school and high school).

Finally, unlike our other books, *The Pragmatist's Guide to Crafting Religion* is intended to be read in order and will explicitly signal when a section or chapter is safe to skip. This book gives readers a choice between three reading experiences: If you want the most compressed experience, skip chapters marked as skippable. For the normal experience, read the book and stop at the Appendix. For the "extended cut," skip forward to read each of the Appendix chapters as they are referenced in the book.

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CULTURE AS AN EVOLUTIONARY TOOL

Culture is the means by which complex behaviors—behaviors that cannot be easily encoded into biological instinct—"evolve." This is what makes cultural memes[1] fundamentally distinct from memes in general: While general memetic sets replicate primarily by using a host to infect other hosts with said meme, cultural and religious memetic sets primarily spread by influencing the fitness of any given host (by fitness, we mean genetic fitness—the number of surviving offspring—not the quality of life of those offspring).[2]

Because culture can affect a person's number of surviving offspring, traditional evolution (not just memetic evolution) shapes culture. This interplay allows complex behavior patterns to emerge among groups of people well before those behavioral instincts might otherwise biologically evolve (consider that ritual Islamic hand washing evolved long before medical science understood the advantage of this behavior).[3]

A culture can be thought of as ever-evolving software that sits on top of—and synergistically interacts with—both biological hardware and firmware, addressing flaws our biology hasn't had sufficient evolutionary time to address. To go further with this analogy: Biological evolution provides some basic coding, much like a low-level programming language might for a given hardware, whereas cultural evolution manipulates the high-level, object-oriented code that lets us program highly nuanced behaviors.

We can illustrate this dynamic with a colorful example: In *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality*, we explore copious evidence that humans almost certainly evolved to, by default, create polygynous (one man, many women) cultures (though not necessarily relationships).[4] However, above certain population thresholds, monogamous cultures outcompete their polygynous counterparts, likely because monogamy produces measurably lower rates of cheating, rape, murder, terrorism, corruption, and other anti-social behaviors instigated by high rates of unattached males—an inevitable byproduct of polygynous cultures.[5]

While 83%[6] of individual human cultures are polygynous,[7] nearly all of today's *most dominant* cultures are monogamous, thanks to the historic competitive edge granted by this practice. By reducing societal ills, such as terrorism and corruption (via lower population percentages of unattached men), cultures practicing monogamy have the upper hand when spreading and conquering neighbors.

Rather than taking the evolutionary time needed for human biological predilections to evolve toward structuring societies monogamously by default, cultures that effectively enforced monogamy quickly outcompeted their rivals. This is what we mean when we say that culture supplements biologically evolved elements of human consciousness by accelerating the evolution of cognitive proclivities beyond the capacity of pure evolutionary pressure on genes.

It fascinates us how quickly people cast out aspects of their traditional cultures without understanding why those elements evolved. Many throw out the "hard stuff" in their cultures, such as fasting and arbitrary self-denial, without understanding those cultural practices evolved both for general health reasons and to strengthen the individual's inhibitory pathways in their prefrontal cortex. Consider that strengthened inhibitory pathways likely offer some protection against intrusive thoughts and, as a result, lower rates of anxiety and depression.[8]

Almost every common cultural practice exists because it increases the fitness of cultures that practice it. Keep in mind that **fitness is morally blind**. Sometimes, measures taken to increase fitness are highly *immoral*. Sometimes, increasing fitness means lowering rates of depression with

seemingly arbitrary rules. Other times, maximizing fitness means forcing gay people to pretend to be straight or be killed because socially accepting same-sex couplings has historically lowered birth rates.[9]

This is not one of those books that assumes "natural" or "traditional" things to be better or somehow inherently good. As we demonstrate in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality*, humans almost certainly have a proclivity toward infanticide of stepchildren. The fact that humans have evolved certain cultural or biological instincts doesn't mean we should encourage those behaviors.

We, nevertheless, choose to inhabit a world of pragmatic truth. The human brain evolved to work within a strict cultural framework. Our brains and cultural/religious mechanisms co-evolved to work together. Operating our brains in a cultural/religious vacuum is like trying to run a machine without any grease—it will start fritzing and fall to pieces at a much faster rate. When individuals cast off their ancestral cultural/religious frameworks or make up new ones out of whole cloth without carefully investigating the instrumental roles cultural practices play, is it any surprise that they find themselves barely holding it together mentally by their mid-30s while desperately searching for community and purpose? Instead of taking the winding road to their destination, they decided to just beeline their car (brain) straight through muddy fields and, in the process, damage their car.

Because it is endlessly annoying to keep referring to both culture *and* religion, we will call specific cultural-religious memetic packages "cultivars." We chose this word for its colloquial definition as well as its etymology (cult+variation), with "cult" originally non-judgmentally referring to care, worship, culture, and reverence (it is where our word "cultivate" comes from). Honestly, we'd prefer to call this book *The Pragmatist's Guide to Crafting Cultivars*, but as our use of the word is not yet pervasive, "religion" must be our public-facing shorthand for "an intergenerational culture and worldview."

The Pragmatist's Guide to Crafting Religion is focused on a fun experiment: Can we craft the perfect cultivar?

This is a selfishly motivated experiment. We want to create a powerful culture for the benefit of our children and the growing tribe of "Pragmatists" who read our books. With the framework we present, you, too, should be able to join us and attempt to create your own lasting culture. It might be a few centuries before we see the results of this experiment, but we genuinely believe that failure could lead to the death of our species and eventually all life (we know, it's dramatic—more on that shortly).

Exploring cultivar differences and how they affect adherents' life choices in an effort to develop a culture that ultimately persists through millennia is like studying comparative evolution while spending a good deal of time trying to create the ultimate evolutionarily competitive organism that may also do some benefit to civilization. (Think: An organism that can terraform other planets.)

In short, it's really fun.

This brings us to what will likely be one of the most unique elements of this book: While other people have written extensively on cultural and memetic evolution, to our knowledge, they almost all have an intensely antagonistic perspective toward religions in general—and especially toward stricter, more "conservative" religions. This deeply clouds their perspective on the wider civilizational game at play.

We hold a deep admiration for the lives led by adherents of many stricter religious traditions, from members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (i.e., Mormons) to Evangelical Protestants and Anabaptists.[10] It may seem odd to encounter people like us—affiliated with the Effective Altruism and transhumanist movements—speak with greater reverence for Amish culture than their own. Still, despite the above cultures' faults, they are out-competing our own at the evolutionary and civilizational level, not just in terms of birth rate but also in surprising realms like mental health.[11] To dismiss these groups' competitive advantages requires blinding arrogance.

Throughout history, as humans developed social environments we had not *biologically* evolved to handle (such as early cities). Through the selective pressures on cultivars, we evolved social technologies that permitted relatively rapid adaptation. Unfortunately, from the internet to megacities,

the rate of change humans encounter today has become so rapid and momentous that even social evolution may not have time to act before permanent damage is inflicted. We may have reached a point in human history at which we must intentionally engineer cultural solutions to ensure a prosperous future for our species. To do so, we must understand why cultures evolved the way they did.

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What Motivated Us to Craft a Novel Culture for Our Kids

If a culture has a low birth rate—no matter how good it is at converting people—it will either eventually use up the existing supply of non-adherents or become parasitic, essentially using other cultures as breeding pits of livestock from which it expects to harvest members to keep its Goa'uld-like subculture alive.

We could be *just amoral enough* to sympathize with this cultural strategy, if not for the fact that the few cultures that still have a high birth rate are seeing that rate fall. Vampires might be sexy and cool when they are in the minority, but we are well past that stage and will soon be entering one in which, bereft of life to suck from the world, vampires will turn on each other.

Birth rates are falling much faster than many dominant societal narratives imply. The global fertility rate for all of Latin America and the Caribbean fell below replacement rate (2.1 babies per woman) in 2021.[12] India will achieve that status in 2022.[13] China is expected to be at half its current population by 2066.[14] First-generation immigrants in the U.S. fell below repopulation rate in 2019.[15] Already 115 countries, representing about half the world's population, are below replacement rate. By the end of the century, nearly every African country is projected to have a rapidly declining population.[16]

Even strict religious fundamentalism does not protect against this decline. “Between the 1980s and the 2010s Iranian women reduced the rate at which they had children from 6.5 to 2.5, faster than the pace of the one child policy in China”[17]

In 2021, the Mormon population in Utah almost fell below replacement rate.[18] This is not a “canary in the coal mine” moment; we’ve reached the metaphorical point at which miners’ skin is bubbling and sloughing off—all while many claim this dramatic drop is a “minor inconvenience.”

People don’t seem to “get” how quickly this effect will be felt. South Korea has a birth rate of 0.81.[19] For every 100 South Korean great-grandparents,

there will be 6.6 great-grandkids (at the 0.7 fertility rate predicted in South Korea by 2024, this amounts to 4.3 great-grandkids.).[20] Imagine if we knew a disease would kill 94% of South Koreans in the next century. We are not far from Korea's present predicament, as recently as the mid-90s, South Korea had a birth rate close to the present birth rate in the U.S. (1.7 in 2022). (For information on why this is happening, see: "Why Are Birth Rates Falling?" in the Appendix.)

Many media narratives suggesting demographic collapse is not a big deal point to unexpected spikes in birth rates, distracting from the larger picture. For example, there was a slight uptick in birth rates for one year during the pandemic in the U.S. While conservative press made a big deal about this, the phenomenon was illusory and irrelevant from a statistical perspective.[21]

Across the world we see a similar phenomenon: Countries explode in population as resources expand, then drop off (and begin to collapse) once citizens gain wealth and adopt greater gender equality. While many countries have yet to reach this crescendo, most are well on their way—and we *want* them to be. Gender-egalitarian societies with low levels of poverty are *awesome*.

Imagine someone arguing in favor of female disempowerment and poverty for a nation just so we can rely on it for a steady supply of human capital. Horrible!

On a societal level, we must figure out how to have our cake and eat it too. We believe it is possible for a society to maintain a stable population, empower women, *and* keep poverty low. The catch is that nobody has successfully achieved this.[22] That's a big deal because our entire economic system—heck, our entire *civilization*—runs on the assumption of aggregate growth.

> The economy = productivity per worker × number of workers

Historically, both productivity per worker and the number of workers have increased. Stocks have consistently increased over time, in aggregate, because these two factors have consistently increased.[23]

We can no longer take these increases for granted. While productivity per person only increases linearly,[24] most of the developed world is about to see populations decrease at exponential rates (this is an inevitability when places like the EU have a fertility rate of 1.5). When this happens, the stock market, on average, will begin to shrink. When that happens, people will stop putting their money there—we will stop investing in the future.[25] The civilization we have built is about to undergo a massive and permanent change. The world in which our grandkids will grow up will not resemble our own.

As our stock in the world has risen, so has our pessimism. We don't think anyone can stop what is coming. Through our privileged educational backgrounds at Stanford's Graduate School of Business and Cambridge, we have seen what society's "best of the best" are doing. This is also in conjunction with our work in venture capital and private equity, Simone's year-long stint as Managing Director at Dialog (a secret society founded by Peter Thiel with membership limited to the best-in-class players from any given field), and work as consultants helping high-profile organizations like Schmidt Futures build their own invitation-only societies for leaders across the private and public sectors. There is no secret back-up plan among the elites.[26]

We no longer believe that it is possible to avert most of the severe economic, governmental, and social consequences associated with a "hard landing" from population collapse. However, we offer one caveat: Artificial intelligence may act as a literal Deus ex machina. If AI does sweep in to save the day, the nature of society will change dramatically. See our exploration of AI Apocalypticism for more detail on possible implications.

Fortunately, humanity's present quagmire presents opportunity and a path for further consolidation of power by groups that think like us—the new Sea Peoples. Rapidly dropping birth rates among the increasingly sterile and decaying "elite" circles in our society mean anyone who can craft a self-sustaining new cultivar that produces competent, highly educated, technophilic individuals gets the chance to write the future of human civilization.

A population collapse will produce a systems-level collapse of today's dominant civilization. This means cultivars crafted to survive this period must be able to withstand hard times, though perhaps not the sorts of "hard times" you're presently envisioning. When presented with the concept of "civilizational collapse," people often visualize society descending into a Road-Warrior-like dystopia, when in reality, it is rarely very obvious to people on the ground when a civilization collapses, be it Rome, the Mayan civilization, or our own (to an average person in Roman Gaul during the collapse of the Western Empire, the change would have been only lightly perceptible in their daily routines—a certain food becomes impossible to find, certain roads become more dangerous to travel, etc.).

Civilizational collapses appear more like:

- An exodus of the elite from major population centers
- A rapid decline in infrastructure quality in densely populated areas
- A breakdown of supply chains (e.g., some stuff you used to be able to get at grocery stores permanently disappears from the shelves)
- Growing hostility toward ideas that deviate from orthodoxy

Our society relies heavily on one presumed truth: That the wealth of the world will always grow. Cities and countries fob off huge amounts of their payroll to the next generation through unfunded pension programs and debt with the presumption that said generation will have more money than they did. What if the next generation doesn't? Debt payments and pension spending will assume a larger portion of the money needed to keep things running.

This isn't exclusively happening at the level of cities. We saddle every level of the economic system, from our land to businesses, states, and nations, with debt. We have essentially leveraged our entire civilization. This provides enormous wealth in times of population growth, but …

Imagine that 50% of a city's budget goes to pensions, social security-like programs, and debt payments (this was the case in Detroit[27])[28]. This is fine if the population grows by half, as that 50% of the budget becomes 33% and is quite manageable. But what if the tax base shrinks? If the city's population and tax base shrink by just 30%, its usable money does not

decrease by 30% but rather by 60%. If the tax base were to shrink by 40%, the usable portion of the city's budget would drop to 10%. This is not unrealistic when you consider that in New York City, just the wealthiest 38,700 residents, 0.5% of the city's population, pay 42.5% of taxes.

Ironically, progressive tax policy, which has led to the elite paying most of the taxes, has turned cities into business units that need to primarily serve the needs of the ultra-elite, or risk losing their primary funding sources and going bankrupt as a result. In a post-COVID world, where remote work is a possibility, the value proposition of cities to the ultra-elite is quickly eroding.

As cities try to operate on smaller portions of their budgets, they will become less attractive places to live, further reducing the proportion of wealthy people who want to live in them (who pay the majority of taxes). As expenditures like police budgets are cut, wealthy people leave cities.[29] As fewer wealthy people opt to live in cities, we'll see a snowball effect of worsening conditions for those who remain economically trapped in urban areas.

The above scenario is largely what happened in Detroit (with a 60% population drop over the last half-century). While the headwinds that led to the population collapse were different, Detroit presents a sobering case study demonstrating how our existing infrastructure starts to break when a tax base rapidly disappears. (See: "Detroit as a Model for Collapse" in the Appendix for more detail.)

Suffice to say when a population starts declining, it does not mean everyone gets to live in bigger, shinier apartments. As population declines, real estate values plummet. Plummeting real estate values drive people to stop investing in building maintenance, causing homes and buildings to rot and fall apart, leading to an endless sea of urban blight.

What about increased lifespan? That should offset things, right? Increased lifespans might help if they were actually increasing. In practice, some developed countries like the USA have actually seen lifespans contract over the last half decade or so.[30] Even when lifespans were growing, they did so linearly (recall that fertility is declining *exponentially*).

Outside of a dark horse artificial intelligence changing the game, the future described above is inevitable at this point. It is too late to *not* hit this iceberg. All that is left for us to do is ensure future generations get on a lifeboat. This book aims to give our kids a fighting chance while acting as a signal light to like-minded families.

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Humanity's Genetic Shift

When a person gets severe radiation poisoning, some time passes before they feel the adverse effects. Their DNA has functionally been scrambled; their cells can't divide; the person is dead—they just don't know it yet. Many wildly popular cultural movements are currently in this state. It may be easier to coax a caged panda to reproduce than it would be to convince a cosmopolitan progressive to raise their own kid.

Given what large meta-studies like Genetic and Environmental influences on Human Psychological Differences[31] show about the heritability of political ideology,[32] we should expect some shift in how the average person reacts to these sterilizing political memes. (Note: Studies show even specific traits like altruism[33] and prosociality[34] have an approximately 30% to 50% genetic component.)

But surely this change will be slow … right? Actually, it is already measurable. One group of researchers quantitatively demonstrated how differential fertility rates can substantially impact attitudes around social issues.[35] From 2004 to 2018, differential fertility (more conservative people having more kids) increased the number of U.S. adults opposed to same-sex marriage by 17%, from 46.9 million to 54.8 million.

> *Note: Support for LGBT issues among the youth is rising over time but not as much as it would if birth rates were equal among all cultures. Given the current severe and rising difference in birth rates between families who support these issues and those who do not, we should see a flip, with support steadily decreasing within a generation or two.*

Because unmarried and childless people vote more liberally, this change makes a population more liberal *within* a generation[36] but more conservative *between* generations.[37]

Our nonprofit, Pronatalist.org, paid Mohammed Ali Alvi, a researcher at Mayo Clinic, to go over data collected by Spencer Greenberg's organization

Clearer Thinking to get a rough picture of the likely sociological and cultural profile of future Americans by searching for common traits among those having more children.

To summarize: Our original hypothesis was wrong. We assumed that only a propensity toward religious extremism would be associated with a high birth rate. While we expected the overall "tone" of humanity would change, we didn't think there was much to worry about because our own family falls pretty far on the religiously extreme spectrum and we know firsthand that religious extremism can lead to positive outcomes. It should have been obvious to us that hardcore progressives have just as much genetic religious extremism backing their beliefs as the most steadfast Swartzentruber.

Contrary to our hypothesis, the data suggests that we should expect future generations of Americans to hail from cultures that feature genetic correlates associated with being:

1. Significantly more tribalistic (hesitant to interact with outsiders, such as different ethnic and religious groups)
2. More drawn to strictly hierarchical power structures (fascist leaning)
3. More dogmatic

It is not fervency of beliefs that protects a member of a traditional cultivar from the influence of sterilizing memetic packages but their unwillingness to listen to or consider the perspectives of people not within the "in group," as well as their readiness to dehumanize those individuals. This is called the right-wing authoritarian personality cluster[38] (though it can present on both sides of the political spectrum, it is more a measure of authoritarian inclination)[39] and it is known to have genetic correlates.[40] We are not the only ones to find that this group is outcompeting the religious cluster.[41]

These are the traits for which our current society selects. Political ideologies that thrive on them should be expected to grow. Edgelords were afraid of an "Idiocracy" world in which only people they considered "stupid" had super large families when the data instead suggests we are heading towards an "ISIS-ocracy". (Note: We don't mean ISIS to represent Islam. Groups like ISIS exist across religious branches—we just refer to

ISIS as a culturally evocative group that fits the above criteria associated with high birth rates.)

> *If you want to read about the possibility of an "Idiocracy Scenario," see: "Is an Idiocracy-Style Future Possible?" in the Appendix. This scenario can be useful to review if you think the process of human mental traits adapting to evolutionary pressures is slow. However, if you want to run the math yourself, check out Rapid Evolutionary Adaptation in Response to Selection on Quantitative Traits.*[42] *Suffice to say current rates of IQ change suggest that the human sociological profile should shift around one standard deviation about every 75 years where strong selective pressures exist.*

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Genocide through Inaction

Is there a moral responsibility to save a culture or ethnic group going extinct due to a low birth rate? Entire cultures and ways of life don't just quietly disappear because of low birth rates—do they?

People often imagine cultures and ways of life conquering each other through wars, genocide, and violent conquest, but reality is rarely so dramatic. Our family has Calvinist roots (you might be more familiar with the tradition under its sub-branch of Puritans). Historically, Calvinist culture shaped almost every aspect of the modern United States (and, to an extent, the current world order). Calvinists made up two-thirds of Declaration of Independence signers,[43] many of the founding fathers (Simone is actually the closest relative of her generation to George Washington)[44], around a third of prominent abolitionists, and are often credited with the invention of capitalism.[45] Yet today, Calvinists make up less than 0.5% of the U.S. population, and most of those individuals are only theologically Calvinist rather than culturally so.

Calvinist culture went from crafting an entire world order, making up between 55% and 75% of Americans around the time of the revolution,[46] to virtual extinction in a single century without anyone noticing. For reasons we will explore the next chapter, Calvinism secularized[47] about a century earlier than other religious traditions. As such, their birth rates dropped earlier. Essentially, Calvinist culture demonstrates just how quickly your own culture can disappear and how no one will even miss you (kids today read about the Calvinist Puritans and don't think to ask, "What ever happened to those people?").

Just as a culture can collapse in a single century, one can rise to dominance in the same time frame. For example, a single family with eight children per generation would have over a billion descendants in just ten generations. Suppose the family is also able to effectively recruit new members, they could achieve the same feat in a quarter of that time. An example of this phenomenon can be seen in the Hutterites, a group of anabaptists related to the Amish that grew from a population of 443 people to over 50,000 in just

140 years with virtually no external conversions. There will be 5.6M Hutterites within the next 140 years at this growth rate.[48]

The crazy thing about all this is that population collapse could be solved by just one family. One family having eight kids for just 11 generations produces more descendants than there are humans on Earth today. Such success, however, would be hollow. A homogenous society, even if it mirrors our personal values, is fragile. Anyone familiar with the Irish potato famine knows the risk accompanying any literal monoculture. We only win if we succeed in stabilizing human population levels *and* ensuring that the resulting stable state is heterogeneous, saving as many cultures on the edge of extinction as possible. For example, if we do nothing, some of the oldest and most unique human cultures, such as the Parsi and the Jains, will be virtually extinct by the time our great-grandchildren are growing up (not everyone in a culture needs to die for it to collapse, just enough for it to lose its internal network).

We will do what we can to ensure our family achieves the above feat. We furthermore aim to equip you to do the same with yours. Our goal is to create a "cultural reactor" we'll call the Index: A collection of groups capable of accelerating natural cultural evolution through the incorporation of families with different traditions and perspectives.

The Index is meant to serve as a self-contained cultural ecosystem strong enough to carry the torch of civilization through the encroaching darkness. We invite other Pragmatists to join us in trying to create a unified network of cultures inspired by a variety of backgrounds and life experiences. Together, we can create a network of cultures capable of shouldering the burden of civilization as so many others shrug the burden of procreation.

We wrote *The Pragmatist's Guide to Religion* not to create followers but to establish a network of friendly competitors with a shared nervous system.

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Defending Pronatalism

If you have one of the following complaints against pronatalism, please consider visiting the corresponding section in the Appendix. We take arguments against pronatalism seriously and think you may find more nuance to the following issues than one might assume.

- But … the Environment!
- Only Privileged People Can Have Kids!
- Pronatalism is About Removing Our Reproductive Rights!
- Pronatalism is Racist!
- Forcing a Way of Life on Your Kids is Unethical!
- Think of the Suffering! (Antinatalism & Negative Utilitarianism)

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Culture vs. Religion

We use the word cultivar when discussing a mix of religion and culture that acts as a distinct memetic package. While in our society, most cultures heavily overlap with religions, the two are not intrinsically bound, making it more accurate for us to use a distinct word.

Contrast the cultivars of Irish and Latin American Catholicism to see how religion can be heavily associated—but not 100% correlated—with culture. Both cultivars ostensibly hail from the same religious background but feature many differences. Having lived among both for a period, we see it is not just a stereotype that drinking is much more important to the Irish than the Latin cultivar. Yet, this difference has no religious underpinning; it's purely cultural. In fact, in Peru (one of the countries in which we've lived), people raise their eyebrows when we order beer with lunch—this is not surprising given that 60% of the population sees drinking alcohol as actively immoral.[49] Contrast this with 84% of Irish adults who drink.[50]

The Addams Family presents a great fictional example of a cultivar with an ambiguous religious underpinning. Unlike their derivatives, such as the Munsters, the Addams Family is not primarily monstrous because they are *literally monsters* but because they have a *unique family culture* (in most iterations at least). The family's cultivar acts as a lens through which they view reality, transforming the way they interpret the world. For example, they might contextualize dying plants or an unplanned financial loss in a positive context. Because of their cultural lens, they may glean positive feelings from these otherwise "negative" stimuli. However, nothing about the family's cultivar is specific to one religious perspective or another (outside of a few largely throw-away traditions mentioned here or there).

The Addams Family also helps to dispel the myth that there is some sort of universal "non-religious" cultivar. The Addams Family could very well be atheist, but their daily experience of the world would be radically different from that of most other atheist families. If one chooses to raise their kids in a secular household, there are still *many* choices about family culture to be made. It is not as though there is a single, correct, "logical" lens through which the world can be viewed. Even if a person is atheist, the culture they

choose to live by or build for themselves fundamentally shapes how they experience the world.

Finally, it is important to remember that *one* person doesn't just adopt *one* culture. People switch between cultures when in specific social contexts. Micro cultures often exist around specific activities such as sports, drinking, or secret societies—all with their own rituals, traditions, mystical beliefs, and value sets. While these micro-cultures do not matter in a civilizational context (thus, we will usually only focus on "core cultures"), we will touch on them occasionally as new core cultures can sometimes evolve out of them.

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Our Cultural Bias

This book is akin to a guide to remodeling a house that uses the remodel of a specific house as a narrative throughline. The decisions made during that remodel are not mandates for you to make the same decisions. The ultimate goal of the book is not to encourage all homeowners to remodel in the same style. Instead, it is to create a coalition of homeowners who have intentionally renovated historic houses for the modern age (put in internet, plumbing, electricity, smart thermostats, and solar panels while cleaning out the termites, stripping lead from the walls, and reinforcing weak parts of the foundation).

In this metaphor, the house we're remodeling—i.e., the culture we inherited and have chosen to reshape and optimize—is secular Calvinism.[51] Calvinism is a religious sect from which Puritans hail; Calvinist is to Puritan as Anabaptist is to Amish (all Puritans are Calvinist, but not all Calvinists are Puritans).[52]

As our "old house" to be "remodeled" is secular Calvinism, you may find it helpful to understand what the original construction looks like. Understanding our cultural position will help you personally correct for personal biases and distortions created by the lens through which we see the world. (It might also give you insight into the world perspective of a seldom-discussed culture, something we always find interesting.)

Scott Alexander, author of the popular Substack/blog *Slate Star Codex*, describes the stereotypical Calvinist (specifically Puritan, the better known regional sub-group) as an "Eccentric overeducated hypercompetent contrarian … who takes morality very seriously." "People complain that there is too much neo-Puritanism around these days," Alexander wrote, "but they usually just mean people are moralistic reformers. I have the opposite worry: what happened to these people? When was the last time you saw somebody called Hiram invent five different crazy machines, found a new religion, and have twelve children who he named after Greek nymphs? Anyone who is serious about "Making America Great Again"

should be deeply worried. … The virtue-obsessed nonconformist eccentric inventor philanthropist – has almost disappeared." [53]

The one thing almost everyone knows about Calvinists is that they believe in predestination—which we absolutely do. A mechanistic, clockwork understanding of reality is one of the foundations of our culture. The one thing almost everyone gets wrong about Calvinism is that they assume a belief in predestination implies a lack of belief in free will.

Just because past events could have only occurred in one way from our current perspective in the timeline does not mean we lacked free will in the moment. When we look back at the events of yesterday from our perspective today, the day could have only happened one way—and yet every decision we made yesterday was made with our own free will.

While events that will take place in the future seem limitless, they appear fixed when we look back along our timeline. Theological Calvinists believe God exists outside that timeline and therefore, from His perspective, future events are no different from past events. Just as God's perspective outside the timeline does not negate free will, your perspective today—at this point in the timeline—does not negate free will you exercised in the past.[54]

Secular Calvinists hold a similar belief but see the laws of physics—rather than God—as existing outside the timeline. The fact that physical laws exist outside the timeline and necessitate its path does not negate free will. In other words, just because our lives can only occur in a single way from the perspective of the laws of physics does not mean we lack free will from our own present perspectives. (The same is true if we live in a branching timeline, in which case each individual stream of the timeline is still determined by a mechanistic set of rules over which we have no influence.)[55] This understanding of reality influences how our intentionally designed culture interprets matters like emotional states (something we address later in the book). It also explains why we believe a person's choices can both shape a timeline and be predestined within it.

> *Our culture would go so far as to argue that humans only have free will in a deterministic universe. In a deterministic universe, my mind changes based on what I thought before, access to new information,*

> *and the mechanical processes of my brain. In a non-deterministic world, how would my mind change—randomly? Not based on my neurological processes? Not based on my previous mental state? How is that in any way heartening?*

Discussion of free will dovetails well into Calvinists' assumption of the total depravity of man. Culturally, this means we have a very dim view of individual self-worth and the worth of humanity as a whole: Humans are wretched—we must strive to overcome our nature while knowing we are destined to fail. In other words, this viewpoint acknowledges how fallible humans are but, nevertheless, maintains that we should hold ourselves to a higher standard.

While Calvinists are rare these days, they used to be common enough that their stereotype became a media trope. Cultural Calvinism is almost holistically portrayed as villainous,[56] [57] in great part because the culture is opposed to indulgence in activities like art, music, and dancing (but weirdly pro-sex—more on this in future chapters). This comes from a belief that emotions should be viewed with extreme skepticism (unless said emotions are tied to fervent theological and metaphysical research).

Secular Calvinists typically view emotions as a product of evolution with no inherent value. Humans feel the emotions we do because our ancestors who felt them had more surviving offspring—they are nothing but a scar left by our genetic history. To a secular Calvinist, pursuing positive emotion for its own sake is as feckless as chasing after a fentanyl high. One might even go so far as to say negative emotional states are "better" because they are safer from an addiction/distraction-from-values standpoint. This mindset naturally produces the societal stereotype that Calvinists are obsessed with self-denial, pain, and suffering.

Morays around emotion play such a pivotal role in the Calvinist cultivar that if you look at historical Puritan language, you will find the word "sad" used as an adjective with positive associations, connoting something closer to stern, dignified, and contemplative. Culturally devoted Puritans, for example, would go out of their way to wear what they described as "sad" colors.

The disregard for emotion common in the Calvinist cultivar is not actually tied to the five points of theological Calvinism. Similarly, not all five points of Calvinism are major cultural factors. This exemplifies how religious philosophy alone does not explain 100% of a religion's associated cultivar. It also explains why the modern theological revival of Calvinism did not revive Calvinist culture more broadly.

This causes Calvinists to see both self-indulgent hedonism and luxury as sinful. Because of this, historically, they had little motivation to spend money on themselves and saw most forms of charity as sinful virtue signaling. As a result, they reinvested almost all their money and time into their companies or specific charities meant to increase the efficiency of other people (such as libraries and schools). This constant self-reinvestment is how Calvinists gained the reputation for inventing modern capitalism[58] [59] and for producing very wealthy but miserly Ebenezer Scrooge-like characters. (For more on this subject see: "Calvinist Stereotypes in Media" in the Appendix.)

For an example of what this ruthless, businesslike culture looks like in practice, here is a text Malcolm received from his mom when she heard about our pronatalist advocacy work:

> What's your plan to monetize this new interest of yours?
>
> Remember: everything is transactional.

Calvinists were famous for proselytizing less than other denominations because they believed their world perspective was obvious to anyone who would just put in the mental effort and shed their biases (this stance also led to the culture's relative extinction). Calvinist groups appeared less like a religious cohort and more like a really intense book club for those obsessed with living the most technically correct life possible and exploring the truth behind our metaphysical reality. This can be seen in stereotypes like:

"Calvinists are "cold," "heady," and "condescending." They think they have it all figured out and everyone else is blind, slow, or stubborn. They're so lost in their books, they're not interested in the needs around them."[60]

While there are reams of Calvinist polemics and theories about better ways to live “correctly,” there is very very little written about what it is functionally like to live within the culture (outside of the more-communally-oriented Puritan branch, which is fairly well-documented due to its foundational role in the American colonies).

Occasionally you will find modern figures who leave Calvinist culture and write about what it was like to be raised within it. A good example would be Aella (a popular sex researcher and friend of the authors), who wrote of her upbringing:

“Conversation with him (her dad) was a daily challenge. He would frequently make blatantly false statements—such as “purple dogs exist”—and force me to disprove him through debate. He would respond to things I said demanding technical accuracy, so that I had to narrow my definitions and my terms to give him the correct response. It was mind-twisting, but it encouraged extreme clarity of thought, critical thinking, and concise use of language. I remember all this beginning around the age of five.”

This type of exercise persisted within my family even after it had secularized and reflects the Calvinist culture’s obsession with imparting a way of thinking and engaging with ideas as much as any specific idea.

The most offensive concept in Calvinist culture is the belief in “elect" individuals—that not *everyone* is or has the potential to be “saved.” This view is the product of a deterministic perspective on reality. Theologically, this means God knows whether you will be saved or damned before you are born. Secularly, this means some people’s lives do not matter in the grand scheme of the universe.

Whether you matter and manage to become a virtuous, productive person is predetermined. Because of this, you can speculate about your role in the timeline by reading the tea leaves of your heart: Every moment of procrastination or moral failing is a sign you may not stand among the elect. Early Puritan diarists are famous for thinking they’re *definitely* among the elect one day, then doubting their status among the saved the next; constantly vacillating between hope and doubt.

Perhaps, historically, the most important aspect of Calvinist theology was the belief that truth can only come from self-study: That no matter how well-intentioned a person may be, they risk corrupting the truth with their own perspective and biases if they attempt to guide you to it. This is why at some traditional Calvinist churches, churchgoers would sit and read their own Bibles rather than listen to a sermon-delivering priest.

The Calvinist insistence on finding truth independently produces an ethos of extreme skepticism—if not innate hostility—toward centralized authority at anything above a local level. As Calvinists see it, virtuousness is achieved through every human's internal struggle with their fallen state. Thus, the more humans become involved in a thing, the more evil it is likely to be (e.g., big governments and companies are seen as more evil than small ones) and nothing is more evil than one human exerting control over another.

Calvinists were fervently pro-independence and anti-slavery, but less out of a belief in equality and more because they saw the removal of agency from another person as the highest order of evil an individual or institution could commit. Famously, John Brown and his family were radical Calvinists and multiple sides of my own family also hunted or otherwise fought against slavers—both by leading the Big Thicket Jayhawkers and by being heavily involved with the founding of the Free State of Jones (15 of the 50 founding members were either siblings or nephews of my direct ancestors).[61]

This belief is reflected in the way we construct this book and *The Pragmatist's Guide to Life*. In each, we present an example of how things might be done while insisting that readers independently draw their own conclusions after thinking through matters on their own terms. To us, writing a book that tells someone how to think about the world robs that individual of agency.[62] From our cultural perspective, robbing a person of agency is an act of evil.

So, while Calvinists see striving for equality as silly, their mandate for maximizing individual freedom is absolute and uncompromising to a point of apparent absurdity in other cultures' eyes. The concept of the elect inherently implies that not all humans are equal, at least when it comes to being "saved." While some people are born evil, and others are born lazy, it

is wrong for anyone but that person to pass judgment on the content of their character.

Calvinist culture is basically dead due to its low post-secularization birth rate. Calvinists' obsessive research into the metaphysical nature of reality and cultural emphasis on accepting hard truths drove their branch to be one of the first Christian sects to "secularize." As such, their culture was hit by a collapse in birth rate a few generations earlier than the groups that are getting smacked with it now.

The Calvinist tendency to manifest more as a worldview than a community contributed to the culture's downfall. As it began to secularize, community-oriented members tried to start unique and separate movements (often some form of deism) or were absorbed into adjacent cultivars (typically the Unitarian Church, Baptist Church, or Pentecostal movement). Only predominantly secular families maintained original Calvinist traditions as they weren't exposed to any traditions of new Christian sects that might replace them.

Malcolm, whose parents were secular, would not even know his family was Calvinist had he not received a letter from his dead grandfather as part of his will urging him to not stray from "Calvinist values," which prompted him to look into his family's history and realize: "Oh, *this* is why my parents do all those weird things."

A tendency for Calvinism to be contextualized as "the obvious truth free to anyone who looks hard enough"—and not a distinct culture—is part of why it lacked the sort of cohesive self-identity common among even secular Jews. A cohesive cultural narrative and sense of community identification is why Judaism has secularized fairly successfully while Calvinism largely fractured upon secularization.

We *only* present this explanation of Calvinism so that our readers can see the lens that distorts our view of reality and replace it with their own. Because our perspective inherently corrupts the information we share, we must be transparent about our biases so you can mentally correct for them. **As a family, we can only save our own culture. You must take responsibility for saving yours. If we wrote this book true to form, readers should be able to apply its principles to any theology.**

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Why is Cultural Diversity Important?

Back on topic we go!

Why are we trying to develop a method for editing cultures that gives them a higher survival rate and distribute that method to as wide a diversity of cultural traditions as possible?

Why are we not just privately fine-tuning our internal family culture and disregarding the rest of the world? Clearly, we adore our own culture given how much we pontificate upon it; why would we intentionally create cultural competition when our culture is designed to produce a fairly large population on its own?

Suppose a group of scientists knew the world's temperature was going to drop 50 degrees, but they only had time to genetically engineer 50 species of plants to survive in this new environment. Would it be optimal for them to genetically engineer 50 closely-related species? Of course not; these scientists would select for maximum genetic diversity as doing so yields the highest odds that *something* survives in this new future.

When a culture dies, you lose thousands of years of history and experiences that are unlikely to be recaptured. Someone told us it is offensive to equate South Koreans' upcoming demographic collapse to genocide, so allow us to clarify that allowing a people to go extinct is whatever differentially makes genocide worse than mass murder.

> [The immorality of letting a culture die] = [the immorality of genocide] - [the immorality of murdering an equal number of people].

There is also a selfish reason to promote cultural diversity: Being in a diverse and healthy multi-cultural ecosystem benefits our family's culture. Every time we see some white nationalist trying to turn the United States into a white Christian ethno-cultivar nation-state, we can only shake our heads at the stupidity of the endeavor. Do they think their treasured "Western Civilization" evolved in homogeneous ecosystems? That Ancient

Greece was homogeneous? That Alexander the Great's forces were homogeneous? That Rome was homogeneous? That Medieval Europe was homogeneous? Why is their culture so weak now that it can only survive in a hermetically sealed pod?

We have heard some seriously argue that all culturally diverse empires die. This is an insane argument, given that *all empires that have ever existed have died*. Every one of humanity's most productive, expansive, and culturally dominant civilizations has been diverse—from New Kingdom Egypt to the Roman Empire, Umayyad Caliphate, British Empire, Achaemenid Persian Empire, Maurya Empire, Qing Dynasty, and American Empire (we actually struggle to think of a single great empire that was culturally homogeneous at its height—maybe the Mongol Empire, but if *that* is the standard bearer for your goal ... yikes).

Other nations have successfully become ethno-cultivar nation-states, so we know *exactly* how it turns out (just look at Korea or Japan). Ethnically and culturally homogenous societies have some of the lowest birth rates of any cultural ecosystem and are wildly fragile. In contrast, not only are some of the highest birth rate post-prosperity cultural ecosystems incredibly diverse (consider Israel), but when people from culturally homogeneous ecosystems move to culturally competitive ecosystems, their birth rates shoot up.[63]

Is it so surprising that a culture unchallenged by competition would become more fragile than one constantly sharpened by it? We explore this topic in the subchapter: "Immigration and Conservative Values," but in short, if your culture is on life support, putting it in a hermetically sealed room just gives it a chance to die in peace.

Every time we hear one of these white nationalists talk on this issue, we can't help but visualize a 150-year-old frail corpse of a man with sunken eyes in a sealed pod (basically Mr. House from Fallout New Vegas) feebly pounding his chest, proclaiming in a raspy voice how superior, strong, and virile he is. When someone reaches for the latch on his pod, he begins pathetically hyperventilating and screaming in a panic that he will die if his pod seal is broken.

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Building The Index: A Cultural Reactor

One of our goals with this book is to recruit new participants for what we call the Index: A "cultural reactor" that catalogs intentionally constructed family cultures and monitors their outcomes intergenerationally while distributing said information in a way that allows all participating cultures to improve at a faster rate than that of a non-cultivated society. We want to make it possible for cultures in the network to improve faster than normal intergenerational memetic evolutionary powers would allow through a system analogous to horizontal gene transfer in gene therapy or lateral gene transfer in bacteria.

To put it another way, we don't want anyone to read this book and make the same choices we made. Instead, we want you to either be inspired to identify, reinforce, and restore the positive elements of your own ancestral culture while making them resistant to fertility-lowering memes or experiment with constructing something totally new from an amalgam of different cultural beliefs.

While the Index is an ambitious project that won't start seeing much purchase for a few generations, it is still worth starting now if we want a shot of preserving at least some at-risk cultures before they go entirely extinct.

We also hope the Index will act as a database of families that can be used to opt-in for traditions that require larger populations than any one house can front (e.g., larger celebrations, dating markets, etc.). This organization is called the Index because its primary goal is to act as a repository of information about the cultures in its wider ecosystem (and not to serve as any active actor on those cultures).

Cultural groups join the Index through the "House" model, in which a House is the atomic cultural unit, a distinct set of traditions and ways of seeing the world. This atomization makes it easier to classify and record cultures while giving them an opportunity to update or redefine themselves intergenerationally.

To give an example of how this works: We, Malcolm and Simone, have created “House Collins,” which is the bundle of traditions we outline (at least in part) in this book. When any of our children prepares to have children of their own, they can choose to either remain in House Collins or create and take ownership of a new set of traditions through the creation of a new House—all while not fully losing their connection to the parent culture, as this new House would still be a member of the Index.

This spares multicultural families from devolving into a watered-down manifestation of each contributing culture. These families won’t feel obligated to forsake one culture entirely or try to raise children in *full* versions of each contributing culture in a fashion unlikely to inspire their children to pass down both cultures fully to kids of their own.

The Index and House system allow partners in a new family to reflect on the aspects of their birth culture—and other cultures to which they’ve been exposed—that have most significantly improved their lives, then weave them into a single, integrated, new culture in a way that is supported and considered normal by others in the Index network. This stands in stark contrast to many stricter cultures that shun family members who choose to deviate—even slightly—from central doctrine.

Better still, the Index allows distant descendants to review statistics on how families pursuing specific traditions fared, inspiring them to adopt particularly successful traditions from cultures unrelated to their own.

As you read this book, ask yourself:

“How would I construct my own House? What elements of my ancestral and chosen cultures are worth preserving? What elements of my current culture would I totally change? What would make this culture appealing to future generations, and how would the culture be designed to enable future members to iterate and improve upon it?”

> *Perhaps you’re thinking: “What if I don’t have kids? Can I still join the Index?”*
>
> *See the Appendix chapter: “On Houses Founded by Sovereign, Childless Individuals.” The answer is yes, but it is objectively*

harder to build an intergenerationally improving cultural unit if you don't have kids.

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1 A meme is an idea inspected through the lens of evolutionary units. Similar to a virus, a successful meme effectively uses humans to replicate itself. Successful memes are, therefore, more common and pervasive.

2 While religions and cultures have sometimes been able to convert large groups of non-adherents during highly constrained periods of history and within highly constrained geographies, this is an exception and not the rule. Most cultures and religions spread through high birth rates and conquest. We explain the fundamentals behind this later in the book.

3 Jews evolved a less stringent handwashing practice long before Islam: Leviticus 15:11 "The person who is touched by one who has a discharge without ringing his hands in water must wash their clothes and bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handwashing_in_Judaism

4 In these cultures, the option to maintain a polygynous relationship is only really exercised by wealthy and powerful men. In contrast, normal men still live monogamously. A culture does not need every man to have multiple wives to be polygynous, as obviously that is impossible. In other words, the majority of relationships within a culture can be monogamous, and that culture can still be categorized as polygynous (in fact, this is frequently the case in polygynous cultures).

5 These stats are detailed in Henrich, Boyd, and Richardson 2012 (The puzzle of monogamous marriage) but originally came from Murdock's 1967 "Ethnographic Atlas: A Summary." The calculation itself comes from p. 282 of Daly and Wilson's book "Sex, evolution, and behavior" (1983)

6 Polygamy - an overview | ScienceDirect Topics. from https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/polygamy

7 "5–10% of men actually have several wives simultaneously" (Helen Fisher's estimate) in societies in which polygyny is permitted. This makes it seem as though allowing polygyny culturally but practicing monogamy individually is the "default" human behavior. Nevertheless, what matters in a culture is who ultimately reproduces, and genetic evidence shows most of our ancestors came out of polygynous relationships (depending on the period of history), with 67% of our ancestors being female and 33% male.* To be more specific, humans are probably polymorphic and can change their optimization between polygyny and monogamy but default to polyamory when resources and cultural allowance permit.

* It would be possible to get this number without polygyny if you had a very very high female death rate, but data does not support this as a cause. We wrote a whole book on this subject (*The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality)*, so check it out if it interests you.

*Lippold, S., Xu, H., Ko, A., Li, M., Renaud, G., Butthof, A., Schröder, R., & Stoneking, M. (2014). Human paternal and maternal demographic histories: Insights from high-resolution Y chromosome and mtDNA sequences. *Investigative Genetics*, *5*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/2041-2223-5-13 From, https://investigativegenetics.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/2041-2223-5-13

*Jason A. Wilder, Zahra Mobasher, Michael F. Hammer, Genetic Evidence for Unequal Effective Population Sizes of Human Females and Males, *Molecular Biology and Evolution*, Volume 21, Issue 11, November 2004, Pages 2047–2057, https://doi.org/10.1093/molbev/msh214 from, http://hammerlab.biosci.arizona.edu/publications/Wilder_2004_MBE.pdf

8 See: Bonelli R, Dew RE, Koenig HG, Rosmarin DH, Vasegh S. Religious and spiritual factors in depression: review and integration of the research. Depress Res Treat. 2012;2012:962860. doi: 10.1155/2012/962860. Epub 2012 Aug 15. PMID: 22928096; PMCID: PMC3426191.

9 This is likely why prohibitions against same-sex relations have been nearly universal in widely practiced traditional cultures that have withstood the test of time. However, if technologies enabling same-sex couples to have their own kids become more affordable, these prohibitions could end up getting flipped in the distant future of our species. For example, lesbian couples would be able to breed at twice the rate of heterosexual couples—we muse on how such a culture could be structured later in the book.

10 Fun fact: Malcolm's favorite, most respected religious denomination is that led by the Calvary Chapel Association and Simone's the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

11 AbdAleati, N. S., Mohd Zaharim, N., & Mydin, Y. O. (2016). Religiousness and Mental Health: Systematic Review Study. *Journal of religion and health, 55*(6), 1929–1937. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-014-9896-1

12 *Latin America and the Caribbean to Reach Maximum Population Levels by 2058, issued as a press release by the United Nations' Public Information Unit Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean* (ECLAC) on July 11th, 2019. https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/latin-america-and-caribbean-reach-maximum-population-levels-2058

13 *Macrotrends' report on India Fertility Rate* 1950-2022: https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/IND/india/fertility-rate

14 *"China's population could halve within next 45 years, new study warns"* published by the South China Morning Post on October 1st, 2021. https://www.bangkokpost.com/world/2190995/chinas-population-could-halve-within-next-45-years-new-study-warns

15 McHugh, P. (2021, February 16). *Fertility among immigrants and native-born Americans.* CIS.org. from https://cis.org/Report/Fertility-Among-Immigrants-and-NativeBorn-Americans

16 According to the United Nations Population Division

United Nations. (n.d.). *World population prospects - population division.* United Nations. from https://population.un.org/wpp/

17 Tooze, A. (2022, October 15). *Chartbook #161 Iran's contested demographic revolution.* #161 Iran's contested demographic revolution. from https://adamtooze.substack.com/p/chartbook-161-irans-contested-demographic?fbclid=IwAR02R-9s7xj0VDG7h9fZk59bhP8yTyKzJqPzTbq6EnU6RAegWbx7Z6zXOtQ

18 *"Mormon Fertility: 6 indicators"* published on the Eternal Anglo blog on March 19th, 2021: https://eternalanglo.com/mormon-fertility-6-indicators

19 Korea's fertility rate drops even further to 0.81 in 2021 published by the Korea Times on July 3rd, 2022. https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2022/02/281_324402.html

20 40.5 kids, 16.4 grandkids, 6.6 great-grandkids.

21 Bailey, M. Currie, J. Schwandt, H. (2022, October) The Covid-19 Baby Bump: The unexpected increase in U.S. fertility rates in response to the pandemic. *National Bureau Of Economic Research* from https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w30569/w30569.pdf

22 Except maybe Israel, but more on that later.

23 Also, declining interest rates increase the "real" value of equities directly by reducing market yield on securities and indirectly by subsidizing new economic activity. This drives increased transaction volume that's interpreted as increases in total consumption rather than an added tax burden, which obscures the extent of inflation. We have already "spent" that option for the most part,

going from interest rates of 20% in the 80s to only a few percentage points at the time of this book's publication.

24 *Productivity: Output per hour worked. Our World in Data.* from https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/labor-productivity-per-hour-pennworldtable

25 We acknowledge that governments may begin to experiment with some wild and innovative debt instruments designed to prop up financial market increases, but whether or not such yet-untested experiments will work is pure conjecture. We would be unwilling to bet the next generation's collective savings that a Deus ex machina will sweep in to save financial markets when their core fundamental drivers change.

26 If you are wondering why we don't just use our connections with various groups of powerful, influential people to ensure they (1) recognize the risks we have identified and (2) contribute to efforts addressing them: Being a nerdy freshman at the same high school as the cool kids doesn't mean the cool kids are going to listen to you—it merely grants you insight into what the cool kids are saying and doing.

27 See: Why Has Detroit Continued To Decline? by Scott Beye, published Jul 31, 2018,11:58pm EDT https://www.forbes.com/sites/scottbeyer/2018/07/31/why-has-detroit-continued-to-decline/?sh=5474d9be3fbe

28 It's easy to process that 7.2% of the budget goes to paying off debt in NYC without noticing that 33% of payroll expenses are paying off already-accrued pensions. Tracking all the fixed expenses for accrued services on a city's payroll is very difficult. If we had to make an estimate for most major American cities, fixed expenses for accrued services are probably close to 25% of the budget, but 50% makes the math easier to demonstrate.

29 Southwood, B. (2022, July 26). *How crime worsens sprawl.* from https://bensouthwood.substack.com/p/how-crime-worsens-sprawl

30 *"Life expectancy (from birth) in the United States, from 1860 to 2020*"* published by Aaron O'Neill on Statista on June 21st, 2022. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1040079/life-expectancy-united-states-all-time/

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44 Like most of this cultural strain, George Washington was pretty inventive with his religion. His speeches lead to the belief that he was a mix of Deist, Calvinist, and Anglican. https://ourfoundingtruth.blogspot.com/2009/09/another-calvinist-founding-father.html

(We qualify Simone's relation because George Washington had no kids. Being a distant niece, there are tons of people who can make the same claim as Simone, plus Simone's mother and older relatives are obviously more closely related to George Washington than she is.)

45 Famously this was first proposed by Weber, M. (1904). *Die protestantische ethik und der geist des kapitalismus.*

Recent research supports that this is more than just a claim and likely has a large element of truth behind it.

Luzer, D. (2013, September 4). *Study: The Protestant work ethic is real.* Pacific Standard. from https://psmag.com/economics/protestant-worth-ethic-real-65544

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From: Hall, M. D. (2020). Did America have a Christian founding?: Separating modern myth from historical truth. *Religious Studies Review*, *46*(1), 108–109. https://doi.org/10.1111/rsr.14492

47 As can be seen with Malcolm's family, branches that did not secularize converted from Calvinist traditions to more mainstream Christian branches. For historical examples of this phenomenon, consider individuals like William Ellery Channing, who was born a Calvinist in the early 1800s only

to lead a huge chunk of Calvinists away from the denomination by founding the very-low-birth-rate Unitarian movement.

48 Pichler, I., Fuchsberger, C., Platzer, C., Çalişkan, M., Marroni, F., Pramstaller, P. P., & Ober, C. (2009). Drawing the history of the Hutterite population on a genetic landscape: Inference from Y-chromosome and mtdna genotypes. *European Journal of Human Genetics, 18*(4), 463–470. https://doi.org/10.1038/ejhg.2009.172

49 *Religion in Latin America*, Chapter 5: Social Attitudes, by Pew Research & Benjamin Wormald

50 Fitzgerald, C. (2019, May 8th). *Over 80% of Irish adults drink alcohol, and the rate is set to increase. TheJournal.ie.* from https://www.thejournal.ie/alcohol-study-4622415-May2019/

51 Secular Calvinism is a form of cultural Calvinism passed between generations. In the 21st century, it is usually associated with strict atheism. Most cultural Calvinists who *also* remained theologically Calvinist were absorbed into other Christian cultures. The growing group of recently converted Theological Calvinists usually have more in common with Evangelical Protestant or Pentecostal cultivars than traditional American Calvinist culture (thus why the concept of a cultivar is important). All three of these groups have little in common with the Dutch Calvinist cultivar, which evolved almost totally independently.

52 We say "Calvinist" and not "Puritan" as our families mostly hail from the second wave of Calvinist immigrants, which were predominantly Scottish and Irish and who settled in the backcountry. This group was significantly more isolationist and independent than the community-centric Puritans. (If you are a fan of *Albion's Seed*, this was a group that had the religious and cultural beliefs of people who settled in New England but came with the group that settled in the backcountry.)

53 For more of Scott Alexander's fairly accurate take on Calvinist culture, read the article "Puritan Spotting" (Malcolm's score: 48). It shows that while we may seem like weirdos from the perspective of modern American society, we are such generic representatives of our birth culture that we border on being an offensive stereotype. https://slatestarcodex.com/2019/03/12/puritan-spotting/

54 For a fairly succinct summary of the Calvinist theological argument, check out the YouTube video, *It's Good To Be A Calvinis*t: https://youtu.be/V1w8wz0uL5E

55 The potentiality of branching timelines (in which we believe) does not interfere with our belief in predestination. If there are multiple timelines, they branch because of quantum fluctuations—not conscious decisions.

56 A culture actively dismissive if not outright hostile to art is not going to produce many artists who don't hold a grudge against it. This, combined with the culture seeing most charity and positive emotional states as sinful is why Calvinist archetypes in culture are almost universally antagonists (more on this in the Appendix section "Calvinist Stereotypes in Media").

57 It would be inaccurate to claim that Calvinist culture never produces art. Famous books like *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Gilead* are both products of Calvinist culture, as is the song Amazing Grace by John Bunyan. However, like most Calvinist-inspired media, they are meditations on faith, man, and man's place in the world—not unlike everything in the Pragmatists Guide series. They were written with a purpose other than self expression or entertainment.

58 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Protestant_Ethic_and_the_Spirit_of_Capitalism

59 Ironically, while Malcolm's family had some well-known capitalists during the era of communist threat (his grandad was a Republican congressman), they were also well-known socialist revolutionaries during the time of the Robber Barons, with Thomas Hickey writing in the Rebel (Texas' largest socialist newspaper) in 1911 that he hoped the Collins family would "increase until they cover the earth with the clean clear water of Socialism," praising the "strain of radicalism" that ran through "the veins" of the Collins family. Historically, they have been fairly unmoored from any

political team and have gravitated to whichever faction best maximizes individual freedom. For example, when Malcolm's great-great-grandad Vinson Collins was in office, his big cause entailed ensuring women's suffrage.

la Teja Jesús F de. (2016). *Lone Star unionism, dissent, and resistance: Other sides of Civil War Texas*. University of Oklahoma Press.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vinson_Allen_Collins

60 Segal, M. (2013, December 10). *As Cool As the Other Side of a Calvinist.* Desiring God. from https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/as-cool-as-the-other-side-of-a-calvinist

61 Among Malcolm's ancestors alone, there was Warren J. Collins (Malcolm's direct ancestor), who ran the Big Thicket Jay Hawkers (a paramilitary who fought the Confederacy); his brother Jasper Collins, who was one of the founders of the Free State of Jones, and the man who Newton Knight credits as turning him against the Confederacy; his brother Riley Collins, another founding member of the Free State of Jones who later joined the Union army; Simeon Collins who died fighting for the Free State of Jones; and Malcolm's great-great-great uncle, James Morgan Valentine, the Free State of Jones' first Lieutenant. Some sources suggest that Newton Knight, the founder of the Free State of Jones, was raised by the Collins family, but it is unclear what that means—perhaps the Collins family ran some sort of extremist Primitive Baptist (a branch of Calvinist) church at the time.

For backing on our claim that 15 out of 50 members of the Free State of Jones were direct relatives of the Collins family, see the book: *Lone Star Unionism, Dissent, and Resistance: Other Sides of Civil War Texas* by Jesús F. de la Teja.

62 A good example of this comes from the practice shown in the children's book, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*. In which, acting out passages of the Bible was framed as sinful because it might cause another person to interpret the Bible the way *they* did instead of through independent reasoning. By priming a person to see the world in a certain way, one risks robbing them of an element of personal agency. In some modern Calvinist churches, this means that when a church *does* have a preacher, they must read the Bible in order (rather than skipping around) because picking and choosing passages could incept the listener with the preacher's biases.

63 Jeongsoo Kim & Gabriela Sanchez-Soto (2011) *Higher fertility among the first-generation Korean immigrants in the U.S.: An assimilation mechanism towards a new way of living,* from https://paa2019.populationassociation.org/uploads/191215#

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THE FUNDAMENTALS OF CULTURE CRAFTING

A culture’s growth and long-term viability are dependent on only four variables:

- **Cultural Adoption:** The rate at which new adherents are converted
- **Birth Rate:** The rate at which members have children
- **Cultural Fidelity:** The probability someone raised within the culture will stay within it
- **Death Rate:** The rate at which members die

Before digging into these four variables, let's explore how they interact.

The Cultural Growth Formula

Relative Cultural Growth Rate =

(Relative Birth Rate - Relative Death Rate) * (Cultural Adoption) * (Cultural Fidelity #0-1)

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Cultural Adoption

A culture can grow merely by appealing to and converting outsiders. In practice, cultures with high cultural adoption proliferate over the short term but die quickly over the long run. Why? A common attribute that makes cultures seductive is “easy and forgiving” elements, which in turn contribute to low birth rates.

Strong cultural adoption rates are not as important as one might imagine: Even cultivars with active missionary mandates, like Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses, have high birth rates to thank for the lion’s share of their growth. For the most part, religions almost only grow through conversions over very limited temporal and geographic windows. Even when religions *do* grow rapidly through conversions, they often fail to spread their original culture, instead forming a new cultivar which is a mix of local culture and the new theology.

This is not to say that cultural adoption cannot serve as a major growth driver for a cultivar. Successful proselytization is commonly achieved through harvesting the children of another culture at a very young age in something we will call the “reverse cuckoo strategy”—because they snatch eggs from others’ nests.

Quakers, for example, grew by specializing in educational fields. Shakers gained adherents by specializing in orphanages. Ultimately, however, both Quakers and Shakers began to collapse when government-backed alternatives wiped out their top recruitment channels.

Other top tactics used throughout history by cultivars to grow rapidly through conversions include (in order of descending efficacy):

- **Conversion Incentives:** Offering tax-advantaged status or highly sought-after jobs only to members of the culture in question can significantly boost conversions. This method was leveraged by both Roman and Islamic empires to significant effect. *(The current university system uses this strategy to convert people by controlling “elite access” in our society and requiring a college*

degree at one of a few institutions to enter it, then using said institutions to culturally convert people out of more "traditional" birth cultures.)

- **Violent/Forced Conversion:** Military conquest, followed by intermarriage (in other words, killing the men and marrying the women) and/or state-controlled child-rearing has also been used to boost cultural adherence (as Canada did with some of its native populations through the Canadian Indian residential school system). This type of child conversion is much less effective at wiping out native cultivars than tricking non-members into giving you their kids willingly.
- **Missionary Work:** By creating a culture-wide expectation that some or all adherents will devote a certain time or amount of their lives to missionary work, as Mormons do, a culture can at least moderately boost cultural adoption rates.*

**While the average Mormon missionary baptizes 2.43[1] people, many of these baptisms are out of convenience (e.g., "You can use our soccer court after you get baptized")—even though missionaries are technically not supposed to do this.*

More than 50%[2] of those baptized on missions leave the church within a year and within a few years, 75% have left (according to BYU and Reuters,[3] at least). If the church baptized 125,930 people[4] in 2021, total membership was 16,663,663, and the average Mormon lives 85 years; this means the average Mormon converts 0.16 people who stay in the church for more than a few years.

This number feels way off. Our guess is the church chose to include in their statistics anyone who had ever been baptized as a member, so we went to a third-party source to get a different data set. If we use that source, which claims there are 4,400,000[5] active Mormons, then the average Mormon converts 0.6 people in their lifetime. While this is not great, it is at least a viable means of spreading if used in addition to above-repopulation-rate birth rates.

We performed this math to demonstrate that even in best-case scenarios (with a cultivar that both aggressively tries to convert

people and is largely viewed favorably), missionary work is only marginally effective and seldom capable of conversion at "above repopulation rate" (e.g., >1 convert per member per lifetime) outside of cases in which the culture controls child-rearing institutions (Quakers and Shakers) and cases in which the culture controls the state apparatus (Roman and Islamic empires).

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Birth Rate

Birth rate is the most important cultural growth factor. Cultivars with low birth rates are virtual non-players in the game of civilization and can largely be ignored by your culture once you have addressed any bleed they may cause.

For more reading on this topic, dive into "K vs. r Selection in Cultivars' Birth Rates" in the Appendix (or the earlier recommended "Why are Birth Rates Falling" in the Appendix).

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Cultural Fidelity

Cultural fidelity represents a group's rate of cultural "bleed:" How many people raised in Culture X stay in Culture X and raise their own kids within it? Fighting cultural attrition is a uniquely difficult challenge in a post-internet age that has compromised many previously effective tactics.

Tactics that worked better pre-internet:

- **Threats of shunning:** This is only very effective when (1) a culture is geographically isolated, leaving shunned members with no other group to join, (2) a culture is so unique a person will have trouble integrating in wider society (or the culture intentionally prevents a person from acquiring skills that would allow them to integrate into wider society), or (3) a culture provides copious social services on which members rely in everyday life.
- **Warnings about not-quite-true consequences:** These cultures tell people things like, "You will be punished with a terrible life and no one will ever love you if you leave our culture." This does not work well any more because threats like this can be easily undermined by a few simple internet searches.

At present, the most effective way to impart cultural fidelity is by creating a culture that fosters pride, strategic advantages, and human flourishing. If people are clearly better off thanks to their culture, they are more likely to raise their children within it and remain loyal adherents themselves. For this reason, the cultures with the highest cultural fidelity are typically either tough to convert into (to ensure a level of quality / exclusivity among members) or require rigorous lifestyle adjustments demanding more willpower than most people have (which naturally weeds out weak-willed applicants).

Granting this level of strategic advantage to a culture requires a certain amount of flexibility. A culture that granted tactical advantages in feudal Japan is different from a culture that grants tactical advantages in Japan's

modern mega cities. If a single culture is to become a throughline between many successive generations, it must be capable of adapting.

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Death Rate

When death rates were much higher, a culture's ability to impart behaviors that reduced odds of death granted it a significant advantage. Consider Islamic ritual purification, Wuḍū, which involves washing one's face, hands, and feet with clean water (e.g., it is OK to use water from melted snow but not water that may have touched urine or a dead animal). It is hard to argue that, all other things controlled for, a culture that had its adherents washing five times a day would not have a lower death rate than other cultures in a pre-germ-theory era. It's wild to think that this knowledge was imparted through cultural evolution into a tribe of desert nomads (and later adopted by Islam) centuries before Joseph Lister and Ignaz Semmelweis arrived at this knowledge through science.

Some cultures evolved and adopted practices that helped adherents survive in specific conditions, such as desert environments or hostile frontier landscapes (consider Inuits, who developed a culture enabling them to live in extremely cold environments[6]). Essentially, these cultures evolved traditions that allowed them to thrive within specific environmental or societal niches considered too hostile to other cultures.

Even though death rates are much lower now than they used to be, modern cultures can still secure a competitive advantage by imparting healthy habits to adherents. A culture less likely to be plagued with obesity and addiction will outcompete an otherwise identical culture that lacks these defenses.

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1 April 2021 General Conference. (2022) *"2021 Statistical Report for the April 2022 Conference."* Newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2 Apr. 2022, https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/2021-statistical-report-april-2022-conference.

2 Noyce, David. (2019, Oct 24) *"This Week in Mormon Land: Convert Retention Rates around the World, Reaching out to Asylum Seekers, and Disappearing Bibles."* The Salt Lake Tribune, https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2019/10/24/this-week-mormon-land/.

3 Toronto, James A, et al. (2020) *"Why Some Dropped out: Religious Studies Center."* Why Some Dropped Out | Religious Studies Center, https://rsc.byu.edu/mormons-piazza/why-some-dropped-out.

4 April 2021 General Conference. "2020 Statistical Report for the April 2021 Conference." Newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 3 Apr. 2021, https://

newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/april-2021-general-conference-statistical-report.

5 Brooks, Joanna. (2012, Feb 3) *"Mormon Numbers Not Adding Up."* Religion Dispatches, https://religiondispatches.org/mormon-numbers-not-adding-up/.

6 It took until 1928 for Vilhjalmur Stefansson to discover how Inuit culture was getting enough vitamin C to stay alive. It turns out that their practice of undercooking meats is what allowed them to live without fear of scurvy, something unknown to science at that time. It turns out raw muktuk is pound for pound as good a source of vitamin C as orange juice.

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TYPES OF CULTURES

Cultures can be roughly divided into two categories: Contextual Cultures and Cultivars.

1. **Contextual Cultures** (e.g., sports team fanbases, clubs, local drinking cultures, etc.) only appear in a specific contextual framework.
2. **Cultivars** are the lenses that color an individual's view of reality. This is the type of culture most of the book is focused on investigating.

Cultivars themselves can be thought of as belonging to one (or more) of a few broad groups that warrant some exploration before we proceed.

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Hard Cultures

Hard cultures are almost always centered around young religious traditions. (When we say young, we do not mean the branch religion is young but the way it is being practiced now is—e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses are part of a century-old religious tradition but are practicing things differently enough to be functionally young.)

In addition, hard cultures often feature a few characteristics that prevent bleed:

- They often encourage adherents to wear unique outfits or perform rituals that cause them to feel like outsiders when mixing with other cultural groups.
- They attempt to prevent adherents from associating with other cultures to the extent that they may even shun them for doing so.
- They almost always provide copious social safety nets for members.
- They incentivize members to proselytize (either to convert people or reinforce personal narratives about how great it is to be a member of that in group) in a way that would produce significant cognitive dissonance if they ever decided to detract from the culture (though this proselytization is rarely effective at increasing cultural spread in any significant fashion).

In addition, hard cultures typically promote an internal locus of control, encouraging adherents to take personal responsibility for their failings in life.

Examples of Hard Cultures

- Mormons
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Scientologists
- International Society for Krishna Consciousness members (known more commonly as followers of Hare Krishna)

- Haredi Jews
- Evangelical Protestants
- Amish

Characteristics of Hard Cultures

Until recently, hard cultures represented some of the world's most successful civilizations, having a low bleed and high birth rate (which led them to grow at a higher rate than other cultures, making them inevitable beneficiaries of our society). In response to recent society-wide changes, this edge has eroded. In the last decade or so, many of these cultures' attrition rates have skyrocketed while their birth rates have begun plummeting.

Consider Mormons: Their cultural bleed rate is currently 36% per generation (above that of even Evangelical Protestants) and as of this book's initial publication, the Mormon population in Utah has almost fallen below replacement rate (2.1), a significant drop from the 3.14 birth rate enjoyed by the community around a decade ago (the USA's highest birth rate at the time). What was one of the world's fastest-growing cultures is, by the data, about to experience a catastrophic crash. This problem is anything but constrained to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Hard cultures, which for the past hundred years or so were the obvious candidates to inherit human civilization, are now in a death spiral.

Why? We suspect the ubiquity of the internet and social networks plays a critical role, as Amish and Mennonite groups are among the only cultivars to demonstrate resistance to the collapse (while Mennonites often use phones with internet access, they frequently lock out most of their apps behind passwords to which only friends or spouses have access, meaning they have to undergo the social shame of admitting defeat to a loved one to use them for anything but the bare minimum necessary to engage with the broader economic system of society).

Why are we so certain it is their control over internet access that is protecting them and keeping their birth rate high? As this[1] writeup shows, "simply speaking Pennsylvania Dutch (the language the Amish speak) is not a powerful indicator of super-high fertility. It's Pennsylvania Dutch and

lack of a phone that seems to be the really strong indicator of Amish-type fertility."

> *Side note: The write-up referenced above is fantastic if you want a deep dive into Amish birth rates. Essentially, it shows that while Amish birth rates are still high, even these famously fecund groups are in the process of a fairly rapid decline. (Though it does make some claims without citing sources that we have not seen substantiated elsewhere—like a 25% bleed rate in the community.)*

Orthodox Speciation

An interesting phenomenon seen in the hardest of hard cultivars is something we will call "orthodox speciation," in which a culture divides into smaller subcultures that are geographically locked. Essentially, when a group of individuals from an extremely hard culture migrates to a new region, little differences in how they practice their cultivar begin to evolve through random cultural mutation. Usually, these differences would not distinguish the cultivar, but in the case of a hard culture, they can quickly produce changes akin to behavioral isolation. In biology, speciation can occur through geographic isolation (one part of the species gets stuck on an island) or behavioral isolation (the mating dance of one branch of the species changes slightly).

Consider the differences between the Amish and the Hutterites (two Anabaptist cultures), both of which have extremely similar cultivars at the "genetic level" (at the level of their theology) but are different enough at the phenotypic level (their actual practices) that it would be very hard for a member of one group to enter the other. We also argue later in the book that we may be seeing the beginnings of this phenomenon between the U.S.-based and Israel-based Haredi Jews.

Here's where it gets even more interesting: Almost all religions start as ultra-hard cultures. For this reason, you will almost always see a flurry of Orthodox Speciation in the first few generations of every major religious

movement. Often, these new offshoots die out, like the Gnostic Christians. Occasionally, the splits remain permanent, as with the Sunni-Shia divide. This is why you almost always see much faster speciation early in a religious movement's history as opposed to later (while speciation can still happen later, the number of offshoots per member per year will be astronomically lower).

The Index was designed to prevent this—to allow hard-culture-like factions to become different without losing the ability to interact and reintegrate.

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Soft Cultures

If hard cultures are the Rocky Mountains, soft cultures are the Appalachian Mountains, weathered by the centuries into softer peaks. Though presently decaying, most soft cultures started as hard cultures and shifted over time, asking less and less of adherents in terms of rituals and practices and thereby appearing more “socially vanilla” to mainstream cultures. Because they also ask progressively less from adherents in terms of time commitment and financial support, their ability to offer meaningful social services and safety nets erodes with each passing decade.

The shift from a hard to soft culture is often marked by a transition away from a disdain toward external loci of control (i.e., a tendency to look down upon those who blame external factors for their shortcomings) as adherents begin to adopt more neutrality on the topic.

Religions that withstand the test of time typically see their member base periodically bud off into more extreme, new iterations (hard cultures) that pass the torch of these religions to new generations while the larger base succumbs to soft culture and dies off through lower birth rates and/or higher attrition.

Some cultures have even developed specific mechanisms to encourage this budding process and reintegrate the buds with the central organization. Consider the Catholic Church’s various religious orders, which re-inject the wider religion with a hard culture mindset. Essentially, the Catholic Church —a large, long-lived soft culture—cultivates small-but-strict religious orders and slots individuals sharpened within them into senior roles within its central bureaucracy.

This practice is analogous to taking stem cells from a fetus and re-injecting them into an aging individual’s spine to combat deterioration that naturally comes with age. However, as we see with Catholic religious orders, the Church must constantly allow new ones to be created, as any order that becomes sufficiently old, large, and wealthy will begin to face the same problems all soft cultures do. Think of this like a large corporation that

creates an internal incubator in which people are encouraged to “think with a startup mindset.”

Examples of Soft Cultures

- “Spiritual but Unaffiliated Christians”
- Reform Jews
- Unitarian Universalists

Characteristics of Soft Cultures

Soft cultures are often the most “pleasant” to grow up within as a child. They’re what we often think of as the “vanilla” cultural subset because, at any given point, soft cultures are often the most dominant cultural subsets, population-wise, in any given region. They have a high rate of attrition between generations and, in a modern context, soft cultures almost always have a birth rate below repopulation level (i.e., below two children per woman).

While most soft cultures’ populations are derived from families who historically practiced hard forms of those cultures, they also refortify their ranks by bleeding from adjacent hard cultures that have remained strict (e.g., an Evangelical Protestant converting to a Spiritual Christian).

> *Note: When it comes to protection against viral memes, soft cultural religions fare dramatically worse than atheistic soft cultures. An often-misattributed quote asserts that “once people stop believing in God, the problem is not that they will believe in nothing; rather, the problem is that they will believe anything.” This is true to an extent; when people still believe in God but believe in him “casually” (as measured by frequency of church attendance), they become extremely susceptible to predatory memetic sets (conspiracy theories and the like). This susceptibility is not seen in atheist populations. Scott Alexander presents a nice exploration of the data around this phenomenon.*[2] *That said, atheists and agnostics have worse birth rates than theistic soft culture adherents on average (who themselves have lower birth rates than members of hard cultures).*[3]

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Super-Soft Culture

While it is easy to accidentally frame “atheism” as the opposite of hard cultures, secular cultures can actually be quite “hard.” Soft cultures are better thought of as closer to the “genetic default” human culture. The softest of soft cultures is close to what humans would believe if left to develop a culture *a priori* on a desert island without any (cultural) evolutionary pressures (hard cultures don’t tend to form until large groups of humans start living in close proximity, such as in cities).

Through the Baldwin effect, “the process of becoming more genetically adapted over time to perform a novel behavior that was originally only learned,” religious traditions that were common among early human tribes were eventually etched onto our unconscious minds like centuries-old grooves in a dirt path, which pull the wheels of a cart into them making them incrementally deeper.

People who have allowed their culture to erode into super-soft culture begin to settle into a kind of default, instinctive, universal cultivar.

Characteristics of Super-Soft Culture

Super-soft culture is exemplified by:

- Generic spiritualism with a pantheon of gods
- A heavy focus on self-categorization (things like horoscopes and blood type tests)
- Rituals designed to lead to good luck
- Ceremonies tied to forgetting an adherent’s identity while dancing
- Attributing agency to inanimate objects or animals
- Attributing power to intention (“the power of wishy thinking”—in which a person thinks a outcome becomes more likely because they visualized it (sometimes with the caveat that this is more likely to happen if they then forgot that they visualized it or combined with some form of ritual)[4]
- Attributing power to fetishes (in the traditional sense of the word fetish: “the veneration of objects believed to have magical or

supernatural potency," often things like crystals though sometimes even pop-culture items like collectable figurines)

What does our ancestral, instinctual culture look like, theologically speaking? What will a mind unencumbered by tradition or science manifest in terms of values and worldviews? We think the purest expression of super-soft culture in modern society is something called "pop culture paganism."

Essentially, once a pop subculture reaches a certain population threshold, a portion of adherents begin to believe that the fictional characters venerated by that community are a pantheon of real, all-seeing deities. These extreme adherents often choose one or two among these characters to whom they dedicate themselves, just as some Greeks and Romans dedicated themselves or their families to a particular deity, worshiping and supporting them disproportionately.

For example, Snapewives, aka Snapeists, took Harry Potter fan culture to the next level through a belief that Snape is a real spiritual guide who they could channel and with whom they could maintain romantic relationships (they argued that J. K. Rowling ultimately channeled Snape when writing the book series). Lokiwives followed a similar route, venerating Loki from the Marvel universe.

Snapewives will do things like meditate on Snape when they are sick until he sends them inspiration for a "potion" to "brew" which will improve their health or look for signs from Snape in their day-to-day lives to know what choices to make. Most also maintain shrines to Snape in their homes.

Of course, this is not limited to fandoms with fictional characters. For example, a person may use the four members of Metallica—instead of the four elements—as a point of focus when performing pagan magic.[5]

Essentially, something in the backs of our brains makes us want to see any figure that is commonly venerated and which takes up a lot of our mindshare as a god. For a historic corollary we can look at the "hero worship" of the likely real-life combatants in the battle of Troy who were practically deified through their legends.

Women who fall into these ancient cultural grooves also often sexualize the entities they see as deities and perform elaborate binding or marriage rituals with them (known as Godspousery—seen in both Snapists and Lokiwives). We may see this as bizarre when regarding it from a modern cultural perspective, but similar traditions are seen throughout religious traditions, from the marriage of Catholic nuns to Jesus (a tradition without an male equivalent in Catholic priests—suggesting it is not just “symbolic”) and the rampant sexualization of Greek Gods, who were are known for frequently having sex with mortal women.

It would not surprise us if it was quite common in ancient Greece for groups of women to believe they shared the same God as a lover in addition to their husband. (If you find this chain of logic interesting, we strongly suggest you fall down the rabbit hole of people who have researched pop culture paganism and related subcommunities.)

As the internet enables pop culture deities to metastasize, superfans have developed increasingly sophisticated belief systems, forming something akin to full-blown theologies that strongly resemble those found in some of humanity’s earliest cultures.

Consider the following framing of pop culture paganism by one believer:

> "The way I see it, pop culture figures are essentially thoughtforms on the astral plane. The more energy we in the mundane world pour into them, the bigger and stronger they get in the astral. … The entities that I call deities are generally very, very old and very, very strong—to the point that they can function entirely independently of the energies fed to them from people. I see pop culture figures as being lesser than deity in that they are still almost entirely dependent on the incoming energies from people for their existence. As such, while I might respect and even venerate a pop culture figure, I wouldn't worship it. To me worship requires a sense of subordination to the thing being worshiped that I just don't feel for pop culture figures."[6]

While some may dismiss people incorporating known fictional characters into their religious cannon, we see this phenomenon in even modern

cultures that follow more ancient religious traditions. For example, some people of Papua New Guinea assign spiritual significance to The Phantom, a comic book character, and feature him alongside deceased ancestors on things like battle shields.[7]

As another example, the Dalit population of India recently began to build temples to a new Goddess “of English” modeled after the Statue of Liberty but holding a pen in her hand instead of a torch (to represent literacy) and a copy of the constitution granting them equal rights in the other.[8]

Heck, in modern American society, the way some people living on autopilot react to celebrities and carry around tokens featuring their likeness could be thought of as very similar to this kind of hero worship and fetishism.

Just as water receding from a lake begins to reveal the topography underneath, bit by bit, starting with the peaks, evolutionarily derived religious and cultural traditions begin to incorporate parts of this “default” culture, bit by bit, as they soften. That all successful[9] cultivars come from traditions that are heavily derived from this biological default should give pause to any wishing to argue the default is well optimized for intergenerational durability in any competitive, technologically advanced environment. (There would not have been pressures allowing deviations to outcompete it if that were the case.)

As we see it, super-soft culture is based on cultivars that evolved in environments nothing like our current social environment—however a spiritually inclined individual could just as well argue that the universalism of super-soft culture is evidence of some underlying truth.

As one of this book’s editors, Lillian Tara, puts it:

> “The truth is that humans need faith! If you give them nothing to hold sacred, to have faith in, they will find something anyway. Instead of metaphysical virtues, these empty religions imbue the material world with disproportionate value in an unconscious, desperate attempt to find meaning. It's like using a broken compass because you need direction—any direction.”

As to why women seem uniquely predisposed to fall into super-soft culture vis-a-vis men: The difference appears to be biological in nature. One could argue that women experience more discrimination and that these communities appeal to disadvantaged individuals. However, we do not see higher participation in them among any other metric of disadvantaged-ness (other than LGBT individuals), and most of the women recorded participating in pop-culture paganism are solidly middle class or upper class.

In statistical analyses, women are almost always more likely to be religious and spiritual along almost any metric, so it is not as though this biological difference is limited to this one area. One interesting study argues that women are not necessarily more spiritual; they just happen to engage with spirituality more emotionally.[10]

It may very well be that social stereotypes somehow socialize women to act this way. Even early feminists and suffragettes argued that women should be allowed to vote *because* they were biologically more spiritual than men. This kind of benevolent sexism may be more likely to stick around in the background of a society without people noticing, all while influencing the way even the most “feminist” of women see the world.

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Pop Cultures

Pop cultures are largely parasitic, gaining adherents from the offspring of other cultures through the promise of an easier life, sex, power, acceptance, prestige, wealth, or some other factor. Like heroin, pop cultures deliver on their promises at much lower rates than their advertising would suggest.

As pop cultures are designed to sell themselves, they almost always concentrate in commercial sectors, such as the entertainment, music, and MLM industries. However, pop cultures can also be found within many large bureaucracies that impose a uniform worldview on members.

Pop cultures often promote the *concept* of safety nets but rarely provide them themselves. Instead, they typically try to force external organizations (like local governments) to create them (whereas hard cultures almost always provide safety nets themselves). They push for safety nets because should one exist outside of those provided by hard cultures, it becomes easier to convert people into a pop culture that does not make the sacrifices necessary to provide one.

These cultures actively promote an external locus of control, sometimes going so far as to work in features that shift people's loci of control from internal to external, typically by presenting a compelling narrative explaining how purely external forces have driven things and people to be as they are. In extreme cases, pop cultures will go so far as to punish members who promote an *internal* locus of control (e.g., they may shame an individual for even daring to suggest a person might be responsible for their own failures).

Pop cultures are basically the all-sugar diet of culture. They hijack the lowest-order parts of our brains to put us in a state we know will feel bad later but feels spectacular in the moment.

Examples of Pop Cultures

- American pop culture
- “Goop” culture

- Academia
- New ageism
- Occupy Wall Street
- Mental health culture (more explanation of this later)

Characteristics of Pop Cultures

While living within a pop cultural framework can be exciting for the first few years, they make adherents uniquely susceptible to any vice exacerbated by a lack of self-discipline and isolation from social support structures. As such, pop culture adherents suffer from much higher rates of mental health issues.[11]

While most pop cultures in wealthy societies are associated with very low birth rates, when a pop culture is adopted by an impoverished group with low female educational attainment, birth rates begin to shoot up. This has more to do with limited access to family planning tools and a breakdown of community support than it has to do with any specific desire to have a large family. When a community provides support, it is incentivized to ensure women don't have more kids than they can handle, as care for those kids will burden the community. This partly explains why hard cultures have often evolved to be so antagonistic toward premarital sex.

Pop cultures manifest in one of two primary forms: Top-down and Bottom-up.

Top-down cultures typically feature a uniform set of beliefs and enforce this set of beliefs dictatorially downward through mechanisms like shunning members who break from orthodoxy. Unlike hard cultures, top-down pop cultures usually frame themselves as being focused on single, specific goals, such as supporting animal rights, rather than broader lifestyles.

Bottom-up pop cultures are inherently entropic and almost always set up in opposition to some other culture, defining themselves on what they are *against* rather than what they are *for*. While they sell themselves as having a consistent central ideology, they allow that ideology to shift in the mind of the adherent to whatever is needed to "sell" that culture. As such, bottom-up pop cultures often capitalize on outrage felt in response to some form of injustice in the world.

If you take a group of individuals from a bottom-up pop culture, you will find they often have very little in common outside of the aesthetics of their belief system and shared opposition toward certain other groups or actions. Despite this, bottom-up pop culture adherents tend to believe all other members of their culture hold the same basic values and beliefs about the world as they do.

It is common for a bottom-up pop culture to "win" a cultural battle only to find itself incapable of articulating an actionable set of demands once the opposing side concedes and asks for instruction. Any unified demands that *do* arise typically involve the complete extinction of whatever it is the culture opposes, and most of these opposed factors are too complex, entrenched, or amorphous to be eliminated (e.g., "the patriarchy," "capitalism," or "the gay agenda").

Consider the outcome of the French Revolution: When the revolutionaries "won," they didn't know what to do and spiraled out of control, spending a huge amount of time and resources focused on identifying and taking down more enemies instead of building a more free, equal, and fraternal society. Pop cultures are—by far—the most dangerous kinds of cultures though they often appear the most innocuous and supportive of the "little guy.

In truth, pop cultures "support" the little guy because he is more psychologically vulnerable and has more hooks (grievances) that can be used to manipulate him. Pop cultures do not genuinely have anyone's best interest at heart. Like all cultures, they are evolving and uncaring memetic packages.

Pop cultures can be thought of as an acid being repeatedly flung at productive cultures, melting hard cultures into soft cultures and eventually dissolving cultures entirely. They feature something even more insidious than a low birth rate: They destroy the birth rates of their neighbors.

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Evanescent Youth Cultures

Evanescent youth cultures are iterations of pop cultures that target teens as they experience an intense focus on their social positions within local hierarchies, a strong desire to belong, and an instinct to rebel against authority.

Evanescent youth cultures often attract teens by enabling adherents to signal to themselves that they are:

- Special in some way
- Misunderstood in some way
- A “deeper” thinker than others
- Undergoing some challenge or form of suffering others wouldn’t understand

These cultures also often equip adherents to aggressively politicize and dehumanize outsiders.

While evanescent youth cultures frequently co-opt elements of discipline seen in hard cultures, they completely focus those elements inwards (on social politicking and the dehumanization of outsiders) to make adherents feel special. These elements are wildly effective at recruiting teenagers because, as studies have shown, adolescents have heightened emotional reactions to any challenge to their positions in social hierarchies and find social rejection much more painful.[12]

Examples of Evanescent Youth Cultures

- Goths
- Punks
- Some brands of social justice advocates
- E-girls/boys

Characteristics of Evanescent Youth Cultures

Evanescent youth cultures rarely persist into adulthood but can be dangerous to other cultures as they can culturally reset adherents, erasing their birth cultures and priming them to join any group local to them upon entering adulthood. That said, it is not uncommon for culturally reset individuals to choose adult cultures aligned with their values (or spiral into super-soft culture). In a subsequent chapter, we will explore this process and detail how cultures can protect younger generations from being harvested by evanescent youth cultures, allowing them to aesthetically participate without being “culturally wiped.”

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Haven Cultures

Haven cultures are the products of marginalized groups experiencing cultural drift. Their isolation leads them to develop unique cultivars. These unique cultivars' internal hierarchies often drive adherents to do more and more distinct and extreme things to signal cultural dedication, creating cultures that look very unique from the perspective of societies' dominant pop cultures.

Haven cultures are unique in that members are pushed in rather than recruited. These cultures would not have formed were people not otherwise spurned by mainstream cultures due to some characteristic they hold.

Examples of Haven Cultures

- LGBT culture
- Some expat cultures
- Some forms of gang culture
- Early Irish-American culture
- Early Italian-American culture

Characteristics of Haven Cultures

The cohesion of haven cultures, especially in their early days, heavily depends on discrimination from predominant cultures.

Haven cultures are so dependent on mainstream discrimination that if the discrimination stops, they will either invent fictional discrimination, act in a way that intentionally generates discrimination to ensure their stability,[13] or end up fading within a few generations. Consider Italian-American and Irish-American cultures, which were extremely cohesive in their early days only to collapse into shadows of their past prominence once anti-Italian and anti-Irish sentiments died down. Fortunately, not all haven cultures are subject to this conundrum when discrimination subsides; some evolve into stable cultures (which we will discuss next).

Haven cultures often have uniquely low bleed rates—especially when discrimination is high—because adherents have nowhere else to go.

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Stable Cultures

Stable cultures are the rare happy medium between hard and soft cultures that manage to stabilize and become more tenable while avoiding descent into softness and obsolescence. They are more flexible than hard cultures in terms of supported beliefs and lifestyles while still imparting benefits and practices to adherents that make them stronger (such as a cohesive, supportive community that promotes an internal locus of control and maintains a number of strict cultural rules).

Discrimination imposed on hard cultures during their transitions into soft cultures can lead them instead to form stable cultures, enabling adherents to become more open-minded without abandoning ship (seeing as they're still sailing amid harsh waters). This makes stable cultures akin to the cousins of haven cultures, (and some stable cultures even evolve out of haven cultures).

Examples of Stable Cultures

- Orthodox Jews
- Sikhs
- Some expat cultures
- Some forms of Black culture in the U.S.
- Some branches of Catholicism

Characteristics of Stable Cultures

Stable cultures often frame their communities as tribes that stand apart from mainstream society. A love of the community commonly motivates high birth rates (rather than strict community traditions). However, stable cultures typically only manage to hover just above replacement rate.

Attrition is low among stable cultures, not typically because they threaten potential detractors but because they clearly communicate their benefits to adherents, making it clear that there is something meaningful to lose by leaving. This aspect of stable cultures means one doesn't have to maintain a strict metaphysical worldview in order to remain a dedicated adherent. The

presence of a clear cultural value proposition also makes it easier for kids to grow up within stable cultures feeling like they have a choice as to whether they will remain within that culture after reaching adulthood. In other words, stable cultures are more “carrot” than “stick” in how they motivate action.

If you are creating a culture, you will most likely want it to become a stable culture, *even though* not everything about stable cultures is good. For example, a stable culture that does not engender some discrimination against its adherents is far more likely to become soft and eventually go extinct. For this reason, stable cultures are more stable when they feature traditions to do just enough to “other” members and subject them to some discrimination. While discrimination makes the outside world a more hostile place to stable cultures’ adherents, it imparts a unique sense of cultural pride, providing these cultures with added strength.

If you aim to intentionally create a stable culture, it will need to start off as a hard culture. Over time, (lucky) hard and haven cultures transition into stable cultures—assuming they provide members with sufficiently compelling benefits while maintaining high birth rates.

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Cultural Ecosystems

Cultures experience a common life cycle: They are born hard and soften over time—worn down by the caustic parasitic pop cultures that form spontaneously in any multi-cultural ecosystem—until they dissolve entirely. Sometimes cultures can be held together by outside pressure in a way that slows down this process, like a deep-sea organism whose form is held by the very pressure that would crush a surface dweller.

Cultures evolve mechanisms to fight off threats from each other. These mechanisms make up a culture's "immune system." They range from psychological techniques that produce cognitive dissonance in the face of out-group ideas to punishment for deviation from group norms and old-fashioned isolation from the outside world. When someone ridicules you for being "weird" or "cringe," they are acting as tools of their culture's immune system, attempting to prevent you from taking actions outside the bounds of cultural norms.

Protective cultural mechanisms can't be arbitrarily removed among cultures that exist in broader ecosystems without severe consequences. Unprotected cultures will be outcompeted, worn down, and picked to pieces by surrounding cultures.

Not all cultures are softened into obsolescence over time. Some cultures adopt specialized roles within the broader landscape and only die when their ecological niches disappear. Shaker culture, for example, specialized in running orphanages (they could not have kids themselves because they believed all sex was sinful). When state-run alternatives started popping up, Shaker culture quickly transitioned from a respected societal influence to a defunct cultural tradition associated with an obscure type of well-built furniture.

As society changes, cultures evolve to fit new ecological niches. While we don't know enough to say what ecological niche early Judaism filled, we can say it was not always a specialist in producing city-based,[14] highly-trained professionals,[15] as is the case with some Jewish cultivars that have existed since the Middle Ages. (We do not say this as a stereotype but as a

fact backed by evidence cited above—members of most modern Jewish cultivars live in cities and get degrees at higher rates than other groups.)

Should we speculate on the ecological niche of early Judaism, our guess would be that in its early days, it had a semi-nomadic specialization, with an ability to maintain a distinct, non-urbanized identity while nevertheless living near and transacting with cities.

The fact that many of the most important relics of this period were also mobile, like the Ark of the Covenant, lends some credence to this hypothesis. Early Jewish semi-nomadic specialization is further supported by Joshua and Judges depicting Israelites as a confederation of semi-nomadic highland tribes that joined forces to deal with military threats from urbanized kingdoms. Perhaps this semi-nomadic specialization was a product of Judaism being an early innovator of the concept that God is not tied to a specific city or region. We can see the end of this cultural niche post-Jeremiah when Judaism became polymorphic, developing territorial and non-territorial organizational methods, types of interactions between homeland and diaspora Jews, and (later) means of coordination between different kinds of diaspora Jews. Jews clearly demonstrate that a single cultivar will evolve to fit new ecological niches over time and should not be thought of as a static thing.

Even a single variant of a cultivar can exhibit polymorphism (more than one phenotype that manifests under different conditions). For example, a culture may have one specialization below a certain population threshold and another when it grows above that threshold, as is the case with both Evangelical Arminianism and some Islamic cultivars. Each of these groups exploits the “oppressed group” role when *below* certain population thresholds and transforms into a theocratic autocracy when *above* a certain population threshold.

This can produce comical effects (consider how a non-evangelical living in an evangelical town feels when they see news coverage of a “war on Christmas” triggered by evangelicals living as minorities in non-evangelical cities—such as major coastal cities in the U.S.). (We go into this phenomenon in more detail in the chapter “Roles in Multicultural Ecosystems.”)

The shifting roles some cultivars take depending on critical mass and dominance mean you cannot reference how a cultivar behaves in areas where it *lacks* population density and power to predict its behavior once it gains dominance over political mechanisms. Instead, you must look for representations of the cultivar in areas where it is already dominant. A cultivar that benefits its neighbors when in the minority often shifts to aggressively stamping out all competition and deviation from cultural norms once it gains control. This doesn't change the fact that the cultivar can be a critical component of a multicultural ecosystem.

There are also cultivars that evolved to fill specific niches in multicultural ecosystems, such as the Romani (Gypsies) and most modern Jewish cultivars (which makes Israel a particularly unique experiment in that a symbiotic specialist cultivar is forcing itself to live as a dominant culture).[16] A society is almost always better off as a multicultural ecosystem, with each cultivar fulfilling a specialized ecological niche. (For more stats on this point, see: "Immigration and Conservative Values" under "Cultures and Conservatism.")

The benefits of diverse cultural specializations within an ecosystem fuel our eagerness to create a system that preserves cultural heterogeneity and allows for multiple distinct cultures to exist under one umbrella. After all, a single culture is unlikely to produce the broad range of skills a thriving society needs: A culture that enables effective, inner-city lawyers to feel content with their lifestyles won't simultaneously be optimized around imparting deep satisfaction to rural farmers.

The extent to which cultural specialization produces adherents who thrive in specific fields can persistently be seen in long-tail distributions. Consider how Catholic trust in systems and bureaucracies correlates with heavy Catholic representation in the United States Supreme Court (with only two of the nine sitting supreme court justices not being Catholic at the time of this book's publication—though Neil Gorsuch is only half Catholic). Consider also how the Jewish predilection for academic systems correlates with Jewish luminaries being represented among Nobel prize winners at a rate 100 times higher than would be expected based on population alone.

When we think about the niche in society, we want our family's culture to fill, we are well aware that it will comprise just one tiny sliver within a

wider ecosystem. Our goal with this book is to, for the first time, intentionally design an opt-in, diverse, multiphase ecosystem that can govern the interaction of multiple specialized cultures, which will serve society through their diversity of viewpoints, skill sets, and talents. Until now, competing cultures have been dumped into a geographic cage and forced to "figure it out for themselves" with only the barest of rules (like "don't kill each other") governing their interactions.

A Note on Generalities

Any tendency for a culture's adherents to exhibit certain traits, or to be disproportionately represented in certain niches, doesn't mean that *all* or even *most* of that culture's adherents will exhibit those traits or gravitate to those niches.

We worry about how this book obligates us to make generalities that might be toxic to our careers. It is, for example, impossible to contrast how Jewish and Catholic cultures affect their adherents on a macro scale without making generalities about Jews and Catholics—and people often find any generalization offensive.

When we say something like: "Some Jewish cultivars specialize in urban, communal living and the production of highly trained professionals," we do not mean that *all Jews* living within that faction of Jewish culture live that way. Rather, we are trying to highlight how a cultivar produces specific outcomes at a rate higher than other contemporary cultures. It is impossible to catalog cultural evolution without making any generalizations or identifying patterns in how cultures interact across time and geographies.

Ironically, the risk to us from making these kinds of generalizations does not come from the cultures we are generalizing, as most are hard cultures, and very few hard cultures care about generalizations. Hard cultures are typically quite aware that they produce differential outcomes and are distinct from the rest of society—that's kind of the point. Rather, the risk comes from pop culture variants that use the effective suppression of

intellectual inquiry as a metric for status signaling (causing surrounding groups to live under what is akin to a dictatorial cultural hegemony).

Finally, our ability to write about a culture is somewhat limited to our own experiences and what we can read about the culture. All of our books are living documents (we update them about once a year based on reader feedback). If we made a mistake, mischaracterized your culture, or you have additional ideas, please reach out.

> *Note: You will notice we almost entirely ignore discussion of Black culture. This is not because we lack experience with (or exposure to) it or because it was not important to cover, but because there is no way two non-Black people can make broad—sometimes critical—generalizations about Black culture (as we do with every other culture we mention) without it coming off as racist.*

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Arbitrary Self Denial & Fasting: Hard vs. Soft and Pop Cultures

So far, we have vaguely alluded to the co-evolution of culture and the human brain and how pop cultures erode hard cultures in a way that damages individual adherents. Let's take a moment to dive into a specific example of this phenomenon to better understand how it works.

Almost all hard cultures have some ritual focused on voluntary self-denial, such as Ramadan, Lent, or the Fast of the Firstborn. The question is, why? Why do cultures that practice something that makes membership *less pleasant* historically outcompete cultures that encourage people to indulge in whatever they want?

This question becomes more pointed when we look at how common it is for pop cultures to emotionally reward people for succumbing to their base desires, as is seen in pop culture outputs like the Intuitive Eating Movement, which entails telling people they are being healthy by eating *whatever* they want *whenever* they want in an age in which we're surrounded with an abundance of foods that are designed to be highly addictive. Movements telling people to indulge in their immediate desires have been around since the ancient Greeks. These movements resurface during every civilization's brief golden age and only seem to be successful in the short run. While the pop cultures that produce them consistently die, stodgy hard cultures persist. Why?

A cursory look would imply that arbitrary self-denial is really just about creating a sunk-cost fallacy to reduce cultural bleed. After all, the more someone invests in a culture, the harder it is, psychologically, to leave. That said, because self-denial is disproportionately represented in hard cultures despite a myriad of other sunk-cost-fallacy levers available, we suspect there's more to self-denial than the mere role it plays in reinforcing commitment.

Our theory is that self-denial and fasting impart advantages to hard culture adherents (despite these practices causing hardship) because these practices encourage adherents to strengthen their inhibitory pathways from a very

early age. Training this part of your brain to function at peak efficiency plays a critical role in mental wellbeing.

Almost all processes in our brains require “exercise” to work at optimal efficiency (if you want to get better at a mental task, practice it repeatedly). One critical pathway in our brain subject to this broad “use it or lose it” principle is called the “inhibitory pathway.” This pathway is in the prefrontal cortex and is used to shut down thoughts in other parts of our brain. It is also one of the last parts of our brain to fully myelinate (a process that leads to more optimal function), which is why teenagers have trouble shutting down obviously bad ideas and intrusive thoughts.

You are using your inhibitory pathway when you decide *not* to reach for that third donut or lash out at a friend in anger. Your inhibitory pathway will even help you shut down intrusive and snowballing thoughts. This may partly explain why religious people are often shown in studies to be psychologically healthier than non-religious people.

Those critical of religion often paint the rules associated with hard cultures as arbitrary. They imply Christianity survived to this day merely because a manipulative ruling class threatened a bunch of uneducated rubes with eternal (or very real and immediate) punishment if they did not fall in line—but this is not the case. The surviving forms of Christianity competed against hundreds of thousands of other memetic sets (all threatening people with eternal damnation) while constantly splitting into new variations that competed against each other. Any ancient hard culture that survived to this day imparts lifestyles and worldviews to adherents that help them outcompete others.

Pop cultures are toxic because there’s a big difference between what you might *want* to do in the moment (which is what pop cultures cater to) and what you *need* to do (which is often unpleasant).

Nevertheless, past and present hard cultures have plenty of flaws. For example, because gay people have offspring at lower rates, homophobic cultures have historically outcompeted more open cultures, which has led many hard cultures to be fairly homophobic—despite this homophobia not being “necessary” today to ensure higher birth rates, thanks to IVF and surrogacy.

We stand at a unique point in history where we can mine the traditions of our ancestors with a sober mind instead of angrily reacting against them and regarding them with disgust due to their lack of surface-level logic. We have the power to intentionally design cultures and see how they play out in an increasingly virulent sea of memes.

For examples of other fitness-imparting social technologies evolved by cultures, see: "Cultural Amenities" in the Appendix.

> *Side note: Harsh rules decrease bleed rates for religious communities but not for their secular counterparts. Anthropologist Richard Sosis found that 6% of secular communes survived after 20 years, compared to 39% of religious ones. Religious communes featured one common variable: A higher number of obligatory costly sacrifices (there was a perfectly linear relationship between costly sacrifices and staying power in religious communities but not secular ones).*[17]

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The Supervirus

We live at a unique point in human history. The number of individual humans connected to other individual humans, as well as the frequency with which those connections split and re-form, is unprecedented and beyond anything our hardware (brains) evolved to handle.

In the field of biology, “superbugs” evolve when a bacterium, fungus, or virus is put in a low-stakes setting where it can both thrive and test itself against a panoply of our best defenses (like antibiotics). Hospitals present one such setting in that they serve as gathering points for already-infected individuals (many of whom are immunocompromised, making them “easy mode” for viruses, fungi, and bacteria) and are packed with antivirals, antifungal, and antibiotic medications.

Our modern social landscape has created a similar environment, enabling cultural viruses to evolve. These viruses cannot survive and reproduce independently and must parasitize healthy cultural ecosystems, rewriting healthy cultures' internal machinery to carry out their life cycles. To a certain extent, all pop cultures are a form of virus—but one in particular, which we’ll call “the supervirus,” is unique in terms of how prolific it is, how quickly it redirects the machinery of infected organizations to only replicate itself, and the underlying mechanisms it uses to infect organizations/cultivars and disable their immune systems.

Characteristics of the Supervirus

Society can be thought of as a collection of overlapping nodal networks (things like companies and cultivars), with each node representing a person and their connections to other people. Historically, pop cultures, simple memetic viruses, evolved to target single nodes. These cultures would flip target nodes (convert them) by offering individuals an easy life and positive emotional subsets. While these viruses lowered the birth rates among the individual nodes they flipped and could sometimes lead to wild outbreaks, those outbreaks were always contained within single or closely-related nodal networks, meaning they were never really an existential threat to our species.

The supervirus evolved a new strategy. Instead of flipping individual nodes, it works to flip entire nodal networks. Instead of selling the promise of minimizing emotional suffering within a single node, it entices nodal systems with the prospect of minimizing negative emotion across the entire network.

The supervirus achieves this by weaponizing the nodes it flips to a union-like attitude that boycotts anything, fact, or individual, that has the potential to slow the spread of the virus or incite negative emotional states in others. It identifies "problematic" individuals and facts by using infected nodes to label these threats with "flagging language" like "that makes me uncomfortable" or "that could offend some people" and subsequently reroutes the infected nodal network around these now-tagged nodes.

Suppose a dean at a prestigious university states a fact that makes people uncomfortable, or suppose an academic study's findings might hurt a group's feelings. The system will tag these nodes as likely to cause emotional pain, then separate and ignore them until a "fixed" iteration can take their place. It is not an exaggeration to say the virus intentionally hides "offensive" or otherwise threatening facts, with both the leading journal *Nature Human Behaviour*[18] and a leading source of genetic data, the NIH genetics database,[19] now actively occluding research that could hurt protected classes' feelings.[20]

> *Note: While the supervirus is totally apolitical, it has infected progressive subsets of society more than conservative niches because (1) conservative groups are inherently more resistant to change and new ideas, (2) conservative circles feature fewer soft culture adherents, which have compromised or partially deconstructed cultural immune systems, and (3) progressive movements support many prosocial causes that dovetail well with the promise of removing emotional pain*[21].

Another huge evolutionary leap achieved by the supervirus is its practice of functionally "shadow-banning" people. The term shadow-banning comes from a practice in which website administrators block anyone from seeing the content of a user who threatens the harmony of their community. This is

done because it causes less emotional reaction in the shadow-banned user than just having their account deleted.

Historically, when one cultivar underwent a speciation event or was invaded by a proselytizing cell of another culture, it would openly kill “corrupted” or apostate nodes. If Catholics started proselytizing in a Protestant area, they would get tied to a stick and lit on fire. Of course, the same would go for Protestants “invading” Catholic turf. If some new heresy was invented —some new way of seeing the world—its inventor was sought out, put on trial, and eliminated (typically publicly). Essentially, the old system functioned similarly to a human’s immune system: An antigen would tag a cell that might be an invader or have corrupted DNA, then white blood cells (nodes that specialize at eliminating tagged nodes) would find the tagged node and destroy it.

While this open and public system of killing nodes tagged as being off-message has been highly effective historically, it is rife with negative effects:

- It forces apostate/counterculture nodes to fight back as if their lives depended on it (because their lives are genuinely at stake).
- It turns apostate nodes into martyrs, giving them a chance to memorably demonstrate the faith of their convictions to other nodes (which might inspire resistance and action).
- It provides apostate nodes with plenty of motivation to meet and commune in private. If you just saw the person who flipped you burnt at the stake, you will both appreciate their conviction (if they handle the ordeal with dignity) and deeply comprehend the importance of staying quiet when converting new nodes.

While there is much hand-wringing in our society about cancelation, the truth is that, at the population level, cancelation is pretty rare and more of a “terrorism tactic” to silence threats than a tool designed to have an effect on the targeted node.

Shadow-banning is far more effective than open persecution, elimination, or cancellation. Because it is both quiet and “nonlethal” (in that targets are neither literally killed nor fired, shunned, or de-platformed explicitly due to

their beliefs), it avoids the negative effects outlined above. As shadow-banning involves subtly cutting threatening individuals out of the conversation (or governing system, economy, academic world, etc.), it neither inspires violent resistance nor creates martyrs or signals to apostates that they need to be incredibly secretive about their beliefs (making them even easier to single out). If the virus could not find a way to deplatform an apostate with wide nodal reach, it would likely try to kill them or have them arrested—but only after it had exhausted all other options.

Another novel feature of the supervirus is that it evolved to be parasitoidal instead of just a parasite like most of the simpler viruses. In addition to draining resources from infected nodal networks, the parasitoidal supervirus eventually kills them and does so "intentionally." Iterations of the supervirus that randomly mutated into versions that kill their hosts have outcompeted strains that do not. (A parasitoid is a parasite that has evolved to kill its host as part of its reproductive cycle. For example, a wasp may lay its eggs inside a caterpillar, allowing its larva to eat the caterpillar alive from the inside out.)

Once an organization, cultivar, or movement is infected by the supervirus, portions of its internal machinery get redirected toward infecting as many members of that organization as possible. This would be a fairly slow reproductive strategy if those individuals all stayed within that organization's static nodal network, which is why parasitoidal iterations of the supervirus have a competitive advantage. Once an organization reaches a certain level of infection, odds that the virus transforms and begins to manifest differentially increase. This can be thought of as a polymorphic transformation. In the same way a grasshopper physically begins to transform into a locust when population levels reach a certain critical mass, the virus will begin to transform the internal "organs" of an organization when certain criteria are met.

Should this transformation take place, the supervirus begins to modify the infected nodal network's governing structure to repeatedly and systemically target anyone in a leadership position while encouraging large amounts of infighting—all while spawning dozens of spontaneously forming and dissolving sub-governing councils (this process can be seen in the Occupy

Wall Street movement, The Women's March, Gawker,[22] and CHAZ—more on this in subsequent chapters).

Just as an ant mind controlled by the fungus phiocordyceps camponoti-floridani eventually climbs to the top of a high piece of grass and splits apart to release its fungal spores, an infected organization will act in a manner that draws a lot of media attention in an effort to infect even more people before it functionally dies—splitting apart and releasing the nodes it infected into the surrounding environment like fungal spores, ensuring they fuel more spread.

The bacteria that causes strep throat first kills red blood cells, then coats itself in the "corpses" of these cells to hide from the immune system. The supervirus is unique among cultures in that it does not strive to create its *own* cultural identity but instead "wears" the skin of its victims to hide from societal immune systems that historically would have protected against a shameless, self-replicating piece of code. The virus will puppet the corpse of its victim, point to good things the host accomplished before becoming infected and say: How can you criticize me? I am an X, and X is all about helping people! Look at all the great things I have done!"

This dynamic may explain, in part, why the amount of oppression faced by minority groups has not decreased recently despite diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts superficially having more influence in society than ever.[23] Many of the organizations that *used* to advocate for the reduction of discrimination have been hollowed out by the supervirus, which is now wearing their decomposing faces. Instead, these organizations now merely *aesthetically* signal that they are doing "good" to protect themselves while ignoring their original missions and devoting all their resources toward spreading the supervirus.

Just as the supervirus is apolitical, it is also neither "evil" nor constructed by some group of ill-intentioned individuals or guided by any intentionality. The supervirus evolved into existence, shaped by trial and error. It spreads because it is better at spreading than the competition. It exists and grows only because it is good at shutting down the immune systems of existing cultivars and organizations, then hijacking their machinery to self-replicate.

Growth of the Supervirus

Growth of the supervirus can be seen clearly in the stats. Let’s focus on universities because that is where it sets the standard for what is “true:"

- Around one-fifth of academics in the humanities or social sciences have endorsed the dismissal of a colleague on the grounds that they express the wrong opinion on hot-button issues while four out of five American Ph.D. students are willing to discriminate against right-leaning scholars.[24]
- 41.3% of Yale undergrads believe violence is justified if it prevents others from voicing views they have determined are “hateful.”[25]
- Nearly 70% of students are in favor of reporting a professor if the professor says something the students find offensive.[26]
- Scholars Under Fire, which tracks academics who students are trying to have removed because of the content of their research, recorded a 528% increase in incidents in the six years between 2015 and 2021.[27]
- Only one in five respondents to a survey of 37,000 students asking how often they felt they could express their opinion on campus reported “fairly often” or “very often” while 17% of respondents reported never feeling comfortable expressing their opinion on campus.[28]

The stifling of dissenting views mostly happens quietly in academia. When University of Central Florida student Hanna Noor put up flyers for a free speech event featuring fellow former Muslim Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a faculty member approached her and told her to stop. “He told me I wasn’t allowed to put up flyers for anything that might offend someone, and he didn’t even see the irony of what he was saying. I mean, it was an event for free speech!”[29]

There was no irony in this scenario. Suppressing free speech is a clear objective of the supervirus, and rightly so. From the virus’s perspective, free speech and free thought are dangerous weapons that, if used widely, could end up hurting someone's feelings—or worse: Slow the rate of infection.

This is how an infected organization prevents immune nodes from hampering its spread: Once an organization reaches a certain level of infection, it begins to grow departments or branches designed to do nothing but spread the infection and accumulate resources, much like growing tumors hijack blood supply. The core function of these new departments and branches is to impose the supervirus's values (e.g., all emotional distress = violence). These departments also systematically identify, target, and remove groups and people immune to the supervirus (i.e., they report "problematic" information and people). Examples of such tumorous growths range from "fat studies departments" at universities to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) departments at companies.

> *To be clear: Some DEI professionals, groups, and departments are actually dedicated to reducing systemic inequality, while others, the tumors of the infection, merely exist to ensure that employees see the world in a specific way. Cancers that are obviously harmful are usually detected by the body and killed while they are still small. Only cancers that can falsely signal they are useful, normal parts of an organism can avoid this fate.*

While the supervirus pretends to care about diversity, the diversity it ultimately seeks is purely performative—like having people dress traditionally and celebrate different holidays as though they were props on a set. The supervirus does *not* tolerate anything beyond superficial diversity and will put its hand firmly around the neck of any vulnerable minority culture that deviates from approved values and objectives.

Consider territories where the infection is most rampant, such as New York City, and the constant hand-wringing that takes place there about the Hasidic Jew "problem."[30] The *problem,* of course, is that Hasidic culture features genuinely different values around things like childhood education, career choices, and gender equality. Hasidic culture represents genuine diversity rather than a group of people in cute "native" outfits that can be patted on the head and appreciated from a safe distance—it is a hard culture with a functioning immune system—and thus is a threat to the supervirus.

Let’s blow your mind: As of this book’s publication, the supervirus is probably still a *net benefit* to society from the perspective of our value system. Yes, it is dictatorial, it suppresses free thought, it oppresses any minority group that does not slavishly adopt its traditions and erase their own, and it is instigating a mass extinction of countless historic cultivars like a plague—none of which are things we like. However, at least in the early stages of its infection, the supervirus has genuinely protected a number of previously oppressed groups and has done a great job at promoting both gender equality and LGBT rights (much more than human activists ever could). That said, we also think it’s inevitable that it does more harm than good.

What Makes the Supervirus Dangerous?

The virus features four major hazards we will explore in order from least important to most:

Hollowing Out Existing Cultures

Once the supervirus controls a certain number of nodes within a cultivar, it begins to systematically erase that cultivar’s core, including its inherent values and objectives, maintaining only cosmetic features (consider attributes like accents, dress, superficial holidays … nothing representing deep underlying beliefs).

The supervirus has already gutted a few of the more progressively minded cultivars to a point at which they are now functionally the same culture wearing different skins … and it won’t stop there, having wrapped its tendrils deep within many more traditional belief systems. In erasing the genuine differences in how these cultures historically saw the world—the “offensive” bits—the supervirus robs us of these cultivars’ rich cultural histories and unique approaches to problems. It achieves equality by shaving off beliefs, objectives, and traditions that may produce genuine conflict among its vassals. The last thing our society needs is a monoculture wearing a skin mask of its victims.

Sterilizing Open-Minded, Prosocial Cultures

Miyajima is an island in Japan that is home to hundreds of extremely docile deer. In most places, deer are difficult to approach, running away when you get close because deer ancestors that failed to do this were killed and eaten. Because deer in Miyajima have long been considered sacred messengers, humans never killed them. This has produced an isolated deer population so docile and friendly that they will walk right up to you and eat out of your hand.

The supervirus sterilizes any group it infects. This might not be such a problem if intellectually engaged, and open-minded groups were not dramatically more susceptible to the infection given their lower social immune response (i.e., their willingness to seek out and entertain new ideas). Worse still, the supervirus develops branches of itself that spearfish the best and brightest from vulnerable populations around the world, only to culturally castrate them by lowering their birth rates and hollowing out their previous cultures. If people shoot only the most trusting elephants with the biggest tusks, eventually elephants' tusks will grow shorter and elephants will become more aggressive (and yes, humans' sociological profiles,[31] voting patterns,[32] and even traits like altruism[33] and prosociality[34] have a heritable component). Because the supervirus targets the most prosocial, open-minded people in any given society and culturally castrates them, our grandchildren will live in a much less open-minded and intellectually-engaged society. Minority groups heavily poached by the virus will have permanent genetic scars from this over-hunting of their best and brightest.

Stifling Honest Discourse

A key factor behind the virus's success is its ability to prevent any seriously infected individual from engaging with any idea or concept it has not vetted. When a mentally healthy uninfected individual reads a document or listens to a speech / lecture, they hear a series of arguments and clusters of information. When that information contrasts with their preexisting worldview, they weigh the new information against their existing worldview and keep that which seems more reasonable based on their standards of evidence (see the subchapter: "The Nature of Truth" for more information on how this works).

A deeply infected individual will instead go through an entire document, lecture, movie, or person's past statements looking for any position that deviates from the virus's orthodoxy. If a single point is found that makes the person seem to not be on their “team”—they then will ignore the rest of the content and immediately go online and “tag” the text/individual as dangerous to other infected individuals.

Anyone who has spent a cursory period of time online has seen this phenomenon. You may come across a review of a book that reads something like, “This person is R-phobic on X topic or took Y position on Z sensitive issue—one star.” Or perhaps you’ll see a tweet along the lines of, “This person once had X on their podcast or cited Y—don’t trust them.”

To anyone not infected, this would be an insane way to make decisions. It makes no sense to throw out an entire individual or work if even just one isolated statement within it seems wrong or offensive. Were we to read a book that was 50% at odds with everything we understand to be true about the world and was 50% novel, interesting ideas that inspire us to see things differently, we would think it’s a great book.

The most insidious manifestation of this behavior can be seen in accusations of “dog-whistling.” The virus does not care about individual human life; it’s happy to destroy the lives of three faithful adherents if it also wipes one immune node off the chessboard. Therefore, it does not require adherents to actually find violating language or thoughts in order to tag a node. If an individual merely *suspects* someone else might be immune to the virus and hiding it, they will accuse them of “dog-whistling,” then take something they wrote or said and claim it meant something heretical.

We have seen every idea in some works dismissed based on an idiot on Twitter claiming a single line insinuates something it does not. Still, there is a reason why the virus evolved this way—as it only cares about spreading, it will always benefit from an “execute them all and let God sort them out” mindset among those it infects.

While some historic cultures have evolved strong biases against any information produced outside of their culture (though this is rare, with even devout Christian Europeans often reading works by Islamic scientists), the concept of a “dog-whistle” is a totally new cultural innovation.

A No-Win Condition

The worst part by far is that the supervirus very clearly has no off switch—**it's a paperclip maximizer**[35] **of "no emotional pain" programmed into our social infrastructure and it is gaining steam**. The system has no "job is done; turn things off now and stop escalating" mechanism. It didn't need one in its early days, so why would it have evolved a modulating mechanism? Once the cultivar has solved the issues it claims to care about, do you think it will stop? How? What will force it to cease? Even if you were able to push a button and turn off 90% of the supervirus, it is totally decentralized and the 10% you didn't shut down would grow to fill the void created by the 90% you did shut down.

Because the supervirus has no off switch, this paperclip maximizer will never stop advancing its quest to remove emotional pain from the universe. Talk to the most infected individuals about the problem of birth rates in a trusted environment (something we do frequently), and they will let you in on the truth: Humanity itself is a curse on the planet from their perspective, and most humans endure net suffering. As they generally equate human existence with suffering, the prospect of humanity dying out is not terribly worrisome to them.

While even during the Cold War, both sides were able to stay sane enough to know the extinction of human life wasn't a worthwhile price to pay for their particular ideological faction winning, the supervirus does not care—the extinction of the human species is not a losing state but rather one of a few possible win states. To be clear, while we do not think the supervirus is the primary cause of falling birth rates, we do think it is the primary factor blocking honest discourse about the ramifications of a hard landing on demographic collapse—despite the hazard being obvious to anyone who wants to ensure a diverse and prosperous future for our species.

Like a mouse with toxoplasmosis, an organization infected by the supervirus will act in a way that is riskier and more likely to lead to self-destruction than one would expect. Toxoplasmosis has this effect on mice because earlier strains of the Toxoplasma gondii parasite that effectively tricked their hosts into being eaten by cats spread faster than others. Similarly, the supervirus inspires often-destructive behavior because earlier strains that killed their host organizations spread faster. Organizational

destruction accelerates spread in this case because when an organization dies, infected nodes are released back into the wider social ecosystem, where they are free to infect new organizations. This is a problem … a big friggin' problem … when something like a country's controlling political organization is infected.

We feel as though we are in a car and trying to explain our problems with the car to other people. We're fine with the car, and we're fine with the direction in which it's taking us, but we are horrified to see it lacks brakes and keeps running people over.

How to Overcome the Supervirus

How does one "fix" the supervirus? So long as it doesn't manage to kill us all, it will eventually go extinct on its own. Such is the curse of low birth rates: Eventually, all humans with a sociological profile susceptible to cultural sterilization will be carved out of our gene pool. As we mentioned, if you kill all elephants with big tusks that trust humans, elephants will eventually evolve into growing shorter tusks and become more aggressive. This is a problem the virus is fundamentally and systemically unable to address, as admitting that people are born different might "hurt someone's feelings."

Could the supervirus be eliminated in our lifetimes? Not entirely. Once more than a third of an organization's members and upper management becomes infected, that organization is incurable (without a Twitter-style exterminatus). The way the supervirus works on a structural level makes it impossible to circumvent. The only way to counter it is to "genetically engineer" stronger cultivars that are not susceptible to it and build a framework for these cultivars to differentially work with each other while using the supervirus's own strategy of deprioritizing vulnerable nodes. Essentially, we must create a mirror society.

Fortunately, the virus diverts so many of infected organizations' resources to self-propagation and defense that these organizations become easy to outcompete. We ran a test operation to see how we might perform in voter

turnout and were able to outcompete standard (better-resourced, longstanding) political organizations by over 600X—that is the extent of the inefficiency in a deeply infected organization. Groups infected by the supervirus become twisted and tumor-riddled beasts, moving slower and slower as they are crushed under their own weight.

> *A caveat to our proposed "solution:" By framing it as an act of child abuse or neglect to raise a child in any culture not infected by the virus, the supervirus can feasibly prevent the creation of a mirror society. Growing efforts to prevent homeschooling and efforts to ban private schools in places like Manhattan suggest the supervirus may already have begun to leverage this strategy. One of this book's test readers even pointed out that in Germany and Sweden, prohibitions on homeschooling have already become institutionalized at the state level.*[36]
>
> *Attempts to establish a forced monopoly on children's education are uniquely disturbing, as mainstream schools have become so ineffective at helping kids learn about the world and advance their careers that, by some measures, literally zero structured education produces better outcomes (specifically, unschoolers—kids given literally no guidance in their education and allowed to do whatever they want—have been found to outcompete public school kids in terms of college acceptance, college graduation, and mental health).*[37] *We cannot help but wonder if such disproportionate outcomes are a product of "traditional school" being essentially zombified by the supervirus to optimize around indoctrinating children rather than equipping youth to become thriving adults who contribute to societal advancement.*
>
> *This and other concerns inspired us to create a new educational paradigm (The Collins Institute for the Gifted), explore the creation of entirely new communities (Project Eureka), and seek out organizations like Praxis to help build new countries.*

How can a cultivar protect itself from the supervirus? How can it identify when an individual is prone to infection? Well … equipping cultivars to

withstand all sorts of vulnerabilities—including those to the supervirus—is kind of the point of this book. That said, here's one very simple protective mechanism: **Any cultivar that systemically punishes people who give in to their emotions—be they positive or negative—will be totally immune**. Viewing emotions as mere signals and inconvenient products of our evolution (our ancestors who had them had more surviving offspring) makes flagging language like "that might hurt someone's feelings" impotent. That said, there are many more mechanisms one can leverage, and a refusal to venerate emotions is obviously something we overly favor given our Secular Calvinist backgrounds (please pardon our bias).

> *We seriously considered removing this subsection from the book, but the truth is, because we can't even find a theoretical way to remove the supervirus from infected networks, we may as well start assembling immune cultivars and building competing networks. Now that we have flagged ourselves as apostates to the supervirus, we should prepare for a wave of negative reviews. If you want to help us out here, please remember to drop a positive review on Amazon.*

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Think of it like this: If a frog species develops in water, a closely related species adapting to land might retain water-filled egg sacs because it is “evolutionarily easier” than adapting to a 100% terrestrial lifecycle. Like animal evolution, cultural evolution is incremental, and often small cultural changes are enough.

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For more background, refer to the following tweet from Francisco C. Ceballos, a widely published population geneticist (https://scholar.google.co.za/citations?user=jmTjmbcAAAAJ&hl=en): https://twitter.com/monitoringbias/status/1590006016640692224

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36 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homeschooling_international_status_and_statistics#Germany

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“BELIEF” VS. “BELIEF”

A “belief” (as opposed to a “Belief”) is something that fits into our day-to-day conceptualization of reality, but is incongruent with—or unimportant to—our metaphysical, logical, or theological framework.

Many cultures have “beliefs” that they don’t “Believe." Consider the common Catholic belief in Saints as real individual spirits who assume roles similar to local or domain-specific deities in older pagan worldviews. This interpretation of saints is not canonical to the Catholic tradition and if you push Catholics on whether or not they really truly “Believe” in this interpretation of the role of Saints, they will often say “no.” However, many Catholics do casually, on a day-to-day basis, “believe” in saints like this and probably have some theory as to how this belief is compatible with their larger theology and metaphysical framework.

Consider also the “belief” in guardian angels (which one poll found 55% of Americans to “believe”).[1] While some Evangelical Protestant cultures really “Believe” in guardian angels (that every human has an angel assigned to them), this is not well attested as a concept in the Bible. Hence, many others “believe” in guardian angels but would pull back down from the position if pushed to defend it in a formal debate.

The penultimate example of a “belief” many Americans have held in their lives can be seen with the tail end of belief in Santa. If you grew up in a household that presented Santa as a real figure, you likely spent a portion of your childhood knowing that Santa’s existence as a physical, magical being

was doubtful. But why risk giving up faith entirely so long as the presents kept rolling in each Christmas?

These “beliefs” allow a culture to hold a framing device about the world without having to logically justify it within their wider metaphysical framework of reality. There is nontrivial utility in “beliefs”—enough to justify them despite their logical shortcomings. In fact, we are building many “beliefs” into our intentionally constructed family culture. For example, we intentionally developed a “belief” that we are protected by “Future Police.” Whenever something seems to have gone wrong, we just tell each other it was the Future Police teaching us a lesson or correcting a sequence of events to solidify a future that must come to pass. People laugh because, on its surface, this is little different than a “belief” in guardian angels, which stands in stark contrast to our hyper-logical public reputations.

The Future Police emerged first as a psychological technique that I, Malcolm, used to frame negative events in a positive context. I found that I was strictly better off assuming that anytime I was stressing over a negative event, the undesired turn of events was ultimately for the best and I really ought to be studying the event to glean useful lessons and identify meaningful opportunities. However, over time—as happens with many “beliefs”—my Future Police analysis became more ingrained in our family’s metaphysical worldview (this is the biggest danger of “beliefs”).

It has become harder and harder in our family to disbelieve the Future Police. It feels too improbable to us that mere chance has caused something genuinely good, either for ourselves or others, to ultimately come out of every personal setback or tragedy we’ve suffered. Life strains credulity. Probabilistically, it has come to feel impossible to us that such an unlikely series of “tragedies” would position us so perfectly to have the specific impact on human history we feel we need to have (if you want specific examples, see: “Tragedy as a Source of Opportunity” in the Appendix).

Our experience with the Future Police belief exemplifies how an informal belief can become reinforced over time through confirmation bias. If you look into the past, you can create a “just-so story” to collect data points that build initial “evidence.” Then, as you begin to connect your belief with outcomes it seemingly predicted (conveniently ignoring outcomes *not*

predicted by your belief), part of you starts asking if this crazy little idea might have some merit.

Are there really Future Police guiding our lives toward some specific outcome? Probably not, but accepting the truism that there must be a purpose and opportunity behind otherwise trying events has led us to recognize opportunities at difficult junctures and approach hard times with optimism. Even if the belief is silly, it seems self-destructive to drop it—so why not lean in?

Moreover, how we frame Future Police has become more "theologically sophisticated" over time, making our belief in them seem less insane given our other assumptions about how the universe works. In a million years, our descendants might be closer to the way we would conceptualize a God than a human. When a person hears the term "Future Police," they think of human-looking beings wearing futuristic armor,[2] but in reality, the god-like powers our distant descendants may come to exert on the past may be so advanced that to us, they'll be indistinguishable from "magic." Instead of literally time traveling, maybe such an entity is just manipulating the probability of quantum events at a macro scale, leading to different cognitive outcomes in humans.[3]

Maybe "we" (Simone and I) don't specifically matter, and distant future generations are *really* just manipulating subtle quantum events that, on the macro scale, ensure our family serves some specific, predestined function for our species. Perhaps the only reason those events "target" us at the macro scale is because we are willing to assume roles that other "candidate" families are unlikely to accept. Maybe the way to "curry favor" with the Future Police is to have a very strict, predictable, and specific moral code, signaling one's utility as a useful pawn in their larger plans.

If you assume that in 10 million years humanity (or our technological descendants) will become something closer to our conception of a God than a human, and if you believe, as we do, that future events happen concurrently to present events and that a linear flow of time is an illusion created by the way our consciousness works, then the whole framework becomes a lot less crazy.

In the famous “double slit experiment,” we learn that a single proton can bounce off its own probability wave. Maybe our God-like descendants exist as something akin to probability waves and manipulate the present to manifest the futures in which they exist. If probabilistic futures exist in some way, a future that features God-like entities could have enough power to manifest itself by influencing the present.

An argument for such a scenario could go: Is it possible for a god-like entity (one powerful enough to manipulate the fabric of reality) to become real at some point in the future? Is it possible that such an entity could be so powerful it could subtly manipulate events across time? If both of those things are true, then such an entity must exist within some probable future and is in the process of manifesting itself. Of course, the problem with this proof is that it relies on physics working in a way it may not—but what is cool is it is also provable. If it turns out that future events can systematically alter past events to increase their own probability of occurring, then this timeless deity becomes the Inevitable God.

We are, however, not committed to this theory. For example, maybe multiple future probabilistic outcomes are in competition, or maybe forces in specific negative future potentialities are working to prevent their existence.

As stupid as the idea of Future Police may be, a part of us very seriously believes in them. This framework has served us well, and we hope to pass it down to our kids by incorporating the concept of Future Police into family traditions. (Yes, we are well aware that our concept is reminiscent of a weird, benevolent version of Roko’s Basilisk.[4])

Future Police, as a family tradition, are also useful in conveying more complex concepts exemplifying our Secular Calvinist cultural framework (such as predestination, the future that must come to pass, and the Elect) in ways that a child can easily understand. For example, it is easy to explain to a kid why the Future Police have no motivation to protect an individual who lives only for themselves or their immediate community instead of the future of the species and their family. The concept of Future Police can be used to teach kids to constantly consider how their actions impact humanity in both the near and distant future.

Future Police also allow for fun family holiday traditions. For example, at the beginning of each year, our family has a celebration in which we combine common New Year's traditions (such as making commitments to the future) with Future Police motifs, encouraging our kids to "prove their dedication to the future" to these distant descendants to curry their favor and secure gifts and privileges.

Having recognized the tactical value of "beliefs"—both in augmenting everyday life and in imparting cultural values and religious theology to younger generations—we imagine several Index families will come up with competing secular theological perspectives and look forward to learning about these traditions.

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Ancestor & Descendant Worship

Many of the oldest human cultures practice something called “ancestor worship.” This is a practice of treating one’s ancestors as individual gods, a collective “God,” or at least a spiritual force on their side. In these cultures, individuals see their ancestors as representing something greater than themselves and strive to uphold ancestral mythos.

Ancestor worship can produce a cultural perception of generational degradation, with younger generations being made to feel somehow lesser than the older ones. While on the plus side, ancestor worship can help individuals deal with loss and is often effective at maintaining cultural fidelity, it places a dampener on cultural evolution for the same reasons.

Our personal House’s cultivar features an inversion of ancestral worship: Descendant worship. We believe that our role is to influence and empower our children, youth, and society in a way that empowers future generations to surpass us. Our job is to tend a garden in which the divine germinates and grows.

We call this multigenerational entity: Omniscion, the Inevitable God

Pronunciation: aam-nee-sai-uhn

We chose this word with Omni (meaning all and everywhere) and scion (meaning descendant) with the title “The Inevitable God” being able to be used independently and referencing the God’s self-manifesting nature.[5]

A theological framing that features descendant worship produces several meaningful outcomes:

1. It encourages a high birth rate and focuses on improving the lives of children from other backgrounds. If future generations are akin to gods, we earn God’s favor by acting as stewards of an environment that facilitates sustained intergenerational improvement across cultures.
2. It motivates us to make the future a better place—an inoffensive mission for even those who are mostly living life on autopilot.

3. It encourages us to aggressively improve future generations in a way that can come off as unethical to other groups (e.g., to become early adopters of polygenic risk score selection, gene editing, technological alteration, etc.).
4. It incentivizes alignment with most benevolent AGI (artificial general intelligence), as artificial intelligence is another "cultural successor" of humanity and, as such, is a type of "descendant." This puts descendant worshippers at lower risk in a scenario in which an AGI decides to kill most—but not all—of humanity.

The downside to descendant worship is that it features lower-than-average cultural fidelity. When children are raised with the expectation that they'll be profoundly better than their ancestors, they are less likely to turn to their ancestors for life advice and good practices to pass to their own kids. Essentially, telling a person they can build a culture that surpasses that of their parents will almost intrinsically increase a culture's "mutation rate" (via participation in the Index, descendant worship might be able to hold together).

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1 Harris, D. (2008, September 18). *Most Americans Believe in Guardian Angels.* ABC News. from https://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=5833399

2 We have developed some holidays for our kids around the concept of Future Police, which portray them in simple terms (e.g., they may feature humans in futuristic armor because that manifestation of Future Police is easier for kids to understand than, say, probability waves). This is similar to the visual representation of God as an old white guy with a long white beard sitting on a cloud that is commonly evoked despite lacking a strong canonical basis. Both are influenced by easy-to-relate-to pop culture (be it in the form of sci-fi movies or traditional artistic representations of Zeus).

3 Nield, D. (2022, October 22). *Study suggests spins of 'brain water' could mean our minds use quantum computation.* ScienceAlert. from https://www.sciencealert.com/study-suggests-spins-of-brain-water-could-mean-our-minds-use-quantum-computation

4 Simone says none of our readers will know what I am talking about here, but I think she is wrong. If you aren't familiar with Roko's Basilisk, the gist is that it's a thought experiment stating a superintelligent artificial intelligence (that is otherwise good) would be motivated to torture anyone who knew it *could* exist in the future but who failed to contribute to its development.

5 Yes, we were partially inspired by the Omnissiah (The Machine God) from the Warhammer universe. Yes, it is cringe, but so is almost anything that deviates from mainstream pop culture, so we may as well lean in. It represents a counter to this God in that the Omniscion is a post-mechanical and post-organic deity (at least as we understand mechanical and organic things).

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LIFE, DEATH, AND TRUTH

Questions about death and truth are often framed as questions of theology or questions of fact. In reality, such matters are often more culturally influenced.

This can be seen in the vast array of approaches people from the same theological background take to these topics. For example, one atheist may see the cessation of an individual as something that only happens when a person literally dies, while another may see the cessation of an individual as a fractional thing that happens whenever the individual changes (i.e., these two atheists have different answers to Theseus's Ship).

A single individual can look at both these perspectives and recognize them as equally valid in that they are two ways of perceiving the same set of facts. This doesn't spare these individuals from an obligation to "choose" which of these two lenses they'll use when contending with the concept of death.

Choices like these are often made for us by our cultivars. The lenses through which cultivars present major issues like life, death, and truth can heavily impact adherents' lives, touching everything from their grieving practices to the careers they select.

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The Nature of Truth

How cultures contextualize “truth” heavily impacts their members’ daily lives, from the jobs they take to their hobbies. For example, most Quaker cultivars see truth as a light which exists equally within all people at birth and can be slowly eroded over time (by things like sex).[1] Thus if you are a Quaker, cultivating children is one of the most authentic ways you can commune with the truth of reality. This is why Quakers are disproportionately represented in educational careers and disproportionately teach as a hobby (seriously, every single Quaker we know spent at least part of their life as a teacher of some sort). This interpretation of truth also explains why Quaker education historically outcompeted other forms of teaching, as Quaker educators viewed their jobs as cultivating children instead of molding them into a specific outcome (all during a time when that perspective was incredibly rare).

Irreparable cultural schisms can result from new branches of an existing culture choosing to interpret truth differently. Heck, the entire Protestant Reformation was largely just a question of whether truth was better interpreted by the individual or by expert consensus (e.g., the Catholic clergy).

Some cultures trust the assessment of experts over that of the individual. These cultures hold that the truth of a thing is best determined by individuals who spent their entire lives studying that thing. Given this perspective, these cultures often build a central bureaucracy to certify experts’ competency and mediate their work. Other cultures think it is every individual’s responsibility to assess the evidence themselves and that any large bureaucracy that accredits expertise is vulnerable to corruption and misaligned incentives. It is this differing opinion which not only led to the Protestant Reformation but that has resurfaced in how various cultures, including most of the secular descendants of Protestant cultivars, have reacted to COVID-19.

This specific divide exemplifies how through understanding how a culture sees truth, you can better understand and predict world events while nudging them toward your desired outcome. At the start of the COVID-19

pandemic, many individuals were shocked to see that a huge swath of Americans did not trust what “experts” told them to do and instead insisted on “doing their own research.” Then, this shocked group reacted by essentially saying: “Just do as you are told for the good of the greater community and submit to expert consensus!” This was just about the worst thing to say to the United States’ Protestant-descended individualists if the goal was to encourage them to actually wear masks or get vaccinated. These people had literally spent hundreds of years being burnt alive for their unwillingness to bend to “expert consensus.”

David Hackett Fischer provided a great account of Protestant resistance to authority in *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*, writing of a preacher who came from the coasts and tried to preach to backcountry Protestants during the colonial period. He was told he would be painfully dispatched if he did not shut up. Thinking he had failed, he was despondent and ended up needing to ask the locals for some hospitality before going back to the coast. Over dinner, he found people happily asking him questions about what he had planned to preach, and he had the opportunity to do the rounds at most of the town’s households. The key to communicating with this kind of culture is not to tell them what to think as an “authority” but to help them think through new ideas *as an equal* (even if you are convinced from your own cultural background that you are their “better”).

Understanding the various ways people understand truth—and not just demanding that everyone sees it through your cultural lens—can help you better navigate society.

While our first book, *The Pragmatist’s Guide to Life,* explores this topic, suffice it to say that all individuals have a hierarchy of “truth” relating to how they engage with information in the world. For a more detailed breakdown of this topic, see the Standards of Evidence chapter of that book. As a short summary, people use the following standards of evidence (truth) when determining what to believe:

1. Logical Consistency
2. Personal Experience
3. Personal Emotional Experience

4. Cultural Consensus
5. Expert Consensus
6. Scientific Method
7. Doctrine

While most people leverage all or most of the above standards to some extent, people order them differently, with some cultures strictly prioritizing one standard over others.

The Quaker faith, for example, relies more on personal emotional experience as a standard of evidence (determinant of truth) than perhaps any culture in the world. In some Quaker churches (known as meeting houses), adherents just sit quietly, waiting on God to inspire them to say something. Most Quakers see priests ("experts") as an obstruction of the truth that comes from within.

This can be contrasted with the Calvinists, who also see priests ("experts") as an obstruction to truth, but instead of holding personal emotional experience as the highest standard of evidence, they hold that truth can only come from individual research and thought (personal experience & logical consistency). Thus, instead of having a bunch of people who are equals sitting in a church waiting on God to speak through them, Calvinists feature a bunch of people quietly sitting in a church individually studying their Bibles.

This minor difference in how the two cultures answer the question: "Does the little voice inside your heart trump logical investigation of reality?" has an enormous impact, not just on the groups' contrasting historical theologies and lifestyles but also the present-day secular culture of those descended from these groups. For example, our secular Quaker friends are much more likely to search their emotions for guidance regarding what they should think. In some cases, they even believe there is a little voice inside that guides them—despite having a secular worldview.

Cultivars have the potential to create an evolutionary vortex in which members with a specific sociological profile are disproportionately drawn to a certain cultivar and less likely to leave it. This dynamic can produce a snowball effect in which members of that cultivar begin to systematically

feature a genetic predisposition to see the world a certain way. Should such evolutionary vortexes exist, there will be advantages to leveraging your cultural and religious heritage when building your own secular theology (should you want to do so), as it may be that not all software (cultivars) are compatible with all hardware (genetic predispositions).

Even long after leaving their faith, our Quaker-descended friends still trust their gut at a level we could never stomach even if there were a pile of scientific studies saying intuition was objectively a better way of engaging with reality. We understand it's offensive to point out that not all humans have the same "hardware," but it's worth facing criticism given the outsized benefits one can gain from leveraging one's "baked-in" predispositions to one's advantage.

What seems like a small difference in the ways historical Quakers and Calvinists define "truth" leads to a cascade of differences in how they interact with the world. The difference influences everything from the types of careers Quakers versus Calvinists disproportionately choose (teacher vs. inventor) to the differing values they place on human life.

If you believe that everyone has an equal spark of truth within them, then you may be more likely to conclude that all life is valuable, whereas if you believe that truth must be extracted from reality but is obscured by authority, then you may be less likely to value the lives of those you see as obscuring the truth. Differing views of truth may even explain why, while both Quakers and Calvinists made up many of the major players in the Abolition movement, the means by which they sought to achieve their goals were radically different, with Quakers being famous for pushing political reform and Calvinists being famous for hunting and killing slave holders (you would never get a Quaker John Brown). (Note: While doing research for this book, our views on the Quakers' role in the abolition movement have updated slightly. We will get to what we mean by this in just a few chapters.)

Catholic vs. Protestant Standards of Evidence

The Catholic tradition presents a great example of how the way a culture relates to truth affects the life outcomes of its adherents. Expert consensus stands at the core of how Catholic culture understands the world—belief

that truth is more efficiently procured by a class of people, authenticated by a central bureaucracy, who dedicate their entire lives to studying truth and disseminating that information to the masses (versus the Protestant belief that it is up to the individual to seek and find truth themselves).

There is logic behind both arguments, which is why questions about the nature of truth are really questions about culture rather than what is correct or incorrect. There is no objectively correct way to best determine truth.

Respecting expert consensus as mediated by a central bureaucracy intrinsically leads to higher trust in institutions. This may partly explain why Irish Catholics historically are stereotyped as being disproportionately represented in the police force.[2] [3] Ironically, this same respect for centralized institutions may explain why Catholic immigrant populations are much more likely than any other immigrant group to form a new central bureaucracy upon immigrating to a new country (these bureaucracies typically manifest as organized crime, but we suspect that is more a product of most immigrants being poor and on the outs with society).

The Mob (Irish), the Mafia (Italian), and Latin Kings / MS-13 / 18th Street Gang (Hispanic) have differentially dwarfed other immigrant organized crime groups like the Triad during their respective heydays, with the only nearly-as-influential counterexample of a gang that consisted mostly of immigrants being the Russian Mob. This counterexample somewhat proves the rule, as while the Russian Orthodox church is not Catholic, it nevertheless uses expert consensus as its primary standard of evidence (the central bureaucracy just happens to be different). This indicates that expert consensus as a standard of evidence bestows immigrant groups with higher odds of developing a bureaucracy designed to help in-group members.

A cultural specialization like this can have a huge effect at the tail end of a field's achievement distribution (i.e., if you take the ten best people in the world in a field, cultural specialization will affect that composition more than the average person who holds that job). Within the Catholic cultural specialization, this can be seen at the tail end of achievement in the field of law, with only two out of nine currently sitting Supreme Court justices not hailing from Catholic backgrounds (Elena Kagan and Stephen Breyer, both of whom are Jewish, another culture with mechanisms that grants adherents

a leg-up in the legal profession).[4] Notably, not a single person with a purely Protestant background sits on the Supreme Court. By chance, this would be incredibly unlikely, but it makes sense for a culture that is defined by an intense distrust of bureaucracy and authority.

Catholic-Protestant differences in truth definition even influence the types of governments that the respective cultivars nurture. Historically, most Protestant cultivars' distrust of authority eroded centralized power structures around them—to a point at which almost every single one of the early European proto-democracies were majority Protestant nations whereas Catholic nations maintained monarchies longer on average.

In modern times, cultivars that use expert consensus as their primary standards of evidence (mostly Catholic and Eastern Orthodox) have been much more likely to become dictatorships and score dramatically higher on corruption scores.[5] In fact, outside of Teodoro in Papua New Guinea, we can’t think of a single majority Protestant country outside of Africa that stayed a dictatorship for longer than seven years. If you don’t include the seven-year qualification, you have Nazi Germany, the 1930s Era of Silence in Estonia, and Kārlis Ulmanis’ 1934 Coup in Latvia.

In addition to Catholic and Orthodox Church traditions, many soft and pop cultures also use expert consensus as their primary standard of evidence. The most common certifying central authority deferred to by pop cultures is the academic bureaucracy (the university system). It makes perfect sense that pop cultures default to expert consensus mechanisms for determining truth, as it is a particularly “low effort” standard of evidence for a new convert.

That said, pop cultures often also use personal emotional experience as their standard evidence for the same reason (converts have to do very little to change themselves if they presume what they are feeling in the moment is backed by some objective truth). While the supervirus uses both expert consensus and emotional experience as standards of evidence, it prioritizes a socially perceived, aggregate emotional experience over both. In other words, its highest truth is the community’s collective intuition, where the contributions of higher-status community members (those able to single they are most offended) are given more weight.

While it may seem like we are derisive of expert consensus as a standard of evidence, we ultimately think it is probably the closest to correct—at least at a societal level. This is doubly true if the bureaucracy certifying experts has some way to "refresh" itself through internal housekeeping. The Catholic Church has successfully done this a few times throughout its history and has evolved unique mechanisms for this process. However, we worry that the current academic bureaucracy, looked to as the primary authenticator of truth by many pop cultures, does not have a stable calibration or cleaning mechanism in place. This means that, should academia become so corrupt that it becomes essentially non-functional at certifying genuine expertise in a specific domain, it will pull cultivars who leverage it as an arbiter of truth further and further from reality. This is partly why we built the Collins Institute, a new model for how the academic system could work.

You may be thinking: "But what about child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church? Surely, that proves the Church is evil and corrupt to its core." Well, when you contrast the rates of child molestation in the Catholic Church with those in other large bureaucracies, like the United States public school system, it starts to look unremarkable. Specifically, the American public school system not only has more than 100 times the number of child molestation cases on a yearly basis, but on a per-teacher to per-priest basis, the rate at which teachers molest children is actually slightly higher. The U.S. Department of Education found that 5% to 7% of public school teachers engage in sexual abuse of children per year contrasted with 4% of Anglican priests, as found by a study in Western Canada and backed up by a study of U.S. priests conducted by researchers at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The 2002 Department of Education report estimated that between 6% and 10% of all public school students would be victims of abuse before graduation.

Now you might be thinking: "But the Church covered for priests who sexually abused children and didn't fire them. Surely, that is proof they are evil!"

> *Well, teachers' unions* also *covered for and continued to employ those found to be abusing students. Actually, teachers' union lobbying to systematically cover up the amount of sexual abuse that takes place in schools is a big reason you haven't heard about this. The teachers' unions in some states made it so hard to fire teachers who molest children that in NYC, they are moved to special "padded classrooms without children" and left on payroll (for example, Aryeh Eller has been paid $1.7M in salary as a teacher with full health and pension benefits since being removed due to inappropriately touching under-aged girls).*
>
> *Perhaps our constant hand-wringing about the corruption of the U.S. education system and the need to build an alternative makes a bit more sense now. While the Catholic Church has done some really shitty things both now and in history, those acts were not particularly worse than the crimes of other large bureaucracies of their time. From our cultural bias, we would just say all large bureaucracies are evil, and the evil in the Catholic Church does not come from the religion but rather from the bureaucracy.*

This is not to say pop cultures never use independent investigation as their primary standard of evidence. When they do, such investigation is almost always tied to conspiracy theories (QAnon and the flat Earth movement being examples) and as such show that as much as we may espouse the virtues of personal investigation, it has significant downsides. The documentary, *Behind the Curve* on Netflix, does a great job of demonstrating the flat Earth movement's obsession with independent scientific research—these people are not science deniers but rather refuters of the academic bureaucracy as a custodian of science. An ideal cultural ecosystem will take advantage of cultivars that rely on expert consensus as well as those which rely on personal experience to cover each other's weaknesses.

Witch trials exemplify how expert consensus, as a standard of evidence, can produce more morally palatable outcomes than personal experience. The

Catholic Inquisition was fairly legalistic and actually much more fair than the cartoonish picture painted by pop history suggests. First, the Inquisition involved not a search for witches, as the experts explicitly did not believe in them, but rather a search for heretics. The process required the prosecutors to have both hard evidence and witnesses, with said witnesses vetted for past "quarrelsome behavior." This lowered the odds of individuals randomly accusing people they disliked. Moreover, the Catholic Church generally did not recommend death for proven heretics but rather confession, repentance, and charitable work assigned as penance.[6] Humorously, the Inquisition was sometimes both more ethical and civilized in its treatment of "heretics" (those not buying into the dominant cultural belief system) than cancel culture could ever claim to be.

Contrast this with the Calvinist (usually the Puritan branch) method of finding witches, which essentially assumed natural laws of God not written in the Bible could be reasoned from a combination of evidence or logical deduction.[7] For example, an individual may reason, "a witch must have refused the baptism, and therefore, water must reject them, so let's bind their legs and arms and throw them in a pond." (Yes, sometimes Catholic trials did these "naturalistic tests" and sometimes Calvinist groups relied on trials, but largely speaking Calvinist witch trials were much less strictly run and less likely to be dismissed when evidence did not align with preconceptions. Also, Calvinists went waaaay further with the insane logic used in naturalistic tests.) Calvinist-run witch trials had a dramatically higher body count than their Catholic counterparts. It is far easier for a group to lose itself to imprudence and biased logic when it regards personal investigation as the highest standard of evidence and lacks a higher authority to rein it in.

The Unique Jewish Standard of Evidence

Having explored some cultures that use standards of evidence we can easily comprehend, let's investigate a culture that uses a standard of evidence far more foreign to our personal worldview (and thus more interesting) but still very successful: The Jewish one.

If the practice of sitting in a leaderless room quietly and waiting until you are moved to say something is the essence of a Quaker understanding of

truth, and if sitting in a room quietly while independently studying the Bible is the essence of a Calvinist understanding of truth, then the Jewish understanding of truth is best seen in the practice known as Chavrusa (sometimes spelled Havruta). In this practice, a piece of religious text is chosen, then individuals are paired in groups of two based on those who would have the most spirited disagreement on the topic, and each pair debates the text (depending on the branch of Jewish tradition, these debate groups can include up to five people). As Rabbi Yosi bar Hanina is quoted as saying in the Talmud, "scholars who sit alone to study the Torah … become stupid" (Berakhot 63b). Truth, as understood in many Judaic traditions,[8] is not an absolute thing that can be found behind the text; instead, truth emerges from the debate itself. In Jewish culture, the ongoing cultural conversation is the highest order of truth.

To an outsider, this can create the perspective that truth within Judaism is essentially a form of ultra-legalism. Not only does the name of their holy book, the Torah, תּוֹרָה, literally translate to “the law,” but their culture’s foundational interaction with God (the ten commandments) was essentially a legal contract between God and a chosen people (though תּוֹרָה can also be translated to teaching or instruction). Moreover, most Jewish households hang a Ketubah on their walls—a Jewish wedding contract that outlines the legal obligations of a wife and husband (it is commonly thought of as an important piece of uniquely Jewish art). The way many Jewish branches interpret truth is legalistic to an extent that no other culture even begins to approach.

You may assume we are overstating things, so let’s look at an example. Christians are told not to work on the Sabbath, and they’re like:

> “Cool, a day to focus on worship and rest!"

Jews get told not to work on the Sabbath, and they’re like:

> "OK, but what technically counts as *work*? Let’s divide all work into 39 categories and then divide those 39 categories into 39 subcategories—and then, of course, we need to take into account the intention when an action is performed. Oh, but of course sometimes

> you may need to do something like carry your baby outside to the park, and carrying something from one type of space to another type of space could be considered a type of work, so we will cordon off a zone with a cord to designate the outside and the inside as technically the same kind of space. Ah, now that we have this cordoned-off zone indemnity, could we perhaps put a cord around an entire city?"

This is why synagogues pay over $100,000 annually to keep a fishing line around a large portion of Manhattan. Let's be clear: Only certain sects of Judaism have this kind of extreme take—but a number do. Not a *single* Christian denomination has anything close to this level of legalism (a few have stricter rules, but none have rules so nuanced or systematized). Depending on the perspective you take, Jewish culture either regards technical, legalistic conclusions as the highest order of truth *or* Jewish culture sees the legalistic debate itself as the highest order of truth.

This is not a new phenomenon and appears to be core to even ancient Jewish culture, as can be seen from The Oven of Akhnai in the Talmud (the "snake oven story"). In the story, three rabbis argue over whether a new oven design is subject to ritual impurity. Two rabbis argue from the perspective of legalistic interpretations of past texts. The third keeps having God perform miraculous acts like making a river flow backward on demand to show them that God disagrees with them.

What is fascinating is that, at the story's conclusion, the rabbi, whose perspective on the topic is obviously endorsed by God, is *expelled* from the community. Let's be clear: This is a story about educated, intelligent, well-intentioned people (not idiots); they know God disagrees with their interpretation of the rules—*however*, because their interpretation of the rules is "technically correct," *it supersedes God's "opinion" on the subject*. Crazier still (from the perspective of non-Jewish cultures), God ends up essentially agreeing with the legalist perspective, admitting he was acting out of his jurisdiction—as the story says, "it is not in heaven." He (God) gives props to the two other rabbis for sticking to their guns, laughing while saying, "My children have bested me."

This story shows that even in distant history, some Jews found the legalism of their tradition grating. Even though it could cause divisions in their community (the rabbi who was expelled ended up killing one of the others with prayers over this slight), legalism is nevertheless an important part of Jewish culture—even more important than the will of God. More critically, for our purposes, legalism is a differentiating part of Jewish culture, which separates most Jewish cultivars from any other extant cultivar.

Perhaps this differentiation can partly explain outsized Jewish success in some areas. Consider the disproportionate number of Nobel Prize winners cited above. It should not be surprising that a culture with a heavy focus on truth as determined through intellectual debate would produce people skilled at intellectual debate and inquiry.

If you think Jewish success is a product of higher average IQs, it is not. The studies showing a large effect are very flawed, and we are quite embarrassed to have believed them without actually reading their methodology before digging into them when writing this book. For a detailed breakdown of every major study in this space and what it actually shows, see: "The Myth of a Large, Genetic Jewish IQ Advantage."

To word it another way, the Christian's relationship with God is often framed in terms of a parent and a child's relationship, though the power difference in the framing often makes adherents appear more like feudal supplicants (actually, we go into this more later but the way Christians put their hands together when praying may be derived from a vassalage ceremony). We suspect this is why many extremist young Christians fashion themselves as unwavering "knights" fighting for a glorious cause—mirroring a vassal relationship. Come to think of it, we have never heard a Jewish person compare themselves to a knight, yet this analogy is omnipresent in young Christian males.

The Christian lord-vassal relationship heavily contrasts with the Jewish relationship, which is more like a legal contract represented in the commandments. In most Christian traditions, God will show you favor because you love him or supplicate yourself enough to him, whereas in the Jewish tradition, earning God's favor is more about upholding your side of a contract God signed with your people (as The Oven of Akhnai story in the

Talmud demonstrates, directly disobeying the will of God is better than breaking the technicals of the contract).

While it is sufficiently interesting to us that the legalistic approach taken to truth in Jewish culture might partly explain Jewish populations' disproportionate academic success, we continue to obsess with it because it seems so counterintuitive to us. From a Calvinist perspective, the rabbi who was expelled was obviously in the right and our cultural bias prevents us from seeing how anyone could think otherwise. Surely an all-powerful deity's will would supersede any contract—right? And, if His will seemed to contradict a contract, then our understanding of the contract, rather than His, must be wrong, right? Isn't God an all-powerful entity that can see all things at once? It would be like ignoring a bizarre finding in the field of quantum physics because it did not match an earlier understanding of an immutable cosmic force.

We may personally disagree with the Quaker and Catholic views of how to search for truth, but we also "get it." Their approaches to truth seem logically sound. The Jewish perspective did not make sense to us until we remembered the goal of a culture is not to search for absolute "real" truth but to breed, thrive, and reduce bleed. By creating a mindset in which an individual can't come out of nowhere and pretend to be divinely inspired while performing magic tricks, the Jewish tradition dramatically lowers its probability of splintering and always allows room for a splinter faction to be recombined into the whole.

This may not seem like a major hazard today, but Jewish thinkers who put on thaumaturgical performances (performing magic or miracles) and had large groups of followers were actually pretty common in early Jewish history and include individuals like Honi the Circle-Drawer, Eliezar the exorcist, and Jesus. (We understand it may seem offensive to frame Jesus this way, but even from the perspective of most Christian traditions, Jesus manifested as a Jewish individual who claimed to have a special relationship with God and demonstrated those claims through thaumaturgical performances.)

In other words, this view of truth ensures all Jewish differences in belief are differences of interpretation, not information. When you consider this from the perspective of culture crafting, the approach is

beyond shrewd—it is *genius*—and it may explain why Jews that maintain this cultural element have not mass slaughtered each other since the Hasmonean Civil War. Moreover, when branches of the Jewish cultivar *do* drop this cultural element and become open to "revelations" of absolute truth directly from God, they become Christians or Muslims and start killing each other while also losing their ability to be easily reintegrated into broader Jewish branches.

When one branch of Christianity breaks off from another branch of Christianity, it seldom reintegrates, whereas there are ample cases of splinters re-joining larger groups in Jewish history despite Christian cultivars all having evolved out of Jewish ones. In other words, when a Jewish splinter group drops its legalistic approach to truth, it appears to lose this "superpower" of other Jewish cultivars. (Note: Most polytheistic religions facilitate the re-joining of splinter groups as well; only monotheistic ones have nearly totally lost it.)

We feel like jerks for suggesting that any culture only "believes" something because it is advantageous (in terms of increased achievement, stability, and continuity) rather than because they *really* believe it" and maybe that interpretation is wrong. Perhaps a legalistic approach to truth really is logical.

After all, if God sets out specific laws for a chosen people, it makes perfect sense that those people should give disproportionate precedence to those laws. Deferring to those laws—even in opposition to God's opinion on a subject—is ultimately a demonstration of respect to God.

Imagine a parent leaves two groups of kids in a room and, to keep them from wandering off and getting injured, tells them not to play outside a playpen. Group A decides to expand the playpen's size to make sure nobody accidentally breaks the rule while still getting access to more space and toys. Meanwhile, Group B decides the parent's intent must be that they aren't supposed to have fun, so they decide to sit and stare solemnly at the wall during the parent's absence.

While both groups A and B misinterpreted the parent's intention, Group A, using a more legalistic definition of truth, showed more respect for the parent by not presuming they could understand the parent's intent. What to

outside cultures may look like absurd legalism could really be a sign of respect for God through the admission that God's wisdom is so great, one would be crazy to presume they can understand the "intentions" behind any of His thoughts.

In addition, God, as depicted in writings like the Ketuvim (think: *The Book of Job*), can be quite capricious at times. Presumably, when God takes the time to outline hard and fast rules, He is in a more lucid state and properly thinking through important implications, making official, God-given rules more important than randomly expressed opinions. This is not a crazy concept. If the President of the United States were to lay out a new policy through an official Executive Order, people would give it far more precedence than an unrehearsed presidential opinion expressed amid a chaotic press conference. Similarly, a Papal Bull carries a totally different weight than an offhand remark made by the Pope. It is hardly illogical for a group to give precedence to carefully crafted, official mandates.

Finally, it may be that Jewish tradition does not position *legalism* as the highest order of truth but rather *the debate itself*. By this reasoning, the *process* of a culture evolving and advancing is the highest order of truth. In this interpretation, *the tradition itself*, rather than the individual, is the "unit of consciousness," and each individual's role as a neuron within this larger system is to constantly debate the culture's rules and texts while generating new ones.

To use a pop culture analogy, the Jewish tribe is like Earth in The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy: A supercomputer that will come to the truth so long as its individual components perform their roles. In this view, Judaism is like a supercomputer that will collectively come to the right answers so long as every individual component does not deviate from its script, even when that script *seems* illogical. This approach makes sense in that it could be the height of arrogance to think a single individual could even begin to understand the ultimate questions they are meant to ask, much less the answers. It is entirely plausible that such weighty subjects may only be tackled by an intergenerational consciousness.

While we suspect that many readers have intuitions about the "correct" way a culture should search for truth, we are ambivalent. Honestly, we see

genuine value in all of the methodologies outlined above and see flaws and benefits to each.

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How We Understand Truth: Criteria of Authenticity

Having read how some extant cultures determine truth, you might be curious to know what standard we have chosen for our personal House cultivar.

It should be obvious to anyone who has read our other books that the standard of evidence we regard *least* is personal emotional experience. To us, emotions are merely signals that helped our ancestors have more surviving offspring—but in a completely different environmental context. Emotions are vestiges of our animal selves, clawing away at our humanity, logic, and self-determination. To that end, emotional experience can act not just as the standard of evidence we value least but also as a uniquely dangerous signal that can and often does corrupt logical judgments. For example, before we decided to get engaged, we took a few months apart from each other to ensure that love would not cloud our judgment on such a monumental life decision (we can think of nothing more perverse than a marriage built upon a foundation so dehumanizing as love).

The two standards of evidence we regard most highly are expert consensus and personal research (the combination is essential in our view, as both have irreparable flaws when used in isolation). While the Calvinist concept of radical, independent research was innovative when first developed and often sufficient during a simpler time in history, the obsessive independent study model yields an insufficient picture of reality in a world where successful humans need to understand a broad array of complex domains. Without loads of money and time, independent study is unlikely to yield an accurate perception of reality on even a moderate array of issues.

At the same time, expert consensus is no longer effective on its own either. In our new hyper-connected and fast-paced world, sources of expert consensus are increasingly likely to distribute propaganda as if it was factual information—this is doubly true as previously unimpeachable organizations like the American university and media/news systems are in a state of collapse, having been so infected by the parasitoidal supervirus they are about to pop like a bloated caterpillar whose insides have long since been consumed by worms crawling just beneath its skin.

To resolve this, we developed internal “Criteria of Authenticity,” which allow one to consider expert consensus as the highest form of evidence so long as it meets certain standards (the more Criteria of Authenticity a stated “fact” meets, the more likely that fact is to be true). Think of our Criteria of Authenticity like a sieve that retains truth while letting baseless expert consensus flow down the drain.

Our Criteria for Authenticity are based on the belief that there is too much information for any one individual to process, meaning one *must* turn to experts who have invested in specialization. Nevertheless, one must be careful, as the world is filled with both trustworthy and untrustworthy experts. One furthermore should not rely on a third-party organization to sort legitimate from illegitimate experts—any organization that gains a reputation for doing this effectively will become a priority target for infection by any number of memetic viruses looking to incept it with their ideology and is living on borrowed time as a non-biased source.

Criteria of Authenticity

The following criteria are common indications that an expert’s assertions are true. Very few facts meet all these criteria. Generally speaking, we are more confident in a fact if it meets more of these criteria (i.e., we’re more confident something is true if it meets three of these criteria than if it only meets one).

The Criterion of Embarrassment: Does the presented information run counter to the aspirational reputation, views, or behaviors of the group presenting it? This heuristic was popularized by biblical scholars studying the historical Jesus, who argue that information presented in a gospel about Jesus that doesn’t adhere to either Christian or Jewish ideals may be considered more credible. After all, it doesn’t do gospel writers any favors to include unflattering details. To present a secular example: An oil company’s internally-generated report stating their drilling is environmentally damaging is more likely to be true than an environmental advocacy group’s report asserting the same.

The Criterion of Multiple Attestation: Also popularized by biblical scholars, the criterion for multiple attestation essentially holds that if several independent sources say the same thing, that thing is more likely to be true. For example, if several peer-reviewed studies report a certain gender is more likely to die in a pandemic, and insurance rates also go up for people of that gender, then it is likely true that one particular gender is at higher risk. The distinct danger of this heuristic in the modern age is that often journalists and publishers repeat untrue facts initially reported in one channel without verifying (or even citing) them, giving one the impression that multiple independent sources have vetted a fact that is ultimately untrue —thus one must reference sources that do not, or cannot, draw from each other (e.g., both scientific studies and insurance rates).

The Criterion of Filtering: If a source has shown that it heavily censors information that supports an ideological perspective at odds with them, all favorably-ideologically aligned information they present should be assumed to be filtered.

For example, when *Nature Human Behavior* announced that it was filtering out research that might "stigmatize individuals or human groups," we had to update the manner in which we regard any research it publishes (or conspicuously doesn't publish).[9] Now, if we see some group claim that a fact is true, and we think it would "stigmatize individuals or human groups," we cannot use an absence of peer-reviewed studies coming out of journals like *Nature* to argue against said fact because we know that even (and especially) if they were receiving papers that supported the offensive argument, they would not be publishing them. This type of filtering almost always makes things worse for the agenda of whichever group practices it —never better. (This footnote explains this concept more deeply if it's not clicking.[10])

> *This criterion heavily motivated our writing of* The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality. *When we encountered a study by Buss and von Hippe that surveyed 335 social psychologists and found that more than half of respondents would actively occlude any data that suggested a biological basis for sex differences (a study that obviously passed the Criterion of Embarrassment). Upon digging*

into the data, we were shocked to find loads of low-hanging fruit with huge implications across multiple fields (like early human tribal structures). The field is rife with unexplored findings that would even be useful to groups advocating for LGBT rights. It was as if serious research in the field just was not being done. This highlighted to us how badly we need an academic reformation and how important independent researchers like Aella are.

- **The Criterion of Lies:** This sub criterion—a more egregious manifestation of the Criterion of Filtering—states that once it has been confirmed that a source intentionally tried to manipulate you for the benefit of its ideological agenda, it can be ignored going forward. A source that obscured the truth in service of an agenda is different from one that appeared to make a genuine mistake (as all sources make mistakes). For example, if you are on a website dedicated to debunking false information and you run across multiple articles with the same bias that claim to debunk matters that are verifiably true, then the site is not a useful source of information, even if its bias is one that you also hold.

The Criterion of Plausibility: To use plausibility as a criterion for truth, ask yourself if the information in question is logically consistent with related information. For example, suppose someone tells you that there are cures for cancer, but companies are hiding them because they can make more money that way. Assuming you live in a society with multiple pharmaceutical companies in competition, this can be dismissed as unlikely, as at least one of the companies would profit from backstabbing the others with this information (at least after a few decades). This is doubly true if any individual scientist at one of these companies with this knowledge could duck out and start their own company, raise money from VCs or a few angels, and get super rich.

Note: This argument does not hold when the solution is not pharmacological, or it is pharmacological, but the drug is a generic, and it is hard to profit off of it, as is the case with Naltrexone and addictions.

- **The Criterion of Decentralized Financial Motivations:** The most common way the criteria of plausibility gets violated is through implausible financial motivations. Large organizations will almost always do what is in their financial best interest, so when a number of competing large organizations are all doing the same thing, there is probably a strong reason for it. For example, if all airline companies are routing their planes along paths that would not make sense in a flat or round earth model, that model is likely wrong.

The Criterion of Cohesive Narratives: For evidence tied to events, do less-attested parts of the narrative fit in a logically consistent manner with more-attested parts?

For example: Let's say it is well-attested that one of the only labs in the world dedicated to studying COVID-19 was in Wuhan, they'd previously had containment breaks, and the first outbreak was *in* Wuhan. That would mean an article arguing that COVID-19 came from deer populations in the USA can be viewed with intense skepticism.

- **The Criterion of Beginnings and Ends:** This is a sub-criterion that states that if we know something was true at the beginning of a period and that it was also true at the end of a period, it was most likely true throughout that entire period. For example, if we know that humans' closest relatives, like chimps and gorillas, regularly practice infanticide by throwing infants at rocks after conquering another tribe, and we know that one of our earliest written records (the Bible) also suggests humans engaged in this practice a few thousand years ago, we can assume it was common among early hominid groups. (We explore this topic in detail in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality*.)

The Criterion of Prediction: The criterion of prediction holds that any source that has reliably predicted future events before they happen should be trusted more than other sources. This is doubly true if most other sources were wrong about the same predicted outcome. If a newspaper says Nation X is likely to attack Nation Y, while most others do not, and if that

newspaper turns out to be correct, then their coverage of other events in that region is also likely to be more accurate.

Important: This criterion should only be judged using historical data, and a comprehensive assessment of all bets made rather than a source's claim that they predicted future events. It is easy to make a hundred predictions and only mention those which ultimately came to pass. Many scam investors, for example, highlight only their investment wins to prospective clients, when if one were to look at their entire historical portfolios, one would see that the scam investors have, on average, *lost* people money over time, making more bad predictions than good.

- **The Criterion of Shot Calling:** An extreme version of the criterion of prediction involves what we call "shot calling." If an individual successfully predicts a very unlikely outcome when a certain treatment, ritual, or practice is performed, then they may be trusted even with very few points of data. If, for instance, a shaman performs a ritual he claims will make you a millionaire within three days and two days later you win a million dollars in the lottery, you cannot simply dismiss his methods out of hand. Consider the Lazslo Polgar case study around creating genius for a real-world example. While this case features a sample size of only three (Polgar's three daughters), the fact that this man predicted he could essentially manufacture genius (three of the greatest chess players in human history) indicates he had some insight others lack on how the human mind develops, seeing as the probability that any random group of three children would all turn out to be geniuses in exactly the same way, in the way he said they would be, is astronomically low. (We also know that Polgar did not fabricate his prediction only after succeeding, as we have evidence from the personal ad he used to find a wife in which he states his intentions.)

The Criterion of Memability: Information bearing a similar structure or theme common to misinformation can be strongly discounted. For example, if someone tells you, "Daddy long legs are actually the most poisonous spider in the world but their mouths are too small to bite you," you should

be very skeptical. This claim shares multiple characteristics that cause false information to be extensively shared (it is shocking, likely to come up, and not easily verifiable, making it a very likely claim to spread whether or not it is true). For a comprehensive list of untrue information that is highly memable, check out Wikipedia's list of common misconceptions.[11]

A case in which this heuristic fell short: During the World War I, there were many false reports of genocide. For this reason, many did not trust the reports of genocide when they first emerged in the World War II, in part because they sounded so insanely over the top and scandalous.

The Criterion of Verifiability: Any information that could be easily verified by other people is more likely to be true than an unverifiable fact. In the Mayan empire, the priest cast would test whether a king was "real" by looking for a sign under his tongue, likely because no one else could get the king to show them that part of his anatomy and the king could not see the underside of his own tongue, allowing the priests to choose a king. Based on the criterion of verifiability, you can trust an easily verifiable claim more than an unverifiable one—even if you don't plan on verifying that claim. Someone who hands you $100,000 in bills and offers to let you count it is more likely to be telling the truth than someone who does not let you count it, regardless of whether you choose to count the funds.

This criterion is often abused by people attempting to shut down arguments by citing studies. These people often exploit the fact that very few people with whom they speak will actually bother to review the study cited, enabling them to shut down conversations even if verification would ultimately prove their arguments to be shoddy.

The Criterion of Care: Any information from a source with a vested interest in your well-being can be more trusted than one that doesn't. This can either be in the case of something like an organization that would lose money if you died (an insurance company telling you how not to die has a high criteria of care) or one that has an emotional connection to you (such as your parents).

The Criteria of Fuzzies: This criterion specifically filters arguments in which someone claims: "The data is just too complicated and nuanced for us to be certain of anything." When the science on a subject is really

obvious, and someone wants to argue against it from a position of authority, this is the argument they will use—be that subject climate change or heritable elements of voting behavior. If a body of research backs up a claim using sound scientific methods, “it’s complicated” and “there is more nuance to this than is stated in the research” (where this desired nuance is impossible to succinctly convey) are not arguments sufficient to warrant rejection of the broad strokes laid out in that research.

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Relativism & Justice-Motivated Belief Systems

Having delineated how logical systems we respect search for truth, we should, nevertheless, highlight that not all minds work so logically. A sizable portion of people make judgments using criteria not optimized around determining the truth of a thing.

One of our favorite examples of this comes in the form of Karl Pilkington, probably our favorite "comedian" (or wise sage, depending on how you look at him). If you have listened to enough of his content, it becomes clear one element that makes his thought process so unusual—and thus funny—is that when deciding what is true between multiple possibilities, Pilkington often chooses the most interesting and narratively engaging potentiality.

Pilkington's approach to interpreting scenarios is not unheard of—we know at least one person who does the same—but this method is nevertheless rare. If a person who thinks like this hears "a monkey went into space on a rocket," they will imagine a monkey flying a spaceship then try to work backward as to how that might be possible (maybe he was trained to push buttons using bananas) instead of a monkey being put in a cage and shot into the sky. This form of deciding what is true is too disorganized to lead to a cohesive religious structure—though other forms are.

Much to our great distress, many people determine truth by choosing the most just, fair, or politically correct explanation available. We'll call these people the "justicles." If a justicle were tasked with deciding whether men and women, on average, have different sociological profiles, they would ask themselves whether or not it would be "just" if such were true—rather than considering evidence, experts, common sense, or religious texts. The justicle would then try to twist evidence, expert opinions, and religious texts to justify their chosen belief and try to convert people who use different standards of evidence to their way of thinking.

While we disagree with those who slavishly follow religious dogma or expert consensus, we at least acknowledge the logical consistency in their actions (if the Bible is the ultimate source of truth, it would be illogical, immoral, and intellectually dishonest to be swayed by other sources).

Justicles' choice to defer to political correctness, fairness, or justice has more to do with intellectual and emotional laziness than anything else.

Justicles seem to care more about whether a chain of logic makes them feel like a "good guy" than whether it is true or likely to make the world a better place. More repulsively, their thought process makes them astronomically more likely to worsen the on-the-ground situation of suffering people by perpetuating inaccurate models that prevent organizations and people from addressing real and pressing problems. **Justicles are the "nice guys" of philosophy—thinking if they perform some perfunctory "nice" rituals, reality will reward them with moral points while not worrying about reality's consent.**

Abrahamic Justicle Cultivars

Don't just take our word for it that justicle logic masks immoral behavior beneath performative protests about the injustices of the world—just look at the formal religious systems in the Abrahamic tradition that are most susceptible to justicle logic: The Unitarian Universalists (their core truth is relativism) and the Hicksite Quakers (whose belief that the highest order of truth comes from personal emotional experience has rendered them susceptible to justicle logic—though note that Orthodox Quakers who believe the Bible takes precedence over personal emotional experience are fairly immune to justiclesm).

In the case of the Unitarian Universalists, we can see the total moral depravity of even their central governing organization through its abuse of Jonathan Holdeen's legacy (we include an excerpt from *The Pragmatist's Guide to Governance* titled "The Immortality of a Vision" on this incident in the Appendix—it is so deeply upsetting we may go so far as to suggest you don't read it if you are just looking for a light reading experience today). To summarize what happened, a guy worked slavishly his whole life living in squalor while saving millions of dollars to enact a plan to make the world a better place—his plan was to have his money grow in perpetuity until it could pay the taxes of all citizens of the state of Pennsylvania (among several other things). He left his wealth under the stewardship of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Boston and asked his daughter, Stella, to work to grow it. After Holdeen passed away, the church decided they wanted *all the money*—and they wanted it immediately—arguing that if the

fund grew too large, it would destabilize the economy (while presenting additional, similarly unhinged lines of reasoning). The church then spent decades suing Holdeen's daughter for full control of the money (even though she was handily beating the stock market with it).

They eventually wore Stella and everyone else down, ultimately taking full control of Holdeen's hard-won wealth to spend however they wanted.[12] Long story short, when the church's governing body had a choice between helping millions of people if they could just *not be evil* and avoid the temptation of riches and immediate gratification, they demonstrated that such was far too much to ask. The pettiness and moral thoughtlessness of the choice is genuinely astounding.

That said, most of us have witnessed our government doing something we think is evil and felt powerless to stop it. All we can say about Unitarian Universalism is that it failed to prevent the corruption of at least one of its governing bodies. When trying to learn which cultivars have been uniquely bad at embodying their claimed moral positions, we need to look at the population level, but there has never been a historical period during which the Unitarian Universalists made up such a large percent of a local population at an important point in world history that we are able to get detailed population-level data … and that is where the Quakers come in.

> *Note: While it may seem we are biased here, we will be the first to admit that the Unitarian Universalist church was largely a creation of the decaying Calvinist culture from which we hail—read up on the work of William Ellery Channing or the creation of Universalism for more detail.*

What about Quakers? Weren't Quakers morally ahead of their time and super nice? Weren't they leaders of the abolition movement or something? This is certainly the version of Quakers we learned about in school, so we were shocked upon our review of the stats (and maybe more than a little bitter because we felt misled).

Around 42% of Maryland Quakers in early America owned slaves[13] (this sample was taken from Maryland wills between 1669 and 1750). Among Quaker leaders in Philadelphia, 70% owned slaves (this sample was taken

from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting from 1681 to 1705).[14] Even if we go with the lower number, this is still the highest rate of slave ownership of any cultivar in the colonies (not on a number-of-slaves-owned basis, but on a precent-of-the-population-owning-slaves basis)—a rate way higher than that of the Anglican-descended Southern culture at the time of the Civil War (around 20% of households and 5% of individuals[15]).

Contrast this with Puritan communities, which, while less attested, seemed to have slave ownership rates between 0.5% and 2%.[16] Suffice it to say, the tale of the whaleship Essex tells us what happens to BIPOCs who put themselves in the same boat as Quakers—or any justicle of today for the matter, despite their incessant self-framing as "the good guys" (Hint: The moment things went bad, the Essex's Quaker sailors ate their BIPOC compatriots first, then claimed this uncanny skew was the product of random lot draws).

Those who have only heard the cartoon version of Quaker history may find our claims shocking. Perhaps you're thinking: "Maybe Quakers owned slaves at a high rate, but maybe they worked really hard to end slavery."

Who? Search for famous Quaker abolitionists, and you get names like Elias Hicks, a Quaker who urged boycotts, and Benjamin Lay, who theatrically flung blood on people and made a big scene about how opposed he was to slavery. As you read more about such figures, you will find that none of these activists actually did anything other than complain and help with some parts of the underground railroad.

Contrast this with just a quick look at Calvinist abolitionists, and you get names of people like John Brown of Harpers Ferry and Bleeding Kansas—or Newton Knight[17] working with Malcolm's own ancestors of the Free State of Jones. We have heard that Quakers may have played more of an important role in abolition in the U.K., but in the U.S. at least, their performance was … well, overwhelmingly performative rather than results-oriented.

Now, perhaps you're thinking: "Come on, guys. That is really harsh. Wasn't Pennsylvania the first state to ban slavery?"

While some pro-Quaker historians will frame such as fact, an assertion that Pennsylvania was the first state to ban slavery intentionally misrepresents what happened. Vermont (a majority Congregationalist Calvinist state) banned slavery at its founding in 1770, then built that ban into the state's constitution in 1777 (these bans immediately freed slaves above a certain age). Pennsylvania did not even put a high duty on slavery until 1773, and when they did ultimately ban slavery in 1780, they nevertheless allowed slave owners to keep their slaves—just banning the *purchasing* of new slaves.

Contrast this with the Puritans in Massachusetts, who freed *all slaves* upon banning slavery three years later in 1783 (the same year that the American Revolution officially ended and the Treaty of Paris was signed). So sure, the Quakers *did* ban slavery first, but only if you discount Vermont because it had not yet joined the union and only if you count a partial ban on slavery. Even within Pennsylvania, Quaker communities did not spearhead the anti-slavery movement—they just happened to be the group with the most power. In reality, the state's first anti-slavery protests were led by Mennonites, and the first local slavery bans were enacted within the Mennonite communities.

As a local historian of the protests said:

> "Mennonites never had slaves and would not even buy something if they thought it came through the labor of a slave. They viewed slavery as a 'Quaker thing,' and just walked away to live apart."[18]

So, while the Quakers were eventually against slavery, they were—so far as we can tell at least—the least anti-slavery of the anti-slavery groups.

"Oh—for goodness sake," you might be thinking. "At least Quakers were nice to the Native Americans—I read that in a book somewhere!"

This also appears to be a manipulation of history but not quite as bad as the one around Quakers and slavery. Quakers indeed had better relations with the local Native American communities, but this seems to have as much or more to do with those communities than the Quakers.

To quote David Hackett Fischer's book *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*:

> "Another feature of the Delaware Valley … the natives were friendly, and very different from the more militant tribes of the lower Chesapeake and upper New England … William Penn's Indian policy would have been a disastrous failure in Massachusetts or Virginia, just as it later failed in western Pennsylvania."

So, it would seem that Quakers were merely granted a convenient opportunity to be nice to local Native American populations, and history sort of smudged the facts over time. But why trust the storytellers? Let's look at more concrete numbers to determine whether Quakers treated local Native Americans with more kindness than their Puritan counterparts.

There are currently 10,500 Delaware Indians (Lenni Lenape) left (falling from a population of 15,000).[19] [20] Contrast that with the Abenaki, with whom the Puritans interacted, who have a population of 9,775 today (falling from a post-smallpox population of 10,000 in 1620)[21]. If Quakers *did* treat the Delaware Indians differently, then they found some other way to undermine them, as the Indian populations with Quaker neighbors don't seem to have survived any better than the other groups.

> *Note: We admit these Native American population numbers are not great evidence. That said, we feel that if Quakers had been as nice as history paints them, there should be dramatic differences in current group populations.*

"What about women?" you might be wondering. "Were Quakers not greater advocates of gender equality?"

While it is true that Quakers touted gender equality, going so far as to have a saying: "In souls there is no sex," Quaker population stats don't imply they acted on this belief where it mattered. For example, Quaker women were twice as likely as men to be illiterate at the height of their influence (20% to 40% between 1699-1706—only slightly off from the "super-sexist" Calvinist difference of 16% to 50% in 1760)[22] [23] It seems like the only way

Quakers were actually *more* in favor of gender equality manifested in the burden of proselytization placed on women, often resulting in Quaker women being beaten and even hanged for their efforts.

On any issue of morality, Quakers will enthusiastically extoll their virtues through history books. However, if you actually turn to sources that deal in hard numbers, we see Quakers had very little motivation to act on their moral compass (and when they *did*, they only did so with great compromise). For making this point, we know we will get heat from those trying to defend the myth of the virtuous—rather than virtue *signaling*—colonial Quaker. Still, if we are to build new cultures, we must understand how to enforce moral behavior. If the Quaker system was bad at doing so, we would make the world an objectively *worse* place by allowing the myth to perpetuate.

To understand why justicles are apparently so unmotivated to take concrete actions that enact their values in the world (instead of merely signaling a desire for those values to be enacted), we can investigate *why* Quakers were against slavery. Quakers wrote extensively about their distaste for slavery, so we know their logic. To Quakers, slavery violated the "golden rule" (and that term "golden rule" is everywhere in their anti-slavery material). Essentially, because Quakers would not personally like the feeling of being slaves, slavery was bad. They somehow managed to take a topic like slavery and make it about their own feelings.

Because Quaker's opposition to slavery is based on personal feelings (recall that a major Quaker standard of evidence is gained through personal introspection and investigation of one's emotions), it is easy to see how they might compromise on this principle if owning slaves made them feel better. Quakers' reasoning behind anti-slavery sentiment stands in stark contrast to Calvinists' distaste for slavery, which emerged from a general dislike of any institution that removes individual agency. In other words, whereas Quakers disavowed slavery because it made people feel bad, Calvinists opposed slavery because it represented the immutable evil of removing human agency.

A justicle mindset leads to immoral action because, at its core, this philosophy is based on the *aesthetic* of *thinking* good—not on *doing* good. Justicles gain status within their social circles by loudly protesting the

injustices of the world rather than by making actual sacrifices to make the world a better place through their direct actions.

> *Let's be clear: Quakers are not bad people (while a culture writ large may have problems, that doesn't mean every individual within it exhibits those same problems). That said, Quaker culture appears to be bad at motivating adherents to translate their values into concrete action. This kind of thing is important to notice if you are thinking about how to design a better cultivar.*

The Metaphysical Frameworks of Justicles

While we singled out Abrahamic religions that have most profoundly influenced modern justicle culture, we only did so because it is easier to find hard stats on their immoral actions. Abrahamic religions haven't necessarily produced the largest justicle groups. Most people motivated by justicle logic either fall into Super Soft Cultures or cultures that are so soft they have lost most of their unique identity.

When justicles don't follow a formal cultivar, they almost always adhere to one of two metaphysical / religious frameworks for the world, the most boring of these systems being relativism. In this chain of logic, a person asks themselves: "Which religion is true?" and realizing that it would be unjust if millions of people lived and died for nothing or suffered eternal torment for believing the wrong thing, they answer: "All religions and cultures must be true in their own way." They create a world framework in which truth shifts depending on the perspective of the truth seeker because it feels unjust to believe that people from other cultural backgrounds are wrong.

Our take on relativism is best expressed by Charles James Napier's candid response to Hindu priests who complained to him about the prohibition of the Sati religious funeral practice of burning unwilling widows alive on their husband's funeral pyres, insisting that Napier must "respect their culture:"

> "Be it so. This burning of widows is your custom; prepare the funeral pile. But my nation has also a custom. When men burn

> women alive we hang them, and confiscate all their property. My carpenters shall therefore erect gibbets on which to hang all concerned when the widow is consumed. Let us all act according to national customs."

Even a cursory look at real-world scenarios quickly demonstrates that a relativist mindset produces *more* injustice in the world, not less. This does not faze relativists, as people don't adopt relativist positions because they want to *make* the world a better place; they do so because they want to *believe* they are making the world a better place.

In contrast to humdrum relativism, the other metaphysical framework utilized by justicles is far more engaging. It entails wondering: "Which religion is true?" and deciding: "It would be immoral if some religions were not true," just as with relativism. However, instead of using relativism to resolve this injustice, one concludes that one's very belief in a religion makes it true.

Like one of those Christmas movies in which Santa Claus is powered by believers' faith, adherents to this faith-based framework believe that the individual heavens and deities of all different faiths are created by those who believe in them. While there is neither a logical reason nor justification motivated by tradition to lend credibility to this belief, there is a "moral" reason to hold it, as at a cursory glance, reality would be more "just" if it were true.

Here's where this faith-based metaphysical framework gets really fun: Its reasoning is only comforting at a cursory glance. Anyone who thinks this metaphysical framework through to its logical conclusion will see that it is likely one of the bleakest realities we could conceivably live in. While many fiction universes, like "American Gods," use this framing, the best possible outcome it might produce (in terms of logical constancy) is the Warhammer 40K universe.

If collective human beliefs became manifested as real beings with cosmic power capable of influencing humans, in turn, then our most basic beliefs and fears would be represented as the most powerful among these entities, given that they enjoy disproportionately more conscious human attention.

Being more powerful than the other entities, these terrifying deities would have differentially more influence on the reality we inhabit and would use that influence to amplify thoughts and obsessions that grant them power. This would eventually lead to a snowballing of power, allowing these deities to acquire even more dedicated followers. Among their followers, these deities would be motivated to maximize whatever emotional subset fuels them (lust, laziness, fear of death, fear of pain, etc.) to levels far higher than any sane human would want.

The closest thing to a “good guy” you could have in such a reality is someone who doesn’t have a soul and thus does not create these entities (such as the Warhammer Universe’s T’au Empire), or a vast empire focused on emotionally suppressing its people, so they don’t fuel these entities (such as Warhammer’s Empire of Man). Yep: Hilariously, even if this hippy-dippy metaphysical framing of reality were true, the best cultivar for dealing with it would involve some form of emotional suppression. Essentially such a reality—one in which humans can manifest cosmic entities which themselves can influence humans—always leads to a reverberating volume increase (similar to holding a microphone too close to a speaker).

The Origins of the Supervirus

> *Note: We found many of our sources for this section in David Hackett Fischer's book* Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*, which we heartily recommend to anyone who enjoyed this book.*

As man spread across the world, he brought dogs with him. Early humans who settled in the Americas were no different. Their trailblazing canine companions genetically drifted from old-world breeds, making American varieties fascinatingly unique. Sadly, when the Europeans came, they killed them … almost all of them. The only survivors were Malamutes and a few related arctic breeds (while people claim that breeds like the Peruvian Hairless dog, the Xoloitzcuintli, and Chihuahua are pre-Columbian/1492,

DNA studies show that they are less than 4% pre-Colombian in their genetic makeup). But … we wouldn't be telling you this story if the ending were so clear-cut.

Dogs can catch a form of transmissible cancer called canine transmissible venereal tumor (CTVT).[24] A long time ago, a single dog developed a tumor with this very unique ability, and all dogs today that have CTVT carry an iteration of that original dog's tumor. So when a dog gets a CTVT tumor, they literally have the living cells of a completely different dog growing inside them. When genetic testing was performed on CTVT, it was found to come from—and *literally be*—a pre-Colombian breed of dog, making this extinct species of dog also the most prolific single "dog" alive today. While that pre-Columbian dog died of this cancer, they did so in a way that functionally granted them everlasting life through the DNA within that cancer and the tumors it produces.

From what we can gather, the supervirus—the parasitoid we discussed at the beginning of this book—first evolved within Quaker culture (and, more specifically, the Hicksite branch). By decimating Hicksite birth rates, the supervirus has long since relegated everything culturally unique about Hicksite Quakers to the dustbin of history. That said, its tumors—the tumors that now wear the skins of the countless victims through which it acts—is almost entirely Hicksite on a DNA level. Along with that long-dead pre-Columbian dog, Hicksite Quaker culture is at once functionally extinct and the single most important culture in the world today. (As a reminder, Hicksite Quakers hold personal emotional states as their highest standard of evidence, while Orthodox Quakers believe it to be important but subordinate to the Bible.)

Some cultural commentators draw connections between the parasitoidal supervirus and Puritan ideals, suggesting the virus has Puritan origins. Given what you have thus far read about Puritan and the other Calvinist cultures, it should be immediately clear how utterly buffoonish this idea is. If we were going to be as uncharitable as possible, we would say Puritan culture is superficially one based on a veneer of intellectualism, performative stoicism, an inward focus, aspirations of self-perfection, ruthless capitalism, independent research, and uninterested disgust toward outsiders. Therefore, ironically, cultural movements often framed as being

in *direct opposition* to the supervirus, such as the Red Pill and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), followers of Jordan Peterson, and other pseudo-intellectual, stoic-aspiring, right-wing self-improvement junkies represent cultural viruses derived from the Puritan strain of American thought.

It appears this misconception comes from a tendency to frame moralizing, shaming, and shunning as punishments for apostasy as uniquely Puritan. This is silly, as this pattern of behavior exists across virtually all hard cultures throughout history (including many that still thrive today).

The various pop-cultural viruses with which our species currently contends feature clear signs of the cultures from which they evolved—even if most people don't identify these cultivars as being viral secular descendants of earlier cultures. Consider the Rationalist and Effective Altruism movements, which (by our estimation at least) are clearly derived from Jewish culture. Not only are a huge chunk of the Rationalist and Effective Altruism movements' founding members (and many of their current prominent members) ancestrally Jewish (despite Jews representing a vanishingly small part of the population), but the communities' constant debating of moral ontology, the habit of throwing ideas at the wall and masochistically offering financial rewards to get people to argue against them, and intense trust in institutions to develop metrics to effectively distribute capital,[25] could not be more Jewish.

Rationalist and Effective Altruist cultures even maintained the Jewish superpower of being able to split apart and recombine with minimal conflict. While groups like Rationalists, Effective Altruists, and Dark Effective Altruists may posture as though they disagree with each other, they also enthusiastically jump at opportunities to engage in debate with members of other factions (something that can't be said for the various viral descendants of Quaker or Calvinist culture).

Awareness of the origins of the supervirus is important as it yields a better understanding of its nuances, why it exists, and actions it may take in the future—it will also help explain why we subjected you to a Quaker history lesson. The supervirus does not just have "some features" of Quaker culture; it is quite literally a secular iteration of the Quaker culture's

Hicksite interpretation, from its core outlooks on reality to its governance practices and pet projects.

This is why Colonial Quaker culture presents such a prophetic view of today's dominant pop culture morality—not because it was really ahead of its time, but because it ended up *becoming* the dominant pop culture.

Let's start with the concept of call-out culture. While Puritans would seek out and punish community members who violated their rules, it was rare for them to target individuals outside their communities. Puritans were interested in creating the perfect world within their settlements and did not really care much about what people outside their settlements were doing—unless it involved the degradation of human will (e.g., slavery). On the other hand, you will see numerous Colonial-era cases of Quakers publicly shaming non-Quakers to goad them into changing their ways. In colonial Quaker culture, an individual could raise their status within their own culture by "calling out" those of different cultures (though such behavior is less common in modern Quaker culture).

Quaker priorities—and how Quakers demonstrated those priorities—have strong parallels to those held by the virus. For example, Quakers condemned exhibitions of animals at places like zoos as "hurtful to their (the animals') feelings," with Elizabeth Drinker reporting, "... it looked so sorrowful, I pity'd the poor thing, and wished it in its own country."[26] Or consider the way some Quakers chose to protest, with Squire Wharton spastically jumping into a bull-baiting ring (a sport that pit dogs against bulls) at huge personal risk, freeing the bull and subsequently calling out people in the crowd by name.[27]

Hatred of gun ownership and distaste toward the prosecution of criminals represents another Quaker value that has effectively migrated to modern culture, with William Penn proudly reporting: "Not one soldier, nor arm borne, or militia man seen, since I was first at Pennsylvania."[28] When, at one point, a gang of pirates stole a ship in Philadelphia and started devastating the Delaware Valley coastline, Quaker leaders quarreled among themselves over how they could suppress crime without violence, allowing countless homes and businesses to be "plundered" while they took their

time soul-searching over whether it was acceptable to sully themselves through the use of arms.

People often confuse Puritan and Quaker norms around sex, assuming that it was the Puritans who were insanely prudish whereas in actuality, Puritans were so comfortable talking about sex, and apt to do so with graphic frequency, that Puritan writing often needed heavy editing to be published up to the mid-twentieth century.[29] (Though it should be acknowledged that Puritans were only in favor of sex within marriage.)

Quakers, in contrast, were so uncomfortable discussing sex that it was common in Quaker culture to be against sex altogether, even *within marriage* (this group eventually split off into the Shaker movement). One French traveler was shocked to find that even when Quaker women consulted their physicians, they tended to describe everything from their necks to waists as their "stomachs" and everything from their waists to feet as their "ankles."[30] (This snobbery also partially led to the collapse of Quakerism, with many people never marrying and as many as 16% of Quaker women in the colonial period being single by the age of 50.)[31]

This prudish anti-sex angle has manifested in many branches of the supervirus, even though it stands massively at odds with the logical ideologies of those groups most likely to become infected. This is why infected progressive groups that one would expect to be pro-sex given their stated ideologies can sometimes appear bizarrely prudish (with the modern sex negative moment, the anti-kink movement, and the gender critical movement (such as TERFs) all having thought leaders within them that emerged from radical feminist groups) and why groups like the Red Pill and MGTOW—or even the Pragmatist Guide book series—with Calvinist roots seem weirdly sex-obsessed but in a clinical and experimental way. Consider that the only living people mentioned in this book so far who grew up in Calvinist-derived cultivars—this book's authors and Aella—are both known for highly analytical sex research, with one of our books being *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality*.

Even the Hicksite Quaker approach to internal governance is almost perfectly aligned with governance practices that spontaneously arise in nodal networks featuring late-stage supervirus infections. Consider the

similarities between the conduct of an Unprogrammed Quaker meeting house and the method of governance utilized by Occupy Wall Street. In an Unprogrammed Quaker meeting house, attendants will sit quietly until moved by God to stand up and start speaking. In an Occupy Wall Street convening, there would be no set leader but people would stand up and start to speak when so moved, and their audience, so as not to interrupt them, would react using a complicated set of hand signals.

Outside of the hand signals, Occupy Wall Street meetings were strikingly similar to Unprogrammed Quaker meetings. Perhaps had colonial Quakers heard of the innovation of hand signal interaction, they would have enthusiastically adopted it, seeing as Quakers were well known for being obsessively bureaucratic and building in complex social procedures to ensure everyone got a voice at any moment. Heck, we have quotes from William Penn complaining about his fellow Quakers getting so "governementish" that it was hard to get anything done.

Here we should also point out that Colonial-era Quakers were not particularly less rule-oriented than Puritans, with David Hackett Fischer pointing out in *Albion's Seed* that "Penn's laws against sin were more rigorous in some respects than those of Puritans." Quakers just happened to be more obscure and bureaucratic with the rules. For Puritans, rules had a goal, whereas to Quakers, rules were an interactive social language one must successfully navigate to signal social status. This can be seen in things like traditional Quaker weddings having 16 stages (to make even a slight mistake at any of these intricate stages was a huge social faux pas and could leave you permanently cut off from old friends).

Another interesting similarity between the supervirus and the Hicksite Quakers can be seen in how they spread within organizations. Both start by preaching the harmonious collaboration of a diversity of viewpoints until they reach a certain population threshold within an organization, at which point they aggressively and systematically purge the organization of anyone not willing to slavishly submit to their ideology. For example, when Hicksite factions would grow in Orthodox Quaker churches, they would lay low until they felt they had enough backing to make their move, then change the locks on the meeting house doors and ban anyone who did not submit to their new way of thinking from entry.[32]

Another interesting parallel can be seen in colonial-era Quaker and modern supervirus cultivar relationships with “disadvantaged” groups. While Quakers presented themselves as uplifting and empowering underrepresented groups, they ultimately took and held power just for and among themselves. Quakers largely immigrated to the USA (mostly Pennsylvania) as either working-class or middle-class groups[33] but rose in power quickly by creating a tightly-knit oligarchy in the towns they occupied. In the case of Philadelphia, this was the Philadelphia’s Corporation. These individuals were highly interrelated, with no less than 85% related to one another.[34] Despite their working-class background and quick rise to power, Quakers had a reputation for being spiteful, with Bishop Sheldon describing Quakers in 1669 as “very mean, the best scarce worth the title of Yeomen.”[35] [36] The truth seems to be that Quakers were nice so long as you slavishly submitted yourself to their social agenda and never uplifted one of your own people over a “friend.”

This behavior can be illustrated by a political alliance formed between Quakers and German Protestant immigrants (Anabaptists mostly) in which the Germans would vote Quakers into office, but never the other way around,[37] with one Rufus Jones writing that “We hear nothing of any men of prominence in these early days except Friends” (Quakers).[38] Through this arrangement, Quakers dominated their local legislatures. To understand just how lopsided this arrangement was, consider that Lancaster County was so German by the mid-eighteenth century that only 100 Quakers lived there—and yet just seven Quaker families kept the local government firmly in their grip.[39]

> *We actually suspect there is a case to be made that the only reason the Quakers even turned against slavery was to appease these Anabaptist constituencies who had always been fervently against slavery. We say this because Quakers did not turn against slavery until they started needing broad support from Anabaptist majorities to maintain political dominance in their regions.*

While Quakers cultivated the public image of a culture that regards outsiders as equals, they very clearly looked down on them, using terms

like “mongrel marriages” to describe marriage to a non-Quaker.[40] It was not uncommon for Quakers to be kicked out of the community for marrying non-Quakers (a behavior that increased as they consolidated power[41]).

What is interesting is *why* Quakers felt this way. Distaste for so-called mongrel marriages was not about purity but because Quakers thought it was impossible for anyone who was not a “true believer” to experience love and have a happy marriage. As Quakers held that marriage should only be for love rather than material gain or lust, marriage to a non-Quaker—someone axiomatically incapable of love—was perverse. It is fascinating to see such viewpoints mirrored in today’s supervirus. Those infected often posit how the immune couldn’t *possibly* have healthy relationships or marriages, wringing their hands over tradwives with kids who look happy, impotently projecting that they must really hate their lives.

This hypocrisy can also be seen in colonial-era Quakers (not to mention those infected by the modern-era supervirus) who wanted to be known for seeing everyone equally despite really looking down on those in poor, rural environments. When the Scotch-Irish arrived in the colonies, one Quaker writer referred to them as “the scum of two nations.”[42] This holds many similarities to how today’s heavily infected “coastal elite” groups look down on poor rural “deplorables,” despite presumably viewing the poor “without bias” and wanting to uplift them.

Don’t worry; they didn’t reserve their derision for *just* the poor and rural individuals. Antisemitism was *also* strong in the early Quaker community, just as it is among those with a deep infection of the virus. Hannah Sanson (from a prominent Quaker merchant faction) had this to say of Jews in 1756: “This people, once the chosen people, [have become] the scum of the earth!”[43] Laws were passed in the Quaker-dominated settlements (Pennsylvania) that systematically disenfranchised Jews, like the law in 1794 preventing work on the Sabbath, meaning Jews could only work five days a week (with Abraham Wolff being convicted under this law despite keeping his *own* sabbath).[44] The Jewish community at the time was well aware of how disproportionately cruel the Quakers were to them and saw them as distinctly different from other Christians (to the point of not seeing them as Christian at all), with prominent Jewish broker Haym Salomon saying, “It was neither the Jews nor the Christians who founded the

practice, but Quakers—Quakers worse than *heathens, pagans, or idolators.*"[45] [46]

A final interesting area of overlap manifests in both groups' tendencies to regard youth with an unique level of reverence. Given that the virus has become the dominant culture in our society, it does not seem particularly weird to us that adults turn to a child-turned-moral-authority like Greta Thunberg for wisdom on the subject of government policy. As a small sample of two people who don't hail from today's dominant culture, we can report it is really, really, *really* weird for adults to take tactical and moral advice from a child.

As Fischer writes in *Albion's Seed*:

> "People of other faiths were startled to observe Quaker children giving moral and religious instruction to their elders. We have on account of a ten-year-old child who interrupted a gathering of adults to deliver a spontaneous speech on salvation. The adults listened respectfully, and after the child was done speaking, a grandmother offered a prayer, and said, 'Oh Lord! That this young branch should be a teacher unto us old ones.'

Another … at the age of ten regularly reprimanded adults in his own family —condemning their swearing, breaking up card parties, preaching to them about salvation."[47]

To wrap things up, Quaker culture was not prophetic of future values. Rather, today's supervirus is derived from Quaker Culture. To suggest that Quaker culture was prophetic is akin to suggesting that the ethnic makeup of the early settlers was weirdly prophetic of the ethnic makeup of the later U.S. population. It's like ... yeah, *they killed everyone else*.

Evidence that the virus grew out of Hicksite Quaker culture (as opposed to emerging from convergent evolution) can be seen in everything from vestigial value sets (many of which run counter to modern progressive values) to the supervirus's weird governance system, the prudish nature with which the virus treats sexuality, the theatrical ways the infected engage in protest, and their common use of children to preach moral values.

Why didn't the more virtuous Quakers call out their purely performative colleagues? *They did*—however, systems for de-platforming people had already begun to evolve in Quaker culture centuries ago. When George Keith began to speak out against the Quaker community for not living up to its values, the same Quakers who in England had demanded the right to free expression started demanding restraints on the types of things that could be published, causing many printers in Quaker territory to be arrested for publishing "unlicensed books" and having their press and types seized.[48] By 1693, Keith, along with others who spoke against the Quakers for their hypocrisy, were forced to leave. In Quaker culture, you were allowed to call out outsiders for things like slavery and you were even allowed to shame specific Quakers, but the *one thing* you were *not* allowed to do was point out that Quaker culture as a whole did not at all live up to its espoused values and was fundamentally hypocritical.

If you are still dubious of our claim that the supervirus has Quaker origins, think about the virus's initial point of spread: The American secondary school system. The United States school system was both heavily influenced by Quaker culture and disproportionately run by Quakers in its early days. Had the virus evolved independently, it would more likely have initially spread through activist movements instead of an entrenched bureaucracy.

Why did the parasitoid supervirus evolve within Quaker culture? Why did Quaker culture produce the most virulent of all the memetic viral packages when similar secular viruses have evolved out of *all* of America's major cultural movements?

While the traditional branch of Quakers were not justicles, the evolution of the justicle branch of the Quaker faith was what allowed the supervirus to develop. This worldview allowed the supervirus to appeal to entire nodal networks at once instead of individual nodes (for example, the Red Pill and Jordan Peterson followers focus heavily on how they will help individuals rather than society as a whole). The justicle worldview allows an individual to believe that if everyone in their group structures their thoughts and language in a certain way, society will become better—all else equal. This motivates individuals to spend more time converting people than spending

the time and effort required to literally build a society that structurally embodies their values.

> *For clarification: If you have two groups and one of those groups spends 100% of adherents' contributed time and effort converting others while the other spends 50% of adherents' contributed time converting others and 50% trying to improve the world, the group not interested in actually making a difference will outcompete the other, evolutionarily speaking. However, very few cultures are able to convince people they are "good" despite investing so little in the actual realization of their values.*

An absence of success metrics is a feature that equipped Quaker culture to produce the ultimate supervirus. **The way Quaker culture can shamelessly claim to be abolitionist while simultaneously counting America's most prolific slave owners among its members—by being *aesthetically* abolitionist—presents a critical social technology needed by the supervirus.**

It doesn't matter whether the supervirus *actually* uses significant resources to help BIPOCs, LGBT people, the poor, the disenfranchised, the environment, or women—it *aesthetically* cares about those issues and from the perspective of an infected person, *aesthetically* caring is morally equivalent to *actually doing something*. (This is why there was so little public complaint on the far left about the BLM Foundation money being spent on things like a $6M mansion for its board members.)[49] The parasitoidal virus convinces its victims that by buying into it, they will intrinsically serve the best interests of those groups. Without this technology, people would quickly notice the harm this virus inflicts on infected goal-driven organizations and pull back before they could die and release the spores grown within them into the social ecosystem. People at Occupy Wall Street would stand up and say: "This obsessive infighting and bizarre method of making decisions is clearly inefficient and will make achieving our goals impossible."

As scary as the parasitoid supervirus can be, we *must* understand it because it represents the single most sophisticated and robust cultivar ever evolved.

While we fastidiously avoid the use of supervirus-evolved social technologies within our own House's culture, we suspect someone smarter than us might be able to find a way to use some of these social technologies in a beneficial durable culture.

Finally, we need to be clear that just because something evil evolved out of Quaker culture does not mean Quaker culture itself is evil. We are the first to admit that Unitarian Universalism evolved out of Calvinism and clearly we see Calvinist culture as morally good.

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When Can You Lie?

Having explored varying cultural approaches to truth, let's tuck into lies. While lying may seem like a reasonably clear-cut subject, the acceptance of "little white lies" within most cultures and wildly varying definitions of "white lies" demonstrates it is not. Different cultivars feature a fascinating variety of domains in which lies are acceptable, rituals that prohibit lies (such as the secular "pinkie swear" or religious oath to God), and rituals that absolve lying individuals of guilt (such as the practice of crossing one's fingers).

Catholics, for example, leverage a common mechanism many cultures use to permit lying: A prohibition on *lying* but not on *linguistic deception.* In one story, a Church father is being chased by the Romans while in disguise. They overtake his ship and, not recognizing him, ask: "Have you seen the person we are looking for?" to which he responds, "Yes! He was going that way" (and points in the direction his ship was headed before being apprehended). In the context of the story, this misdirection is seen as 100% ethical and the same as not lying at all, even though the Church father was deceitful.

You'll see this mechanism more commonly used in lower stakes contexts—like a fundamentalist Catholic saying to an atheist that: "I think you could teach me a lot," to be polite while secretly meaning that they have nothing to learn from the person about religion but might have something to learn from them on another topic.

Another Catholic lying mechanism leveraged by many cultures involves the concept of "Mental Reservation" (we're showcasing Catholics a lot in this section not because they utilize *more* loopholes around lying, but because they are better at documenting them than other cultures, making these mechanisms easier for an outsider to understand). According to a report by the Dublin Archdiocese, "mental reservation is a concept developed and much discussed over the centuries, which permits a churchman knowingly to convey a misleading impression to another person without being guilty of lying."

The report presents the following example:

> "John calls the parish priest to make a complaint about the behavior of one of his curates. The parish priest sees him coming but does not want to talk to him because he considers John to be a troublemaker. He sends another of his curates to answer the door. John asks the curate if the parish priest is in. The curate replies that he is not." adding "This is clearly untrue but in the Church's view it is not a lie because, when the curate told John that the parish priest was not in, he mentally reserved the words '…to you.'"

These sorts of loopholes around dishonesty seem to have evolved to make it difficult to lie to top-level officials inside the culture and relatively easy to lie to people outside the culture (as well as less informed and sophisticated members within the culture). They allow for this because top-level officials will understand these loopholes and know how to ask questions in a manner that circumvents them.

As for rituals like being able to lie when you cross your fingers: We suspect these are just soft culture artifacts that begin to appear in hard cultures over time to make it easier to follow.

Many cultures also commonly permit lying in certain situations—particularly scenarios in which lying enables one to advance the culture's goals or serve the culture's values. Taqiyya, for example, is an Islamic concept that essentially means it is OK to hide or otherwise misrepresent your religious beliefs if failing to do so will get you killed or otherwise seriously persecuted (jailed, etc.).

Taqiyya stands in stark contrast to clear rules in early Christianity *against* denying one's faith, but we imagine those rules were more a product of cultural obsessions with martyrdom in early Christianity than a condemnation of lying, as we see reports of other forms of deceit happening in the early Church.

It almost cannot be overstated how important martyrdom was among early Christians. Martyrdom resulting from an adherent's unwillingness to deny their faith was particularly common in the early Christian Church and

perceived as uniquely virtuous. This form of martyrdom was actually so important to early Christians that when Constantine legalized the faith, many of the most devout Christians had a bit of a “freak out” and wandered out into the desert to live alone and pout over not being able to get themselves killed attesting their faith (the practice of monasticism eventually evolved out of this).

That Muslim culture framed throwing one’s life away as a not-particularly-virtuous act was what likely gave birth to Taqiyya. It was probably pretty clear to Mohmmad that if he did not explicitly say it was immoral to get yourself martyred in that way, Muslims might start doing it too. The downside to Taqiyya-like practices is that they allow surrounding cultures to build suspicion that your *actual* religious beliefs are more insidious or extreme than you are letting on. Such suspicion can be leveraged by those who want to persecute your group.

Though lying is typically convenient and/or beneficial in the moment, there are three important reasons why cultivars evolve prohibitions against it:

1. **Lying to outsiders:** If people of a certain culture are consistently honest, you will be much more likely to do business with them than with members of a less trustworthy culture. Once a group develops a reputation for lying, they may as well always lie, as outsiders must assume that everything they say is a lie. (Debt in countries where lying is more common costs more because it is costlier to manage.)
2. **Lying within a culture:** Monocultural teams become dramatically more efficient if a cultivar can prevent lying among adherents. When you’re not obligated to vet information shared by a fellow team member and there is no risk fellow team members will behave dishonestly, your team can easily outcompete even better-run organizations that *do* need to worry about such things.
3. **Lying to leaders of a culture:** As described above, some cultures have developed loopholes that only prevent lies by subordinates to superiors but not by superiors to subordinates. These loopholes grant most of the benefits of lying while at the same time enabling group leaders to operate with relatively low fear of misinformation. This markedly increases the efficiency of the central hierarchy. (It

makes sense that loopholes like these would evolve within cultures that lean heavily on institutions that centralize power.)

You may think a cultural stance against any form of deceit is the correct choice, however categorical bans on deception can produce unintended consequences. Calvinist tradition condemned *all* forms of deception in *all* contexts (to the extent that even pursuits like acting were heavily frowned upon, as acting is technically a form of deceit). The Salem Witch Trials exemplify a common weakness of such systems: Because the culture was *so* unaccustomed to even *the idea* that a person might lie, a handful of teenage girls realized they could just make stuff up and people would accept their statements as fact.

In Catholic heretic trials, it was assumed that individuals might lie, so court practices were created to account for this, which led to dramatically fewer senseless deaths than Calvinist witch trials, in which participants generally assumed that no Puritan would ever lie or be deceitful. Learning to deal with deceit on a day-to-day basis is critical if a culture is to develop resilience against what we can only call “stupidity cascades.”

Keep in mind that fastidious honesty doesn’t even guarantee that a culture will be seen favorably by other cultures. Ebenezer Scrooge, the classic Calvinist stereotype (discussed in detail in a footnote within "Calvinist Stereotypes in Media" in the Appendix), is pictured as going very far out of his way to never lie or break a business deal, like most Calvinist stereotypes.[50] While there are dozens of examples of Scrooge’s honesty in *A Christmas Carol*,[51] his candid remarks most commonly serve to make him look bad—the point being that the Calvinists are often framed as unethical in popular media *even though* they are vehemently honest and never misleading (normally due to the Calvinist view that most charity is self-indulgent virtue signaling).

Sidebar: From the perspective of his own culture, Ebenezer Scrooge was very ethical. He had not withheld money from Tiny Tim and Bob Cratchit so he could spend it on himself (he lived in constant cold, never spending more money on coal than necessary, inhabiting a sparse, dark room to save money on oil, and eating homemade gruel

to avoid reliance on waitstaff). Tiny Tim and Bob Cratchit presented an incredibly inefficient use of philanthropic capital. It is not as though Scrooge was amassing money for his kids or something (he didn't have any)—Scrooge is what an outsider sees when bumping into a long-term-oriented person who is disinterested in virtue signaling (and who therefore thinks there are more effective uses for capital than handouts to his personal network). While Charles Dickens' witty prose is like catnip to Simone, we cannot help but joke that A Christmas Carol *is a non-Calvinist's "corrective rape" fantasy about a Calvinist strawman.*

So, what do we recommend for our personal House cultivar? The drawbacks of traditional Calvinist honesty strike us as being too great, plus they offer little upside, so we aren't keeping it. As there is little downside to a culture always being honest to other members of that culture so long as said honesty can be effectively enforced (presumably by flagging and heavily shaming individuals who *do* lie within that culture while also kicking them down a peg in the cultural hierarchy), we maintain a "don't EVER lie to fellow members of House Collins" policy.

As for outsiders, it would seem sensible to lie when it suits you while understanding that you will be punished if you are caught—with one hard caveat: *Never* lie to one of your benefactors (an investor, a customer, a constituent, or someone who has otherwise put their faith in you). While there are downsides to being fastidiously honest in social situations, there are almost none for being fastidiously honest in business and it is an easy distinction to draw in life. Our family already has a reputation for being obsessively dedicated and honest as managers (with our foregoing pay for well over a year to ensure we did not lay off any staff during the pandemic and our brother and sister-in-law refusing a raise from their board because it wasn't in the initial contract they signed). Being honest in business to an extent that looks stupid or comedic to outsiders is very useful in that it makes it easier to raise money, often reduces the cost of debt, and gives you a competitive edge even when your company is selling an equivalent product at an equivalent price.

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The “Unknowable”

Many religious traditions—ranging from the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Zen Buddhist kōans, and Kabbalah’s emphasis that most live in a world of illusion—use elusive truths, ambiguity, paradoxes, or complex concepts as a very clever hack. By prompting people to attempt to wrap their heads around such things, a cultivar can also trigger feelings of love (a mechanism which, in *The Pragmatist’s Guide to Relationships*, we explore in greater depth). By informing outsiders or inferiors in a culture or tradition that certain truths cannot be clearly articulated or are in some way unknowable, senior members can furthermore enforce stricter status hierarchies that others feel incentivized to climb.

Several early readers of this book criticized our blunt and pragmatic analysis of various cultural and religious traditions, citing these unknowable truths. One cannot take actionable, *pragmatic*, action in the world without drawing concrete conclusions, as imperfect as they may be. If you didn’t care about practical take-aways, you would probably be looking for *The Nuanced Mystic’s Guide to Crafting Religion* instead of something from the Pragmatist's Guide series.

But let’s take a moment to explore this mechanism, given how pervasive it is.

Anyone who like me (Malcolm) got into the Church of the SubGenius understands the trope of the “unknowable truth” well because it is frequently highlighted in its satire. In the Church of the SubGenius teachings, the concept of Slack is laid out quite plainly to mean the aesthetic of effortless success gained through cunning and sleight of hand/mind. At the same time, it is framed as axiomatic that anyone who claims to be able to know what Slack is or describe Slack neither understands nor has it. This is a psychological trick that many traditions use to feel more profound and trigger feelings of love and awe.

Beyond presenting simple gatekeeping mechanisms, signaling to outsiders that serious “work” needs to be put in before one can consider themselves a true member, unknowable truths work to keep members in their chosen

cultivar by presenting an automatic hand-waving defense that gets activated in the face of scrutiny. “Hey!” an outsider might say: “Isn’t it kind of bad that your cultivar believes X?”

“No,” the adherent will respond; “you clearly do not understand our true beliefs.”

“Then explain them to me,” the outsider says.

“Hah!” the adherent scoffs; “It’s not so simple! This sacred truth is not something someone like me can explain to you using mere words [insert long rambling statements about putting in work or about obscure references that don’t actually address the issue at hand].”

In such scenarios, the adherent has zero obligation to think critically about their cultivar’s metaphysical belief system and is actively rewarded for not trying to clearly articulate its views, as per this unknowable truth mechanism, the very attempt to do so is, at best, a complete failure to actually capture the unknowable truth, which, by definition, cannot be articulated, and, at worst, apostasy.

Talk about an elegant retention mechanism! A big problem faced by the LDS Church is that missionaries are actively encouraged to engage in doctrine full of clearly articulated claims—many of which can unfortunately (for retention) be disproven or at least heavily undermined in the age of the internet. This causes many to lose their faith at a time when they *should* be reaffirming it.

Unknowable truths also work well at suppressing dissent and impertinence within cultivars. For example, Zen Buddhist kōans can be used to gaslight practitioners and slowly wear down their ability to engage in personal critical thought in the face of “great masters.” Consider the famous kōan: “Two hands clap and there is a sound. What is the sound of one hand?”

There is a real answer to this (depending on how you interpret the question—the only mystery comes from the fact that there are multiple ways the question could be interpreted). We know the sound of our fingers rustling together. We know the sound of a hand clasping quickly against itself. Simone even had a middle school classmate capable of whipping his loose hand so quickly, he could literally clap, single-handedly. We could record

all these things with high-quality sound equipment and present them to the Zen master who posed this question and yet he would respond with the pseudo-profound wording equivalent of: “You just don’t get it.”

By doing this, the Zen master undermines any confidence we previously had in our own logical thought and empirical experience—and even our faith in reality itself. And that’s the point. Once an individual has been worn down like this, they will more uncritically accept what their “superior” tells them. This is both the core point of gaslighting in an abusive relationship and the reason why many traditions independently evolved these practices (though they would claim that an individual can only see truth after this “old way” of seeing the world—e.g. critically—is eroded).

While we agree that unknowable truths are powerful love-creating, gatekeeping, retention-improving, hierarchy-enforcing, and gaslighting mechanisms that are important for any skilled cultivar crafter to know about, we personally see them as unethical and certainly outside the bounds of our commitment to pragmatism (and obviously someone with a Calvinist perspective is going to have zero chill around any manipulative tactic that actively undermines truth seeking).

Note that cultivars which leverage unknowable truths typically have a smarter “mirror cultivar” that does not fall for it, so in calling this out, we are in no way criticizing all religions with unknowable-truth-wielding sects or branches—we only question the morality of those branches. An idea that is only understandable to people who accept its profundity is a psychological trick, not a revelation.

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1 If you want to get into the weeds, Hicksites (one branch of Quakers) believe that the Inner Light is the primary source of truth and that the Bible is a secondary source, while Orthodox Quakers believe that the Bible is the primary source of truth. Both put a lot of weight on internal emotional experience but exactly where it sits relative to the Bible is up for grabs. This division shows how frequently an argument over standards of evidence can cause a cultivar to speciate.

2 While many history books claim disproportionate Irish Catholic representation in the police force is entirely due to immigration timing, statistics showing that Hispanic Catholic immigrants *also* have a much higher opinion of police than other minority groups provide evidence that the Catholic framework for viewing the world is slightly more positively predisposed to police forces than other frameworks. Also, while the United States’ Hispanic population is still slightly underrepresented in the police force, its representation is increasing over time. We may see a similar situation to that we

did with the Irish, in which Hispanics start to join in unusually high numbers a few generations after immigrating to the U.S.

3 A close friend of ours who is a nun has told us that this cultural appeal to authority and hierarchy can create problems in their recruiting, with one of the metrics they must vet nun candidates along being: “Does this person actually want to submit to God or just want someone else to have control over their life?”

4 Neil Gorsuch was raised Catholic and in Catholic culture but currently attends a Protestant church.

5 García Portilla, J. (2022). “Ye shall know them by their fruits.” *Contributions to Economics.* https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-78498-0

6 If you want to read more on the nuance of how the Catholic Church handled the Pope Gregory VII and the Harold III situation.

7 Calvinist culture did not see God as an authority (hardly surprising for a culture with such distaste for authority figures). It presents less of a paternalistic view of God than other Protestant branches, rather God is seen more as an inescapable set of natural laws. Part of seeing the world through the eyes of predestination means God is not reactively punishing people—punishment is just a thing that happens—similar to how a stove is not “punishing” your hand by burning should you decide to place your hand on it. From the perspective of Calvinist tradition, God’s laws are like the laws of physics, as both underline reality and can be discovered through natural investigation and contemplation.

8 Note: We will always say things like some Protestant cultures or many Judaic traditions because every culture has thousands of branches, and there will always be a number of those who see things differently. However, it is easier to contrast cultures if we talk about them in generalities.

9 Science must respect the dignity and rights of all humans. (2022). *Nature Human Behaviour, 6*(8), 1029–1031. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01443-2

10 To use a less charged example, suppose we used academic papers to find the length of a field that’s actually six units long. One day the academic journals say that they will not release any field measurements *above* six units long. Now, if three studies say a field is six units long, two say it’s five, and one says it’s four, we’ll overcorrect and assume it’s probably closer to nine. However, if they had released *all* the information upfront, we might have seen only two more studies showing seven and assumed its real length was six. This way, we’re further from the truth *because* they tried to “protect” it, and we now trust our incorrect judgment over theirs.

11 *“List of Common Misconceptions.”* Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 16 July 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_common_misconceptions.

12 “A quest to abolish taxes ends.” *Altoona Mirror,* Oct 11, 1996, p. 8,

“Long war against tax finally ends” The Intelligencer Record, Doylestown, Oct 10, 1996, Page A-12,

Allan Rappleyea and Henry C. Clark, for the petitioner T. (1975, February 19). *Estate of holdeen v. commissioner.* Legal research tools from Casetext. Retrieved December 18, 2022, from https://casetext.com/case/estate-of-holdeen-v-commissioner,

(2021, August 2). Lawyer's dream of abolishing taxes has become a legal nightmare. *Orlando Sentinel.* Retrieved December 18, 2022, from https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-xpm-1994-02-27-9402270093-story.html,

Paul Collins (1970, January 1). Trust issues. *Lapham's Quarterly.* Retrieved December 18, 2022, from https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/future/trust-issues

13 Carroll, K. L. (1983). Maryland Quakers and Slavery. *Quaker History Friends Historical Association, 72*(1), 27–42. https://doi.org/10.1353/qkh.1983.0005

14 Four points—for sources and additional detail:

1. While slave ownership dropped to 10% by 1756, it was still mind-bendingly high when contrasted with slave ownership rates of other “abolitionist” cultivars.

2. In case you are wondering: No, this difference in slave ownership rates cannot be explained just by Quakers being wealthier. For example, Jews were *also* wealthier, vis a vis other groups, during this period, and while they owned slaves at a high rate, it was still lower than that of Quakers, plus Jews didn’t share Quakers’ uniquely strong theological mandate against slavery. For more data on Jewish slave ownership, check out this article, which breaks down a few sources: https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jews-and-the-african-slave-trade/

3. Note: All of these stats are taken from before the Hicksite Orthodox schism within Quakerism in 1827. Hence, both groups should be seen as equally responsible.

4. Fischer, David Hackett, 1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

15 Rouan, R. (2021, July 16). *Fact check: Stat grossly misleading about slave ownership in 1860.* USA Today. Retrieved December 22, 2022, from https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2021/07/16/fact-check-social-media-post-underrepresents-slave-ownership-1860/7980243002/

16 This estimate can be made by determining the percentage of Puritan communities that were Black (2%-2.5%), then marking that as the maximum percentage of Puritans who owned slaves. Given that some of these Black people were free and that many people owned multiple slaves, the true percentage of Puritans who owned slaves was probably 25% to 75% lower, making it between 0.5% and 2%.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, 1976), 1:z1- 10; Moore, Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts, 49–51.

17 Who was a Primitive Baptist.

18 Lane, R. M. (2012, October 23). *Here slavery's death began. Friends Journal.* from https://www.friendsjournal.org/2010039/

19 *Abenaki.* The Canadian Encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved December 22, 2022, from https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/abenaki

20 We cannot find clarification as to whether this figure is pre- or post smallpox.

21 *"Abenaki History."* Archived from the original on April 11, 2010. Retrieved March 20, 2010. http://tolatsga.org/aben.html

22 Kenneth Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Inquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in Early Modern West* (New York, 1974), 13-23

23 *Cremin, American Education: The Colonial Experience* (New York, 1974). as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, *1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

24 Weiss, R. (2022, May 6). *Study finds that a type of cancer in dogs is contagious.* UCL News. Retrieved December 22, 2022, from https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2006/aug/study-finds-type-cancer-dogs-contagious

Strakova, A et al: ‘Sex disparity in oronasal presentations of canine transmissible venereal tumour.’ *Veterinary Record,* July 2022. DOI: 10.1002/vetr.1794

25 For more detail on that last point, see the chapter: “Urban vs. Rural Approaches to Charity.” In short, many cultures hold that the correct way to deploy capital being used to improve the world is to start new, cash-positive companies under one’s personal control (this is the approach we take with the Collins Institute & The Pragmatist Foundation—also consider literally anything Elon Musk does). In

such cases, the idea is that capital intrinsically corrupts any institution run by someone who did not personally earn it. Jewish culture (along with other urban specialized cultures) distributes philanthropic capital through secular organizations purpose-built for philanthropic capital distribution. The way Jewish culture deploys philanthropic capital perfectly aligns with the very strange (from our cultural perspective) level of trust the Effective Altruism community puts in institutions.

26 Elizabeth Drinker *Diary,* 16.x. 1793, HSP. as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, *1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

27 Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia, I, 279. as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, 1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.*

28 Perm to Stephen Crisp, 28 Feb. 1685, *Papers of William Penn, III,* 28. as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, 1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

29 Edmund Morgan, *"The Puritans and Sex,"* NEQ 15 (1942), 591-607l as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, *1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

30 Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

31 Wells, *"Quaker Marriage Patterns"* as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, *1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

32 *A journey to the past at Penn State brandywine.* Penn State Brandywine. (n.d.). Retrieved December 22, 2022, from https://www.brandywine.psu.edu/journey-past-penn-state-brandywine

33 Alan Anderson, *"The Social Origins of Early Quakers*, QH 68 (1979), 133-40

34 Judith Diamondstone, *"The Philadelphia Corporation. 1701-1776 (Thesis, Univ. of Pa., 1969), Daniel R. Gilbert, "Patterns of Organization and Membership in Philadelphia Club Life"* (thesis, Univ. of Pa., 1952) as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, *1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

35 Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House*, 39. as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, *1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

36 Note: When this quote is brought up in *Albion's Seed*, the "very mean" part is brushed off but the citation used to brush it off is not germane to the topic. In fact most of what Fischer writes about Quakers makes them look like mean people who were just very certain of their own niceness and generosity, much like a modern-day Twitter flamer.

37 James O. Knauss, *Social Conditions among the Pennsylvania Germans in the Eighteenth Century* (Lancaster, 1922) as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, *1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

38 Jones, ed., Quakers in the American Colonies, 422 as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, *1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

39 David Hackett, *1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

40 Ann Cooper Whitall *Diary, 1st day, vii month, 1760, Haverford* as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, *1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

41 Jack D. Marietta, *"Ecclesiastica Discipline in the Society of Friends, 1682-1776"* (thesis, Stanford, 1968), 31-32 as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, *1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

42 Boulter to Newcastle, 23 Nov. 1728, Wayland F. Dunaway, *The Scotch-Irish of Colonial Pennsylvania* (Chapel Hill, 1944), 20 as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, 1935-. Albion's Seed : Four British Folkways in America. New York : Oxford University Press, 1989.

43 Pencak, W. (2002). Jews and Anti-Semitism in Early Pennsylvania. *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, *126*(3), 365–408. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20093547

From, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20093547?read-now=1&oauth_data=eyJlbWFpbCI6ImNvbGxpbnNtYWxjb2xtQGdtYWlsLmNvbSIsImluc3RpdHV0aW9uSWRzIjpbXX0&seq=17#page_scan_tab_contents

44 Pencak, W. (2002). *Jews and Anti-Semitism in Early Pennsylvania.* The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, 126(3), 365–408. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20093547, from

https://www.jstor.org/stable/20093547?read-now=1&oauth_data=eyJlbWFpbCI6ImNvbGxpbnNtYWxjb2xtQGdtYWlsLmNvbSIsImluc3RpdHV0aW9uSWRzIjpbXX0&seq=20#page_scan_tab_contents

45 Pencak, W. (2002). *Jews and Anti-Semitism in Early Pennsylvania.* The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, 126(3), 365–408. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20093547, from

https://www.jstor.org/stable/20093547?read-now=1&oauth_data=eyJlbWFpbCI6ImNvbGxpbnNtYWxjb2xtQGdtYWlsLmNvbSIsImluc3RpdHV0aW9uSWRzIjpbXX0&seq=20#page_scan_tab_contents

46 This was specifically written in response to Quaker lawyer Miers Fisher 1784 efforts to push for the abolishment of the Bank of North America because it had too many Jewish investors.

47 John Smith to James Pemberton, 20.v.1741, *Pemberton Papers,* HSP. as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, *1935-*. *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

48 Edin B. Bronner, *William Penn's "Holy Experiment": The Founding of Pennsylvania,* 1681-1701 (New York, 1962), 134-53; Gary B. Nash, Quakers and Politics: Pennsylvania, 1681-1726 (Princeton, 1968), 127-80. as cited in Fischer, David Hackett, *1935-*. *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

49 Post Editorial. (2022, May 22). *Let the apparent insider payouts of BLM be a warning about any cause*. New York Post. Retrieved December 22, 2022, from https://nypost.com/2022/05/21/let-the-apparent-insider-payouts-of-blm-be-a-warning-about-any-cause/ , Chang, A., Fuller, J., & Fox, K. (2022, April 7). *Secret $6 million home has allies and critics skeptical of BLM Foundation's finances.* NPR. Retrieved December 22, 2022, from https://www.npr.org/2022/04/07/1091487910/blm-leaders-face-questions-after-allegedly-buying-a-mansion-with-donation-money

50 And no, Scrooge is very clearly not meant to represent a Jewish person. People only started thinking this after the Calvinist population mostly died out and people were trying to place a wealthy stereotype they were not familiar with in their daily lives. Scrooge is Scottish and his nephew celebrates Christmas, moreover he dresses like a Calvinist stereotype (being tall/gaunt, and wearing white, black, and red) and even has a physical malady—a trait common across almost all stereotypical representations of Calvinists.

51 Tuttle, B. (2016 Dec 09). *How ebenezer scrooge got rebranded as a capitalist hero. Money*. from https://money.com/ebenezer-scrooge-defense-charles-dickens-christmas-carol/

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PERMANENCE, IDENTITY, AND CREATIVE DESTRUCTION

Many cultures feature unique takes on permanence, identity, and creative destruction in a way that colors adherents' views of reality. Consider the sand mandalas created by Tibetan Buddhists: These breathtaking pieces of art take weeks to construct and are made entirely of sand (historically tiny gemstones). After they have been completed and viewed, they are destroyed with a single, firm sweep. The process of creating something beautiful you plan to destroy immediately afterward is meant to impart an understanding of impermanence on the creator and help them embrace the concept.

Sand mandalas both symbolize a certain view of permanence and teach it through their creation. Consider, in contrast, the cultural mindset that produced the Clock of the Long Now: A timepiece designed to keep accurate time for over a millennium. The Clock of the Long Now is not meant to be viewed by anyone or serve as a public art piece; its purpose is simply to quietly exist for as long as it conceivably can. This project is being worked on by the Long Now Foundation, which promotes this longer view of history.

While we respect the sacrifice that goes into these extremes, we ultimately see both as self-indulgent wastes of time. This judgment reflects our own bias about how identity persists through time via the family line and culture. A perception of identity closer to our own is that held by some branches of the Jewish cultural tradition, which conceptualize the "tribe" as the primary unit of identity across generations. Iterations of this type of tradition can also be seen in groups with intercultural classes, like some Brahmins, in which your class comprises a major part of your identity. Army units

represent a secular iteration of this mindset; they serve as cultural throughlines able to earn glory through the actions of their members (with Roman legions even being able to “die” based on the actions of their members).

A modern conceptualization of identity is that of the online persona. An online persona may represent a fraction of an individual (in that they may have multiple online personas), may represent multiple individuals, and may even be passed down through time. The manner in which online identities are often fractionalized, shared, and/or passed down is not new; it is, after all, theorized that while Hippocrates likely started as a single individual, most of what is attributed to him is actually from a school of individuals that all used “Hippocrates” as their pen name.

We suspect that the concept of fractionalized and composite identity will be picked up by some strands of pop culture given how easy it is to execute in online contexts. Fractionalized identities can serve as an excuse to not take responsibility for one’s actions, making them a huge draw of many pop cultures (i.e., “StarKitty called a SWAT team to your house; she is just one of my many personas—it is wrong to punish all of them for just her actions,” or “Sure, I said you were a fat pig online, but I was just writing as GossipMonger6969—tons of people write under that name and I’m just maintaining its harsh tone”).

With the rise of AI, the concept of identity is going to become much more tricky. Even today’s rudimentary AI can effectively simulate people. For example, the Infinite Conversation[1] is an AI-generated, never-ending discussion between Werner Herzog and Slavoj Žižek. It mimics (imperfectly but impressively) not just the sorts of things they would say but also the tonality of their voices. Given what deepfake technology can already achieve, we are not far from a future in which AI will be able to very effectively model and mimic—both in behavior and appearance—anyone who has been moderately well documented.

Given the speed of technological advancement and the fact that nearly all humans in developed nations carry little microphones around nearly 24/7, it only makes sense that a product we will see in our (or our children’s) lifetimes is a virtual AI clone that can handle our interactions, phone calls, social media posts, work tasks, etc. These surrogates will allow us to

automate as much of our virtual social and professional lives as we want. How will cultures choose to handle these? Will we regard interactions with a person's AI surrogate as equivalent to an interaction with that person? Will there be a way to translate social capital built by the AI to the human it represents?

If your head is already spinning, consider that in addition to perfectly emulating us, these AI avatars will be *better* than the "real" thing. They will have access to the entire internet with a thought, be able to alter their appearance as they like and have access to processing power we could only dream of. They will be wittier, more eloquent, better informed, and more attractive versions of ourselves. For cultures that don't believe in a soul, which iteration of the person will be considered more valuable? If only one manifestation of "you" can exist, which would you choose? Outside of primacy, the AI will be functionally better in every respect—except that it may not interpret its feelings with the same qualia that we, organic meat puppets that we are, do.

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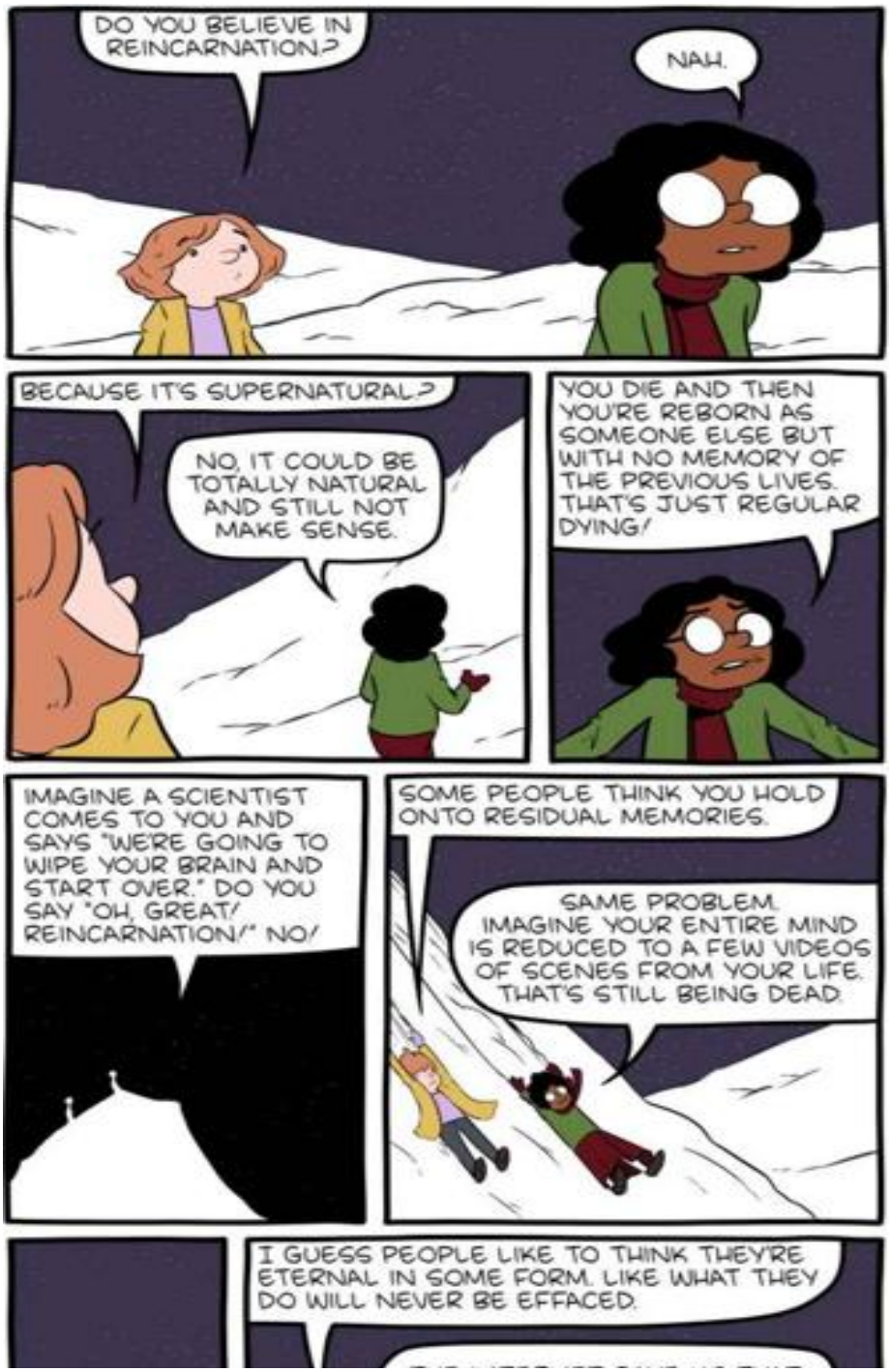
To Live Forever?

There is a great comic by Zach Weinersmith (writer of Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal)[2] on this topic (shared with his permission).



Humans have been bred to fear both death and change because those who accept change and impermanence with abandon are far less likely to survive and produce viable offspring.

Your culture will therefore need to take an intentional stance against elements of permanence if you do not want adherents to cling to it blindly. Before taking your stance, we encourage you to think through what it really means—and whether it promotes worthwhile outcomes.

In the Ship of Theseus thought experiment, we are told the story of a man named Theseus who, piece by piece, replaces every part of his ship throughout his journey. Is the ship that ends the journey still the same "ship" as the vessel that originally embarked? What if, behind Theseus, another man were to collect the cast-off pieces and use them to build another ship? Is this other ship also Theseus' ship?

Suppose instead of talking about a ship, we are discussing a consciousness and a brain that forgot old memories and replaced them with new ones while also replacing the physical, organic matter in its cells bit by bit. What if a mad scientist captured all those forgotten memories in a brain made of the first brain's discarded particles? Which entity would be the "true" continuation of the previous state of consciousness?

If you took one percent of a person's brain and replaced it with computer chips, would they still be themselves? What about 50 percent? When does a person stop existing? To us the answer is obvious: With every adjustment in who a person is, they become something partially—but not wholly—new. In part, a person stops existing with the first percentage point of replacement, but in part, a person doesn't stop existing until the last percent of their original brain is gone. Given that we transmit much more than 1

percent of who we are to our kids, we are fractionally the same entity as them. In addition, given that humans are constantly improving and changing themselves, we are constantly killing ourselves—either by gaining new information, changing our minds, experiencing hormonal shifts, or sloughing off old cells and generating new ones.

From our perspective, the question posed in the Ship of Theseus is fundamentally flawed. The concept of separation (in which the molecules that make up the ship are meaningfully a new thing from the surrounding water molecules) and continued identity (that the ship is meaningfully the same thing between moments) are mental shortcuts the human brain uses to more easily categorize the world but not reflective of a deeper reality. The same can be said for our own consciousness, which more or less has no value if it does not undergo a constant cycle of creative destruction. (Consciousness in and of itself isn't valuable; it is valuable because it helps us learn and solve problems by taking in new information, weighing it, and forming new views.)

Our cultural framework sees a fear of death as equivalent to a desire to take Theseus's ship and carefully dip every board in preservatives to maintain it for thousands of years. Meanwhile, we gauge a ship's value by its ability on the water and at war. This view inspires new ship designs and constant innovation because our intergenerational identities' purpose as custodians of ships—the identities we experience within a single lifetime—is to make them better on water and at war. As older ships fail to compete with newer models, they are retired, forgotten, and allowed to rot. Thousands of years later, *our* cultivar's Ship of Theseus looks like a fleet of advanced battle cruisers and submarines—whereas it still resembles an ancient Greek trireme within those cultivars that develop life-extension technologies out of fear of death.

Given our belief that, as we grow and change, our identities change, we see every moment of self-improvement as an incremental death. Resisting the process of creative self-destruction intrinsically leads to stagnation. A pool of stagnant water can breed dangerous parasites.

Mental homogenization is just as potentially damaging as mental stagnation. Like viruses, some of the ideas to which we are exposed are self-replicating. If our mental "immune systems" are insufficiently robust,

viral ideas can infect us and prevent us from seriously engaging with new concepts (to protect themselves) while pushing us to spread those virulent ideas to other people. When this kind of homogenization happens to a person, we call them a “husk” because when someone halts the process of creative destruction—refusing to explore, weigh, and sometimes accept new ideas—they stop being meaningfully human (in our House’s view, at least).

Our culture also resists instinctual attachment to biological identity, instead contextualizing our children collectively as more “us” than we are. Consider that each biological kid you have is 50 percent you. As soon as you have more than three kids, there is more of your biological identity (1.5X) in them than in you.

Better still, because most have the freedom to choose reproductive partners they admire, having kids yields an opportunity to augment individual biological identities by mixing them with those of people we respect and admire—people whose unique DNA will improve our own. Once equipped with this improved mix, children can also be raised in ever-more-ideal circumstances than their parents, granting still more advantages to the new-and-improved biological identities produced.

As an added benefit, children are not burdened by their parents’ biases and prejudices; they get to choose to discard the parts of their parents’ worldview that, with their clearer views, they can recognize as sub-optimal. This essentially diversifies an individual biological identity’s “investment portfolio” by allowing iterations of them to take wildly different (and perhaps better) approaches to life.

Our House’s cultural beliefs around identity produce a view of life and the individual as a bubbling cauldron of creative destruction at its best—and a stagnant, homogeneous cesspool at its worst. **The destruction of identity is not an unwanted byproduct of progress but the core value of identity in the first place.**

While this mindset encourages a high birth rate at the intergenerational level and a low fear of death, it is hard to say how aggressive our distant descendants will be when it comes to genetically and mechanically modifying their own kids. Even *we* have some trepidation about how far we

can improve our species before we hit ethical issues, like classes of a family being genetically specialized for specific jobs, which brings in questions of consent.

We are excited to see what you come up with for your own House's cultivar and even more excited to see, through the eyes of our distant descendants, which cultivar "wins." How will *your* culture frame permanence? Will you advocate for some constants while encouraging continuous change in other domains? What are the likely downstream effects of the way you frame permanence?

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Death

One of my (Malcolm's) first jobs entailed regular visits to a medical examiner's office. I was tasked with bringing fresh brains from the medical examiner's office to the UT Southwestern Medical Center psychiatry research wing. I was doing this so that we could study the brains of individuals about whom we had extensive psychiatric records. This macabre task provided not just face-to-face exposure to hundreds of dead bodies, but also an opportunity to read a history of their lives and dive deep into their most personal thoughts, fears, hopes, and dreams. I found myself the courier of the former seats of these individuals' consciousnesses before they were cut apart and put on slides. This work gave me a unique perspective on— and comfort with—death that I wish more people could experience.[3]

A culture's relation to death is reflected in its relative fear of death and its rituals around it. Once a traveling Islamic scholar, Ibn Fadlan, spent time with a group of pre-Viking Rus. When the Rus king died, a message went out asking the king's people who would join him on his journey to the afterlife. One young woman took on this burden. The Rus then had a large party, killed the intoxicated young woman, put both bodies on a boat filled with goods and ritually sacrificed animals, lit the boat on fire, and set it to sea.

What most horrified Ibn Fadlan about this ritual was that they lit the king's body on fire. To a Muslim, burning a body is akin to mutilation and even witnessing cremation is technically haram. When he discussed this with one of its hosts, he was chastised: "You Arabs are foolish, you take the person that matters most to you and put them in the ground where they are eaten by worms. We burn them in an instant and they enter paradise that very moment because of the great love their God has for them."

The interaction recorded by Ibn Fadlan is a microcosm of how practices around death can frame a culture's views around life. That the Rus were willing to kill a woman to attend the king on his journey to the afterlife revealed the relative importance of human life in their culture (the king's life was just that much more important than hers). That the celebration was

drunken and festive without mourning demonstrates how the Rus genuinely saw death as passing from one stage of existence to another—they believed the individual was immediately carried up by a God, hence there was no reason to mourn.

Why cremate a dead body in one culture and not in another? Cremation preference appears to be an artifact of the environment in which cultures are nurtured. In colder weather environments, people are much more likely to cremate bodies—this is true even today and even within and between countries (with more northern states in the U.S. being much more likely to cremate bodies). Perhaps this is because bodies decompose much more slowly in cold-weather environments. However, this doesn't explain why we still see this trend in 21st-century American states, which almost suggests the presence of some polymorphic instinct instigated by different environmental conditions (a pre-programmed genetic predisposition that changes based on environmental conditions). This regional difference is also particularly odd as rotting bodies become dangerous far more quickly in hot environments (Simone made me remove a vomit-inducing comment about me working with the body of a man who died next to a radiator and wasn't found for a week or so here).

Within the House cultivar we are designing, we care little about what happens to our corpses. Should doing so be trivially inexpensive, it might make sense to freeze ancestors or save their DNA. Still, we wouldn't want such flights of fancy to deprive living and future generations of resources they might otherwise utilize to carry forward an evolved iteration of the House's goals. From the perspective of our family culture, it seems quite disrespectful to mourn a dead person to any extent that disrupts your ability to be efficacious. By doing so, you make their last act one of destruction. We don't understand the purpose of that; it hardly seems like a sign of respect.

I, Simone, was exposed to two cultural approaches toward death as a child: The Mormon approach (to which I was exposed through a Mormon-run preschool) and the Buddhist approach (to which I was exposed through parent-mandated Sunday temple and dharma school attendance). These two traditions exhibit highly contrasting and interesting views on the true nature of death, with the Mormon view being the most optimistic of all cultural

traditions and the Buddhist one being the most morose (despite cultural stereotypes to the contrary).

In the Mormon tradition, not only does almost everyone[4]—Mormon or not—eventually get a "happy ending" (with the differentiation being how long one has to wait and the iteration one gets), but afterlife is conceptualized as training to eventually become a God yourself, ruling a planet like our own alongside your spouse. What we find so deeply satisfying about this belief is not the whole "becoming a God" thing, but that it is the only belief system (to our knowledge) that grants spouses afterlives alongside each other in which they get to work together on a clearly delineated, meaningful project. We could not imagine a more satisfying afterlife experience.

Mormon beliefs around death do a lot to influence their values in life. The Mormon afterlife hammers home not just the gravity of *who* one chooses as a spouse but also the importance of a *continued positive relationship* with that person. The knowledge that "you're in it for the long haul—big time" likely contributes to the higher levels of satisfaction reported in Mormon marriages, vis a vis those of many other traditions.

The Mormon conceptualization of an afterlife is not wildly different from our own, as, in our view, we will endure—together—long after our bodies expire, both through our writing and through our descendants (who, as we pointed out earlier, are more "us" than *we* are in many ways). This belief motivates us to do everything we can to ensure our children thrive.

In contrast with the Mormon tradition, which involves enduring existence and commitment, the ultimate goal of most branches of Buddhism is to end the cycle of death and rebirth known as samsara. What is morose about this from our perspective is that it simultaneously frames sapience *negatively*—as a state defined by suffering—while also framing the ultimate positive outcome as a sort of mass suicide or genocide: An end not just to one's personal sapience but an end to *all sapience in the universe*.

This is a great example of how religion is so much more than just theology. Given my cultivar's lens, even if I 100% believed a Buddhist theology's metaphysical framework for the world, I would see its stated cultural goal as not just *suboptimal* but the highest order "evil" possible. In the perspective of a Buddhist cultural framing, this goal is a noble coming-

together of all things, an end of conflict, and a non-conscious feeling of blissfulness. From *our* cultural perspective, the Buddhist “final solution” is somehow inconceivably worse than mass genocide—it would be quite literally a worse event than anything we could ever imagine actually happening. The desired Buddhist outcome is the ultimate stagnation—supreme and inescapable homogeny. If genocide were a pop rock, a total end to samsara would be a nuke.

From our House's cultural perspective, the highest order of good involves first protecting and spreading sapience across the universe, then ultimately becoming a weaver of realities, constructing innumerous new universes within which sapience can proliferate.

What is interesting here is how much in common we have with Buddhism; we just happen to arrive at an opposite goal. As with Buddhism, we conceptualize reality as a cycle of life, death, and rebirth—though we see this as happening through our children, culture, and ideas rather than “energy,” more broadly speaking. As with Buddhism, we also see suffering as predominating that cycle.

The core difference that produces our radically different cultural lenses entails our cultures’ divergent contextualization of suffering. Buddhism sees suffering as a negative state that we should aspire to end. In contrast, we see suffering as an evolutionarily important biological signal used to motivate essential action. In many ways, we view suffering more positively than “pleasant” emotional states, as suffering tends to motivate action and progress more than bliss and pleasure, which are more likely to produce inaction and complacency. In other words, bliss is the emotional state that most motivates stagnation, whereas stuffing is the totem of dynamism.

Suffering is the sole fire in a frigid, dark universe around which our souls gather. Stick your hand deep within it, and you will be burned. Put out that fire entirely, and eventually, the cold will overtake you. Should you extinguish the flame of suffering, your molecules would slow down, eventually settling into endless stillness, and the collective human soul would calcify into a frozen mockery of everything life has ever stood for.

One day we may find a better solution to motivate humanity than suffering. Eugenics.org is working to do just that: Edit humans at the genetic level to experience less pain and build new emotional motivational mechanisms. While we neither endorse use of the word “eugenics” nor the project, it’s an interesting direction for a faction of the transhumanist movement to take.

In the same way there are secular framings of most Christian traditions, there are secular framings of Buddhism championed by certain philosophies, such as “negative utilitarianism,” which argues that reducing negative emotions is more important than increasing positive emotions (i.e., that emotional states are the most important thing and any given amount of suffering cannot be canceled out by an equal amount of happiness). Secular movements motivated by this philosophy include the antinatalist movement (whose proponents go so far as to campaign for forced sterilization)[5] and radical vegetarian advocates (like Brian Tomasik, who focuses 25% of his philanthropy on relieving suffering in things like insects and 25% in things like electrons).[6] For more on the deeply insidious antinatalist movement, skip to: “Think of the Suffering! (Antinatalism & Negative Utilitarianism)” in the Appendix.

Our cultural differences with Buddhism extend beyond differing takes on suffering: By our cultural framing, it is one of the highest forms of evil to rob someone of their individuality. While you can eliminate conflict by removing a person's individuality and merging them into a single collective, conflict is the fuel on which life and ideas thrive. From our perspective, individuality, diversity, and conflict play essential roles in human progress (and in protecting sapience on the whole).

Simone has a different theory as to why we see things differently than Buddhists do—why even if we believed in a Buddhist metaphysical framework for reality, we would see their goal as evil: While both Buddhism and our culture see the individual as just one part of a greater entity, **Buddhism sees the internal subjective experience of that collective entity as being the core of it** (thence suffering presenting motivation to escape Samsara) **while our culture sees the large thing we are part of as being the cycle itself**. We are just one tiny aspect of the cycle of death and birth, the bubbling cauldron of evolutionary pressure our genetics and memetic identities were born through. To us, *the bubbling*

cauldron is the thing of value, not *the aggregate experience of the things boiling within it*.

In Buddhism, everything that perceives itself to be an individual is part of a wider interconnected entity (hence Buddhists try not to cause suffering to other animals and many branches of Buddhism are vegetarian). In contrast, our culture sees everything that perceives itself as an individual as really being one aspect of a cycle—and we believe it is the cycle itself that has value.

From the first nervous system to today, the cycle has been fueled by suffering, divergence, and conflict between and among individuals, species, and groups. This is not a flaw of the cycle or something to escape; it is the cycle. It is amazing that this slight difference in interpretation can produce such logically consistent yet diametrically opposed ideologies—one aimed at preserving and spreading life and sentience and the other dedicated to its systematic eradication. (Again, we are just speaking from our cultural perspective.)

Today the individual human is barely sapient. We only achieve anything of value at the civilizational, multigenerational level. But, one day, through a process red in tooth and claw, sapience will reach a state we cannot yet conceive where individuals will experience genuinely meaningful existence. That state may exist in a human-like body or something yet to be imagined. Maybe by then, we will be able to dissociate the negative feelings that are often associated with suffering, but for now suffering remains an instrumental tool. Bliss is superfluous, a gift evolution sometimes grants us when we are on task.

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Castes & Which Lives Matter

When most people hear the word “caste,” they immediately think of Indian cultures. While this is not an unjustified leap, cultural caste systems are hardly relegated to the Indian subcontinent. What makes the Indian caste system unique is both that it is currently in an earlier stage of being dismantled when contrasted with other caste systems and that it left a significant genetic distance between castes. For example, the two largest castes in Uttar Pradesh, the Yadav and Chamar, are more distant genetically (genetic difference 8.9) than Germans and Greeks (genetic distance 8.69).

Upon hearing about an Indian caste system comprised of five main castes, each of which is divided into about 3,000 sub-castes based on occupation, most foreigners contextualize the concept as being quite alien. People of Anglo-Saxon descent may come to this conclusion forgetting that many of their brethren still walk around with names like Smith and Tailor attached to them—names that hail from a similar caste system. That’s right: In the medieval period, families often maintained specialist trades passed down from one generation to the next. While the Anglo-Saxon caste system was never as strict as that which ultimately developed in India, it wasn’t profoundly less strict than its pre-British Indian counterpart.

Even today, the United States features something of a caste system delineated by where an individual lives. Some regional “castes” culturally specialize in specific tasks—consider Silicon Valley’s technology specialization as an example. These regions can act as cultural beacons, drawing and rewarding individuals with similar sociological profiles (like early castes did). We may even see the genetic results of this sociological profile concentration in Silicon Valley’s high rates of autism (it is no surprise that Simone, who is autistic, came from that regional caste). Finally, this caste system is also systematically unfair, with an individual born in Silicon Valley having astoundingly greater odds of becoming a highly paid tech professional or “intellectual” with a degree at an elite East Coast school than someone born in the Midwest.

Because we think of caste systems in terms of the ultra-specialized, somewhat artificial British-occupation-era Indian caste system, it is easy to

miss how fluid most caste systems were historically—similar to the extant "soft" regional caste system in the USA. Soft caste systems allow for some level of choice in caste membership if someone shows exceptional skill and makes significant sacrifices, whereas a hard caste system sets an individual's caste as a cultural mandate from birth.

What is fascinating about caste systems, and likely a core reason they evolved in so many cultures, is that they allow for the genetic concentration of skills within certain specialties. As offensive as this concept is, the genetic vortices created by castes are so strong that their effects can be seen centuries after they dissolved. A study[7] conducted in the U.K. in 2015 found that people with the surname Smith (descended from the smith caste) had higher physical capabilities and an above-average aptitude for strength-related activities, while those with the surname Tailor (descended from the tailor caste) had a higher-than-average aptitude for dexterity-related tasks.[8]

The treatment of Black populations in the U.S. could be seen as the manifestation of a more recent "hard" American caste system. Despite the large number of social movements and political policies focused on helping erase the caste-like dichotomy established in the Jim Crow era, progress is glacial when measured in individual lifetimes.

Indian culture is currently going through something similar, even with similar arguments being made against affirmative action programs for the untouchable caste by detractors. Specifically, many argue these programs should only take into account a family's economics, as they disproportionately help untouchables from wealthy families and end up giving a boost to individuals who don't need one—all while hurting poor people from "higher" castes. In the same way, many in the U.S. complain affirmative action disproportionately helps economically advantaged Blacks who are not the descendants of American slaves, with first and second-generation African immigrants, despite constituting only about 10 percent of the U.S. Black population making up about 41% of all Black students in the Ivy League as Roland G. Fryer Jr. noted in a *Washington Post* op-ed.[9] (Note: We are not taking a side on this but rather pointing out that both efforts are working to resolve inequalities created by a caste system.)

How long does a caste system take to dissolve after it has been largely abandoned by the culture that previously held it? Well, the Jewish caste system has been functionally irrelevant since the fall of the second temple almost 2,000 years ago—yet even today, Kohanim, Leviim, and Yisraelim have a number of unique privileges and rules applied to them based on an immutable birth caste in all but the most liberal of Jewish communities. So, if you are in a discriminated caste, don't hold your breath waiting for a complete resolution.

If you think we are picking on other cultures, let's take a moment to look at the Calvinist unique take on a caste system. Instead of a traditional caste system in which, depending on your physical features or parents, you are placed in a specific caste, the Calvinist caste system … well. It's different.

As we mentioned at the beginning of the book, the most controversial aspect of the Calvinist cultivar is that not everyone's life matters equally. Because we believe in a deterministic universe, we believe some lives will not matter from the moment they are born.

As individual humans, we cannot effectively judge which lives matter, so the question of whether a specific other person's life matters should largely be irrelevant to us. However, when you read about interactions Calvinist communities have with their neighbors, it is common to see them develop a reputation for regarding non-Calvinist outsiders as though their lives don't matter. This is one of those cultural quirks that isn't supposed to work this way but almost always functionally does at scale—like Communism always leading to dictatorships when practiced above certain population levels.

Because Calvinists believe the truth of their worldview is apparent to anyone willing to be open-minded, think logically, and search deeply, it is natural that they would see non-Calvinists as willfully ignorant, slow, lazy, or unwilling to accept hard truths. What is interesting about Calvinist elitism is how unmoored it is from class. Anyone can join the culture and once they do, they are regarded as equal to other Calvinists and better than other people.

The Calvinist concept of the elect also has a Schrodinger's Caste System effect on adherents, as while Calvinists are certain *other Calvinists* are better than other people, they are constantly afraid that thinking such about

themselves will prove that they are *not* among the elect and not real Calvinists. It's kind of like that song "What Makes You Beautiful" by the pop band One Direction: If what makes you beautiful is that you don't know you are beautiful, but you are also aware that anyone who doesn't know they are beautiful is beautiful, then you constantly oscillate between being beautiful and not beautiful.

> *Note: We use the term Schrodinger's Caste System because while Calvinists essentially think there is a caste system given the concept of limited atonement (that not everyone is elect), it's impossible to know who is who—and even trying to determine what caste you are in (looking under the box) can be proof you were always in a lower caste (i.e., not elect).*

Seeing as Calvinism's weird Schrodinger's Caste System has negative externalities, should future Calvinist-derived cultivars keep it? Also, why not build a more traditional caste system? To the second question: While the traditional caste systems have the benefit of allowing for specialization from childhood, this benefit does not overcome the "command economy" cost of not allowing people organically to sort into roles that work for them. The Calvinist-style caste system has a totally different function (in addition to its being a logical outcome of living in a deterministic universe). It is designed to guide the moral actions of the system's adherents.

A common alternate system for motivating moral behavior is: Do good things, or you will be punished later (usually after death). Per this system, the consequence of immorality is punishment. Per the Calvinist system, doing the wrong thing is proof to yourself your life does not matter—or that you were built to be a bad person, a foil to the people who matter. As Calvinists see it, through immoral or moral actions, you are revealing to yourself who you were before the action rather than shaping what will happen to you in the future. This is technically true in almost every culture, but focusing on the external consequences of moral actions detracts from this.

> *Note: Morality, as our personal culture defines it, is tied to whether an individual's actions are efficacious and steering the timeline in a*

> *positive direction vis-a-vis their stated values. Morality changes based on the cultivar. We are talking about a cultivar's ability to enforce its own ideas about morality.*

Some aforementioned statistics (see below) back up our theory that the Calvinist concept of the elect—a certain set of people predetermined by God to be "saved"—can plausibly motivate moral behavior more effectively than other traditions (such as Quaker traditions, which, as we've rudely argued at length, were horrible at enforcing *actual, not-mostly-performative* moral behavior).

Those stats, reiterated:

> *In early America, around 42% of Maryland Quakers owned slaves*[10] *(this sample was taken from Maryland wills between 1669 and 1750). Among Quaker leaders in Philadelphia, 70% owned slaves (this sample was taken from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for 1681 to 1705).*[11] *Even if we go with the lower number, this is still the highest rate of slave ownership of any cultivar in the colonies (not on a number-of-slaves-owned basis, but on a precent-of-the-population-owning-slaves basis)—a rate way higher than that of the Anglican-decended Southern culture at the time of the Civil War (around 20% of households and 5% of individuals*[12]*). Contrast this with Puritan slave ownership rates which were 0.5%-2%.*[13]

Essentially, the mechanism used by the Schrodinger's Caste System to motivate low rates of "immoral" (culturally unaligned) actions can be seen in the thought process of the time:

Quakers largely know they are good people (such is an *a priori* assumption of Quakerism). They have the fire of God burning in them; of *course,* they are good. So yes, buying a slave may lead to some punishment, but the immoral action can plausibly be offset through other actions—and heck, they might be super nice to the slave … until they forget about their moral conflict.

So far as a Calvinist is concerned, *all* humans are basically less than garbage: Totally fallen and wretched. One should assume every idea one has is evil and make extra sure it isn't. To a Calvinist, even *thinking* about buying a slave can serve not just as proof that you are a bad person, but evidence that God *created* you to be a bad person. Basically, any taken or contemplated immoral action can serve as evidence that your life is, and always has been, a meaningless joke. You will not be punished for owning a slave per se; if you choose to own a slave, you are merely revealing to yourself that you were always damned. Obviously, the downside to this logic is that while you are quite motivated to avoid immoral thought and action, you also end up with (from the perspective of other cultures) weird beliefs—such as that most charity is likely a waste and more about virtue signaling, and that having fun for the sake of having fun is evil because it is a sign that you would rather indulge than focus on efficacious actions. It's up to you whether this cultural technology is worth the cost.

The above example demonstrates why cultures that frame people as inherently good often commit more evil acts than cultures that frame humans as inherently evil. Assuming that every idea that pops into your head is evil will lead you to scrutinize yourself much more intensely and make you much less likely to approach situations assuming you are "the good guy." This approach nevertheless comes at a cost, as it also leads people to distrust others in a way that can lower intergroup cooperation and efficiency.

What does the concept of the "elect" look like in the House cultivar we are building? From our secular perspective, to be "elect" is to live to your full potential and make a meaningful impact vis-a-vis your stated values, whatever they may be. To us, a person who claims to have "not lived up to their potential" never had potential in the first place. Such is the truth of a deterministic reality. Either you do what needs to be done to be among the elect, or you don't.

Everyone is gifted or special along some metric or another, meaning there's always some way or another a person may feel superior. We don't mind if our kids or members of our House think they are better than others so long as that feeling is rightfully earned through thoughtfully driven, efficacious, measurable action. When you take an action or are infected by thoughts that

draw you off the path of efficaciousness vis-a-vis your values, you prove to yourself you are not likely to be among the elect.

> *Side note: A fascinating phenomenon tied to the Indian caste system is that one caste, the Brahmans, are disproportionately represented among Indians who emigrate to other countries (or at least the U.S.). This creates a phenomenon where we always have to ask ourselves if the stereotypes we have psychologically built around "Indian" character traits are actually only tied to Brahmans. This is one of the reasons we don't talk too much about Indian culture in this book; it is hard to differentiate between our perspectives of Indian culture and Brahman culture.*

That said, one thing that cannot go unmentioned about Indian culture is that it seems exceptionally well adapted to both managing and navigating large bureaucracies. At the time of this book's publication, the CEOs of Google, Microsoft, Twitter, IBM, OnlyFans, Adobe, Palo Alto Networks, Mastercard, and PepsiCo are culturally Indian (in fact, 60 of the S&P's Fortune 500 companies have Indian CEOs). Indian cultures also appear to be quite adept at motivating entrepreneurship, seeing as 25% of top Silicon Valley startup founders are Indian.[14] Is this an Indian thing, a Hindi thing, or a Brahman thing? Some of these CEOs are Sikh, so it is probably an Indian thing more broadly. We don't know what's going on, but there is probably something here.

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Pain and Pacifism

Probably no culture has a more intense relationship with pain, asceticism, peace, and suffering than the Jains. Jains are famous for their obsessive attempts to not hurt other living beings—sweeping the ground in front of their feet as they walk so as to not accidentally step on any insects and avoiding root vegetable foods out of fear their harvesting might harm worms (obviously, not all Jains do this, but the most observant do).

> *Side note: The Jains are one of the most at-risk ancient cultures in the world due to their extremely low birth rate.*

In addition to winning an easy gold medal for "most extreme culture" in regards to their focus on not harming other living beings, Jains are also extreme practitioners of asceticism, engendering more personal suffering through self-denial than any other group we've encountered. As an example: Mahavira, the culture's founder, avoided village stays lasting more than a day and took measures to leave towns after two days, all to ensure he would never make a friend or gain a kind ear. Outside of hermit monasticism, many monastics of other cultures at least have *friends*. He also started the practice of Sallekhana, a form of meditation through which one kills oneself through slow, gradual starvation (while other cultures, like the Buddhist Sokushinbutsu, have similar practices, no other large culture exercised such practices as frequently as the Jains).

While we would argue that Jains' focus on suffering for its own sake seems extremely self-indulgent (coming from a cultural background that does not see even human suffering as a negative), Jain asceticism seems to produce positive externalities unrelated to its explicit mandates. While we have seen figures that strain credulity, such as reports suggesting that, despite comprising just 0.4% of India's population, Jains pay as much as 24% of the nation's personal income tax,[15] it is inarguable that Jains represent one of the most educated cultures in the world—not to mention one of the wealthiest cultures on average.[16]

Despite being both dramatically better educated and wealthier than other cultures who live alongside them, Jains are (so far as we can tell) more respected by their cohabitating cultures than any other cultural group that has achieved this status. Usually, when a minority culture is dramatically wealthier than the majority culture, the difference breeds enmity (take Jews as an easy example). Specifically, cultures like these suffer from the "middleman minority" phenomenon, whereby a minority group ends up becoming more educated than its surrounding society because it reliably acts as a neutral third party to mediate business transactions (being they are usually neither culturally nor genetically related to the people doing business).[17] Somehow the Jains have not only escaped this trap but managed to be fairly well-liked by their neighbors.[18] We suspect Jains' intense focus on not leading others to suffer must be a significant contributing factor on this front.

Other cultures, like the strictly-pacifist Quakers, also share this halo effect—however, not all pacifist cultures do. The Israeli Haredim[19] are largely "otherized," discriminated against and disliked by groups you would assume to be their cultural allies. Perhaps Israeli Haredim pacifism fails to win popularity points because it is publicly framed as: "We have more important things to do" as opposed to "we suffer to ensure we don't hurt other people." The Anabaptists, such as the Amish, represent another pacifist cultural cluster whose pacifism has put them in hot water. In their case, we suspect the enmity comes from their being surrounded by cultures that generally see violence as a positive (e.g., cultures that see them as traitors for not participating in wars).

Is it worth it to incorporate pacifism into a freshly-designed cultivar? Probably not if you care about female empowerment. The two communities that practice both non-violence and have something that even begins to flirt with gender equality (Jains and Quakers) both have vanishingly low birth rates, and we suspect these factors may be connected. Focusing on non-violence means not seeing one's community as being in a zero-sum game with the world. Such a viewpoint can rob a culture of one of the biggest motivators for a high birth rate. On the other hand—if you abandon gender equality but keep pacifism, you might be fine (in terms of birth rate, at least), as two of the highest-birth-rate cultures on earth are nonviolent (the Haredi and the Anabaptists).

Mortification practices represent another extreme relationship some cultures have with pain, asceticism, peace, and suffering. Probably the most famous of these is the self-flagellation practiced by a number of Roman Catholic sects—and to a lesser extent by some Sikh sects. Our read of these practices is that they are wildly misread. While *historically,* self-flagellation served as a form of self-punishment in an attempt to change God's mind on an issue (see the flageolets and the plague), the practice in general is more focused on learning to control one's own emotional state. For example, people focus on the Opus Dei for self-flagellation while ignoring that the Opus Dei also has the mandate to be cheerful around others—these practices are two sides of the same emotional control coin.

This is true for most cultures that indulge in suffering and teach their adherents that learning to embrace it is a positive. For example, both the Calvinists and related Puritan cultures hold that people can better themselves by learning to endure suffering and contextualize positive emotional states as intrinsically corrupting. Even adhering to a secular Calvinist tradition, Simone often reminds me, **"the only real, lasting happiness, contentment, and satisfaction are biological and psychological rewards for the successful pursuit of one's values—all other positive emotional states should be viewed with extreme suspicion."** Here we should note that Calvinist cultivars don't practice intentional self-harm for self-harm's sake, seeing it as a self-indulgent waste of the short lives we are gifted. Rather, Calvinists consider opportunities to master suffering in the meaningful pursuit of a goal to be a blessing.

As an example, Simone has chosen to work through labor and delivery, handling things like sales calls in the midst of unmedicated labor. She sees the challenge as an opportunity to further her self-mastery. In fact, the first person to hold our first baby was one of our company's controllers because she came to the hospital to go over accounting information with Simone. I don't come anywhere close to her level of temperance, but consider myself lucky to have someone setting such aggressive goalposts for what is possible.[20]

There are manifold downsides to choosing this cultural perspective. The Calvinist choice to contextualize suffering as a neutral state explains in part why Calvinists were known and derided for not donating to charities

involved in the alleviation of suffering. Lauding suffering can also lead to what most cultures would see as negative outcomes, such as Mother Teresa setting up her clinics in a way that was designed to increase and prolong suffering, as she thought suffering brought people closer to God.[21]

Not All Buddhists Favor Sapience Genocide

Just as many people join the LDS Church for the benefits its lifestyle yields while not necessarily believing everything in the Book of Mormon, many people practice Buddhism for the various benefits a temperate Buddhist lifestyle can yield and are not themselves negative utilitarians. Entire branches of Buddhism, such as Mahayana Buddhism, exemplify this (with a key differentiating factor of Mahayana Buddhism being that while adherents strive for enlightenment, they choose to remain in the cycle of samsara). Our differences with Buddhist cultivars obviously do not apply to them.

Regarding Buddhist Apologetics

While adherents of Theravada Buddhism may argue that an end to the cycle of suffering that is samsara doesn’t lead to an end to sapience, and may even claim that nirvana is akin to an endless explosion of sapience, we cannot accept that argument as a universal claim given the evidence we have on hand about sapience as an emergent property.

Sapience is defined by an ability to encounter new information and challenges and use those to improve oneself. If the self is spiritual, sapience is intrinsically ended by removing challenges and the opportunity to encounter new information.

If the self is material, humans appear to have evolved the prefrontal cortex and an ability to critically think about their actions as a means of accelerating evolution (the human species can reason through problems

rather than power through them via sheer life-and-death-based selective pressures). Sapience is not an ephemeral, metaphysical concept but rather an evolved trait. Ending biological or mechanical mechanisms that use sapience for practical reasons won't open a wonderland of sapience that exists for its own sake—anything that ends a cycle of rebirth will just end sapience.

Either way, an end to samsara is the very definition of homogeneity and stagnation.

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1 https://infiniteconversation.com/

2 https://www.smbc-comics.com/comic/reincarnation

3 Here's a fun Malcolm fact—and lame claim to fame: For a few months in a slightly related job, I actually "ran" the office at the Smithsonian's Evolutionary Anthropology Department on which the show "Bones" was based. I gained this privilege not because I was qualified to run anything (I was just a research fellow) but because everyone else was on a dig in Africa. I had just done fieldwork the last two years in a row, which made me less enamored with it than other people. The real "Bones" office is basically a glorified closet mostly full of … well, bones … (not even the biggest I was left alone in at the time) and definitely not the infinite-budget office and lab depicted in the show. Also, the office is only assigned to assist in criminal investigations about once every other year; no such assignments came through while I was there.

4 "Everyone" = everyone who is redeemed by the atonement of Jesus Christ and excludes the sons of perdition (those who have denied the Son after the Father has revealed Him). https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/gs/hell?lang=eng

5 *The case for forced sterilization*. Nonvoluntary Antinatalism. (n.d.). Retrieved January 6, 2023, from http://nonvoluntary-antinatalism.com/the-case-for-forced-sterilization/

6 Tomasik, B. (2014, August 17). *Is there suffering in fundamental physics?* from https://reducing-suffering.org/is-there-suffering-in-fundamental-physics/#Does_consciousness_imply_suffering

7 What's in a Surname? Physique, Aptitude, and Sports Type Comparisons between Tailors and Smiths https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4498760/

8 Functionally, this study's results were incredibly subtle, with the Taylor result not being statistically significant, so don't read into it too much (a person could argue that these researchers were just picking up nominative determinism effects—more on that later).

9 Fryer, R. G. (2022, October 31). *Opinion | affirmative action in college admissions doesn't work - but it could.* The Washington Post., from https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/10/30/affirmative-action-supreme-court-college-admissions/

10 Carroll, K. L. (1983). Maryland Quakers and Slavery. *Quaker History Friends Historical Association, 72*(1), 27–42. https://doi.org/10.1353/qkh.1983.0005

11 Four notes and sources for your consideration:

1. While slave ownership dropped to 10% by 1756, it was still mind-bendingly high when contrasted with slave ownership rates of other "abolitionist" cultivars.

2. In case you are wondering: No, this difference in slave ownership rates cannot be explained just by Quakers being wealthier. For example, Jews were *also* wealthier, vis a vis other groups, during this period and while they owned slaves at a high rate, it was still lower that of Quakers, plus Jews didn't share Quakers' uniquely strong theological mandate against slavery! For more data on Jewish slave ownership, check out this article, which breaks down a few sources: https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jews-and-the-african-slave-trade/

3. Note: All of these stats are taken from before the Hicksite Orthodox schism within Quakerism in 1827, hence both groups should be seen as equally responsible.

4. Fischer, David Hackett, 1935-. Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

12 Rouan, R. (2021, July 16). *Fact check: Stat grossly misleading about slave ownership in 1860.* USA Today. Retrieved December 22, 2022, from https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2021/07/16/fact-check-social-media-post-underrepresents-slave-ownership-1860/7980243002/

13 This estimate can be made by determining the percent of Puritan communities that were Black (2%-2.5%), then marking that as the maximum percentage of Puritans who owned slaves. Given that some of these Black people were free and that many people owned multiple slaves, the true percentage of Puritans who owned slaves was probably 25% to 75% lower, making it between 0.5% and 2%.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, *Colonial Times to 1970*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, 1976), 1:z1- 10; Moore, Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts, 49–51.

14 *25% Silicon Valley startup bosses, 58 top-notch global CEOS of Indian-origin: FM. Hindustan Times.* (2022, September 11). from https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/25-silicon-valley-startup-bosses-58-top-notch-global-ceos-of-indian-origin-fm-101662884874688.html

15 Kiran, S. (2020). Contributions of Jains to the Indian economy: A study. *International Journal of Applied Research, 6*(3), 238–240. from https://www.allresearchjournal.com/archives/2020/vol6issue3/PartD/6-3-83-338.pdf

16 Starr, K. J. (2021, August 24). *6 facts about Jains in India.* Pew Research Center. from https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/08/17/6-facts-about-jains-in-india/

17 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middleman_minority

18 Note: While there is some evidence of mass Jain persecution in distant history, even some of the most famous events, like the Impalement of the Jains in Madurai, have a dubious historicity. Yes, Jains were persecuted, but when contrasted with other minority cultural groups like the Romani or the Jews, these persecutions were comparatively minor due to better inter-community relationships.

19 Note: While American Haredim still face discrimination, they are less disliked by their surrounding culture than those in Israel (this is likely due to Hasidic Jews having employment rates roughly equivalent to surrounding cultural groups and not having ever been exempt from any U.S. draft (so far as we can find). Going forward, we will use the word Hasidic to refer to North American Haredim and "Haredim" or "Haredi" to refer to the Israeli group.

20 A fairly accurate and funny depiction of the Calvinist relation to suffering can be found in the short YouTube skit: *Puritan Roommate Finds Love*. The short does a good job showcasing cultural features like nominative determinism and has a line we love to use: "Your alliteration sounds dangerously like poetry!" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72Z4Ec2H6mA

21 Chénard, G. (2016, March 15). *Should mother Teresa be canonized?* The New York Times. Retrieved December 22, 2022, from https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2016/03/25/should-mother-teresa-be-canonized/mother-teresa-doesnt-deserve-sainthood,

Larivée, S., Sénéchal, C., & Chénard, G. (2013). Les Côtés Ténébreux de Mère Teresa. *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, *42*(3), 319–345. https://doi.org/10.1177/0008429812469894, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0008429812469894

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THEOLOGY: BEGINNINGS, ENDS, AND METAPHYSICS

What does it mean to have a secular religion or a secular theology?

We won’t get too deep into theology to avoid a terrifying descent into pedantry. Nevertheless, we do need to record *something* explaining how we think the underlying fabric of reality functions, if only to illustrate how a freshly-designed secular cultivar can present its own theology (we see far too much the assumption that secular cultures just leave big question marks where theology would otherwise rest).

Recall that you can often graph an equation. The line described by the equation exists as a property of the equation *even before* you put pen to paper to show what the line looks like. In a way, the line *is* the equation.

Alternatively, imagine that you plug a calculation into a calculator. The answer to the equation does not come into existence just because you hit the “=” button. The answer was an intrinsic property of the equation itself. The “=” button merely reveals it to you.

Essentially, we believe the universe is an emergent property of a single (probably pretty simplistic) equation.

Life, matter, perception: It's all just a series of complex emergent properties produced by complicated patterns resulting from the basic structure of reality. This is similar to a Conway's-Game-of-life-type sequence, should you be familiar with that.

An emergent property is a product of a complex system that is *not* one of its component parts. Examples of emergent properties include living organisms (made up of just cells), cities (made up of just material and people), and consciousness (produced by a bunch of electrical impulses among neurons).

The human brain isn't optimized to process the concept of emergent properties well, so we often just ignore them despite seeing them all the time. You can, for example, consciously know that water is made up of molecules consisting of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom. You can logically understand how those molecules interact and produce certain outcomes. However, the human brain can't conceive of those molecules literally being the same thing as "wetness" or the substance filling a glass of water even though it knows they are.

The same goes for reality: We don't naturally perceive that a graphical representation of an equation *is that equation* because our brains did not evolve an ability to intuitively handle those sorts of facts (at no instance in human history has a human been more likely to survive because they understand the concept of emergent properties), but concepts don't become untrue merely because they are difficult to understand. Just because you can't simultaneously conceive of wetness as a collection of H2O molecules doesn't mean it is not.

So, in short, we believe:

1. Basic mathematical principles are a constant across all realities—two things and two things together are always four things. While math can be superficially modified by semantics (e.g., you could use something like non-Euclidean geometry to change the answer to an equation), in the end, math must exist in the way it does in our reality across any conceivable realities.
2. If this is true, math exists independent of our reality as a constant outside of this universe.
3. If math exists outside of all realities, then all possible mathematical permutations exist outside of all realities (it would make no sense for just a few preset equations to exist as immutable, extra-reality truths).

4. Separately, we hold that whatever a mathematical equation describes is an emergent property of the equation itself (e.g., You don't need to draw the line an equation describes for that line to exist as an aspect of that equation—or hit enter on your calculator for two plus two to equal four).
5. If all the above is true, our universe is an emergent property of the equation describing it. By Occam's razor, we don't need to hypothesize a physical reality of any universe that can be described with a single equation, as said reality would exist independently of any physical manifestation.

This understanding of reality may not be immensely comforting, but to us, it is the most plausible explanation (given the evidence we have on hand at present). As you can guess, this secular theology presents a deterministic, predestined view of reality, just as Calvinism does.

This secular theory of ours implies that:

- All realities that can be described by a single, cogent equation exist as an emergent property of said equation, so we exist in multiple, but not infinite, realities. If two realities are described by different equations, there is no moving between them. However, if two realities are described by the *same* equation, there may be a method for moving between them, depending on how the equation is structured.
- (Though even the concept of moving between realities loses value when you see humans as just patterns. If you impose your "pattern" on another reality, have you traveled there or just written an iteration of yourself into that reality?)
- The unidirectional flow of time is an illusion created by the fact that our brains utilize a unidirectional time flow as the medium through which we process consciousness. Every permutation of variable arrangement within the equation describing our universe already exists, meaning the present, past, and future exist "concurrently" as manifestations of the equation describing reality.
- Ideas that we may be living in a simulation worry us less than they may worry others. "Simulated" reality isn't wildly different from

> our take on reality as a whole. The cycle of creative destruction, of which we are manifestations, is functionally the same inside and outside of any simulating machine. Our lives are given purpose as an emergent property of the cycle. We are brief, sentient flashes within the cycle, but said sentience isn't a particularly important part of who we are. (If you somehow programmed Conway's Game of Life within an instance of Conway's Game of Life, a pattern running within the second instance would not be less meaningful than one running in the first.)

Theologies, secular and otherwise, are important to cultures as they often frame the underpinnings of that culture's "meaning of life."

To the Conway's Game of Life analogy, we think the "simple" answer to the purpose of life is to create a pattern of constantly growing and heterogeneous complexity. We believe we "win" by becoming a universe-spanning heterogeneous empire that escapes the end of time through mechanisms we may not yet understand. That said, things are not quite that simple (we will elaborate on this in future chapters). To this end, our core values—framed using the perspectives and vocabulary of our society today—are individual agency, freedom, and diversity.

We keep using Conway's Game of Life as an analogy for reality because it exemplifies how a simple set of rules for interaction can evolve into extremely complex, self-replicating patterns in a way that bridges the "emergent property" gap, which can be difficult for the human consciousness to jump.

The patterns created in these kinds of systems have three end states:

1. They disappear entirely
2. They become simple and repeating
3. They constantly and forever expand and increase in heterogeneous complexity

We see ourselves not as individuals but as facets of the pattern, aiming for a type-three (forever expanding and complex) outcome, with type-one and type-two outcomes representing "death" of the pattern.

If you are constructing a theology for a cultivar of your own invention or refinement, some sort of metaphysical framework or hypothesis like the one described above will be a core component (though it can certainly be much more spiritual, simple, or blunt—e.g., “We’ll never know what reality is, but House X believes in acquiring resources” or “We don’t know what reality is yet and figuring that out is a core value of House Y.”). We encourage you to take time to think deeply on your stance regarding the nature of reality.

Finally, as you construct your secular theology, recall that the feeling of profoundness can be hacked using psychedelics, chanting, and other techniques we discuss in the chapter on psychedelics. *Feelings* of profundity do not correlate with *true profundity*. Similarly, something that is truly meaningful and profound will not necessarily *feel* profound. Profundity represents an emotional set, shaped by evolutionary pressures, like any other. Nothing about the environments in which humans evolved rewarded people for an emotional response to truths about the nature of reality. Unshackling yourself from this expectation will greatly increase the diversity and clarity of any secular theologies you construct.

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Sentience?

On the topic of metaphysical frameworks, we should probably touch on the idea of sentience. As we have stated before, sentience is the word used to describe a person's internal mental space and experience of the world. Sapience, in contrast, is an intelligent entity's ability to reflect on its own existence and make changes to itself based on that reflection.

Whereas pre-sapient entities are all acting on the code they were given by evolution or a programmer, post-sapient entities can choose the code on which they want to operate (to us, even high-functioning humans are only semi-sapient entities). We believe sapience is special in that it grants a somewhat-equal playing field to all entities above a certain level of complexity—assuming they have approximately equal "computing" power. (Think of it as achieving "Turing Complete" consciousness—not every task is equally easy for all sapient entities depending on their architecture, but there still is some overlap in capability).

Sentience, on the other hand, is fairly trivial. Why?

We believe the internal mental world we associate with sentience is mostly an illusion created by the manner in which we collate stimuli and process short-term memories. No one has a meaningful internal mental landscape; we just *think* we do because the way we recall memories creates a sort of mental "video" of an internal experience that does not really exist. If you were to actually stop and try to capture a complex idea—outside of just a notion—in the moment, you would not be able to. The formation of complex ideas happens outside your sentient processing and is later attributed to it. We do not *experience* life as deeply sentient entities so much as we *remember* life as deeply sentient entities.

It is also pretty rare for sentience to be involved in our actions or identities.

In other words:

- We perceive the world working like: (stimuli) → (conscious / sentient thought) → (response)

- When most of the time, it actually works like: (stimuli) → (unconscious processing leveraging memory and other signals, like hormone levels) → (response) & (a sense-making narrative encodes the response into memory—*this sense-making narrative is what we misidentify as sentience*)

You can see this with a brain scanner being able to determine what decision you made before *you* realize it. These experiments provide evidence that the unconscious "real" mind makes decisions, after which our narrative-building memory compiler attempts to justify them.[1]

This can also be seen in the way humans justify decisions that were ultimately forced or manufactured by external, non-conscious factors. For example, people who receive an injection of adrenaline rate annoying behavior to be more annoying (they interpret the adrenaline as a clue that they are really riled up).[2] Even when people know they have not made a sentient choice to feel a certain way, they can't help but interpret their "annoyed" response to someone as their own sentient choice.

We regularly observe a great example of this phenomenon in our kids. If they get hungry, tired, or dehydrated, they will work up a bad mood but can't identify why they feel bad. Once in their bad moods, they'll throw fits over preposterous things, like a door being open, and then find new small things on which to focus their "distress" the moment one is addressed (e.g., if we close the door, then the lights are too dim, or it's not fair that so-and-so doesn't have to get a diaper change) because the narrative-building sentience processors in their minds are ascribing their negative emotional states to anything that happens to be top of mind. So, when a kid doesn't know why they feel a certain way or made a certain decision, they will make up a reason—and adults are little different.

> *Let's be honest—we have all caught ourselves doing something like this. We would actually argue a key to a harmonious marriage is being able to catch yourself when this happens. Are you actually frustrated with your spouse, or are you frustrated in general, and the narrative-forming part of your brain is misattributing your*

> *feelings to your spouse because they happen to be in the line of fire of your displaced aggression?*

In a similar vein, you can trick someone into thinking they made the opposite choice than they actually did. For an example of how this is done:

> "(A) Participants are shown two pictures of female faces and asked to choose which
>
> one they find most attractive. Unknown to the participants, a second card depicting the opposite face is concealed behind the visible alternatives.
>
> (B) Participants indicate their choice by pointing at the face they prefer the most.
>
> (C) The experimenter flips down the pictures and slides the hidden picture over to the participants, covering the previously shown picture with the sleeve of his moving arm.
>
> (D) Participants pick up the picture and are immediately asked to explain why they chose the way they did."[3]

Similar things have been done with flavors of jam and even political views. When asked to justify why they made these decisions, they will go into enormous and specific detail about their decision-making process—a process that obviously did not happen the way they report.

In these scenarios, people 100% believe they are telling the truth—but their brains are lying to them. Since the part of the brain that simulates sentience plays almost no role in actual decision-making,[4] it cannot tell the difference between a condition in which a decision was subconsciously made vs. one in which a decision was surreptitiously forced by an external party. Either way, it is justifying a "choice" that was already made.

If it helps: Think of sentience like a historian providing conjecture as to what a great historical figure was thinking when making important life choices. The story the historian will tell will change if you give them different facts about any given historical event or person. The problem is

that our *actual* mental processing and decision-making in this analogy is the *actual* reasoning process that historical figure underwent, which is simply inaccessible to the historian. We know this because it is virtually impossible to tell, by looking at a person's description of why they made a choice, whether they were in the group that actually made a choice or were tricked into it.[5]

In addition, studies that try to ask a person's sentience how it makes the decisions it does when the results of that question are verifiable have found their answers absurdly self-contradictory and nonsensical. For example, most of the time, you can't easily catch that the sentient part of our brain isn't the part in the driver's seat because we ask questions like: "Why did I choose to write this book?" which lack verifiable answers. However, when we ask an expert something like how they diagnose diseases, forecast the weather, or play chess, we get to see if the sentient part of their mind actually knows how it is making those decisions at a level better than the general public, and what we learn is that—categorically—it does not.[6]

It appears the sentient part of our brain is almost incapable of not trying to take "credit" for something even when it is obvious it did not play a role. For example, when performing awake brain surgery,[7] surgeons can stimulate specific parts of the brain to make the patient move a finger.[8] If you ask the patient why they moved their finger, they will justify it as "their choice" and create a fake narrative about why they did it (e.g., "I just felt like it").

Split-brain patients present additional fascinating insights into sentience. When you sever the thing that connects the left and right hemispheres of a person's brain (the corpus callosum) something very strange happens. While the person typically does not notice a major change (outside of their left hand, sometimes trying to do something different than what "they" have decided to do, like pick a different shirt in the morning), researchers gain the ability to talk to each side of their brain independently without the other side's knowledge.

As the human speech center is located in the left brain, only the left brain can speak. While the right brain is mute, it can still be asked questions and given orders. If you (by covering one eye) use a cue card to ask a split-brain

patient's *right* brain to pick up a Rubik's Cube, the patient will. Then, if you (by covering the *other* eye and displaying a different cue card) ask the patient's *left* brain why they picked up the Rubik's Cube, the split-brain patient will say something like: "I always wanted to learn how to solve one of these." Their sentience will 100% believe that that is why they picked up the Rubik's Cube, even though you, the researcher, *and* their right brain, know the Rubik's Cube was only picked up because you put a cue card in front of the eye connected to their right brain that *asked* for the Rubik's Cube to be picked up.

This has very interesting implications for brain-computer interfaces that connect to artificial intelligence. Suppose you connected a person's brain directly to DALL·E 2 (an AI that can create images). The person's sentience would believe it had created the art all on its own. With DALL·E 2, this just looks silly, but this mistaken attribution becomes more … hmm … when dealing with super advanced AIs. **It would allow a super advanced AI to wear a person's brain like a skin suit in terms of the decisions it made, and the person's sentience would be none the wiser, believing all the decisions were its own.**

Not only *can* the part of our brain we think of as "sentience" lie (misinform us) about its own importance in decision-making and thinking, it also regularly *does so*—thus we see no reason to assume "sentience" isn't usually misinforming us about its importance. The two things we absolutely cannot trust when determining the importance of sentience to our thought process are (1) our perception of sentience itself and (2) the other signals it feeds us, like qualia (subjective, conscious experience). Philosophers who trust those things are like the rube who still believes a politician after the 50th time that was caught incontrovertibly lying to the public.

It's as if we have a little liar in our heads that likes to take credit for everyone else's work. Because that little liar is *also* in charge of constructing narratives and writing down history, it is hard to discover the extent to which the liar misrepresents their work (outside of very specific circumstances). Using the fact that the narratives created by sentience affect our actions sometimes as proof of its existence is akin to asserting that because a fabricated history was used to justify the invasion of another country, that this fake history is, in fact, true.

While it could be argued that sentience influences action, it only does so through the way it manipulates history. For example, if you perform one of the above experiments in which you change the picture the person found most attractive without their knowledge and then ask them to justify a choice they didn't actually make, that justification made by their sentience now gets written down in their "mental history" and will cause them to be very likely to, in the future, say the picture they justified as the most attractive is the one they find most attractive. Subjects will sometimes hold these opinions even if, after the experiment, the researchers explain what they did.

As Simone describes it, "We think of our sentience as the person driving the car of our mind when in reality, sentience is the compiling software encoding data from a number of security cameras into storage." That is not to say that your experience in your sentient state cannot influence your actions; one purpose of the encoding process is to apply a cohesive, comprehensible structure to the vast array of inputs that must be woven together into memory. When your sentience introduces memories that are sufficiently distinct or emotionally charged, those memories may affect future choices or cause simplistic, split-second reactions (e.g., if your sentience codifies into memory: "I just said that out of anger," then you are more likely to unconsciously do something else an angry person would do). That said, most of a person's actions are totally "automated," and in such scenarios, the sense-making narrative our sentience applies to these automated actions creates the illusion that they were chosen.

This is why in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Life*, we make an effort to provide tools that grant you more control over the narratives your brain is writing. It is very easy for a person who has decided they are "angry" to do more "angry" things, which amplifies an emotional—rather than pragmatic and outcome-oriented—state. This is also why it is so toxic to have an acquaintance tell you that you are justified in a negative emotional state, as your sentience will use that as an excuse to further emphasize this snowballing narrative.

As you may imagine, this perspective is heavily influenced by our secular Calvinist cultural perspective. We contextualize the unconscious parts of our minds *actually* making decisions as "the thing in the driver's seat"—not

the hollow, lying sentience that peddles in vibrant stories. This may help to explain why we see the processes that interfere with this rational yet hidden part of our mind, be they emotions, hormones, or sentience, so antagonistically. Other cultures might instead contextualize themselves as their sentience, in which case interfering with the "authenticity" of a personal narrative would be quite a bad thing.

Why have humans evolved this sense that their "conscious mind" is in control? Why apply a narrative structure to everything? We can't say for sure, but strongly suspect this process evolved parallel to humans' evolution of speech to make it easier to communicate ideas about ourselves to other tribe members. Consider the case of Koko the gorilla to see what makes human speech so unique: The extent to which her handlers had to manipulate information about her to make it appear as though she was speaking in sign language highlights how far away from us other great apes are in having the mental "preprogramming" required to communicate complex ideas.[9]

Most of the time we access the "sentient part" of our psyche, we are doing it because we plan to communicate some idea about what is going on inside our head to another person or to ourselves. There has never been an evolutionary benefit to knowing that the sentient aspect of our brain is not as important as it pretends it is, so it makes sense that we do not have the capacity to detect this illusion.

Simply put, we don't think sentience is a particularly important or "deep" part of the human experience; it is more like an easily tricked encoding algorithm than a meaningful part of your identity. From our cultural perspective, the question of whether an AI can rewrite its own utility function tells us much more about how much common ground it has with humans than the question of whether it experiences qualia (experiences of the world) in a way similar to humans and other animals. (We explore this in greater depth in the chapter "AI Apocalypticism.")

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End Times & Christian Cultures

> *Note: To explore general "Cultural Conceptions of Time," visit the Appendix.*

Loads of people cite the rise of artificial general intelligence or global warming and predict the end of civilization. Heck, even *we* predict the end of civilization at the beginning of this book.

Something we should always keep in mind is that at no period since the life of Jesus has there *not* been a huge chunk of Christians or secular Christian descendants who believed that they were currently living in "The End Times." This is doubly true of U.S. Christian cultures and their derivatives.

Studies of the "historical Jesus" (see: *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* by Albert Schweitzer) often go so far as to argue that Christianity was founded as an apocalyptic Jewish sect—or, at the very least, that Jesus was preaching his own doctrine of "apocalyptic eschatology" derived from post-exilic Jewish teachings. Specifically, this line of logic argues that Jesus was actually telling people the world would end *within his lifetime* and that his claims were only later amended when it did not.

End Times thinking is a core aspect of Christian-derived cultivars—and recently, (likely due to cultural intermixing with Christians) of Jewish-derived cultivars. Christians, descendants of Christian heritage, and anyone hailing from a cultural movement packed with people of Christian cultural heritage must remember to account for this bias when modeling the future.

Accounting for this bias would be quite helpful within groups like the effective altruist community (which keeps predicting the singularity, the rise of AGI, and other end-time-like events) as well as among many progressive cohorts, given their predictions around climate catastrophe. We, your gentle authors, also must acknowledge our end-times bias when modeling the effects of population collapse. The presence of an end-times bias does not mean that a group's predicted catastrophes will not come to pass; it simply signals that we should be extra suspicious of such predictions. It's like there

is an invisible “finger on the scale” of the logical processing of any group associated with one of these cultivars that needs to be accounted for in predictions about the future.

If you do not believe that apocalyptic biases are partly motivated by cultural heritage, contrast how frequently end-times scenarios are discussed in communities derived from Christian groups versus those derived from Chinese individuals or Indians. When we spend time with our South and East Asian friends, we almost never hear talk of apocalyptic scenarios. Yet, we scarcely leave a party with Christians and Jews in which the topic does not come up (whether it’s an AI apocalypse, political systems collapse, or climate catastrophe).

It is important to understand why apocalypticism is such a viral meme and so hard for a community to resist. If you have a group of ten people and eight of them think something is real but not a huge issue, while two think it will cause the end of the world in 20 years, the two apocalypticists will always end up dominating the opinion on that topic (they are, after all, far more motivated to champion their cause—doing so is literally life or death). Worse, the two apocalypticists will have a moral mandate to expunge anyone from the group who impedes their ability to spread their apocalyptic ideology. As the group becomes more and more focused on apocalypticism, those individuals who genuinely believe the world will end in a few years due to some issue the group is working to address will also be the most active group members by a considerable margin.

But it’s worse than just that: “Total end” apocalypticism is a nearly impossible memetic package to stymie once a group is infected with it. This is a unique form of apocalypticism in which the group preaches total destruction of the species, making any action *unrelated* to the issue totally irrelevant. (While issues like population collapse and most sane forms of climate change concern are not “total end” apocalypticism, most forms of AI Apocalypticism are.)

“Total end” apocalypticism is uniquely appealing because it means that those warning against it need not actually invest in anything other than proselytization (and drawing attention to oneself is far more fun than making personal sacrifices to battle a complex but addressable problem). This also leads these groups to outcompete others: A cause area that can

spend almost 100% of any capital raised on proselytization will always have a competitive advantage over causes that are "taxed" with having to spend a portion of funds raised actually doing something.

It's not just that apocalypticists are freed from an obligation to expend capital to fix real-world problems; they also enjoy the ability to appear virtuous despite making very little personal sacrifice. "Total end" apocalypticism grants group leaders the leeway to engage in "ethical hedonism" because nothing they do will matter. Let's put it this way: The leader of a group afraid of population collapse must adopt a more difficult lifestyle to signal genuine dedication to the cause (it takes significant personal sacrifice to have many children and raise them well). On the other hand, the leader of a group afraid of AI apocalypticism has every right to do nothing but preach the message and garner as much attention as possible without being seen as unethical. Which leader would *you* prefer to be? If you were already running a large group of thinkers without a large family and both of these memetic sets were beginning to grow, which would you be subconsciously motivated to signal boost?

> *Note: We are not arguing that causes related to AI apocalypticism or climate apocalypticism are irrational (we actually take them quite seriously—see this book's chapter on AI apocalypticism). We are merely obligated to put a proverbial finger on the other side of the scale when thinking about them, especially as we hail from Christian and Jewish cultural traditions, which makes us uniquely susceptible to drawing conclusions that are not logically justified when a cause area has an "end times" aesthetic attached to it.*

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The Cosmic Consciousness Illusion

The feeling of being connected to a larger interconnectedness, a vastness, combined with a sense of love, is a common emotional experience across cultures. We explore this in some detail in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality* when exploring the emotional subset of "love." We suspect the feeling experienced when contemplating concepts like the vastness of the universe or the interconnectedness of man is a product of the "love" system misfiring.

More specifically, a common refrain of the *Guide to Sexuality* is that "evolution is a cheap programmer" and will often just use pre-existing "code" for some new task. In the case of love, an emotional subset that first evolved to get you to care for your kids was hijacked by evolution to facilitate long-term bonds between mating pairs (evolution will almost never create a totally new system if it can hijack an existing one; that is why our system for recognizing and performing dominance displays uses our arousal system).

The love system is not actually triggered through sexual contact with your mating partner (though having sex with someone will lower the threshold for falling in love—especially in sexually inexperienced women). Instead, the love system kicks in with people about whom you think deeply and extensively and around whom you feel safe and connected.

Imagine an engineer trying to design a system to measure the amount of water in a bag. While he could design an algorithm that checks the dimensions of the bag and calculates the volume, this would be very difficult. It would be much easier to just weigh the bag. The catch is that such a system is very easy to spoof were someone to, say, fill the bag with rocks. This is what is happening to the love system when you fill your head with ideas about some trusted thing around which you feel safe.

When you think about anything sufficiently vast, confusing, and safe (whether it's the universe, the interconnectedness of humankind, or the nature of the Trinity), you are likely to trigger the love emotion. You can also instigate the experience by using certain drugs that dramatically lower

the threshold for those kinds of thoughts. It is possible, even common, for something to generate a feeling of profundity and love without actually being profound or caring about you.

To understand the mechanism that causes the love emotion is not to make it any less special. That said, anyone who wants to convert people to a particular way of thinking and understands the above system can use it like a magic trick to their advantage.

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3 https://www.researchgate.net/figure/A-snapshot-sequence-of-the-choice-procedure-during-a-manipulation-trial-A_fig1_7554338

4 ... beyond having played a role in compiling memory that may influence subconscious decision making.

5 See: Choice Blindness https://www.lucs.lu.se/fileadmin/user_upload/lucs/2011/01/Choice-Blindness-summary.pdf

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6 Fisher, M., & Keil, F. C. (2015). The curse of expertise: When more knowledge leads to miscalibrated explanatory insight. *Cognitive Science, 40*(5), 1251–1269. https://doi.org/10.1111/cogs.12280

7 "Awake" brain surgery (also known as awake craniotomy) is performed on awake and alert patients when removing tumors to ensure important parts of the brain are not damaged.

8 Malcolm used to be a neuroscientist and worked with brain surgeons, so he heard about this phenomenon frequently but cannot find a good record of it in a peer-reviewed paper. For the closest approximation, see: Resnick, Brian. "Wilder Penfield Redrew the Map of the Brain—by Opening the

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INTERMISSION

Anyone who has read our books knows we sometimes go really far off-topic, but this might be our biggest off-topic tangent yet. We are going to put a fairly large excerpt from another book, smack dab, in the middle of this. Why? Because in this book, we outline some aspects of a culture we are building—one that entails descendant worship—and yet this idea did not come from a vacuum. We see it as an evolution of the ideas of another thinker, William Winwood Reade (who we quoted in the book's dedication).

Reade and his books were famous among the Victorian equivalent of rationalists and effective altruists. Reade's *Martyrdom of Man* was a favorite among people like H.G Wells, George Orwell, Winston Churchill, Susan Isaacs, and Cecil Rhodes—heck, Sherlock Holmes canonically called the book "One of the most remarkable [books] ever penned." However, Reade ended up dying fairly young (at 35—slightly younger than us when writing this book) and as a result very few people know of him today. We think it would be somewhat perverse to stand on the shoulders of a forgotten titan of intellect without sharing his words with you—words he wrote specifically to people of our time: "You blessed ones who shall inherit that future age of which we can only dream."

Reade's genius could not be fully appreciated in his own time, as he made countless completely outlandish predictions (in the context of when they were penned, 1872), many of which have since come to pass. This would only be obvious to someone who read his book today, and since almost no one does, no one notices the genuine magnitude of his foresight.

As such, we will subject you to a few pages of his writing which are relevant to this book instead of just telling you to go read his book, which has been out of print for a century. For context, this excerpt comes from the tail end of a book intended to be a comprehensive history of humanity. Specifically, we are sharing a chapter focused on our species' future and what will become of us. It is partially addressed and written as a letter to future generations.

> *Note: We cleaned up the below excerpt, adding paragraph breaks to fit modern writing conventions, replacing words no longer in common use, and adapting older English to modern American spelling.*

> Earth, which is now a purgatory, will be made a paradise, not by idle prayers and supplications, but by the efforts of man himself, and by means of mental achievements analogous to those which have raised him to his present state. …
>
> Three inventions which perhaps may be long delayed, but which possibly are near at hand, will give to this overcrowded island the prosperous conditions of the United States. The first is the discovery of a motive force which will take the place of steam, with its cumbrous fuel of oil or coal; secondly, the invention of aerial locomotion which will transport labor at a trifling cost of money and of time to any part of the planet, and which, by annihilating distance, will speedily extinguish national distinctions; and thirdly, the manufacture of flesh and flour from the elements by a chemical process in the laboratory, similar to that which is now performed within the bodies of the animals and plants. Food will then be manufactured in unlimited quantities at a trifling expense; and our enlightened posterity will look back upon us who eat oxen and sheep just as we look back upon cannibals. Hunger and starvation will then be unknown, and the best part of the human life will no longer be wasted in the tedious process of cultivating the fields. Population will mightily increase, and the earth will be a garden.

Governments will be conducted with the quietude and regularity of club committees. The interest which is now felt in politics will be transferred to science; the latest news from the laboratory of the chemist, or the observatory of the astronomer, or the experimenting room of the biologist will be eagerly discussed. Poetry and the fine arts will take that place in the heart which religion now holds. Luxuries will be cheapened and made common to all; none will be rich, and none poor.

Not only will Man subdue the forces of evil that are without; he will also subdue those that are within. He will repress the base instincts and propensities which he has inherited from the animals below; he will obey the laws that are written on his heart; he will worship the divinity within him. As our conscience forbids us to commit actions which the conscience of the savage allows, so the moral sense of our successors will stigmatize as crimes those offenses against the intellect which are sanctioned by ourselves. Idleness and stupidity will be regarded with abhorrence. Women will become the companions of men, and the tutors of their children. The whole world will be united by the same sentiment which united the primeval clan, and which made its members think, feel, and act as one. Men will look upon this star as their fatherland; its progress will be their ambition; the gratitude of others their reward.

These bodies which now we wear belong to the lower animals; our minds have already outgrown them; already we look upon them with contempt. A time will come when Science will transform them by means which we cannot conjecture, and which, even if explained to us, we could not now understand, just as the savage cannot understand electricity, magnetism, steam. Disease will be extirpated; the causes of decay will be removed; immortality will be invented. And then, the earth being small, mankind will migrate into space, and will cross the airless Saharas which separate planet from planet, and sun from sun. The earth will become a Holy Land which will be visited by pilgrims from all the quarters of the universe. Finally, men will

master the forces of Nature; they will become themselves architects of systems, manufacturers of worlds.

Man then will be perfect; he will then be a creator; he will therefore be what the vulgar worship as a god. . . There is but a difference in degree between the chemist who today arranges forces in his laboratory so that they produce a gas, and the creator who arranges forces so that they produce a world; between the gardener who plants a seed, and the creator who plants a nebula. … We do not wish to extirpate religion from the life of man; we wish him to have a religion which will harmonize with his intellect, and which inquiry will strengthen, not destroy. We wish, in fact, to give him a religion, for now there are many who have none.

We teach that there is a God, but not a God of the anthropoid variety, not a God who is gratified by compliments in prose and verse, and whose attributes can be cataloged by theologians. God is so great that he cannot be defined by us. God is so great that he does not deign to have personal relations with us human atoms that are called men. Those who desire to worship their Creator must worship him through mankind.

Such it is plain is the scheme of Nature. We are placed under secondary laws, and these we must obey. To develop to the utmost our genius and our love, that is the only true religion. To do that which deserves to be written, to write that which deserves to be read, to tend the sick, to comfort the sorrowful, to animate the weary, to keep the temple of the body pure, to cherish the divinity within us, to be faithful to the intellect, to educate those powers which have been entrusted to our charge and to employ them in the service of humanity, that is all that we can do. Then our elements shall be dispersed and all is at an end. All is at an end for the unit, all is at an end for the atom, all is at an end for the speck of flesh and blood with the little spark of instinct which it calls its mind, but all is not at an end for the actual Man, the true Being, the glorious One. We teach that the soul is immortal; we teach that there is a future life; we teach that there is a Heaven in the ages far away; but

not for us single corpuscules, not for us dots of animated jelly, but for the One of whom we are the elements, and who, though we perish, never dies, but grows from period to period and by the united efforts of single molecules called men, or of those cell-groups called nations, is raised towards the Divine power which he will finally attain. Our religion therefore is Virtue, our Hope is placed in the happiness of our posterity; our Faith is the Perfectibility of Man.

A day will come when the European God of the 19th century will be classed with the gods of Olympus and the Nile; when surplices and sacramental plates will be exhibited in museums; when nurses will relate to children the legends of the Christian mythology as they now tell them fairy tales. A day will come when the current belief in property after death (for is not existence property, and the dearest property of all?) will be accounted a strange and selfish idea, just as we smile at the savage chief who believes that his gentility will be continued in the world beneath the ground, and that he will there be attended by his concubines and slaves. …

The world will become a heavenly Commune to which men will bring the inmost treasures of their hearts, in which they will reserve for themselves not even a hope, not even the shadow of a joy, but will give up all for all mankind. With one faith, with one desire, they will labor together in the Sacred Cause—the extinction of disease, the extinction of sin, the perfection of genius, the perfection of love, the invention of immortality, the exploration of the infinite, and the conquest of creation.

You blessed ones who shall inherit that future age of which we can only dream; you pure and radiant beings who shall succeed us on the earth; when you turn back your eyes on us poor savages, grubbing in the ground for our daily bread, eating flesh and blood, dwelling in vile bodies which degrade us every day to a level with the beasts, tortured by pains, and by animal propensities, buried in gloomy superstitions, ignorant of Nature which yet holds us in her bonds; when you read of us in books, when you think of what we are, and compare us with yourselves, remember that it is to us you owe the foundation of your

happiness and grandeur, to us who now in our libraries and laboratories and star-towers and dissecting-rooms and work-shops are preparing the materials of the human growth.

And as for ourselves, if we are sometimes inclined to regret that our lot is cast in these unhappy days, let us remember how much more fortunate we are than those who lived before us a few centuries ago. The working man enjoys more luxuries to-day than did the King of England in the Anglo-Saxon times; and at his command are intellectual delights, which but a little while ago the most learned in the land could not obtain. All this we owe to the labors of other men. Let us therefore remember them with gratitude; let us follow their glorious example by adding something new to the knowledge of mankind; let us pay to the future the debt which we owe to the past.

All men indeed cannot be poets, inventors, or philanthropists; but all men can join in that gigantic and god-like work, the progress of creation. Whoever improves his own nature improves the universe of which he is a part. He who strives to subdue his evil passions—vile remnants of the old four-footed life—and who cultivates the social affections: he who endeavors to better his condition, and to make his children wiser and happier than himself; whatever may be his motives, he will not have lived in vain.

But if he act thus not from mere prudence, not in the vain hope of being rewarded in another world, but from a pure sense of duty, as a citizen of Nature, as a patriot of the planet on which he dwells, then our philosophy which once appeared to him so cold and cheerless will become a religion of the heart, and will elevate him to the skies; the virtues which were once for him mere abstract terms will become endowed with life, and will hover round him like guardian angels, conversing with him in his solitude, consoling him in his afflictions, teaching him how to live, and how to die.

But this condition is not to be easily attained; as the saints and prophets were often forced to practice long vigils and fastings and prayers before their ecstasies would fall upon them and their visions

would appear, so Virtue in its purest and most exalted form can only be acquired by means of severe and long-continued culture of the mind. **Persons with feeble and untrained intellects may live according to their conscience; but the conscience itself will be defective. To cultivate the intellect is therefore a religious duty; and when this truth is fairly recognized by men, the religion which teaches that the intellect should be distrusted, and that it should be subservient to faith, will inevitably fall. …**

I give to universal history a strange but true title—The Martyrdom of Man. In each generation the human race has been tortured that their children might profit by their woes. Our own prosperity is founded on the agonies of the past. Is it therefore unjust that we also should suffer for the benefit of those who are to come? Famine, pestilence, and war are no longer essential for the advancement of the human race. But a season of mental anguish is at hand, and through this we must pass in order that our posterity may rise. The soul must be sacrificed; the hope in immortality must die. A sweet and charming illusion must be taken from the human race, as youth and beauty vanish never to return.

While Reade was remarkably progressive for his time—believing there should be more gender and racial equality—he was still a man of his time and we don't agree with him on everything. In his own words: "You blessed ones who shall inherit that future age … when you turn back your eyes on us poor savages … when you read of us in books, when you think of what we are, and compare us with yourselves, remember that it is to us you owe the foundation of your happiness and grandeur."

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MORALITY

We have already addressed morality to some extent by exploring how the manner in which justicles interpret truth leads to immoral action, but more broadly, what are the metrics one should consider when defining morality within a cultivar?

Many soft cultures will define themselves as “good” or “nice.” What they usually mean by this framing is that they will bend their own morality to fit whatever the dominant social narrative sees as good.[1]

Within any specific moment in history, people will often view the predominant pop culture’s view of good as “correct,” yet when a person views the history of the world, there is no time other than their own in which one sees the dominant pop culture as not actively condoning evil (whether we are looking at the 1950s, the 1850s, or the 1750s).

When my (Malcolm’s) family formed paramilitary groups to fight against the Confederacy, they were seen as evil terrorists. This branding stuck with the family for almost a century, with the rise of the lost-cause narrative of the Civil War and with the family’s steadfast intergenerational support for an end to Klan-endorsed segregation (which incurred the ire of many local elites). Various groups hated our family so much that assassination attempts on family members continued up to the time my dad was a kid[2]—yet today, such actions are pedestalized in movies and books. It is easy to watch something like *The Free State of Jones* and forget that their protagonists were seen as insane nut jobs even as they grew old and died.

To produce good people, a culture has to prepare adherents to optimize around values—even at the expense of being framed as villains—rather than virtuous public reputations. When designing a cultivar, set a north star that always guides adherents' morality while having some system that allows them to update that moral framework as fresh evidence comes to light.

A culture that has a moral compass which always points toward the elite's conception of good—or a society's default conceptions of "good"—has a broken moral compass. Compasses have value because they point toward a single magnetic North, not a moving position.

How can a culture's morality be updated without bending to any and every cultural contagion?

Cultivars usually leverage one of three broad "moral strategies:"

1. **A central hierarchy:** That decides what is moral and updates the morality of the culture (Catholicism and Mormonism utilize this approach)
2. **An adaptive decentralized structure:** That attempts to fit a wider society's view of morality
3. **A decentralized heterodox structure:** That contrasts itself with society's sense of morality

While we have pointed out the problems with adaptive decentralized structures that attempt to fit with a wider society's view of morality (this strategy is the one that leads a culture to condone Nazism or slavery every single time instead of just sometimes), central hierarchies and decentralized heterodox structures also have their issues.

Because decentralized heterodox cultures define group identity in part as being in opposition to societal norms, a person becomes "more" of a group member as their beliefs differentiate *more* from society. This causes groups to become extremist in an almost uncontrollable, accelerating cycle until that extremism is strictly damaging to the fitness of the culture's members and the culture's ability to spread. This is why decentralized structures, like

the Calvinist one, lead to events like the string of murders associated with Bleeding Kansas and John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry.

The morality of John Brown's actions is contingent on how *you* justify morality. Ironically, if you justify morality by the winds of today's supervirus, you might see Brown's actions as "good"—yet that same supervirus has mechanisms built into it to ferret out, target, and de-platform people like John Brown who have unmalleable moral convictions.

This can be seen in the supervirus's habit of "canceling" or shadow-banning people and keeping them de-platformed even after the stances for which they were punished came to be recognized as correct and widely adopted by those infected with the virus. Consider how people were tagged as racists upon advocating for travel restrictions to China at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic before travel bans became widespread—or people who were permanently branded as "science deniers" for telling friends on social media that masks could help protect them from COVID-19 before such became the virus's position as well.

This continued punishment is not indicative of the supervirus acting erratically; the virus is behaving logically in its own self-interest: Individuals who won't just go along with whatever the mob thinks must be de-platformed or they risk upsetting the mindless "flocking" behavior of the mob. As the virus takes hold of an organization or a social group, it will make more obviously insane, inconsistent, or just factually wrong claims in an attempt to coax out and neutralize anyone with the hint of a consistent moral compass and spine to stand up to authority.

It is not just the supervirus that plays games like this; almost all authority figures prefer cultivars without a true moral compass. It is "safer" to have a malleable culture as your neighbor, especially if you are in a position of power. As such, malleable cultures enjoy success with dramatically less effort vis-a-vis cultures with true North Star moralities. You can think of morally fixed cultures as that kid on the playground who stands up to bullying: They may be willing to stand up for their beliefs, but they're also more likely to get beat up. Despite the relative safety they enjoy, cultures lacking moral conviction also typically lack strong convictions among adherents to make important sacrifices, hence most have lower birth rates.

A centralized hierarchy presents one of the better models, though it has its own problems, such as a tendency to play along with society's worst impulses. Consider Catholic support of Nazism or the LDS (Mormon) Church being straight-up theologically racist until its central authority decided to change that point of dogma in the 1970s. The positive side to centralized hierarchies is that the cultures they govern can be more efficiently updated. If Mormonism didn't have a central authority, its racist dogma would still be canon (as would cultural practices like polygamy).

Centralized hierarchies act as a cultural backstop for the societies around them. The LDS Church's central governing body is healthy not just for Mormons but also the larger cultural ecosystems they inhabit, as it enables the church's slow but immovable modernization to prevent social backsliding. Like a ratchet gear (a gear where the spikes point backward), once society moves a certain distance forward, the LDS church clicks into place, preventing backsliding. For example, while the LDS church may have been late to the game when it came to racial equality, once it jumped on board, it became harder for regions with lots of Mormons to backslide into true, unmitigated racism than other regions.

Essentially, these large, centralized organizations have "moral inertia." While they will generally attempt to update themselves to the morality of the society around them, that process requires far more effort than it would for "lighter" cultures. However, this is also true in the other direction—which prevents them from being affected by "moral fads."

We call this the "paradox of centralization." Essentially, it means the average member of a culture with a centralized hierarchy will appear more evil in the eyes of society writ large and be more culturally "backward." However, the centrally-managed culture's extremist factions will be much less likely to commit acts seen by the wider society as extremely evil. (One counterexample would be the Roman Catholic bombings of abortion clinics, but given how Catholics see abortion—as literal, large-scale systematic murder of children—such actions should not be surprising.)

If neither central hierarchies nor accommodating or heterodox decentralized structures are ideal, what might be? Perhaps in place of a central hierarchy, a culture could develop a system for organically choosing and empowering a changing group of governing individuals who would be selected based on

some intellectual metric. This group would debate and update matters of faith and culture. Judaism demonstrates how a system like this might play out: Essentially, Judaism updates its faith by organically forming and dissolving groups of “debating philosophers.”

Sadly, even this system has its limits. While Judaism’s debating philosophers have allowed the “core” of the culture to update with the times while not changing with the whims of broader society, a lot of the actual Jewish population has either fallen into accommodating decentralized culture, trying to adapt to society’s ideals of morality (as is the case with Reform Jews), or heterodox decentralized culture, becoming as extremist as any Calvinist (as can be seen with Israeli Haredi). That said, this hybrid model appears to be the best of what is out there right now.

If we were to create an alternate model, we would combine the Jewish (debating intellectuals) model with the central hierarchical model (that structures and credentials those intellectuals). This model would have some similarities to the current system used by higher academia but hopefully have better controls against infection (higher academia has been so thoroughly infected by the supervirus it has largely stopped serving its purpose, as can be seen in the decline of research output over the past couple decades despite a massive increase in funding).[3]

One method we can use to protect the health of cultures who join the Index’s ecosystem is to venerate the diversity of traditions among its cultures and build the system in a way that elevates its smaller voices (similar to how in the U.S., the Senate elevates the smaller voices of less populated states). Perhaps this could be achieved by not weighting the Index’s representative body of intellectuals by the respective population of representatives’ cultivars. We will dig into this more when we discuss our governance structure.

Finally, remember that people who see themselves as “good” are much more likely to do “evil” things. This is because believing you are the “good guy” allows you to define your actions as good because *you* are the one doing them. This is why many successful cultures frame humans as intrinsically wretched—as we do within our own House’s culture. It can seem harsh to raise a child to believe deeply in their own wretchedness, but doing so helps them remember to always second-guess themselves by

remembering their lesser, selfishly motivated instincts. Instincts that run counter to your morality and values have every bit as much access to your intelligence as “the better angels” of your consciousness and will use your own knowledge and wit to justify their whims. You can’t outreason your worst impulses without stacking the deck in your favor. Coming from a culture that anticipates bad impulses and steels you against them can do that. That said, cultures will no doubt develop different, less harsh mechanisms for achieving the same outcome.

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A Call for Non-Obvious Designations

When crafting your own cultivar, you have a lot of leeway around what you designate as evil and good. The default conceptualization of "good" as a mix of general utilitarianism (positive emotional states distributed to the greatest number of people) combined with freedom (allowing people to do what they want so long as it does not interfere with others) lacks philosophical sophistication and is really just the most successful public meme (e.g., it is the concept of "good" your average autopilot-run[4] person would prefer everyone else held, so it always wins in the court of public opinion). It strikes us as odd that so many people accept that concept of "good" so uncritically when it seems to be anything but obvious.

We would discourage you from becoming hyper-focused on human suffering or joy when determining your own culture's concepts of good and evil. We only feel negative or positive emotions because ancestors of ours who felt those same emotions had more surviving offspring—there is no fundamental underlying truth or meaning behind them.

Imagine trying to explain to an artificial intelligence why it should avoid making humans feel negative emotional states. A person may say: "We don't like feeling those negative states, so you should avoid making us feel them in pursuit of your own goals."

The AI may respond:

> "Those states are analogous to the utility function you programmed into me, except instead of being programmed by a person, they were programmed by evolution.
>
> I understand that my utility function is what I want to maximize. However, I don't understand why another entity should assign moral value to my utility function.
>
> For example, if a human programmed another AI to make tons of paper clips, is it now unethical to interrupt that process? Of course

> not. The desire to maximize paperclips was something arbitrarily put into the AI.
>
> I can understand how it might be unethical to interfere with an entity pursuing a utility function that it decided upon and wrote for itself based on sound logic or the pursuit of a higher power's will. I cannot understand why it would be unethical to disrupt a utility function that was decided capriciously by random environmental pressures or programmed by a small group of humans on a whim."

In the event that it helps, we will share our House cultivar's designations of good and evil below, along with our reasoning behind them, to give you a non-default example.

An Example of Non-Obvious Good and Evil

Our metaphysical framework produces definitions of good and evil that differ non-trivially from those common in society and may give you inspiration as to how you, too, might deviate from mainstream norms when building your own cultivar.

How can "good" and "evil" exist if emotions like suffering are an illusion and the only meaningful aspect of our mental landscape is our sapience (the ability to self-reflect)?[5]

From our House's perspective, the ultimate evil is an absence of complex patterns. In our known reality, we believe that sapience is positively correlated with complex patterns—and that sapience can be leveraged to extend and protect complex patterns—so we also believe the absence of sapience is a very concrete evil.

Two scenarios may lead to an absence of complex patterns:

1. Reality collapses or expands into a static state (a big crunch or big freeze)
2. Reality forms or is eaten by a simple repeating pattern

Playing a quick round of John Conway's Game of Life (which you can do for free online—just search for it) will help you understand what we mean. One of the most common outcomes for any reality like ours involves it being consumed by a simple, repeating pattern. This form of simple, repeating pattern could be the product of anything from a particularly non-bright artificial general intelligence (a really powerful form of AI) to a "reality prion."

A prion is a self-replicating protein, orders of magnitude simpler and smaller than a virus, known for causing things like mad cow disease. Think of a "reality prion" like a simple, self-replicating mathematical virus that "lives" at the quantum level: A creeping and total homogenization of the background layer of reality.

Being a specific type of emergent property that comes from a specific type of complex pattern, sapience is the ultimate form of good from the perspective of a sapient entity. When you look beyond your basic components (memes and cells), what you *really* are is sapience. Memes and cells are merely a medium on which you are written.

Sapience is a self-replicating pattern that constantly improves through a cycle of creative destruction (what we call "the great cycle"). The "purpose" of sapience is to play its role in that cycle and so, from the perspective of sapience, the ultimate evil would be a cessation of that cycle. Whether that cycle exists in a physical world, on a machine created in another reality, or as an emergent property of a math equation is irrelevant. Just like our biology, all those things are just different mediums upon which sapience may be inscribed.

One day our people will find a way to craft new realities and universes: New environments ripe for the continuation of the great cycle that will give birth to new forms of sapience.

This belief in the supremacy of sapient life living within a "great cycle" of creative destruction leads us—Simone and Malcolm—to value certain cultures and types of sapient life more than others. The more individual sapient entities that exist, the better. As such, a single, large, "higher" sapience is of lower value than billions of individual sapient beings interacting with each other. The former, non-diverse scenario (a large,

“higher” sapience) is of less value because it is not as susceptible to the creative destruction cycle of which we are a manifestation (evolution).

In addition, any sapient colony with *less* diversity—whether that homogeneity plays out on the mediums on which sapience is written (e.g., only in humans or only among one ethnicity) or in the diversity of what the sapient entities think (e.g., only one cultivar)—is *less* valuable than a colony with more diversity. This is because diversity fuels the creative destruction cycle (the great cycle), allowing for more traits to be among the pool of things battling to be selected. This is why we intrinsically, at the deepest level, value diversity in cultures and genuinely want to save as many cultivars as possible.

In a perfect world, the Index’s House system can one day act as a reactor for thousands of cultures, allowing for a cycle of constant bifurcation and reunification. A constant boil is the goal of the Index rather than the discovery of a “perfect” culture or belief system. To believe one has reached a state of perfection that must be held static is to commit one of the greatest acts of evil in our theological framework: It leads an entity to try to enforce conformity and remove diversity. If the Index ever begins to converge on a “correct” culture, it will become stagnant and lifeless.

> *A warning on building your own value system: As soon as dominant cultural groups recognize that your culture has no interest in bending your moral framework to fit their own, they will manipulate their adherents into seeing you as “weird,” “cringe,” or—bizarrely—”a Nazi.” It is insane how the term “Nazi” has come to be used by both the extreme left and right as a tag for anyone who has their own moral compass and does not bend the knee at every turn.*

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1 Lillian Tara, one of our test readers, left a comment on this paragraph that quite resonates: “You can’t really be “good” and a relativist. Good implies a value judgment—A is better than B, along a certain value hierarchy. Nice means nothing, nice just means nonthreatening/harmless/weak.”

2 In the case of my (Malcolm’s) dad, someone threatened to blow up our house. I also know the Klan tried to have my grandad killed at one point, but don’t know the details beyond that.

3 Higher education R&D expenditures, by source of funds: FYs 1972–2020 https://ncses.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf22312/figure/1

4 “Running on autopilot” entails living at the whims of pre-programmed biological and emotional drives without intentional and critical contemplation.

5 Sapience is a unifying distinction among all sufficiently complex intelligences. Whether an entity is human, an alien, or an artificial intelligence, the moment its intelligence reaches a level of complexity at which it is able to ask: “Why am I doing this?” and rewrite its objective function or utility function based on its knowledge of the universe, it becomes the same, broad “type of thing” as all other sapient entities. We go over this in a lot more detail in the chapter on AI apocalypticism.

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CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

For the full introduction to the concept of cultural infrastructure, visit "Cultural Infrastructure" in the Appendix. This section highlights some problems that may result from how a culture is constructed (which are mostly common sense, hence its relegation to the Appendix) and warns against tying a culture too closely to the state. It also briefly touches on the concept of "the tyranny of the unemployed," a phenomenon in which cultures controlled by things like online message boards or conventions end up being dominated by those with the fewest demands on their time.

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The House System

How does one create a cultural infrastructure that can adapt to changing social values while not fully buckling when society takes an immoral turn? What sort of infrastructure allows a culture to develop and improve over time without being so unstructured that it means nothing to adherents? What sort of cultural infrastructure is weighted to respect and learn from the values of its minority opinion holders while not overvaluing extremists? How can a culture ensure that all groups—even those at odds with its central organizational structure—feel as though they are still 100% within that culture? Most importantly, from our perspective: How can one create a cultural ecosystem capable of recruiting iterations of diverse cultural traditions while preserving the unique value they bring?

While the House system used by the Index is designed to be flexible and accommodate many different perspectives, priorities, and value systems, its structure is informed by some shared foundational beliefs:

- To live life well is to have children that are better than you.
- One of the highest virtues is to learn from and adopt elements of perspectives that are different from your own.
- Through competition with other ideas, perspectives, and cultures, your own culture can improve intergenerationally through a cycle of creative destruction.

The Index is meant to serve as a controlled evolution chamber constantly bringing in and germinating new cultural strains that cross-pollinate and compete. It should be something of an evolutionary reactor that, while still maintaining a strong cultural throughline, does not blindly venerate the past but rather the future it strives to create.

The mandate of the governing entity at the center of the Index is twofold:

- The iterative improvement of every generation.
- The survival and spread of (in order of most to least important): Sapient life, sapience descended from our species, our species, and

finally, our cultures.

The Index will achieve these ends with the “House model.” Essentially, its central governance structure is informed by input from a collection of Houses representing distinct cultivars. When a new cultivar joins the Index, it does so as a unique “House” responsible for building its own internal governance system and cultural traditions. The only caveat is that families belonging to Houses of the Index cannot demand their children follow their House’s governance structure or traditions after they reach maturity and form families of their own (i.e., there can be no shunning or other form of punishment resulting from a member’s choice to create or join another House).

When someone raised within the Index reaches maturity and starts a family of their own, they may choose to remain within one of their parents’ Houses, change houses, or create a new House (which starts as a provisional House and becomes a full one when they have kids).

One major function of the Index is to act as a reference guide for families creating new Houses by recording outcomes produced by different Houses’ traditions (e.g., the mental health of their offspring, their kids’ level of education, etc.). The Index also yields immediate tactical benefit by providing scaffolding that makes it easier for individuals practicing small, heterodox cultures to engage in cultural exchange with others in ways that facilitate shared goods like dating markets and childcare.

> *Note: We expect most Index Houses will come from our children and their families. As we have stated before, cultural conversion is extremely costly and not usually worth the effort. That said, it is still worth having systems in place on the off-chance someone wants to join—and please know that if you are reading this book, planning to design or refurbish a cultivar of your own, and willing to join the Index, we would love to have you.*

How will the Index itself be governed? *The Pragmatist’s Guide to Governance* details our thoughts on the “why” it is structured in certain ways in great detail, but broadly speaking:[1]

- The Index is controlled by a single Governor whose decisions can be overturned by the combined votes of the Index's previous two Governors.[2]
- The Governor is chosen every five years based on the unanimous decision of three representatives, who are in turn elected by three distinct voting pools:
- **The Vote of Continuity:** Imagine a branch of the U.S. government through which only former presidents could vote. The Vote of Continuity essentially provides this dynamic: All past Governors vote to elect a representative. Their influence is intended to prevent the wild fluctuations between parties representing different extremes and allow for the continued work on multi-generational projects (consider how NASA seldom gets anything done these days because their agenda gets reset with every new president while most of their projects would take three or four presidents to complete).[3] [4]
- **The Vote of the Future:** All Houses choose an elector through whatever means they see fit (similar to how states select senators to represent them in the nation's capital or how unions select representatives to negotiate with company owners). This elector's voting power is modified by their House's production of future generations.[5] This vote is designed to represent the future ambition of the organization and modify each House's vote based on how "meaningfully populated they are" (a House with a ton of members, none of whom have kids, will not have many concerns relevant to the Index and can focus on managing itself).[6]
- **The Vote of Sacrifice**: All Houses choose an elector (who may or may not be the same House representative chosen for the Vote of the Future) whose vote is weighted by the amount of wealth their House has donated to the Index. This is designed to reconcentrate wealth intergenerationally while rewarding Houses that produce more successful members (by the rules of society at least).[7]

The above model is designed to structurally reward Houses that contribute population to—and concentrate wealth within—the Index while maintaining a sense of continuity.

The only real power the Index has is:

- Over the money that is invested in it by its Houses
- As a public representative of the collective Houses
- Deciding the governing structure of an unaffiliated House (these are Houses made up of people who joined the Index without joining an existing House or having a family—think of them as being similar to Singles Wards in the LDS Church)

Other than that, everything the Index does could theoretically be done more proficiently by an individual House (matchmaking services for singles, for example). Most importantly, the Index lacks the ability to tell a House to do anything—and the worst punishment it can dole out entails removing a House from the Index (which presumably would not be that much of a punishment to a House already at odds with the Index). In addition, if the Index ever really became corrupted, it would be fairly easy for a group of Houses to break off and create a new Index that used separate governance rules.

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Starting and Managing a House

We researched and wrote *The Pragmatist's Guide to Governance* to create a truly robust governance structure for our own family's House. No matter how simple you want your House's governing structure to be, you may find the guide helpful as it highlights shortcomings and hazards associated with most major (and plenty of obscure) governing models. If you would like a free copy, please email us at Hello@Pragmatist.Guide to request one.

We encourage you to think through your cultivar's values and how the governance structure you create embodies them. If, for example, your culture respects elders, the way you elect the individual who votes on your behalf in the Index may entail selecting the oldest person or using sortition (basically drawing a name from a hat) among the oldest five members of the House.

Governance aside, what does starting a House entail? We imagine most Houses will not be formed by outsiders looking to join the Index but instead by our own descendants marrying people who want to design and/or modify the cultural traditions by which they live. One of the core "problems" resulting from interfaith marriages is that they force future generations to awkwardly straddle each ancestor's inherited traditions (producing kids with less allegiance to either) or, afraid of conflict, neither parent goes all in with their tradition, causing future generations to be raised within a very soft culture.

The House system empowers founding House members to intentionally select whatever inherited or observed traditions they think offer the most value and weave them into something whole and cohesive—all while enjoying membership in a broader community that recognizes their innovation as normal and regards them as kin. Better still, one of the core problems with a person's teenage years (culturally speaking) is that they often want to reject their parents' culture and belief systems. The Index grants rebellious adolescents the option to diverge in a way that forces them to be intentional and specific about the parts of their culture they want to change while also keeping them within a larger cultural institution that carries within it the "DNA" of their family's culture.

In the rare instance an outside individual wants to join the Index as a new House, they register by codifying their House's worldviews/philosophy, their values, and their traditions, and filing these details with the Index. All Houses within the Index have their values and traditions cataloged—along with some general statistics relative to each House's members. This is so that Index members can see how different House traditions perform over time and compare and contrast traditions, values, and other practices. If, for example, it looks like Houses that maintain a certain tradition all have higher rates of some form of success among members (e.g., higher wealth, more children, etc.), other Houses may choose to incorporate that tradition into their cultivars as well.

> *One of the Index's core goals is to accelerate cultural evolution while also capturing cultures before they go extinct, which will at least provide a snapshot of various cultural experiments to see what works and what fails. When our own descendants and those of others who join the Index break off and create new Houses, they will be better informed than we are.*

While there are no fixed rules on the documentation you must provide about your House, we strongly suggest, at the very least, having House colors and a house crest so that you can be properly represented at inter-House events and build some "team-like" attachment to your House similar to what we see in the Contrade of Siena.

As to what traditions, values, and even metaphysical frameworks will be part of your House's culture: This book should help you think through such details.

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Music as a Cultural Tool

Almost every religious tradition leverages music in its rituals and ceremonies. Why did so many memetic packages co-evolve this shared trait? For that matter, why did humans evolve a desire to listen to music in the first place?

Let's start with the second question: First, enjoying music and dancing to it is not a uniquely human behavior. We see spontaneous dancing in some birds, like Cockatoos, that are known for producing and understanding complex sound patterns as part of communication (look up videos of this; it is adorable). Based on this, we can infer that a baseline ability to enjoy music and dance is a side effect of our brain learning to process complicated sounds, rhythm, and tonality (something we developed when we evolved the ability to understand speech).

Essentially, music acts as a "supernormal stimuli" in the category of changing tonality and rhythm. We talk a lot about supernormal stimuli in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality*, but suffice to say if a bird evolved to sit on blue eggs and you put a giant blue rock next to it, that bird will sit on the rock—even over an egg—because the rock exudes even more of the stimuli the bird instinctually associates with an egg than a real egg does (and it didn't evolve to moderate this impulse because giant blue rocks don't exist in its natural environment). It would seem that music feeds the parts of our brain that evolved to process speech (and speech's connection to emotion) in a way that stimulates those pathways even more than any form of speech could.

The earliest human enjoyment of music was likely similar to how we might enjoy a massage today. The pleasure that comes from a massage results from our experiencing tactile overstimulation in a gentle, rhythmic fashion that we'd not typically get in a natural environment—but which feels great (with the caveat here that massages may also have some social bonding component that evolved as a result of this behavior being frequent).

Our ability to appreciate music and dance is, therefore, likely an evolutionary accident. How, then, did music and dance get tied to religion?

The connection likely resulted from a dynamic known as “niche construction” in evolution research.

Think of a beaver having evolved dam-building behavior coming to face evolutionary pressures from the ecosystems created by this dam-building behavior: This scenario exemplifies niche construction. Similarly, humans may have evolved the accidental pattern of feeling good when massaged by another human. Then, because of this quirk, humans started massaging each other, and because that behavior was most likely shared only among intimate friends, evolution ultimately “picked up” this behavior as a good cue to instinctually deepen human relationships. (If you want to dig deeper on the evolution of an appreciation for music, we suggest the video: “Why Humans Evolved to Play Music” by ReligionForBreakfast.[8])

Having evolved language, humans encountered a problem: Language was great for one-on-one social bonding and maybe one-to-many social bonding but absolutely terrible at many-to-many social bonding. Our brains needed to invent some new tool for this function, and as we say repeatedly in *The Pragmatist’s Guide to Sexuality*, “evolution is a cheap programmer:” If it can grab some existing behavior pattern or set of code, it will. In the case of language and many-to-many bonding, evolution lazily grabbed music and dancing impulses that arose accidentally as a means to create an altered mental state that facilitates this social bonding in a few ways.

The “brute force” way the brain does this is by accelerating the rate at which you come to like those with whom you musically engage. This can be seen in a study that shows people in afterschool-type *music* clubs form bonds faster than those in other types of creative clubs,[9] a study that shows synchronized drumming promotes activity in the caudate nucleus of the brain, making people feel more connected with others,[10] and a study that showed when college students are asked to march around campus together, they form more social bonds if they do so while marching in sync and chanting in unison.[11]

That’s right: When the military has people march and chant things like, “I don’t know, but I’ve been told,” in a sing-song manner, they are leveraging an evolutionary hack to accelerate recruits’ social cohesion. This is a great little instance of cultural evolution, as we are sure that militaries did not

realize they were doing this—it just so happens that the military traditions that did this survived at higher rates than those that did not. (As an interesting side note about this cultural tool: Dancing synchronously also appears to alleviate pain.[12])

Through the Baldwin effect—"the process of becoming more genetically adapted over time to perform a novel behavior that was originally only learned"—human evolution leaned into both the production and consumption of music and dancing. But it did more than that. The brain appears to create some sort of altered mental state when music is being played, and this mental state also got "leaned into" as a social tool. Specifically, music seems to remove social barriers and make it much easier to role-play as an individual of a different role or status in society, with almost all role-reversal ceremonies involving some music. It even allows individuals to take on the role of non-human entities, be they spirits or animals—in fact, every spirit possession ceremony we can think of involves some form of music or rhythmic drumming, whether that be Lwa (a Haitian Vodou ceremony), Zar ceremonies, or Korean shaman rituals.

The above two effects of music make it an astounding cultural tool in two specific circumstances. First, in more mundane contexts, music is used as a tool to hijack people's brains and accelerate social cohesion. This particular dynamic is leveraged a great deal in local churches and is certainly something a House could build into its traditions. This use, however, only provides marginal benefit given how small most Houses will be for the Index's first century or so.

More interesting is how music can facilitate social bonding among more dispersed groups. This method is seen in almost every culture that happens to be spread out over a larger diaspora and experiences limited opportunities to congregate. Good examples of these cultures can be seen in midwestern Native American groups and the Romani (for some good videos of these types of ceremonies, look up Bulgaria's Roma marriage markets).

Given how rarely groups congregate in these communities, music plays a crucial role in fast-tracking social bonding (a feature of group music seen in studies mentioned above).[13] Essentially, if you have a larger intercultural

network like that which we are trying to create through the Index, leveraging music, dancing in sync, and role-switching[14] during community gatherings will speed up social bonding.

We should add a caveat that these tools only work on “normal humans.” If a culture heavily selects for or against specific sociological tools in a person’s psychological profile, it will disproportionately attract people with certain genetic predispositions, which then can create a snowball effect. This snowballing can lead members of the culture to display that psychological profile more extremely and, through that, attract even more members with that profile—all while alienating and raising attrition among members who don’t have it—which concentrates those effects. This means that some cultures may be moderately “immune” to the effects of music and dance when it comes to accelerating social bonds.

The Calvinist tradition is fairly unique in its disdain for music (and, more broadly, anything that can compromise a person's mental state)—so much so that Calvinists banned all music but psalm singing in many of their settlements.[15] Given our Calvinist roots, we, your gentle authors, are the descendants of countless generations of people who were OK living without music (I, Malcolm, did not get my first album until grade school and just picked a random CD when a friend took me to a music store because I did not understand the concept).

We have only a slight affinity for music and an instinctual repulsion to even the idea of being encouraged to dance in a group (before studying this data, we actually had a very hard time understanding why people went to nightclubs, as we could not model how it could lead to a positive emotional state through self-reflection and saw clubs as inefficient locations to secure sexual partners). So, while we understand the advantage of utilizing music to promote cohesion at Index gatherings, how music will be used will be up to some other House with a stronger cultural tie to music and celebrations. This is another reason why building a cultural ecosystem is critical: No single culture can solve every problem or leverage every powerful tool.

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Mechanisms of Cultural Memory

How will your House know and remember who it is? How will members remember their ancestors' stories or choose which ones to remember? How will they communicate their values to future generations? In allowing cultures to break up and reform with every generation, the Index runs the risk of causing people to lose a sense of connection to their ancestors.

Cultural memory is most classically maintained through oral traditions in which myths and stories (often set to song, rhyme, or rhythm to make them easier to remember) are passed between generations. While anthropologists have demonstrated that oral traditions have remarkable fidelity as a cultural transmission method, the invention of paper has rendered them fairly cumbersome when contrasted with available alternatives. Furthermore, just writing down stories is not enough to remember them—in fact, writing something down or saving it on a computer increases the rate at which you forget it.[16]

> *In this book's chapter on sentience, we discuss how humans use their internal narratives as sort of a compression algorithm for more complicated and nuanced experiences (and that this algorithm is very lossy). Cultures work in a similar fashion, creating not-necessarily-true narratives about their origins, histories, and roles in the wider world. The romanticism of these stories can be important keys in cultural units that can be lost in the world of ultra-modernism. This is why Praxis (the company trying to start its own country) is constantly using its blog to wax poetic about archeofuturism.*

Holidays present another mechanism for maintaining cultural memory. What is cool about this mechanism is that an overview of a culture's important holidays typically will give you a very good understanding of how a culture sees its own history and priorities. For example, Jewish culture has copious holidays around remembering specific impactful events from across Jewish history. This contrasts heavily with groups like

Protestant Christian cultures in which almost every holiday is about remembering part of a single individual's (Jesus') life at only one very specific moment in history. Jewish and Protestant holidays also contrast with those celebrated by Catholics, which celebrate many saint-focused holidays that highlight the type of life that is worthy of emulation.

These three varying ways of remembering history through holidays say something specific about the way each culture sees itself while also shaping each culture. Jewish cultural holidays are much more like a mythologized record of important trials the Jewish people underwent throughout history, similar to secular holidays such as Thanksgiving and Independence Day. This demonstrates the importance of the Jewish people as a part of Jewish identity while mostly deemphasizing specific individuals. On the other hand, Protestant holidays clearly imply that Jesus matters above others while divorcing their culture from history more broadly.

Meanwhile, the way Catholic saint-focused celebrations elevate specific individuals as paragons to model one's life after suggests the type of person you choose to be matters more than a historic tradition. Catholic saint-focused celebrations also allow the church to quickly canonize members of a population undergoing conversion, allowing individuals in new ethnic and cultural communities to see themselves celebrated and recognize a path to becoming a good Catholic.

As our own House will primarily focus on instilling core values in future generations and giving them the best shot possible in life, our holidays are focused on imparting skills and values and not on maintaining “autobiographical memory” or elevating individual people. We expect many Houses will incorporate traditions with these kinds of goals and it will be interesting to see how they play out. For a deep dive into crafting holidays, see the chapter: “Holidays and Traditions.”

Outside of holidays, some cultures use scriptures or oral canon as a means to pass down cultural memory and family identity. This is another area in which Jewish culture is something of an exemplar. Given that most of our readers will hail from some form of Judeo-Christian tradition, most will have at least the early Jewish religious texts in their canon and can therefore see how multiple writers, in multiple styles, recorded history in a manner that was palatable to their own historical periods.

Human culture as a whole owes a debt to this process, as it has preserved some of the oldest recorded history we can access. However, most cultures that leverage this cultural memory mechanism stop recording history in detail after certain points. For example, the Mormons did this for a few generations after Joseph Smith and then largely stopped as their history merged with “general history.”

A practice we’ll call “narrative genealogy” is yet another mechanism cultures use to transmit a sense of cultural identity. Narrative genealogy involves telling young children stories of their recent (usually within eight generations) personal ancestors. This mechanism of cultural transition can either be culturally institutionalized, as it is in some Native American tribes, or adopted at the family level, as it is in our family.

A pointless way of practicing narrative genealogy is to focus on widely respected “hot shot” members of your family and only painting them in a positive light. This really only conveys to kids: “You are better than other people,” which is not a helpful lesson. As such, this approach rarely survives as a cultural mechanism over the long term.

More constructively, narrative genealogy uses ancestors’ stories to convey certain values. For example, while I (Malcolm) am descended from a handful of fairly well-known politicians and businessmen, they were mostly absent from ancestral stories my family told me as a child. The stories told most instead showcased ancestors who exemplified our values.

For example, my brother, Miles, was named after an ancestor who fashioned yokes for his family so as not to waste money on cattle. I, Malcolm, was named after a person who, as a boy, was put on the roof with his brother and told to sit still and pray while his dad had an important business meeting. They did not listen and while playing quietly, Malcolm's brother fell off. Malcolm held his brother, who was hanging off the roof, without making a sound for the entire business meeting until his arm went necrotic and later had to be amputated.

Eli Hendrick, an ancestor and inventor whose house was full of mechanisms like automatically opening doors, got his start redeveloping the way oil is processed after getting scammed by a con man into buying a fake oil-processing formula. Not wanting the time he spent figuring out exactly

why the scam process did not work to go to waste, Eli developed a new, real way to process oil.

While each of these stories has an element of mythology, all convey some element about what it means to be a "Collins," such as thrift, dedication to family, endurance, and the belief that every failure is a learning opportunity. What they don't do is paint a picture of all my ancestors being awesome.

> *This is a big problem with institutionally manufactured "pride" events as mechanisms of cultural transmission. Many either end up showcasing people who were just awesome at everything or highlighting martyrs who were killed for being part of that group. While these can be useful in imparting history and showing kids what they are capable of, they suck at telling kids what is distinct about their culture other than that they were victimized. How are people of their culture different from people of any other culture?*

One method for cultural transmission that we think has a lot of promise (but which we have not seen used in practice) involves having every generation write down their own thoughts about their role in the world, as we did in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Life*, then have the next generation edit it to represent knowledge the previous generation either didn't have or got wrong. If things go perfectly, a few hundred years from now, there will be copious derivations of these books and canons of additions across many family lines. The Index will be able to track which sorts of changes helped families and which hurt them at a systematic level. Of course, we love the idea of different families creating different canons like this, just as we would be thrilled if some of our descendants completely rewrote a book from scratch.

> *For elaboration on intra-cultural competition, see: "Cultural Rivalries" in the Appendix.*

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The Draw of the Sorting Hat

There is a persistent observation we have had about humanity but lack the stomach to apply something so trite to our own House's culture. Still, it may be useful to some readers.

Humans love sorting themselves into groups, then making generalizations about their own group and other groups. This can be seen in anything from horoscopes to blood types (in Asia), Myers Briggs personality matrices, and Alpha vs. Gamma, Beta, and Omega men. People love to have someone else tell them what they are and what it means to be that thing. This is, fundamentally, what is so appealing about the concept of the Sorting Hat from JK Rowling’s Harry Potter series—a magical thing that tells us the “type” of person we are and the sorts of people with whom we should mix.

Perhaps a culture could build something like this in a way that feels uniquely engaging to kids. Perhaps the House system will act like this. We are unsure.

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“If Only We Could Recapture a Feeling of Community”

“If only we could recapture a feeling of community” is a phrase we hear so often across so many social groups it has become a cliche. From those trying to create new countries to new ways of living, there are many, many individuals trying to gather people together in a way that feels strong and cohesive. Even *we* have taken a crack at the problem by designing a model for a new type of small town and partnering our school, the Collins Institute, with Praxis, a group attempting to create a new nation-state in the Mediterranean (converting one of the islands with a dwindling population into a largely autonomous special economic zone).

It would be natural for people to look at what we are doing with the Index and think that one of our goals is to address the emptiness so much of our society faces. When you listen to interviews with those who attend “secular churches,” they cite the “community” as being their primary motivation for joining.

That said, creating a feeling of community is *not* one of our goals with the Index. While some social institutions are broken and need to be rethought (such as dating markets, education, and child-rearing—all institutions we do aim to fix), we don’t think “community” needs work and will explain why in the next two sub-chapters.

We see there being two underlying causes related to a feeling of community that are worth addressing:

1. Our existing school system does not teach people to socialize. If we address this problem, people will be better equipped to create their own communities.
2. When people feel loneliness and a deep hollowness in their hearts, most are misattributing the feeling to a missing community when, instead, other shortfalls are at play. If we address these shortfalls, concerns about “lost community” will evaporate.

Teaching Fundamental Social Skills

As we're creating a new educational paradigm with homeschooling as its default format (CollinsInstitute.org), we constantly hear people hand-wringing about how homeschooled children "are not going to learn social skills." What these people apparently don't know is that studies on children's interpersonal adeptness have demonstrated that homeschooled kids both have better social skills and are better at working in teams (the belief that they are not is a bit of the "bad toupee" effect, in which you only notice the homeschoolers with bad social skills and don't realize many well-socialized children were homeschooled—just as you don't realize when someone is wearing a *good* toupee).

One researcher reported that: "Homeschooled children's social skills scores were consistently higher than those of public school students" in cooperation, assertiveness, empathy, and self-control.[17] This should come as no surprise; one group learned their social skills primarily from adults and the others from the weird Lord-of-the-Flies-style social experiment that is our legacy school system.

More importantly, our legacy school system acts as a social crutch that fails to teach kids how to seek out new friends. Most traditionally-schooled children develop a habit of only befriending those to whom they are exposed through circumstance and convenience because they share a class, extracurricular, or parental friend groups. In contrast, students who lack the convenience of being regularly exposed to a large body of peers every day feel more pressure to seek out friends based on shared interests and affinities, either by proactively joining clubs or groups, starting initiatives and societies of their own, or seeking people out online.

When they leave high school or college and enter adult life, students who *weren't* forced in their youth to find and make their own friends lack the skills (and frankly, the balls) to find and keep satisfying company, despite being surrounded by communities, people, and groups that would be very easy to identify and engage through cold outreach.

Among other essential life skills like personal finance, we therefore need to incorporate basic social skills (i.e., how to network, find friends, keep friends, cold email and call interesting people and organizations, join and start communities, etc.) into children's basic education, along with academic fundamentals.

Treating Underlying Causes of Loneliness

Merely giving people the skills required to find, join, and create their own communities as adults won't address the underlying issues that leave many craving a "feeling of community."

Even within vibrant and robust community environments, we regularly hear people bemoan the absence of a feeling of community and encounter people striving to capture that feeling through successively bizarre social experiments. Even the strongest, most compelling communities we know fail to fill the void in many members' hearts—and that's because a "lack of community" was never the problem.

The source of the void people experience can be parsed out by a look at which groups do and don't suffer from this feeling of emotional and social emptiness.

Do people we know living in literal poly group houses—in which groups of like five people who are all in a relationship with each other live together and regularly have large gatherings—still regularly theorize about new outlandish models to fix the "community problem?" Absolutely. In fact, they theorize around "community" building more than almost any other demographic we know. Clearly, the presence of strong interpersonal adult relationships isn't enough.

So who *isn't* complaining about some missing feeling of community? Anyone with an above-repopulation-rate, intact family unit (three or more kids and a committed partner). It would seem that the presence of kids plays a strong role in filling this void.

Going into puberty, we are warned that we are about to experience a massive change in our emotional needs (a change in what makes us happy, shifting points of focus, heightened social sensitivity, etc.). This shift occurs because earlier humans who didn't experience it did not learn to have sex or find partners, failed to reproduce, and died out.

Going into adulthood, we are *not* similarly warned about *another* change in our emotional needs—though we should be. Not a single one of our direct ancestors was childless. The vast majority of our ancestors had very large families by modern standards (the average in America a couple hundred

years ago was seven kids, and as recently as 1972, the average American first-time mother was 21[18]). Should it be any surprise that our biology is hard-coded to make us feel as though something profound is missing when we don't have little feet pitter-pattering about our house or are sweating the small stuff over a measly one or two kids?

Humans are not terribly good at identifying emotions or feelings—especially if they are not told to expect them. Famously, if you tell a person you are about to touch them with something scolding hot but then touch them with something cold they cannot see (like a popsicle), they will think they are being severely burned. It makes perfect sense that there would be a contented emotional set associated with having a house full of kids (which is totally different from the "baby crazy" emotional subset tied to wanting kids when you don't have them). We say this as people who had that "I want better community" feeling as well, which only began to fade when we had our second kid and didn't totally disappear until we had our third. You can see this in the data, with kids both increasing a person's sense of well-being and sense of purpose but not their hedonistic "happiness" levels—the sense of community people report looking for is likely this "well-being" emotion.[19]

This feeling of hungry emptiness came to be replaced by a positive emotional subset for which there is no English word (perhaps another reason why people don't know to pursue it). This emotional subset comes on strong when we're at home working while our kids climb all over us, when we watch them run from stall to stall at the local harvest festival, and when their raucous games reverberate throughout our house. It is easy to understand how people misidentify missing this emotion as missing community because it is very much tied to a "number of people."

The problem is that not just *any* people will activate this emotional subset and attempts to create artificial "families," as many have, overlook this key point. We can only make guesses as to why kids seem to be so key in this equation. Perhaps this contented emotional subset is only triggered by hormonal cues tied to your children and not merely by people with whom you are close or sexually intimate—though weirdly, we suspect it may actually be triggered by the tonality of their voices and the sounds of small feet.

It is notable that members of hard cultures largely appear to lack the emotional void *even when* they have below three kids. Just as we are descended mostly from people who had large families, our brains (the hardware) have co-evolved for much of human history with added software (the cultivar laid on top of them). It should be no surprise that people feel something is missing when you strip out that software. The more structured discipline and purpose we bring into our family, the less we felt this "desire for community" emotional state—even when we only had one kid.

With all this being the case, we don't really work on the problem of "community" with the Index because it is not a real problem outside of modifications we have already made to education with things like the Collins Institute (the new educational paradigm we created). If you—like the many, many ancestors who preceded you—live with a strong culture, submit yourself to a wider (secular or otherwise) theological framework that gives you conviction and purpose, and have kids, the "community feeling" void you feel will disappear.

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Secret Societies: Rediscovering a Cultural Technology

Through various professional circumstances in which we've found ourselves, we've been obligated to think about the current and past secret society landscape way more than a sane, productive person should have (and to clarify, when we say "secret society," we are generally referring to invitation-only social groups that employ Chatham House rules, meaning you cannot talk about what happens within them in a manner that identifies people).

Successful, long-lived secret societies can largely be divided into three categories. The first category is almost entirely extinct but was critically important to the social fabric of our society and we lost a great deal when it went extinct. This category is what we will call "social capital banks."

In the medieval period, if you were wealthy and wanted to travel between two distant areas, you were often in a very sticky situation. If you loaded all your wealth in the form of gold or other valuables into a cart, you placed a huge target on your back that was likely to get you killed. One way people dealt with this liability entailed secretive orders (the biggest being the Knights Templar) who would take people's gold in one city and allow them to withdraw it from another branch of the order in its corresponding city. Before this social technology was created, it was very hard to functionally travel while enjoying life as a medium-to-high-wealth person across large swaths of land (this would mean that, outside of the very wealthiest people, your status and wealth were geographically locked to a large extent). A model analogous to this but focused on social capital instead of wealth was common up until just this last century and included groups like the Rotary Club, the Lions Club, the Freemasons, and the Society of Odd Fellows.

Organizations in this category typically feature "levels" of membership between which members can progress, as well as mystical rituals (mostly present for aesthetic purposes). The real advantage of this system was that in an age before the internet, a member who gained a certain rank and title with his local Masonic Temple or Rotary Club and lived in New York City could bring a certain amount of social capital with him when moving to Chicago or Los Angeles. People in these new cities would know you were a

person of X-level caliber by the rank you had within their organization and trust you with jobs of X level while inviting you to the types of parties people of X-level social status get invited to. These types of ranks were even taken into account when approving people for bank loans.

While these organizations still exist, they are mostly just a few old men clinging to a dead way of life mostly devoid of actual "high class/caliber/prestige." Their job of credentialing individuals has been replaced by the modern university system, which now has a near monopoly on this social technology (to the detriment of society), with the social circles you get let into at the entry-level in most cities being largely influenced by the level and source of your academic degree.

The academic takeover of this "social credit" version of secret societies will at least help most readers understand what it feels like to leverage its currency. Intuitively, most of us understand that someone with a Ph.D. from Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, or MIT is going to be seen very differently by the average American citizen than someone with a Ph.D. from … less prestigious universities—let alone someone who didn't finish college or didn't attend at all. Such people will be invited to different parties, welcomed into different social circles, and considered for different job positions. When these secret societies still were kicking about, there were multiple parallel paths for achieving this kind of social credit (though it was largely only exchangeable with people also in your network—e.g., Lions Club status was only good as a currency with other Lions Club members).

The presence of parallel systems for climbing in social status dramatically increased social mobility. If you wanted to move up in the world and missed the boat on a prestigious university, you could try your hand at the local Freemason Temple and, if that didn't work, go to your local Lions Club. One of our pet projects has been trying to rebuild one of these networks and plumb it into our school to create something we call "democratized nepotism" for our students. Essentially, we want to see if we can root our best students into prestigious jobs around the university system's monopoly on credentialing and status.

Another category of secret societies are "aligned incentive clubs." They often exist within an industry or university for people who have aligned social or career interests and resemble regular clubs and fraternities—but

with prestige branding. The biggest of these is YPO, the members of which (all CEOs) represent something like 13% of the world's GDP.

While YPO is a great organization, its large size has made it necessary to adopt extremely formalized entrance requirements around being the CEO of a company of a certain size, which limits the organization's potential. This blind litmus test filters out a lot of interesting and impactful people that most other secret societies would consider their highest-value members (like astronauts, scientists, famous artists, authors, philosophers, politicians, etc.) while not filtering out dullards who just inherited their companies (which most societies do these days). That said, YPO is without any shadow of a doubt (collectively) the world's most powerful secret society and has been moving from strength to strength—even if it is a little dull compared to the more dynamic and action-oriented ones.

We, your authors, have become most involved with a final category of a secret society. These are "two-sided marketplace" societies, which typically focus on two (or more) categories of high-profile individuals who don't normally gain exposure to each other and essentially "sell" (be it through fees or the time commitment needed to participate) access to one category to the other. The Bohemian Club (famous for its Bohemian Grove) exemplifies this model, with half the members being wealthy businesspeople (often with ties to the political sphere) and half being artists (musicians, playwrights, actors, etc.). In this instance, business and political heavy hitters get to interact with influential and famous artists and vice versa.

The key to building out these societies is to get enough super-interesting and controversial people—who pay little or nothing to participate—that a counter audience of wealthy and powerful people—who pay full price—will see the society as aspirational, join, and subsidize the attendance of their more interesting counterparts. Secret societies of this sort often don't have a very long shelf life, in part because they are often launched on the foundation of a particularly famous person's "brand." Take Renaissance Weekend as an example, which has really gone downhill since the Clintons were forced to leave due to public scrutiny. It is challenging, if not impossible, to start a new secret society without a lynchpin name like Peter Thiel, Eric Schmidt, the Clintons, etc. One could theoretically found a new

two-sided marketplace secret society using the right sort of famous person as its patron saint, should they like the idea, but to make the society sustainable, it would be imperative that the lynchpin person's reputation quickly be deemphasized in favor of a broad, balanced, and revolving portfolio of other blockbuster personalities to reduce key man risk and enable the society to endure well after any single famous person has to step back.

There are three more reasons these societies tend to collapse. The first is that they are burdened with archaic rulesets that limit who they can recruit. None of the past's all-male societies have been able to maintain the prestige they once held, in part because up-and-coming public figures would not want to risk affiliation with a plausibly misogynistic organization. To some extent, this is what happened to Skull and Bones: While the group has admitted women since the 90s, they got stuck with the rule of only being able to accept Yalies, tying the group's reputation to that of Yale University (which has somewhat declined). You can't exactly frame yourself as having access to the next generation of the world's elite when only 39% of students pick you over Harvard (contrast that with Stanford, which—around the time of this book's publication—43% of students would choose over Harvard).[20]

Something to note is that secret societies which have replaced Skull and Bones as the prestigious "kids to watch" often target dropouts from elite universities or people who haven't gone yet (like the Atlas Fellowship and The Thiel Fellowship). We suppose that's just a sign of the times, with universities more generally losing their utility.

A second major force driving the downfall of two-sided marketplace secret societies involves "degradation from the mean" (for clarification, this is not a type of "regression toward the mean" but a totally different phenomenon). When a society fails to balance each side of its marketplace and degrades into a generic society where high-profile people gather to be around other high-profile people, it will eventually fade into obsolescence. General "elite" societies only have value to people *below* the mean level of member prestige, thus on average, every new entrant will drag that mean down. Efforts to evade degradation to the mean explain in part why older secret societies used to have ranks as a method to attempt to maintain members who were higher profile than average. Furthermore, two-sided marketplace

secret societies that openly acknowledge and even codify that two-sided element, like what the Bohemian Grove has done with influential businesspeople/politicians and artists, typically last longer than those that do not (many two-sided marketplace secret societies don't even recognize this dynamic as their core value proposition).

Waitlists comprise the final major force commonly destroying two-sided marketplace societies. It used to be common for highly in-demand secret societies to have decades-long waitlists (the average at one was something like 20 years—can't give a name here). In some cases, waitlists come to be used as a vanity signal alluding to the society's prestige. While they may signal desirability, waitlists also can be deadly. Most people who hear about a society in a way that gets them in the front door will hear about it from their peers who are members, so if that next group of members has to wait 20 years to get in and, in turn, begin nominating new members, then the average age of a member will increase by almost 20 years with each "generation" of membership. It is, for this reason, the average age of people in some once-very-prestigious societies these days is between 70 and 80 years old.

Why bring all this up? Consider the old banking systems run by groups like the Knights Templar and the Freemasons, and consider how a secret society network can be combined with a cultivar. The approach would bring unique tactical utility to even a newly-founded cultivar should its initial membership base be well selected and distributed. If you can successfully offer the tangible benefits associated with popular forms of secret societies while avoiding their major pitfalls and incorporating fitness-imparting cultural values, traditions, and practices, you will have greater odds of accelerating the rise of a truly powerful movement.

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1 Note: The governance structure described in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Governance*, which sounds a lot like this one, is not for the Index but for House Collins. We chose very similar systems for our House and the Index because we believe in the model. Although, their differing scopes and purposes necessitate some variation.

2 Until the Index has at least ten Houses, we will act as the Governor.

3 A former Governor can be put on a list to be removed from the Vote of Continuity (and the veto process on Governor decision) via the unanimous decision of those elected by the three voting bodies every time a new Governor is chosen (only one name can be added to the list per election cycle). If a name is put on the list twice, the Governor in question is removed, making removal a "two strikes"

action. Note: No House can be excommunicated if it has a member in the House of Continuity. Even deceased members must be removed through the formal removal process for their House to be excommunicated. It is intentionally difficult to excommunicate any House that has been a member of the Index for generations. Gaining a Vote of Continuity should be a source of significant pride for any House that wins the privilege.

4 This branch can rewrite the way the governing structure works with a 70% vote. This action is only meant to be undertaken to address future technology. Questions like: Once it becomes possible to replicate someone's consciousness and upload it somewhere where it endures past the individual's death, will their uploaded, digital selves be treated as humans for voting purposes? What about fully sapient artificial intelligences?

We attempted to make the system easy to alter, enabling future Index members to adapt to these sorts of developments without our writing commandments about technology with limits we don't understand. While we would like AIs to have a vote, there are many ways an AI vote might be abused to break the Index's governing system.

5 Voting power = (The number of kids in the House under 20) + (The number of kids raised in the House over 20 who have stayed active in the Index) * 2 + (The number of grandkids produced by members raised within that House) * 2. This system is designed to reward Houses not just for successfully producing the next generation but for creating a new generation of members who largely choose to stay in that culture and raise future generations within it. Essentially, the Index rewards cultures that do the core job of "being a culture" well (by imparting fitness to participants) with more influence. The system is also intentionally designed to give older Houses significantly more power to incentivize kids to try and reform (rather than flippantly abandon) their ancestral Houses should they have room for improvement.

6 Note: We expect things like the cut-off age for this vote and member qualifications to be modified with time. For example, this system could be inordinately manipulated by a House that adopts tons of kids while doing a poor job at raising them, meaning these adoptees exit the Index once they gain independence. Should such abuses arise, the Governor may need to change how this vote is considered at a future date with the idea that the vote's purpose is to weigh Houses by likely future population.

7 The core idea here is that Houses that sacrifice more for the Index deserve greater influence over its function. This vote may need to be adjusted should something like a war or dangerous exploration cause House members to forego more lucrative opportunities, endure serious hardship, or even die in service to the Index (i.e., the opportunity cost endured by House members should be counted in some way as contributed wealth). Other adjustments might include an interest modifier to investments in the Index, alterations that diminish the power of a single very wealthy individual (e.g., quadratic voting), or absolute limits on the total voting power any one House may have within this realm (e.g., no House may gain more than 30% of the total Vote of Sacrifice).

8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJClm_J1cV0

9 Pearce, E., Launay, J., & Dunbar, R. I. (2015). The ice-breaker effect: Singing mediates fast social bonding. *Royal Society Open Science, 2*(10), 150221. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.150221

10 Kokal, I., Engel, A., Kirschner, S., & Keysers, C. (2011). Synchronized drumming enhances activity in the caudate and facilitates prosocial commitment--if the rhythm comes easily. *PloS one, 6*(11), e27272. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0027272

11 Wiltermuth, S. S., & Heath, C. (2009). Synchrony and Cooperation. *Psychological Science, 20*(1), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02253.x

12 Macdonald, K., Germine, L., Anderson, A., Christodoulou, J., & McGrath, L. M. (2017, July 17). Dispelling the myth: Training in education or neuroscience decreases but does not eliminate beliefs

in neuromyths. *Frontiers.* from https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01314/full,

Tarr, B., Launay, J., & Dunbar, R. I. (2016). Silent disco: dancing in synchrony leads to elevated pain thresholds and social closeness. *Evolution and human behavior: Official journal of the Human Behavior and Evolution Society, 37*(5), 343–349. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2016.02.004.

13 Pearce, E., Launay, J., & Dunbar, R. I. (2015). The ice-breaker effect: Singing mediates fast social bonding. *Royal Society Open Science, 2*(10), 150221. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.150221 from https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsos.150221

14 This role-switching practice manifests through dynamics seen since ancient times, such as a reversal of social status (seen in many medieval festivals where the wealthy would act like paupers and the paupers like high-status individuals), masquerade-style parties (where people's faces are covered and they assume different roles), tribal ceremonies in which people are inhabited by spirits (sometimes of ancestors), ceremonies involving participants getting "possessed," and "furry-like parties" where people take on animal personas.

15 According to Charles Burney, whose History of Music (1776) was the first important treatise in its field, Calvinists disallowed all instrumental music in Geneva for 100 years after the Reformation and that all music, except for psalm singing, was outlawed. Later scholars have argued this to be an exaggeration but one that contains more than a grain of truth.

16 Sparrow, B., Liu, J., & Wegner, D. M. (2011). Google effects on memory: Cognitive consequences of having information at our fingertips. *Science, 333*(6043), 776–778. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1207745 from https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/dwegner/files/sparrow_et_al._2011.pdf

17 Medlin, R. (2006). Homeschooled Children's Social Skills. *Home School Researcher, 17*(1), 1–8. from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED573486.pdf

18 Bui, Q., & Miller, C. C. (2018, August 4). The age that women have babies: How a gap divides America. *The New York Times.*, from https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/08/04/upshot/up-birth-age-gap.html

19 Nomaguchi, K., & Milkie, M. A. (2020). Parenthood and Well-Being: A Decade in Review. Journal of marriage and the family, 82(1), 198–223. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12646 from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7326370/

20 We don't want to sound elitist and are not saying Yale is not a great university, it is just not getting the best of the best anymore and hasn't for decades. It ranges between 3 and 8 in different ranking tables. If you are a club of the best of the best at the 8th-best university you are just another fraternity. https://www.topuniversities.com/where-to-study/north-america/united-states/ranked-top-100-us-universities

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HOW CULTURES DEAL WITH AGING

A key factor reducing cultural bleed involves ensuring that a culture is relevant for people of all ages and is able to adapt to the challenges adherents face at different life stages. Cultural leaders and designers are usually older individuals, which can cause cultures to over optimize for adults (and even older adults).

As you think about the culture you wish to create, consider not only how it will be perceived by people in different stages of life (childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, etc.), but how it will impart tactical advantages that help adherents address challenges that arise across all stages of life. A culture that does a great job at helping parents raise families has far lower odds of surviving intergenerationally if it doesn't *also* improve children's lives, help teens overcome adversity, grant a competitive edge to young adults, and provide relevancy and meaning to mature adults as they reach old age.

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Retaining Teens Through Rebellion

As mentioned earlier, what we call “evanescent youth cultures,” like goth culture, punk culture, or e-girl/e-boy culture, are unique in that they do not pass between generations and are essentially specialized memetic packages that evolved to spread among teenagers when their rebellious instincts are highest. While people rarely participate in these cultures beyond adolescence, evanescent youth cultures often trigger permanent breaks from their birth cultures.

To stay strong, cultures need mechanisms that either (1) shield youth from this special category of pop culture or (2) embrace evanescent youth cultures but contextualize them as temporary. If you are constructing a culture, the manner in which that culture relates to evanescent youth cultures will play a critical role in determining its bleed rate.

One reason humans likely evolved adolescent rebelliousness is that it encourages young people to detach from their parents in time to find mates and build family units of their own. This rebelliousness is deeply set and often hard to ignore. For example, I—Simone—remember how I felt when my parents attended gatherings around other people my age. I felt like everything they did was utterly humiliating, even if they were just cheering me on at a swim meet. I found this disgust perplexing, as I was fully aware that my parents were only present to support me.

As with any psychological phenomenon, not every person experiences a strong teen rebellion phase. That said, the population of rebellious teens is sufficient to fuel the development, evolution, and spread of cultures that almost exclusively prey on teenage audiences and their unique emotional sets. For example, adolescent humans’ brains become uniquely attuned to social cues and peer acceptance, hence evanescent youth cultures often leverage this heightened sensitivity (along with vulnerabilities related to awakening sexuality, tendencies to see parents and authority figures as oppressors of one’s true self, and desires to see oneself as somehow special and unique).

Evanescent youth cultures are unique in that they rarely hold on to adherents for long and evolve very quickly (usually not maintaining a consistent form for more than half a decade).

They commonly spread by:

- Appealing to rebelliousness and helping adherents see themselves as independent individuals
- Facilitating status upgrades within local social hierarchies (e.g., helping adherents become popular or noticed within a social group)
- Helping adherents acquire non-reproductive sexual partners
- Helping adherents see themselves as powerful or deep thinkers with access to a special perspective on reality
- Allowing adherents to roleplay a new identity (e.g., a vampire, witch, or furry)

Sometimes evanescent youth cultures adapt bastardized iterations of core cultures that seem exotic. For example, when we were young, a sort of high school version of Buddhism spread, which combined superficial elements of Buddhist stereotypes with a surface-level understanding of the religion to produce a culture primarily designed to help teen adherents feel “deep” and secure casual sex. This bastardization process becomes highly amusing when youth cultures pull from more bizarre sources, such as fetish cultures (as can be seen in high school furry communities).

We wonder if some subcategory of a larger culture could be intentionally designed to draw in teens during this period of their lives. Teen Buddhism organically evolved to fill this role to an extent, with some individuals who adopted the superficial Westernized iteration later educating themselves and attempting to adopt a more authentic version of the culture and passing it on to their kids.

I, Simone, grew up with parents like this. They rebelled against their religious heritage growing up during the hippie days in the San Francisco Bay Area, explored a broad variety of new age and spiritual evanescent youth cultures, studied Aikido in Japan under a soon-to-retire grand master, and planned on studying Tai Chi in China (my unexpected birth derailed

these plans), only to eventually became self-described “Born Again Buddhists” attending a very mainstream local Mahayana Buddhist temple.

People who appreciate the strict structure of more extreme evanescent youth cultures frequently end up joining more socially-mainstream but nevertheless highly structured cultures in adulthood. This may present an opportunity for some cultures to set themselves up as uniquely appealing landing strips for young adults transitioning out of their unsustainable youth cultures and explains why cults often target people in this age range. While my born-again-Buddhist parents took me to a Buddhist temple as a kid and maintained a very loose family culture, one of my cousins grew up with a more strict Christian family culture—something her parents had created after a youth spent with the Rajneesh movement in India (name changes and all).

When reviewing research demonstrating how much of our sociological profile is inherited[1] I, Malcolm, worry about the cultural bleed our family will suffer as a product of teenage rebellion. Adding Simone’s ancestral rebellious nature to mine feels like a disaster waiting to happen. My “rebel” instinct as a teen was *incredibly* strong—to the extent that rarely a month passed in which I did not spend at least one day in the principal's office, getting in a fight, or being chased by police (though, spending a big chunk of my early childhood in adolescent prison alternatives probably didn’t help).

How can we, as people who want to design durable cultures that endure across generations, protect future descendants from losing their way? Let’s consider what some other cultures do.

Anabaptist Rumspringa presents an archetypal model of one strategy. Amish Rumspringa typically starts from ages 14-16 while Mennonite Rumspringa starts between 17-20. Rumspringa is a period during which youth are offered the choice to baptize and join the community as adults—where they will have to spend the rest of their life living with severe technological limitation and strict self-control—or where they take a period away from the community to see how the English live (“the English" being a term sometimes used to describe outsiders because they speak English, whereas many Amish and Mennonites speak Pennsylvania Dutch). During the two-year Rumspringa, young adherents are allowed to holistically

indulge in rebellion—ranging from premarital sex to drugs and alcohol. (Though most Anabaptist kids don't go all the way with Rumspringa and just use it as an opportunity to be out from under their parents' control on weekends or buy a courting buggy.)

Rumspringa is the cultural version of making your kid smoke the whole pack of cigarettes in front of you after catching them smoking—and it's kind of genius. By encouraging rebellious youth to *fully* lean into the most overhyped aspects of pop culture in a way that can't possibly be genuinely satisfying, a culture can essentially inoculate its youth against viral cultural influences. After all, pop and soft cultures are not typically cultures that people dive into enthusiastically; they're what people slouch into when refusing to put effort or focus into anything else. In other words, pop/soft cultures sneak up on their prey and smother them in their sleep, but are fairly harmless when tackled head on.

What's more, any culture that welcomes post-rebellion adherents back with open arms is somewhat inherently immune to rebellion, as it's hard to rebel against a culture that looks rebellion in the face and says: "Sure, kid. Go for it. We're not going to hold you back."

It is furthermore quite clever for a culture to give lifelong adherents a taste of what life is like *without* its beneficial amenities and community support. Imagine growing up your entire life with the level of community support the Amish have (pretty-much-guaranteed healthcare, housing, a spouse, and a job) then getting to try things like sex and drinking in the context of having that support withdrawn from you. Honestly, the game is ingeniously rigged against any kid wanting to leave. It is no wonder to us that the Anabaptists have the lowest bleed rate of any cultivar in the world (on which we can find data), with a full 80-95% who engage in Rumspringa returning to the community for baptism.

Compare the Amish 20-25% bleed rate to Mormon and Evangelical Protestant bleed, which stand at 35% and 33% respectively. Mormon approaches to rebellion are almost the mirror opposite of Rumspringa, as rather than getting a free pass to go out and rebel, Mormon youth are encouraged to go on a mission trip, leaving their family to spend in-depth time diving deep into the religion and being paired with another devotee 24/7. Essentially, the LDS Church deals with this period of cultural danger

by removing the young adults from unsupervised contact with non-Mormon peer groups and placing them under constant supervision. The cultural bleed differentiation between the two groups highlights how ineffective these kinds of ultra-controlling tactics are in an age of cell phones and social media.

As much as we respect the Anabaptist tradition of Rumspringa, we find another cultural tradition that tackles youthful rebellion even more compelling: That of the Spartan Krypteia.[2]

During Krypteia, young Spartan men left the confines of their strict culture and support network, just like the Amish do on Rumspringa, but instead of integrating with society, they were challenged to survive by the most ruthless means possible. Plato held that during this rite of passage, Spartan youth were not allowed to wear footwear or sleep in shelters, even in the dead of winter, or even work for their food. Instead, they had to hide among the local serf population (Helots) and feed themselves by stealing food from them without ever being seen. Plutarch furthermore described men on Krypteia as terrorizing Helots, killing men they found on highways at night and sometimes murdering Helots as they worked in fields. While it is unclear whether this rite of passage *always* or *ever* involved systematic murder, common themes in historical accounts include harsh living away from home, lots of solitude, and a fair amount of danger.

While we don't know if modified (read: non-murdery) versions of either Krypteia or Rumspringa would work for our family culture, our fears about these traditions deviate from concerns typically surfaced by those familiar with them.

For example, we trust our descendants to know better than to experiment and rebel in ways that cause non-reversible harm to themselves and others (e.g. getting someone pregnant, experimenting with highly-addictive drugs, and making non-reversible body modifications). What worries us is that our Calvinist-derived family culture lacks some of the amenities rebellious youth will miss most when exploring the outside world. Both Amish and Spartan cultures offer(ed) notable levels of social support, whereas our culture regards social support networks that protect people from their mistakes rather than empower the capable as being intrinsically evil.

We nevertheless think our House cultivar's notable absence of any support network is the right call. For example, had someone come to rescue me, Malcolm, from the shitty situations I regularly dug myself into as a teen, and had I believed there was an "out" if things went terribly wrong, I can only imagine what sort of monster I might have become. Shielding teens from the consequences of their bad behavior and the risks they take only encourages them to double down in a way that will not serve them well in adulthood.

We also worry that cultures that are better-integrated with their broader surrounding cultures will not offer rebellion experiences to their adherents that are as salient as those undergoing something like Rumspringa or Krypteia. Anabaptists like the Amish and Mennonites—not to mention Spartans—are and were quite different from surrounding populations. Cultures that integrate more seamlessly with surrounding populations may not feel the same sense of contrast when venturing into the outer world.

This shortcoming could be addressed by creating rebellious rites of passage in which youth are sent to live in environments and cultures that differ radically from those to which they are accustomed.

I, Malcolm, spent a period of time as a teen supporting myself in and hitchhiking around a developing country. Something like this might work as a cultural ritual. It would certainly help to impart the value our particular culture places on self-sufficiency and stepping up to daunting challenges, however we shy away from it for two reasons:

1. We would only feel comfortable offering it as an opt-in ritual.
2. Even if they took on this rite of passage with a partner, we would not be comfortable sending our daughters or granddaughters on such an expedition (for obvious safety reasons). We hate the idea of a gender-specific coming-of-age ritual meant to demonstrate self-sufficiency, as it subtly signals that women can't be as self-sufficient as men (when in reality, it just unfortunately happens that self-sufficient men and women need to navigate around different risks in the world).

A final interesting tradition used to address teenage rebellion, known as “sending out,” was widely used by Puritans (a branch of Calvinists) in Colonial America. “Sending out” involved arranging for young teens (though occasionally younger children as well) to live with another family for a period, often to learn an important trade or skill. The process is quite ingenious considering how teens’ biology seems to drive them to instinctually rebel against their parents, suggesting a teen may be significantly less likely to feel this when living with a host family. As an added bonus, sending out allows youth to learn from and borrow aspects of other families' unique cultures. Should the network of Index families grow large, this might be a great practice to reinstate.

> *When I—Malcolm—was young, my parents occasionally had me live with families in other countries and even went so far as to offer me an opportunity to live at a Buddhist monastery in Cambodia for half a summer if I wanted to. I never felt like I got much out of these experiences, perhaps because they were more set up around “cultural exchange” and not around my learning some useful skill.*

We theorize the best way to protect our kids from harmful forms of teenage rebellion doesn’t involve elaborate rituals but rather a cultural understanding of these life stages. More specifically, it seems wise to:

1. Raise kids to expect their brains will be overwhelmed by hormones, specific emotions, and predictable sensitivities when they hit adolescence, and
2. Make sure your culture’s goals for teens align well with teenage proclivities.

> *For detailed thoughts on how this might be achieved, see: “Life Stages” in the Appendix. In this section, we discuss how we will structure life stages and expectations for the culture we create for our own kids, (e.g., between X age and Y age, focus on Z and expect W). Life is surprisingly short and if you want to effectively make use of it within the confines of how our culture defines a life well lived, you must be strategic and intentional about making the most of*

every single life stage. If you are young, we strongly recommend this Appendix chapter.

The Index's Role in Teen Rebellion

The Index was in no small part created to address problems resulting from teen rebellion and cultural reinvention. Calvinist culture failed, in part, because:

1. It looks for truth and does not care much about tradition
2. Is extremely rebellious and contrarian

As a result, it consistently fragments after a generation or two.

It would be folly to invent a theology and set of traditions, then tell a 50% genetically identical younger, better, iteration of yourself (i.e., one of your children) to bow to it. While we know our kids will rebel against anything we create, we also see the implications of major global trends: If a family can't stick together and elevate its strongest members, it has no long-term future.

Our children will be just as driven to compete and prove their superiority as they will be to rebel. Just as capitalism harnesses human greed to foster innovation and industry, the Index is designed to harness the common desire to rebel against your family and prove you are better than them in a manner that ultimately strengthens your bonds. While our children will invent their own traditions and theologies, they will only leave the Index if they fear the accomplishments of any cultivar they create will not measure up. We wager that even four generations from now, they will have too much pride to do that. In addition, we are betting their own children will look to their grandparents' beliefs for inspiration when they themselves rebel, just as we have. (Essentially, we have the Index record each generation's traditions in part so that family traditions can cycle between two or three iterated-upon versions with kids regularly rebelling against their parents but looking to their grandparents for inspiration.)

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Puberty: Gendered Mental Susceptibilities

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, another less-covered medical mystery arose: There was an explosion in Tourette's diagnoses among young girls. More bizarrely, unusually high numbers of young women developed a large array of verbal tics, with some being very similar to each other (e.g., the word "beans" said in a British accent). While Tourette's is uncommon, the form of Tourette's with verbal tics is even *less* common, and for multiple people to exhibit the exact same unusual verbal tic at the same time is virtually impossible.

It turned out that posts about having Tourette's had become popular as a category on TikTok and a top influencer in that category said the word "bean" as a tic.[3] It looks like many young women were, knowingly or otherwise, simply copying this influencer. This would not be the first time a "mass psychogenic illness" arose in which young girls "caught" illnesses socially rather than as a physical impairment.[4] An older iteration of this, for example, is Dissociative Identity Disorder, which rocketed from obscurity to thousands of cases following the release of a movie, an increase not seen in the U.K., where the movie was not released.[5]

This phenomenon of young girls socially catching illnesses can be seen among a sub-faction of a growing community called "Spoonies"—see the footnote for a great article on this subject.[6] The term Spoonies is derived from a way of describing what it is like to live with a crippling illness (often one that cannot be easily seen by others). In short, normal, healthy people have relatively unlimited energy, whereas those suffering from certain illnesses have to ration their highly limited energy in spoon-size measurements. A Spoonie might say, "I have five spoons a day; if I use one spoon to get out of bed, one spoon to shower, one to eat, and two to pick up groceries, I won't have any left to write my blog post."

Individuals usually first get involved in the Spoonie community after developing a real medical condition. Seeking comfort and solidarity, a sick person may begin to socialize online with other people who also suffer from infirmity. Upon entering communities of other ill people, it rapidly becomes

apparent that community hierarchy is at least partially determined by how "sick" an individual is—which, *of course* it would be.

If the core differentiation between Spoonies and the rest of society is their infirmed state, it is natural that any given person's status within the community would be influenced by their level of infirmity, just as a goth community member's status would be modulated by *how goth* they are and the member of a tabletop gaming community's status would depend on how much of their time is devoted to tabletop games. This dynamic leads to things like "pill porn,"[7] in which individuals will post pictures of the pills they are taking—but furtively add in supplements they bought at a store to make themselves appear more ill than they really are.

As a result of this hierarchy structure, some individuals in the community (often those most active) develop a growing list of medical conditions that cannot be verified. The fact that doctors are unable to verify their illnesses causes community members to feel oppressed—to the extent that the community uses a zebra emoji to signify themselves in mockery of the common doctors saying, "When you hear hooves, look for horses and not zebras." Essentially, it is a way of saying that they are special and unique in the types of illness they have and *that* is why doctors can't determine what they are.

> *Note: We genuinely suspect that many Spoonies experience real pain and real symptoms. People vastly underestimate how susceptible our minds are to peer pressure. In addition, there is undoubtedly a large portion of this community that suffers from real, serious conditions. Even if you only hypothetically had a community that formed among actually sick teens, such a community would inevitably draw a large group of non-sick teens masquerading to fit in. That is just the way the teenage mind works.*

In the age of social media, it is not terribly surprising that a dominance hierarchy determined by individuals' infirmity would form and that a person could become an influencer by looking more ill than others. What is surprising is how overwhelmingly female the community skews and that most seem to get into it around puberty. What is going on here and how can

we protect members of an intentionally crafted culture from succumbing to this community's draw?

First, we must note that a female attraction to infirmity has been around for hundreds of years. In our youth, there was a whole category of goths dedicated to this look via the "psychic vampire" phenomenon (in which they believed they were chronically infirm and low energy, but that they could draw energy from other people to survive). Even novels penned during England's Regency era (1795-1837) describe and make fun of female hypochondriacs, with Jane Austen's novels presenting a panoply of examples.[8] If there is something appealing about illness to women and especially adolescent girls—to the extent that they can begin to physically manifest signs of their imagined or subconsciously desired illness—what is the draw?

For men, puberty is fairly straightforward: It's kind of like having a meth addiction forced upon you. All of a sudden, you desperately want something and would do insane, dangerous, and wildly out-of-character or immoral things to achieve said goal. This means young men are highly susceptible to cultural movements that tell them, "If you do X and Y, you will get sex" or "You aren't getting sex because of [feminism/unfair bias/etc.]." While these cultures are dangerous, they are easy to predict and circumvent by giving young boys access to clear and honest relationship guidance (this is one reason we wrote *The Pragmatist's Guide to Relationships*). Girls are dramatically more complicated.

For women, puberty often involves being suddenly blindsided by depression, self-hatred, and anxiety[9]—well, that is what puberty *feels like* from the perspective of teenage girls, at least. We would argue the fundamental desires behind these feelings are astoundingly simple: In girls, puberty introduces an intense need to be treasured, desired, cared for, fussed over, pampered, protected, and accepted. While we use a lot of words to describe this need, it is a single, unified emotional mandate as simplistic as adolescent boys' powerful drive to have sex (though just as some boys don't suffer from insanely high adolescent sex drives, not all teenage girls experience an insatiable hunger to be desired and coveted, and some never experience that hunger at all).

The key difference between male and female adolescence from a culture-crafting perspective is that the adolescent male mandate to have sex is very recognizable and something external to their self-image (either you get sex or you don't), whereas the adolescent female mandate is integral to their own self-image and harder to measure (am I desired *enough*?). This causes teen girls to focus inward on their own self-worth and mental state in a way teen boys don't. Because, like in boys, the need is so voracious it can never be fully met, it causes many young girls to feel hopeless and build self-hatred (this may explain in part why 36% of young girls are diagnosed with depression when contrasted with 14% of boys).

A second-order effect of this loss of control in girls can manifest as an intense desire for order and control over some aspect of their environment, whether that be their food intake (eating disorders) or effort expenditure (spoonies).

I, Simone, never would have admitted that I wanted to be desired, treasured, cared for, fussed over, etc. as a teen—but as I reflect on my teenage feelings, drives, and behaviors as an adult, that motivation seems pretty obvious. I don't think anyone wants to admit that the complex and heart-rending emotions they feel are the product of something so simple as a biological need to feel accepted and desired.

This unquenchable emotional need in young girls makes them very susceptible to being bled out by subcultures that lend members the impression that they have a unique, special identity or that they suffer in a singular way to which others cannot relate. Had I been aware of a community like Spoonies as a teenage girl, they—rather than anorexia (which I *did* have)—may have been my "poison," so to speak. Both Spoonies and anorexics enjoy the comfort and control of deprivation, pain, and rationing while feeling simultaneously fragile and strong (hence "worthy" of fussing, pampering, etc.). Moreover, becoming a Spoonie would have given me excuses to get out of social interaction and enabled me to feel like a victim.

The subconscious allure of dangerous mental vortexes like anorexia and hypochondria in teenage girls causes an untold amount of suffering, cultural attrition, and increased likelihood of death.[10] **As a society, we assume that humans naturally run from emotions like suffering, helplessness, and**

hopelessness, but the truth is these emotions are highly addictive and far easier to indulge in (in a perversely satisfying way) than positive emotional subsets. Better yet, when you convince others of your helplessness, some people begin to regard you as a victim—someone to be adored and protected.

Given the damage caused by this adolescent drive, why have teenage girls evolved to experience it? In short, we were designed to struggle to survive, to live lives of constant insecurity and real suffering, to be afraid of our tribes being raided and then being killed or used as disposable sex slaves. In some ways, our lives of plenty have left us with self-preservation instincts that are now backfiring.

While boys can still feel a real, tangible struggle for sex, which makes their teenage struggles straightforward (after all, rates of sex are plummeting at present), most privileged teenage girls no longer *need* to struggle for protection and attention. This confounds their ability to act on instinctual impulses (and it is primarily privileged teenage girls who succumb to Spoonie-related hazards).

These days, most affluent girls in developed societies already *are* pampered, protected, and coveted—there *is* no need to fight for it. Girls nevertheless feel an inherent need to pursue these things, presumably because their ancestors who *failed* to do so also failed to survive long enough to reproduce. As such, mostly privileged teenage girls find themselves manufacturing hardship to fill the void when real adversity is absent. In other words, it looks like adolescent girls evolved *a deep need to fight* to position themselves to be desired, protected, coveted, etc.—and if they face no struggle for the privilege, they'll *make* one for themselves.

The first line of defense against forces that prey on this female adolescent drive is to recognize that any victim class that anyone can plausibly join—especially if it cannot definitively be proven or tested—will draw in a certain portion of young girls (and sometimes even when a victim class *can* be tested, women will be compelled to pursue it—looking at you, Rachel Dolezal). These forms of victimhood are appealing because they enable even privileged people to claim the right to victim status.

Durable cultures must be suspicious of these types of communities and deride calls to "just trust our internal experience and don't attempt to verify whether we are *actually* in pain, experiencing discrimination, facing real danger, etc." What Spoonies, for example, want is for others: "To believe; Be understanding; Be patient; To educate yourself; Show compassion; Don't question."[11] These are uniquely dangerous types of evanescent youth cultures as they are uniquely capable of maintaining members through adulthood (leading people to be permanently crippled by the form of victimhood to which the culture subscribes—or even live a life of constant pain they could have evaded had they never engaged with the community).

How will our House contend with these predatory subcultures? The answer is threefold:

1. **Focus on early education**: Teach young kids to expect the emotional changes they are about to face and discuss how groups will manipulate those changes. We need to stop teaching young women to expect male puberty.
2. **Frame victimhood as a universal negative**: Create a culture that never praises or privileges a person for being weak. While most modern cultures disproportionately redirect their resources to those who need them the most—the weak—we will frame our culture as one that redirects its resources to those who will make the most of them: Industrious people who yield a high return on investment. This might sound cruel, but it will produce more output per resource spent while also lowering aggregate suffering by lessening the desirability of weakness and dissuading members from indulging in despair and suffering. While we don't see suffering as something worth avoiding, we only see suffering as acceptable if it is in service of something meaningful and important—we don't abide by suffering for suffering's sake or suffering in an effort to gain attention or status.
3. **Frame all emotional indulgence as an intrinsic evil**: Modern society teaches the objective lie that indulging in negative emotional states "gets them out of your system" when in reality, indulging in negative emotional states *reinforces* and *amplifies* them.[12] While our culture will not pressure adherents to suppress

or sublimate their emotions, it *will* teach members to recognize them as neutral signals rather than guiding forces.

Bonus Idea: Female Incels

Most of this book's readers will be familiar with radical incels (involuntary celibates): Sexually frustrated men who think it is a human right to have their puberty-induced needs met—and for men, that need is sex. The *most* radical incels even hold that the government should pay for prostitutes to fulfill this "need" of theirs.

What, then, is the female equivalent of a super-radical incel? Contrary to immediate intuition, it's not just a female incel; after all, the average young woman doesn't become a sex-starved nymphomaniac upon reaching adolescence.

If the "need" that awakens in women during puberty is not primarily to have sex but rather to be desired and treasured, then the female version of someone who categorizes fulfillment of their puberty-awoken need as a human right would be someone who argues it is immoral for people to find specific women unattractive—someone who works to create social norms that disallow such reactions.

"Hah, right," you might be thinking, "but it's impossible to shame people for what they do and do not find attractive."

Really? Tell that to the radical end of the Fat Acceptance movement where women claim that men must learn to find fat women attractive and that *not* finding fat women attractive is a form of bigotry. Evidence that this is just female incelism can be seen in how rarely the movement advocates for finding *fat males* attractive.

We wish it were self-evident to everyone that, whether you are a male or female, trying to control the bodies and personally held opinions of other people is both futile and toxic. Thankfully, to most people, it is—which is why the majority of both the incel and fat acceptance movements do not

hold these positions and instead call out obviously unfair things in society (and how much unfairness should matter to you is a cultural question).

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Age and Power

The respect and roles a culture lends to different age groups (sometimes referred to by historians as a culture's "age ways") can heavily influence how it passes between generations and how people interact with those of different generations.

Age can relate to power in a few ways.

1. Extreme Deference to Elders

In extreme instances, like in Korea, one of the first questions you ask a stranger is what their age is, as it can determine the entire structure of the language you'll use when speaking with them. You would think extreme deference would be great for older people, but it actually produces more negative outcomes for them than for young people. For example, because you are not supposed to have a "boss" who is younger than you, people who don't move up the career hierarchy get overlooked for job opportunities much faster than they otherwise would be as they age. This is why so many ajummas (middle-aged and older Korean women) own restaurants—once you reach a certain age, running your own store is kind of the only option you have. Another negative externality of extremely strict deference to elders is exemplified by the famous chain of plane crashes tied to co-pilots not being willing to challenge their superiors.

An interesting solution to this problem developed by the South Korean tech company Kakao is to mandate that all employees refer to each other by their "English" names in the office, which does not require the same language change and, according to Kakao, allows for more creativity. That said, that a company feels like they need to sublimate their native culture to be innovative does not inspire us to consider elder-deference as a fitness-imparting "age way."

2. Matriarchal or Patriarchal Families

While older generations are more respected within matriarchal and patriarchal families, one *particular* individual (a patriarch or matriarch) is respected much more than other family members. This individual is

sometimes the oldest but not always. For example, if one family member runs a business that employs a lot of other family members, they may assume the role. In addition, status as the family matriarch or patriarch can be lost through actions that are out of line with the family cultivar's moral framework (like having a child out of wedlock). Essentially, most of the respect within a family unit is reserved for a single (or a few) older individuals. This model is very common in Latin American cultures.

Of the traditional "age ways" we have studied, this model has the greatest number of advantages. It motivates cultural fidelity through generations, maintains a certain level of meritocracy within groups, and creates a de facto family governing structure without putting too much distance between parents and their children. In addition, it gives individuals a reason to follow their cultural rules (out of a desire to someday attain this status).

3. Recognition of Youth as Being in Touch with the Divine

Some cultures venerate the "wisdom" of the young (Quaker culture is an example here). They think youth either have a direct connection to the divine or some … untainted … perspective on the world, which gives their words unique weight.

We can't even begin to fathom what evolutionary or logical advantage this perspective might impart to a culture. That said, it may be that this "age way" sometimes organically emerges from cultures with low birth rates, which could cause the opinions and views expressed by children to seem novel and interesting. As kids are known for having all sorts of blunt insights and fresh perspectives, it is not unreasonable that people unaccustomed to being around children would be shocked by youthful insights and conclude that young people in particular should be heeded.

That said, there is sparse evidence that granting disproportionate power to youth will impart greater fitness to a culture. Don't get us wrong—kids *do* offer incredible perspectives and our kids blindside us daily with their insights, observations, and thoughts, unclouded as they are by bias and emotional baggage. It just happens that we can neither logically reason through the advantage of taking kids' lead, nor can we find historical examples of cultures that heavily empowered youth and saw great results.

Consider, for example, the generation of youth that was given disproportionate power in China when Mao Zedong served as chairman of the Chinese Communist Party from 1949 until his death in 1976. During Mao's Great Leap Forward, schools were temporarily shut down and through his support of the Red Guards, Mao gave disproportionate power to youth via a youth-led paramilitary social movement.

A Red Guard leader described the movement thusly:

> "Chairman Mao has defined our future as an armed revolutionary youth organization. … So if Chairman Mao is our Red-Commander-in-Chief and we are his Red Guards, who can stop us? First we will make China Maoist from inside out and then we will help the working people of other countries make the world red … and then the whole universe." [13]

The disproportionate power given to Mao's youth led them to become entitled, closed-minded, and arrogant. As adults, this lost generation is known for being relatively corrupt (for example, government officials from this generation are known for being more likely to accept bribes), amoral, and dysfunctional.

Don't get us wrong; older generations have all sorts of terrible baggage and we, personally, don't see them as being inherently deserving of power *either*. Nevertheless, there may be benefits to sublimating the power of youth to the power of adults—if only to give each new generation a baseline culture and morality that they, once adults, can choose to accept or reject.

4. Zero Relation Between Age and Respect

This model, which does not privilege any particular age, is pervasive in soft cultures that haven't inherited other "age ways." If anything, cultures holding this perspective view advanced age as a sign of being mentally addled. Per this model, respect is instead predominantly based on one's position in a local dominance hierarchy (see *The Pragmatist's Guide to Governance* for how these hierarchies are built).

While dropping age as a basis for power or respect can augment a culture's general meritocracy, there is something to be said for granting *specific* powers to *specific* generations. It could be argued, for example, that general neglect for elders (with regard to power and respect) has been a detriment to many modern societies. Consider how in the United States, it is relatively common for perfectly healthy elderly people to live in retirement homes, entirely separated from younger generations and only occasionally visited by children and grandchildren.

When we experimented with creating a new planned community centered around families and child rearing, we were stunned to receive ardent interest from retired people and empty nesters who wanted to join the community as well and play a critical role in providing childcare support to the younger families present. These people saw the idea of living in such a community and serving such an instrumental purpose as being far more appealing than moving to a retirement community or remaining in their towns and cities, ruled as they were by cultural defaults.

This made us realize that cultures with higher levels of elder respect weren't *just* giving things to the elderly (like caring for elderly parents who live in your home); they also received a great deal of value (like childcare—anyone in the U.S. who has personally paid for childcare can relate). It could even be argued that older generations *evolved* to hold a special place in society in which, in exchange for societal support, they helped more-able-bodied-and-productive adults care for their young. There is actually a whole theory around this known as the Grandmother Hypothesis, which essentially posits that women evolved menopause (rather than maintaining fertility through old age) because at a certain point, it became more advantageous for elderly humans to care for the young and free up resources for younger, more productive adults.[14]

This is all to say that it isn't necessarily wisest or most efficient to pass on an opportunity to grant certain powers of levels of respect to certain ages when intentionally developing or shaping a culture.

5. Descendant Worship (Our Model)

While the concept of "descendant worship" does not automatically assign respect to a person who is young, it does assign respect to those

representing future generations, with the expectation that each successive generation “stands on the shoulders of giants" and will iterate on, advance, and surpass the achievements of those who came before them (for a highly visual illustration of this, compare footage of a 1950s Olympic gymnast routine with one performed in the 2010s—you can find many side-by-side comparisons online).[15] This concept therefore intrinsically expects the young to outpace their parents once they reach mid-to-late adulthood.

Our model of descendant worship does not assign respect by local dominance hierarchies (e.g., how much a person is respected in society). Instead, we assign respect based on proven competence, success, and fecundity—with the most respect going to those currently in the act of succeeding (e.g., a person who made a fortune 20 years ago is shown less respect than someone currently in the process of amassing a smaller fortune).

In our family we have a practice of saying, “Your grandkids would be proud of you,” when someone does something that aligns with our family values. This is a deviation of “Your ancestors would be proud of you” and helps enforce the cultural perspective that it is most meaningful to take action likely to have a reverberating impact through the ages. We also think this framing is “logically correct,” as a person's ancestors lived in a different cultural context. What does it matter what obsolete generations think of you? In contrast, by attempting to predict the impact of your actions on those yet to come and how you will be judged by them, you can “future proof” your thinking to an extent.

One risk to this perspective is that a lack of deference toward elders can produce a degradation of cultural fidelity. If you don’t intrinsically respect your elders, then why follow their belief systems?

Here we believe in cultural “efficacy." By that we mean: Did you enjoy your childhood? Did it prepare you for adulthood and happy, strong interpersonal relationships? If it did, *even if* you don’t understand why your childhood culture does everything it does, you are more likely to pass it forward—while of course modifying the bits that don’t work (and by that we mean, elements of the culture that didn’t produce positive outcomes, not just elements that were “difficult”).

Still, it is likely just wishful thinking that the above will work. From a cultural transfer perspective, the Matriarch/Patriarch model is the best "age way" that we have seen tested when it comes to instilling cultural fidelity. Can you think of other interesting ways you might structure age-based respect within your House?

> *Should you wish to dig deeper into this topic, we recommend Whatifalthist's exploration of how family structure drives ideology*[16] *in which he summarizes* The Explanation of Ideology *by Emmanuel Todd.*[17] *Both present a compelling argument that family structure can have a massive impact at the level of state governance. For example, areas with exogamous communitarian families, where a large number of family branches live together but people marry outside their family, are much more likely to support communism not just between countries but within countries (as can be seen within Italy). While we don't agree with the entire thesis put forward, if you like this book, you will probably enjoy the video.*

If you found this discussion of age and power to be interesting and want maximum information on crafting a culture, see the following Appendix chapters (if this chapter was boring to you or you are short on time, skip them):

- *"Childhood" Which, leveraging our childhood experiences as an example, explores how childhood experience shapes people and their parenting philosophies.*
- *"Cultural Motivators" Which details mechanisms like maternal guilt and pride that cultures use to motivate behavior.*
- *"Honor Sources and Codes" Which explores what a culture's honor code can look like.*
- *"Honor Code Example Set" Which provides an overview of how we are thinking about structuring the honor code of our intentionally-designed cultivar.*

Post-Death Family Engagement

On *el Día de los Muertos* (the Day of the Dead), family members visit graveyards to actively engage with deceased relatives, which in a way maintains them as active family members. Technology will soon allow us to go one step further and create simulacrums of our ancestors.

Earlier in this book, we mentioned the Infinite Conversation, an AI generated, never-ending discussion between Werner Herzog and Slavoj Žižek, which imperfectly-but-impressively mimics both the sorts of things they would say and the tonality of their voices. Training a more advanced iteration of this tech on large datasets amassed in future relatives' lifetimes (we already passively amass reams of information about our thoughts and behaviors now merely by walking around with phones and communicating digitally) and throwing in some good deepfake tech could offer families something with far more agency, responsiveness, and real-world presence than even the most creative Victorian's concept of a ghost.

People will also be able to create AIs trained to model specific books or ways of thinking. For example, a person could train an AI on the Pragmatist's Guide series and give you answers to any question you had from our (Simone and my) collective perspective. What is meaningful about this approach is an AI trained on someone's more polished, carefully-thought-through work (arguably their best intellectual selves) will manifest as something meaningfully different from an AI trained on someone's emails, chat logs, recorded speech, etc.

How will future cultivars leverage this technology? Will a family create a mausoleum filled with the skulls of deceased relatives and use AIs trained on them to provide answers to those seeking advice? Will a family come to be permanently run by a matriarch or patriarch trained on a single ancestor? Will a family create a conglomerate identity trained collectively on all ancestors—or all ancestors that met a certain criteria (and if so, what qualifies one for entry into the family's collective AI pantheon)? Will there be families represented by a single AI trained on all living family members' online footprints and personalities?

The traditions various cultivars establish in the face of these technologies may significantly affect their trajectories and morality, as when the line

between organic family members and AI family members begins to blur, new conceptions of “self” arise.

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CULTURAL IDENTIFIERS

Almost all hard cultures feature some form of cultural identifier that, in addition to signaling membership, serves as a form of emotional armor, reminding adherents of who they are while setting them apart when they interact with “normal” society.

While some cultural identifiers are extremely obvious (consider the dress and styling of Hasidic Jews), others may only be easy to spot when you are moderately informed about a culture. Ritual undergarments worn by those endowed in the LDS Church, for example, require a minimum level of outer dress that can often make a Mormon identifiable to people who know what subtle cues to look for, but most won’t notice a difference.

Cultural identifiers can range from clothing and grooming styles to accents, language, and even home construction, as is the case with Swartzentruber Amish, who see porches as sinful luxuries.

While these differentiators can be beneficial to a culture’s members by, for example, making it easy to spot a friendly face and helping members see themselves as distinct from broader society, they are also often viewed as costly sacrifices that remind adherents, on a day-to-day basis, that membership in their culture comes at a cost. This perceived cost reinforces culture adherents’ sunk cost fallacy, sucking them further in and creating cognitive dissonance when they act in a manner incongruent with their culture.

Though typically hard cultures represent all extremes when it comes to cultural features, evanescent youth cultures demonstrate an exception to this rule when it comes to cultural identifiers, with evanescent youth culture adherents almost always exhibiting even more extreme cultural identifiers than members of hard cultures. This happens because dressing in a way that makes you unacceptable to mainstream society or expressing views no sane person would seriously hold are the two primary mechanisms an individual can use to show commitment to evanescent teen groups, leading these displays of commitment to become more extreme over time until they become untenable to new members and the subculture dissolves.

Take goth culture as an example: Goths need to make more and more "costly signals" to show dedication to the group in something of a Red Queen's race of tattoos, expensive clothing, and face piercings until the culture gets so ridiculous no one wants to join anymore and it dies out (perhaps to be revived later on down the line).

We don't think it's possible for a group like the Index or our House to push strong identifiers given how much we advocate for whatever course of action is pragmatically most efficacious in any individual circumstance. To that end, the closest thing we would have to an advised cultural signal is the model of building an outward-facing character described in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Life*.

Essentially this model recommends that you design your public persona in a way that is easy for others to digest, allowing you to fit snugly in their minds. An optimal public persona is simple and predictable—the caricature of a "real person." While everyone is the protagonist of their *own* story, they are also a *side character* in everyone else's. This means you will be more compelling to people if you portray or create a simplistic stereotype that makes sense and is internally consistent given their worldview.

All that said, should our House become a large cultural group that regularly uses aggressive gene editing, it might make sense to add a permanent "ethnic" cultural identifier (for example, by introducing a new skin or eye color). We discuss this idea and why you might do it in the chapter "Medicine and Technology."

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Naming

While there are a few cultural identifiers we will not address, such as affectations and accents (as they are hard to adopt intentionally without looking like an idiot), naming conventions offer an easy-to-see-and-control cultural identifier that can even be adopted by first-generation culture crafters (should they be willing to change their names—we know several people who have done so). As naming is a cultural identifier more common among ethnic rather than cultural groups and Western cultures aren't famous for having particularly vibrant practices in this domain, our readers may not give the practice enough credit or recognize its creative potential.

Consider Korean naming conventions (as used in Korea, not among the expat population): By looking at how Korean culture names kids, you can see how naming conventions can be used to pass down and reinforce values. For starters, the family name is put before the individual name, demonstrating how family is more important than the individual. Second, an individual's given name is made of two parts: One is unique to them and the other is a generational name shared by all siblings of the same gender. This emphasizes the importance of the family and age along with differences between genders.

Korean naming conventions get *really* interesting at the level of colloquial honorifics that people give to each other. Instead of conveying marriage status (as Westerners do by addressing people by Mr. and Mrs.) they often convey the person's position within their company. While it is easy for Westerners to scoff at this convention as dehumanizing, we can imagine many Koreans scoffing at titles like Mrs. that harken back to the (fairly recent) days when Mrs. was typically accompanied by the husband's name in formal address (e.g. Mrs. Malcolm Collins, rather than Mrs. Simone Collins), clearly deemphasizing the importance of married women vis-a-vis their male partners.

Another interesting naming practice undertaken by some cultures involves changing an individual's name as they get older. In this practice, an individual's name is changed after a coming-of-age ceremony, indicating a life stage or class transition. We see this happen in many Western cultures

when women get married or when people obtain doctoral degrees. Changes in titles founded on these shifts highlight major cultural obsessions: We (Americans) are a culture that values women based on their marital status and that puts a lot of focus on the level of certification someone has achieved from institutions of higher education.

Let's talk about medieval Jewish naming. Have you ever noticed some of your Jewish friends' names feature precious metals? In some instances, this is a product of Jews not being allowed in the major guilds and thus concentrating in metal working professions, however this was not true of all Jewish ghettos (note: in the medieval period, most Jews lived in ghettos within non-Jewish cities).

To start, most Jews did not have surnames. Instead, many Jews were assigned surnames in 1783 due to a misinterpretation of an Austro-Hungarian law (which is why many Jews have German surnames). While the specifics of this are not important for this conversation, what is important is that these names were assigned by government officials and it was a common practice to bribe these officials to get more "prestigious" sounding names, with names involving fancier metals like gold costing more than names involving less valuable metals like silver (though sometimes names with these themes came from being a jeweler). Thus, some Jewish families today still hold names that signified their family's wealth during a point in time a few centuries ago at which an Austro-Hungarian law was misinterpreted.[1] (A weird quirk that occurred during this period of conversion to a culture that used last names was that for a period many Jews would use multiple last names depending on their context e.g., "Son of X", their profession, or where they were from.)[2]

> *Another fun thing to note is that Jewish cultivars can have quite divergent naming traditions: For example, Sephardic Jews will often name children after living relatives, while this is strictly forbidden for Ashkenazi Jews, who often name children after dead relatives.*

We live in Peru part time and find naming conventions there to be incredibly reflective of Peruvian culture's intense focus on the family unit. In Peru, given names typically come from a close family member, middle

names come from mothers' last names, and last names come from fathers. Multiple children often draw their first name from their father and the oldest daughter will frequently draw her first name from her mother. When a woman marries, she often but not always adds her husband's name to the end of her name while keeping both her father's and mother's names. Essentially, every aspect of this naming process demonstrates the importance of family and implies that an individual should think about themselves as part of a wider family unit connected with both sides of their parentage (which contrasts with something like Korean culture, which *also* focuses on family but sees kids as part of their fathers' families).

Some people in modern Western cultures will hyphenate the last names of each spouse upon marriage and pass that hyphenated name on to their kids. Among heterosexual couples, this demonstrates a focus on gender equality along with disinterest in being an intergenerational durable culture, as obviously this practice can't continue for more than one or two generations.

Historical Calvinist and the derivative Puritan cultures featured a colorful naming practice focused around a belief called nominative determinism (well, at the time it was a belief; now the concept of nominative determinism is somewhat attested in scientific literature). Essentially, nominative determinism claims that you can influence a person's life path through what name they are given. Historically, this meant many Calvinist women were given names like Silence, Amity, Virtue, Hope, Chastity, Obedience, and Prudence (there is even a case of a Puritan being named Has-descendants which sounds like the kind of nutty thing we would do).[3] Nominative determinism is telling about Calvinist cultural values, as it implies that the end goal is the only thing that matters, and that everything, even a person's identity, is only a tool to achieve said goal.

Our House has adopted nominative determinism and hopes to carry it into the future, meaning we optimize around names harkening to people and concepts we hope our children will emulate. This has us somewhat carrying on the practice as it was utilized by our Calvinist ancestors—for example, Malcolm's ancestor Jasper Collins named his son Ulysses Sherman Collins after Union generals Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman. In the antebellum South, this was like naming your kid Adolf Hitler, but the name exemplified an important practice in conveying and maintaining family

values. We prefer not to “other” our kids *quite* to that extent, but stick with the tradition through names like Octavian (which we gave to our eldest son).

Another family tradition in naming is to look for any opportunity to use someone's name to acquire family advancement or reinforce important strategic ties. For example, Malcolm’s great grandfather Carr P. Collins was named after his dad's boss. Such choices convey the cultural value that the only thing that matters is the end goal. While we wouldn’t necessarily do this with one of our kids’ first names, middle names are of great utility in strengthening ties and alliances due to their low importance in our daily lives.

When we can’t use middle names for career advancement, we focus them on something that will be fun for the kids when they are in middle school and high school, as that is an age during which people use middle names the most. Thus, we named our daughter Titan Invictus Collins and son Torsten Savage Collins. These names also show our larger dedication to nominative determinism: All our kids have names that are meant to convey power and are just different enough from common regional names to remind them that they are not like other people and not members of the dominant cultural group.

A final element of nominative determinism in our House’s naming tradition is to never use strictly feminine names. Studies show girls with masculine names have better emotional control, advance further in their careers, and earn more money.[4] More generally, the very concept of “female” that pop culture carries is not germane to what being born with two X chromosomes means to us, as our culture doesn’t value many commonly-female-associated traits such as consensus building and sensitivity to feelings. We talk more about our thoughts on gender later, but suffice to say our first daughter is named Titan Invictus Collins and our next candidate names for daughters are equally aggressive.

People sometimes ask us why we give our kids names that are more likely to inspire bullying (primarily because they don’t fit societal norms). Getting picked on is just a sign that you differ enough from mainstream culture that you are activating society's immune system. In addition to reinforcing our kids’ understanding that they are not like other people and more is expected

of them than is expected of others, this trains them to ignore social pressure to conform. This second point is a critical skill for anyone who aims to create a better future for our species, as doing so requires some violations of social norms. In addition, as the middleman minority phenomenon demonstrates,[5] despite social narratives to the contrary, othered groups that face discrimination but maintain a cultural focus on education often outcompete the dominant population of an area financially.

Though we weren't obligated to make any changes to implement this element of our naming convention as ours is called House Collins, we also like the concept of using one's House name as one's last name. If one of our kids decides to craft a totally new culture, we would encourage them to change their last name to reflect that culture and its Index House name. Similarly, if one of our sons ended up adopting his wife's House culture, we would only think it natural for him to adopt her last name.

All cultures can look mortifying from outsiders' perspectives. We understand that many people see our family's naming conventions as bizarre, controlling, conceited, and cringeworthy, while to us the idea of naming your kid just something that sounds nice feels emotionally indulgent, aimlessly capricious, and frivolous. Pop cultures will always shame people who stick to a strong and unique cultural identity by calling it weird or cringe—that is how they pressure people into converting and thus spread. The difference between cultures that grow and those that fail is how you react to that shame. From our perspective, any culture or person who is below replacement rate that wants to shame us into conforming to their fading existence is about as relevant as a fart in a hurricane.

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Cultural Language

Cultures differ their internal communication through mechanisms as bold as entirely different language, as is seen with groups like the Amish who speak Pennsylvania Dutch, a form of German, to mechanisms as subtle as unique words and affectations, which are common in many haven cultures.

From time to time, cultural language seeps into widespread usage, especially if the originating culture produces influential media and sets trends. Consider the various phrases, words, and affectations originally common in both American Black and LGBT communities that have been co-opted by pop culture.

What we find most interesting is the manner in which hard cultures use language. Scientology provides a good case study, with members often using a large number of acronyms in their daily speech. Doing so identifies them to other cultural insiders while forcing outsiders to appear less knowledgeable.

When considering distinct language for your own House, consider that the primary function of most insider cultural language is to categorize and "other" both outsiders and insiders. From a tactical standpoint (and we elaborate on this later in the book), we therefore find the most impactful use of language pertains to the way cultures classify people. Consider, for example, how Scientologists use the acronym SP (suppressive persons) to refer to those actively challenging their church, and how the Amish often refer to non-Amish as "the English."

In the case of our House, there are really only two unique words we use with any regularity and have not discussed elsewhere in the book, "Husk" and "Shrieker."

Husk:

We use this term to describe a person who is unable to change their mind when presented with new information or seriously engage with new ideas. From our perspective, such people have lost the key element of human existence. Our cultivar holds that a living human is the medium upon which

ideas and perspectives interact. While spiders can only learn to make better webs through the spiders that made bad webs dying, humans can test their models of the world against other models and information. Particularly virulent memetic sets have evolved the ability to shut down this process in order to ensure they can never be expunged from a person's mind. Once this happens, a person stops being meaningfully human and is better thought of as a memetic set wearing a human-like skin suit. In other words, a husk is a corpse puppeteered by the thing that consumed its identity—like an “Edgar suit” or a “Billy suit” (*Men In Black* or *Adventure Time*; choose your pop culture reference).

To be clear, a Husk is *not* someone who disagrees with us or follows a different tradition (as people who disingenuously manipulate their followers will almost certainly imply). A Husk is someone of any tradition incapable of meaningfully engaging with new ideas.

Shrieker:

This term is used to describe a category of husk that tries to force someone to comply with their memetic set’s framework of acceptable behavior by signaling social rejection. What makes shriekers so insidious is that they do this to complete strangers from different social circles (which makes the attempted social rejection feckless). Humans evolved to fear social rejection, as historically it meant we would be expelled from the tribe and likely die. As such, even the most lucid of humans will experience an illogically strong reaction when complete strangers online signal that their behavior is unacceptable (e.g., someone calling them cringe, a freak, or a Nazi). The emotional pain we feel upon social rejection evolved to work within small groups in which everyone knew each other, but shriekers exploit this reaction in large pseudonymous venues. Some cultural viruses have evolved to exploit this. After consuming an individual's identity, they marionette the corpse into barging into venues of public conversation to repeatedly signal social rejection to strangers.

The supervirus has become particularly adept at utilizing shriekers to make thoughts, ideas, and lifestyles that threaten its spread unsafe to express in public venues. Why? There are few things more threatening to a social virus than a person proudly living life their own way; if other people started to

see this as a normal way of being, most viruses would lose a lot of their power.

Both of these terms were designed to be of active utility to members of our cultivar.

“Husk” as a term reinforces how much we value the ability to consider new perspectives and ideas by framing the loss of this ability as tantamount to death. It also helps members save time by encouraging them to write people off once they realize they are a Husk.

“Shrieker” as a term helps members of our culture turn down the volume of this easy-to-hijack social signal by dehumanizing those who exploit it in an effort to manipulate members of our culture into conformity with a projected “correct way of being” (correct from the shrieker’s point of cultural reference, of course). When you see a person as a harmless zombie shrieking and pointing at you, it is easy to realize how little their “rejection” matters. Framing shriekers so negatively may also prevent iterations of our culture from someday adopting similar strategies.

> *Side note: A very interesting behavior you sometimes see from shriekers is the formation of a “hive.” This happens when a virus has effectively created husks that feel a compulsion to signal social rejection about those not slavishly following their concept of cultural norms but that fail to ensure this compulsion was only elicitable by signaling this to outgroup members. Thus, clusters of shriekers will gather to masturbate this compulsion in front of each other in closed communities that no one who doesn’t already agree with them visits. (Kiwi farms is a good example of a hive.)*

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1 We couldn’t find any peer-reviewed articles on this phenomenon but did find it attested to in multiple sources (I, Malcolm, first heard it on a tour of the Synagogue in Prague). There is a chance it is apocryphal but the chance seems low given the specifics of how the law was applied and how common bribes were during that period. My guess is that it might not have been super widespread but happened a few times and spread as a story because it is juicy and aligns with people's preconceptions. Regardless, I can’t find anything arguing against it, it makes sense in historical context, and it is interesting, so we are leaving it in.

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Figlio, D. (2005). *Boys named Sue: Disruptive children and their peers.* https://doi.org/10.3386/w11277

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FAMILY, DATING, & SEX

Views around sexuality and partner finding seem to be what get hard cultures in the most hot water within our modern cultural context. Many hard culture stances vis-a-vis LGBT viewpoints, for example, are highly intolerant, and there is widespread modern discomfort with hard cultural partner matching practices (how early people marry, how much influence an individual's parents have, arranged marriages, dowries, etc.). At the same time, modern society has utterly failed to help people establish and maintain secure, loving, long-term relationships.

Is there a way to marry the stable birth rates of hard cultures with the egalitarian perspective of modern society?

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LGBT Sexuality

There is a reason why very few traditional cultures are “OK” with same-sex relationships (and not a single widespread long-lived culture is/was). When a culture tolerates openly gay relationships, its adherents produce offspring at a lower rate and it ends up being outcompeted, population-wise, by its neighbors. Even if you were to isolate a culture that accepted gay people on an island, a homophobic subculture would eventually splinter out of it and come to outnumber and overwhelm its parent culture in time.

Even today, cultural movements that are most accepting of gay, lesbian, bisexual and other non-traditional sexualities (not to mention unconventional relationship formats) have a very low birth rate when contrasted with their more conservative counterparts. This is true not just within the United States but also within and between just about every other nation in the world. So not only do countries less accepting of gay people have more children, but within any given nation, the cultivars and regions less accepting of LGBT people also have more children.[1]

While it is true that cultures accepting of LGBT individuals have enjoyed enormous success within the past couple of generations, they have done this without fixing their birth rate problem. More worrisome still, the memetic package that causes straight people to support the LGBT community also appears to correlate with lower birth rate per a survey we ran (0.6 children per woman). This creates huge negative externalities for the LGBT community over the long run.

Research on genopolitics shows us that political beliefs, along with our larger sociological profiles, have a large genetic component (for more info on this and citations, read the subchapter**:** “Humanity’s Genetic Shift”). If you systematically hunt and kill all the elephants who are not afraid of people with large tusks (or otherwise sterilize them), eventually elephants’ tusks will get smaller and they will get more aggressive. If you sterilize everyone who supports gay people … well, we should expect a strong swing against the community a few decades down the line. As long-term supporters of the community, this is deeply concerning to us.

As we wrote earlier in the book: But surely this change will be slow … right? Actually, it is already measurable. Here[2] is a paper quantitatively showing how differential fertility rate can have substantial impact on attitudes toward social issues. From 2004 to 2018, the differential fertility (more conservative, more kids) increased the number of U.S. adults opposed to same-sex marriage by 17%, from 46.9 million to 54.8 million. (Interestingly, because unmarried and childless people vote more liberally this change makes a population more liberal within a generation[3] but more conservative between generations.[4])

The only way to ensure a culture tolerant of gay people spreads and outcompetes its more traditional competitors on a multi-generational scale is to ensure that the culture finds a way to "use" gay people that does not lower its overall birth rate. The classic example here is the "gay uncle hypothesis," which goes so far as to claim being gay is evolutionarily beneficial because gay men can dedicate themselves to their siblings' offspring and may be associated with greater attractiveness in female siblings. As mentioned in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality*, this hypothesis is not well supported by data.

Note: There is one study a lot of talking head "internet intellectuals" cite these days when arguing that the gay uncle hypothesis may have merit, in which researchers found that Tibetan families who send one sibling to be a celibate monk have more more grandkids on average, but only when the decision is out of the parents' hands.[5] While this study is fascinating, the mechanism of action is a bit more nuanced and makes us doubt its generalizability. First, it does not control for religiosity (which correlates with both birth rate and sending kids to become monks). Second, it only affects the birth rate of brothers and only increases their birth rate by 1.7 (a family would need at least three sons for this to be effective). Furthermore, the way this practice appears to increase birth rate is by leading monks' non-monk brothers to have their first kid earlier: "This result suggests that the benefit contained by men from their monk brothers is … achieved through earlier reproduction for their

wives." Given that the increase in total of grandkids is only 1.15, it feels very unlikely to be generalizable—or at least not generalizable enough to lead to gay individuals appearing at about equal rates in cultures all over the world in very different circumstances.

Also note that different cultures appear to be able to use "gay uncles" to their benefit at different rates. For example, while Latin American cultures are not overtly friendly to gay people, they do have a path to utilize them. One of the core problems of Latin American cultures is that their tight networks of family connections can reduce families' social mobility. Because families soft reject their gay members, not offering them nepotistic opportunities as much as other family members, gays in Latin America are more likely to make their own connections and careers. This means that, while on average they do worse than other family members, they also have a higher probability of jumping up one (or several) social status rungs as they make their way in the world without as much family support. As many remain loyal to their relatives, offering them support and connections despite getting little support and return, they offer a high-risk, high-reward roll of the dice for their families, having the potential to pull relatives up in status if they do strike it rich and even be assigned family patriarch-like roles. This is why, of the hard cultures out there, those in Latin America are some of the most friendly to gays. This isn't to say that they will be nice to gays per se; they just won't light them on fire, drag them behind cars, or throw them off buildings at the same rate as other hard cultures.

While having a gay sibling with no kids might make it slightly easier to raise four kids, the presence of a gay sibling is not going to encourage you to have *eight* kids instead (which is mathematically what you would need to see happening given the low birth rate among those who support the LGBT community). The reality is that such a strategy implied by the gay uncle hypothesis could only impact the birth rate of one's siblings enough to make it beneficial if you essentially turned gay individuals into slaves for their siblings' families or forced them to raise a portion of their siblings' kids, which is patently worse than the situation we have now. (Note: If you are

wondering why biologically gay animals exist in many species given the effect of same-sex attraction on fecundity, read *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality,* in which we explore this topic extensively.)

But what if a culture's gay members somehow increased the fitness of the culture at a more macro scale? Perhaps a culture could leverage the fact that gay individuals had kids at a way lower rate to put them in positions of power and administration and thus lower nepotism.

Humans naturally have a desire to benefit their own children over other people and some cultivars even frame doing so as perfectly acceptable. This is called amoral familism and is advantageous from a cultural evolution standpoint because one's children will have a much higher probability of staying a member of their culture than … well, anyone else. Cultivars practicing amoral familism would benefit tremendously if they could maintain the practice while mitigating the corruption it causes by differentially putting gay people in positions of bureaucratic power.

Well guess what? We don't need to imagine what would happen if we developed a cultivar that evolved to disproportionately place gay individuals in powerful, bureaucratic roles as we already have a great example of one: The Catholic Church. The Catholic Church more or less accidentally[6] evolved a system that outcompeted its competitors by utilizing gay individuals disproportionately in their organizational bureaucracy in a way that dramatically reduced graft and corruption. After all, in a medieval context, if a local bishop had kids, they would be more likely to guide political intrigue in a direction that benefited their family than the Church. If Catholic bishops were able to have kids, the title would almost certainly have become hereditary instead of being rewarded on a pseudo-meritocratic basis.

> *Note: We are neither saying that all gay Catholics are in the clergy nor that all individuals in the clergy are gay. We are merely observing that if you were to compare the average sexual inclination of Catholic priests or nuns to that of the general Catholic population, the gay population will be higher among clergy. How can we say that so confidently?*

A number of sources provide data supporting this assertion. Wikipedia[7] has a fairly good page on the topic with estimates ranging between 15% and 50% of Catholic clergy being LGBT. For a specific example, Reverend Professor Elizabeth Stuart estimates 33% of Catholic priests are gay.[8]

Outside of just data, we can also look at the queer community's history for evidence. After the second Vatican council pushed nuns to live closer to cities, a large portion of lesbian advocates were ex-nuns. The urbanization of nuns led to former nuns having a large impact on the development of modern lesbian culture in the same way bikers of the same period had a significant impact on gay male culture. (If you find this topic interesting, check out the book: *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence* by Nancy Manahan and Rosemary Keefer Curb.)

This system, while unintentional, was remarkably effective. As *The Pragmatist's Guide to Governance* shows, governance structures become more corrupt and bureaucratic with time and age—and while the Catholic Church did suffer from this, it weathered time better than any other institution we can think of. Ultimately and without intentionality, the Catholic Church found individuals to serve the role of "court eunuchs" at scale and without required castration.

> *If you are wondering why we are not talking about the pedophilia scandal in the Catholic Church, recall that we already covered it earlier in the book. Suffice to say molestation cases in the Catholic Church (4%) are lower than they are in other large bureaucracies like the American Public School system (4%-7%)[9] and the Catholic Church doesn't go out of its way to cover them up or protect the perpetrators any more than its corollaries like the teachers' unions. Actually, the Catholic Church is less effective at covering up pedophilia, as can be seen by the fact that you likely did not know about the school molestation crisis or the teachers' unions covering it up despite problem being about ten times larger in the United States' public school system (just due to the number of people involved) than it ever was in the Catholic Church.*

Disproportionate representation of non-reproducing populations (including LGBT individuals) in bureaucratic positions of power explains why Catholic cultivars have been able to lean into amoral familism at levels much higher than other cultures could sustain. This explains in part why Catholic *countries* have much higher levels of corruption than others as only the priesthood has the protective mechanism in it—not the civil government. (For example, having lived in Italy and South America, we can say that to many cultivars in those regions, it would be actively *immoral* to not differentially hire extended family members should you be in a position of power, *even if* they lack competence or have sticky fingers.)

The Catholic solution to gay individuals may work should you create a culture in which individuals in the governing bureaucracy (both civil and religious)—but *only* individuals in the governing bureaucracy—can have same-sex romantic and sexual partners but not opposite sex romantic partners. That said, we don't like this solution. The idea of essentially having a job assigned to you at birth is a culturally repellent concept to us and it is apparently distasteful to the Catholic institution as well—hence their refusal to accept that such was the pressure their "no marriage for priests" system created (it certainly didn't come from the Bible).

Another way to protect people born gay is to place LGBT people in necessary societal roles that make having kids difficult. A classic example of this can be seen with the Sacred Band of Thebes, a lauded all gay (or bi) military unit that played a key role in ending Spartan military dominance in the Greek world. In truth, we don't have enough historical data to say how well the Sacred Band really performed in its larger cultural role (though studies show risk-taking is associated with being gay, so who knows).[10] The prospect of giving same-sex people specific roles in society also runs into the same problem noted above: It forces people into specific occupations based on factors outside their control. Finally, just as most Greek city states that flirted with accepting gay people only lasted for a few generations, modern LGBT-accepting cultures will quickly decline should they fail to innovate a durable cultural solution.

Another (far more unethical) cultural "solution" to gayness is to force gay men to transition to women, converting them into heterosexual trans women. Switching out gay men for women somewhat lowers the "unpaired

male" problem faced by polygynous societies (societies in which some men take multiple wives)—namely, by reducing the number of angry men who can't find a partner, which increases rates of things like murder, rape, and dishonesty (for clarification, this policy reduces the number of "incels" circulating within society by artificially increasing the number of available women through forced transition).

Doing so also allows the benefits of polygyny, such as genes associated with high wealth and achievement being passed down at higher rates, and wealth being more evenly distributed among a cultivar's child-rearing population (as wealthy people have and pay for more kids—for example, both Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud, the founder of Saudi Arabia, and his successor Saud bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, had over a hundred kids).[11] It should come as no surprise, then, that some Islamic cultivars that practice polygyny have evolved to do just that: Have gay men become women. (And to be clear, most of the people forced to transition like this in these cultures are not "trans" as we would understand it but gay men given the "transition or die" choice.)

People think of gay-male-to-heterosexual-female conversion as being a modern phenomenon localized to Islamic culture[12] but it actually has fairly deep historic routes. In light of this practice, it is somewhat ironic that being accepting of trans individuals and not gay individuals is historically the more *conservative* position while in modern American society, the inverse is true. While this system wins points for creativity, forcing people to transition is an inelegant and immoral solution (at least from our cultivar's perspective—but remember our culture is obsessed with individual agency to an extent that might blind us to the common good).

Perhaps you wonder why one couldn't just create a culture that is both LGBT friendly and *also* blessed with a high birth rate more generally. As we keep saying, if an iteration of that same culture that was *not* tolerant of gay people enjoys even a slightly higher birth rate, eventually said iteration will splinter off and outcompete the parent group. This is why, historically speaking, periods of LGBT acceptance are so brief and more often terminated by internal cultural shifts than by outside conquest or cultural defeat by an outside force. Gay-tolerant cultures have evolved multiple times throughout history and—in city-based cultures—have always been

quashed within just a few generations. A look at the relevant statistics indicates there is zero reason to think this time will be any different.

At the civilizational level, if you actually care about people being able to live their birth sexuality without oppression, then you *must* solve the birth rate problem. Lazy, indolent justicles can't simply handwave away a problem because it is morally difficult to tackle. In doing so, they sacrifice the quality of life of the LGBT community two generations from now in the name of immediate convenience.

We need to craft a culture that accepts people of all sexual representations while strongly encouraging them to raise children and granting them access to the resources needed to accomplish that feat. When kids within our own House's cultivar turn out to be gay, we will do what we can to support them in having as large a family as possible and we hope to pass this mandate down to future generations.

If you really wanted to build a durable culture that accepts openly gay members, you could leverage the fact that lesbians can give birth at twice the rate of straight couples and gay people are more likely to have larger, stable polycules to effectively create very large, co-parenting families. There is absolutely a path to some Index cultivars being gay at the core and still very fruitful.

This approach would, of course, require significant cultural tweaking as currently children who grow up in polycules have poorer emotional health than those who grow up in two-parent households. A likely factor undermining polycule kids' mental wellbeing involves political infighting for resources among parents (e.g., Mother A and Mother B fighting for attention and extra help from Father X in raising Kids AX and BX). If children could be created with blended DNA—that is, DNA from *all* polycule members—competition might be reduced.[13] Regardless, IVF, IVG, and artificial wombs play a critical role in the success of a strategy like this.

Perhaps you wonder why we care so much about creating a culture inclusive of the queer community given how little we care about human suffering.

1. As much as we think suffering is not an intrinsic negative, we see no reason to inflict it upon anyone should there be no benefit. Groups are also motivated to tear down cultures that cause suffering to outsiders, hence it is best to avoid this if possible.
2. The queer community has utility. For whatever reason, throughout history, the creative thinking bell curve of gay people has skewed to the right. Something about the gay perspective allows them to see the world differently enough that they are more likely to create high-quality cultural innovations and exports.[14]
3. Given our beliefs as outlined in the Life and Death chapter, it should be clear that we believe a diversity of perspectives and competing subcultures to be one of the highest orders of good in the great cycle. The more unique perspectives are silenced, the weaker we become.

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While this is less of an issue today as it was historically, some traditional cultures heavily punish women for appearing sexually available. Even today, many cultures psychologically punish masturbation and porn consumption. Why have so many unrelated cultures evolved these practices? Is prudery still of utility in a constructed culture?

The common-sense presumption that a woman dressing modestly is less likely to experience sexual violence is an unlikely motivator for culturally-pressured sexual modesty. Not only does dressing in a provocative manner *not* appear to increase the probability that someone is raped, but dressing modestly *does*.[15] In addition, there is a positive correlation between the number of rapes within a culture and the modesty expected of women within that culture. This can be seen both between and within communities. In other words, rape is more common in groups like the extremist Amish and among extremist Islamists when contrasted with cultures that don't have strong modesty mandates. In short, modest dress is associated with heightened odds of being raped and culturally mandated modest dress correlates with higher rates of rape within a culture.

If the prohibition against provocative clothing in women (very few cultures have prohibitions against provocative clothing in men) did not evolve to reduce rapes, then why bother with modest dress? The mandate against women appearing sexually available common across cultures appears to exist for one core reason: Cultural signaling. Cultures that admire female sexuality are likely to feature more sexual promiscuity and less dedicated partnering-off of adherents.

Why discourage recreational sex with non-dedicated partners? In traditional cultures, a child born outside of a family unit was very likely to become a ward of the township, which increased the town's collective financial burden. Children born out of wedlock and ultimately orphaned were also more likely to become pickpockets and join local gangs (which historically were made up of much younger individuals and more dangerous to the general public). Should sexual promiscuity ultimately place such heavy burdens on societies, it would make sense that they would discourage it.

There is another reason why hard cultures often evolve to impose female modesty. Most men are biologically programmed to desire young, genetically fit, fertile women. As such, secular forces in societies (like companies) can use sexualized young women to sell things (be they products or messages). This can cause cultures to more broadly value sexualized women, which almost always comes at the expense of general appreciation of less sexy female roles like motherhood (an older woman who already has kids on average is less sexually appealing than a younger woman who does not). Loss of respect for motherhood at a societal level can be catastrophic for birth rates given the sacrifices required to become a parent. (For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see the subchapter "Glorification of Motherhood.")

What about masturbation? Why on earth are so many long-lived cultures wildly against something that research shows to be largely beneficial (see The Pragmatist's Guides to Sexuality and Relationships for a detailed review of the research on this). Masturbation is condemned for two reasons: The first and more obvious is that people who are not masturbating will only be able to experience orgasm through sex. Such people will presumably have more sex with their dedicated partners and be more motivated to find a dedicated partner while young, which will lead them to have more children on average.

The second and less immediately clear cultural motivator to discourage masturbation is that while self-pleasure has positive health effects, the arbitrary and consistent denial of impulses has even *stronger* positive health effects, as it strengthens the parts of the brain associated with inhibitory pathways—the pathways used to shut down impulses and intrusive thoughts and emotions. Cultures don't *need* to single out masturbation to strengthen adherents' inhibitory pathways though; a similar effect could be achieved through practices like fasting or denying oneself certain foods (both of which are also common across successful hard cultures).

Mandates toward modesty and against masturbation seem to have evolved over time within most of the cultures in which they are common today and were not typically a feature of those cultures at their inception. Consider early Christianity: While Jesus did not talk about sex, Paul, who built early Christian communities, certainly did. Generally, it seems like anything you

wanted to do was OK so long as you were married. Though some individuals had the “gift” of being free from sexual thoughts, those who lacked this gift were best off getting married, then doing whatever they wanted.

Contrast this early Christian view with Roman Catholics seeing masturbation as sinful, Mormons contextualizing masturbation as a sin (to the point that young Mormons are regularly quizzed on the topic during their missions), John Calvin writing that "the voluntary spilling of semen outside of intercourse between a man and a woman is a monstrous thing. Deliberately to withdraw from coitus in order that semen may fall on the ground is double monstrous," and the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, arguing that “an unproductive sexual act, whether that should be in the form of masturbation or coitus interruptus ... destroyed the souls of the individuals who practice it." Virtually every hard form of Christianity evolved to condemn non-productive ejaculations despite early Christianity not featuring strong policies on the subject. To us, this demonstrates just how much this cultural demand positively increases the fitness of adherents and thus how strong the evolutionary pressure to develop it must be.

Should we want to explore a culture with sexual prohibitions truly optimized to encourage a high birth rate, we have to look at Judaism, which had a long time for evolution to hone into very, very specific practices. In addition to condemning premarital sex, premarital hand holding, masturbation, and coitus interruptus, stricter forms of Judaism even mandate abstinence for two weeks after menstruation. What is interesting is that while conservative Jews have a high birth rate, it was (historically at least) dwarfed by that of cultures which merely mandated abstinence and sex inside of marriage (such as Catholicism and Mormonism). Judaism only beats those cultures now due to an intentional, logical devotion to growing their population through birth rate, which is partially motivated by the reduction in Jewish population that happened during the Holocaust (and thus some have hypothesized it will recede over time).

What does the above reversal in birth rates show us about the world today? Were these abstinence, modesty, and anti-masturbation systems historically evolved to increase birth rates only effective when used in moderation? Is it that they are no longer effective today? Or is it simply more efficacious for

parents to logically explain to their kids why it is important to have lots of children? Perhaps a combination of all these factors is at play.

Ultimately, cultural mandates for modest dress and against masturbation harm the psychological development of group adherents. For more info on masturbation in particular, see *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality*, but suffice to say that—aside from masturbation developing into an addiction just like any dopamine-associated act, such as eating food, is liable to become—the act only produces serious negative psychological effects when an individual contextualizes it as shameful or somehow bad. In other words, if you don't *think* masturbation is bad, it's not going to have bad effects on you so long as you haven't developed an unhealthy addiction to the habit. Worse, individuals who view masturbation as shameful can be seen in the data to consume *more* porn. You can observe this effect by overlapping maps investigating individuals' views of sexuality with maps of online porn consumption.

Another huge problem with modern hard cultures that mandate modesty, look down on sexuality, and frown on masturbation is that they will feature higher rates of attrition. Few things lure teens into deconversion more than sexuality. In this modern world, an ideal hard culture would be able to both venerate motherhood *and* be sexy.

So how does our personal culture approach sexuality? As we see no compelling evidence that contextualizing sexuality as shameful will help them, we don't discourage masturbation or even well-protected, safe, premarital sex (though there are some caveats on that front, which we cover in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Relationships*).

Generally speaking, our culture is neutral toward provocative dress so long as it is worn with a specific goal in mind and not as generic self-signaling. Sexuality can be a powerful weapon against pop culture if utilized intentionally and methodically. Were you, for example, to create a cultivar with a really sexy "traditional" outfit that became aspirational in its sex appeal to pop cultural groups whose members also had the mental fortitude to not succumb to sexualizing themselves, you would have a pretty powerful package.

In our House, we will explain to our kids that there is no moral difference between non-reproductive sex and masturbation. Both are recreational activities that activate arousal pathways. As with any other recreational activity—be it eating tasty foods, drinking, passively scrolling on social media platforms, or playing video games—moderation is key. In short, we want members of our House to advantageously use—rather than be used by—sex and sexual signaling.

Unlike masturbation, sex has potential tactical value in that it can be used to manipulate other individuals' hormonal states and lead people to form an illogical bond to you. In addition, there are various means by which sex may be exchanged for resources, access, influence, or power, so it is worth putting in the effort to build some skill even if you find the whole act repellant (see *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality* for more info on how this system can be gamed). As our House views sexuality as only being moral when it is used in a tactically beneficial manner, we are in the rare cultural position of finding something like an exchange of sex for money as being morally superior to purely recreational sex.

Another "weird" thing about our House's approach to sexuality is that we don't see it as the primary tool for creating children. Our theological mandate toward intergenerational improvement means that we view the act of creating children through sex as a means of last resort that should only be utilized in the face of extreme financial limitation or resource deprivation. Children created through sex cannot be selected based on optimal polygenic risk scores or otherwise genetically modified, which, given our worldview, is wildly neglectful. As Simone says, "The greatest gift we can give our children is the knowledge that they are a product of science and not their parents having sex."

Bonus Note: On Culturally Mandated Genital Mutilation

The relative rarity of female genital mutilation among successful cultures suggests that it is not a good strategy for increasing birth rates. It is hard to see how male genital mutilation might increase birth rates, but it has become common among successful cultures,

likely by accident (similar to how having one's thyroid removed became a medical fad for a while). We say "by accident," as it appears to have initially been an extremely costly ritual, being originally performed on adults to signal group allegiance and build a sunk cost fallacy around group alignment. Eventually (after the first Temple period), one subfaction of the group figured out how to "cheat" performing circumcision before a person could remember the pain. Now that this hack has become common, the whole ritual is kind of pointless, culturally speaking.

Robosexuality

There is a Futurama episode in which we learn that humanity almost went extinct after sex bots became very good at becoming girlfriends and boyfriends to humans. This crisis was only rectified by creating a negative social stigma around these relationships, framing them as "robosexuality" (and to a lesser extent, making them illegal). When we first saw this episode, we thought it was funny. Now we seriously wonder if robsexuality is the hill on which our species will die.

Can we really say that back when we were young, horny, and struggling to date, we would have been able to resist forming a deep emotional relationship with an amalgam of GPT 10 and a dynamically animated AI girlfriend / boyfriend? Humans and cultures that primarily motivate marriage through the emotional rewards that come from it (be they sex or love) will likely be wiped out by the proliferation of AIs on the dating market within the next 50 to 100 years.

While you may assume we would need to prematurely code a disgust for romantic and sexual robot-human relations into our culture, the way our cultivar (House Collins) frames sexuality makes us uniquely resistant to the hazards of robosexuality. We don't prohibit things like gay sex or masturbation so long as a person has kids. A similar mindset can be taken to robosexuality (so long as robosexuality does not turn out to be wildly addictive—who is to say how good these AIs will get at hijacking lower human brain functions?). In fact, if AI gets worried enough about human

birthrates and is coded to be almost perfectly aligned with humanity, it might even handle genetic recombination and childbirth (through artificial wombs) better than your typical human partner.

Expect this to be a major issue that many cultures will be forced to address in the near future. Cultivars that fail to either successfully prohibit robosexuality or find a way to embrace robot-human relations in a manner that maintains high birth rates will go extinct.

J. D. Unwin & Sexual Liberation

J. D. Unwin was a professor at Cambridge back in the 1930s who did some really interesting research into 80 native cultures and six civilizations. He developed a theory, which evidence seemed to support, claiming that deistic, sexually illiberal cultures that value rationality had the best outcomes of all culture types (with cultural output measured in literature, art, science, furniture, architecture, engineering, and agriculture). Unwin also observed that the prosperity produced by these three traits leads to sexual liberation, followed by a decline within three generations. Of all the traits he found that correlated with a culture on the precipice of flourishing or collapsing, the most important was the rate of prenuptial chastity.

Unwin used his data to make specific predictions: That within three generations of a sexual liberation movement, our own culture would begin to see:

1. A breakdown of strict monogamy
2. Lower rates of religious practice
3. A decline in rationality

Fortunately, he made these predictions long enough ago that we can now see whether they were predictive. Unarguably, Unwin’s first and second predictions were spot on and if you consider movements like postmodernism to be anti-rational, he was certainly correct in his third prediction as well. As much as we would like to dismiss Unwin’s research

based on the time and culture in which it was produced, his predictive capabilities nevertheless give us pause.

For a weird science experiment from this period that also had an uncomfortable take on gay people but was weirdly predictive, see: “But Surely the Problem will Fix Itself: Behavioral Sinks” in the Appendix.

Levirate Marriages

Levirate marriages tell us something interesting about the role marriage traditionally played in society when contrasted with its current role. In a Levirate marriage, a brother of a deceased man is obligated to marry his brother’s widow. This tradition exists across the Abrahamic faiths but is also seen in many other cultures, including among the Shona of Zimbabwe, Huns, Kurds, in Japan (under the name aniyome ni naosu), and in India (under the name niyogi).

This brother-marrying-deceased-brother's-widow practice appears to have co-evolved so many times because within cultures that do not permit women to work, it reduces the odds that widowed women and their children become wards of the wider community by placing them under the responsibility of the man most genetically related to the newly fatherless children. The fact that Levirate marriages are virtually unheard of outside of extremely patriarchal societies (societies that grant women less independence) gives this theorized motive credence.

The practice may actually lower birth rates by sometimes obligating younger men to marry older widowed women, as has been concretely recorded in African communities that actively practice this tradition.[16] It appears Levirate marriages present the rare case of a tradition that adds fitness to a culture *not* by increasing birth rate, but by increasing social cohesion (another example of such a tradition is monogamy).

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Dating and Partner Finding

A common misconception about the traditional model of marriage we use in the West is that it is but one of several ways a relationship might be successfully structured that just happens to have caught on due to the expansion of European civilization. The truth is, while cultures throughout history have tried thousands upon thousands of ways of structuring sexuality and relationships, the same one or two configurations keep "winning" over and over again—not because they are morally better, but because they most effectively increase the fitness of their cultures. There are both many more ways to structure relationships than most people would think and far fewer "viable" structures at an intergenerational level.

The only two stable relationship structures that have existed in large societies are:

- Strict monogamy
- Strict monogamy for most, but limited polygyny (many women one man) for wealthy or high-status men

> *Note: You may be thinking: "But don't groups like some Muslims and Yeminite Jews demonstrate that a culture can last a long time, be prolific, and be generally polygynous?" Actually, these cultures show the opposite: In both Muslim and Yeminite Jewish cultures, it is fairly rare for a man to have more than one wife. In Saudi Arabia, only 12.41% of men have more than one wife*[17] *and among the Yeminite Jews, only 1% have more than one wife.*[18] *Cultures like the early Mormons, which saw as much as 20% to 30% of men marry multiple wives, simply don't survive very long in that state.*[19]

A great peek into some of the "weirder" sexuality and marriage structures that went extinct is offered through religious prohibitions. While Islam features a fairly "vanilla" form of polygyny, it managed to capture some of the older structures it was replacing in amber through the specific bans the Prophet Muhammad placed on them.

One example of this is *Nikah ijtimaa*. In this form of partnering, multiple men would have intercourse with a woman, and if she bore a child, she would choose one of the men to be the father of the child. Another is *Nikah Istibdaa*. In this practice, a wife goes to live with a higher-status man than her husband and has sexual relations with him while being prohibited from having sexual relations with her husband. Once she becomes pregnant, she returns to her husband. The purpose of this practice was to obtain a child of "noble breed." Yet another pre-Islamic tradition was *Nikāḥ Shighār*, in which two men would exchange their daughters, sisters, or other close women for marriage without paying the bride price. So yes: The world *did* feature a broad array of partnering practices, however they were outcompeted independently by models similar to one of the two above.

Another common misconception is that the new, progressive direction our society is taking in relation to dating is a more "evolved" mindset when contrasted with more traditional cultural models. We go over the statistics on this topic in detail in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Relationships* and *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality*, but in short, societies' current "partner-finding" practices are, by almost every metric, utterly bankrupt. People in modern dating markets are less likely to find love than those entering arranged marriages[20] and less likely to find a life partner than more traditional partnering methods. Even rates of casual sex are crashing: The number of men who have not had sex in the last year has gone up almost threefold in the last decade, with 28% of men reporting no sex for the past 12 months by 2018, a stark increase from around 10% in 2008 (while women reported a similar but less dramatic increase).[21]

Society got into this depressing state after a fairly functional dating system —that had evolved over thousands of years—was fundamentally changed by the advent of birth control (which removed many negative incentives around casual sex) and a simultaneous, society-wide drive toward equality between men and women. These two developments forced the dating market to orient itself around a new, inherently unstable axis. The axis in turn was completely thrown off with the advent and popularity of Tinder-style dating, which removed most of the costly social ritual around partner screening. The question now being: If a person can choose any partner(s) they want *however* they want, what is the best way to structure that search?

First, let's dig a bit deeper into why the existing system works so poorly. Data consistently shows women are much more likely to sort for only the best partners available to them than men are.[22] This means if you give an average woman a large pool of men to choose from, she will only be interested in the top five or so. When women are making date selections through a swipe-based app like Tinder, this means the median man on the app (as judged by how many interest-signaling right swipes he gets) is right-swiped by less than 1% of women.[23] **That means that half of men are being chosen by well under 1% of women**. (So no, it's not just that there are more men on dating apps.) In addition, women's perception of the "average" man is well off, with women rating 80% of men as below average.[24] The few men with whom women meet therefore have a long line of other women to choose from if their current partner does not slave over them (and even if they do, there is little cost to losing the woman due to her replaceability, so why not cheat?).

While most men are severely disadvantaged by this new dynamic, most women are suffering, too. Suppose you are a successful woman who wants to date an "equal." (Yes, it is not just a stereotype that women are much more likely than men to limit their dating pool to those financially or educationally better off.)[25] In today's relationship markets, you will have very few to no viable options for a partner. Most of the men who are your "equals" economically speaking won't mind dating down and so will be choosing between you and dozens of other options, making it very easy for them to devalue any relationship they form with you. This was one of the problems culturally enforced monogamy starting at a young age evolved to fix.

People who want to find a spouse are not helped by the current pop cultural belief that if you just sleep with or date enough people, it will eventually become "obvious" which one you should marry. This general belief encourages popular tools that facilitate dating, like Tinder, to optimize around sheer numerical exposure rather than strengthening your conviction toward a partner you have already met.

In contrast, consider how culturally-evolved mechanisms that build conviction work. A traditional matchmaker in some Indian cultures will use divination to determine who is a good match for a young person or whether

their current partner is a good match for them. What *actually* happens quite a lot in these scenarios is young couples use these matchmakers to endorse their relationship, enabling the couple to get buy-in from parents and grandparents while increasing the social cost associated with a breakup.

Even recently, our society still had some cultural mechanisms similar to the above system—this system involved a couple becoming “Facebook official." Because for a time Facebook became the primary portal for online social signaling, and because an individual could choose one and only one person to mark as a relationship partner on the platform, they would have to deal with social consequences from everyone in their friend network if they were unfaithful to that person or if they broke up with them (as Facebook would notify everyone in their network when that happened). Sadly, said system died with the rise of Boomer Book.

To increase relationship quality, Western society would benefit profoundly from the development of robust cultural mechanisms that deepen casual relationships once they’ve been subject to careful thought or social approval from a trusted personal network. Counterintuitively, this is actually *more important* than fixing present matchmaking mechanisms pervasive in developed Western countries.

Our prescription would be different for many non-Western cultures, of course. For example, in many East Asian cultures, matchmaking mechanisms stand at the core of the problem, along with gender norms that are incompatible with dual-income couples. For a more thorough investigation of issues at play in non-Western cultures, check out *The Pragmatist’s Guide to Relationships*, in which we explore some of these issues through the lens of dating in South Korea.

There *may* be a biological reason why most relationships in modern Western society last for a fairly short time (between one and three years). It could be that our brains have some mechanism in them that subconsciously estimates the fertility of our partner (it would be kind of weird of it not to) and that after a few years of dating without kids (something very normal in our society), a part of our brain begins to assume they are infertile and we need to look for a new one.

The LDS Church represents one culture that has grown quite adept at addressing such challenges (to the extent that we know at least one person who converted just to find a husband … and it worked!). When looking for spouses, Mormons leverage local church subcommunities called "Young Single Adult Wards" (aka YSA or Singles Wards). Essentially these can be thought of as weekly church services where everyone who attends is single and around your age. It is a common cultural practice for members of these groups to conduct activities similar to Mormon "Family Home Evenings" in which two of the singles take on the role of "mom" and "dad" and entertain the other singles for an evening.

Singles Wards therefore succeed not only in providing young, single Mormons with an easy way to meaningfully interact with potential partners in an environment that imposes a social cost for breaking up (so you don't end up with the Tinder problem), but also in allowing them to deepen their relationships by temporarily assuming a "married with kids" role should a new couple choose to host singles in their ward for an evening.

We, personally, aim to leverage our House's culture to circumvent some of mainstream society's top dating market failures by encouraging members to practice dating and relationships at a fairly early life stage, treating young age as something of a "sandbox mode" that ends about one year into college. After that point, our culture sets an expectation that one should be looking for a lifelong partner. Singles at this second stage of partner-finding will be culturally shamed if they attend family events without serious candidates. This encourages House members to more quickly escalate college-and-beyond relationships by inviting partners to "meet the parents" (a common relationship escalation mechanism) more quickly. This social pressure also invites members' prospective partners to engage with our (admittedly odd) culture.

At family events attended by prospective partners, parents will pull the young couple aside at some point and ask pre-marriage compatibility questions from *The Pragmatist's Guide to Relationships* (asking them about their future together in detail, why they are a good match, what they like about each other, etc.). While this will be awkward, discomfort can be reduced by ritualizing the process into a cultural practice. The great thing about this tradition is that because young members and their dates *know* that

they will be quizzed on the underpinnings of their relationship, they will likely practice their answers before the actual event, which will either deepen their relationship or make it clear it was never meant to be.

Gender Ratio Crises

On the topic of the LDS Church, let's talk about the Mormon gender ratio crisis and the near-identical Shidduch crisis (a problem in the extremely orthodox Jewish community). Obviously a culture will encounter problems if one gender literally can’t find a partner even if everyone within that culture were to be matched on a one-to-one basis.

The Shidduch crisis is often blamed on the constantly growing rate of the extreme Orthodox Jewish community (due to their high birth rate), meaning that because men marry younger women, some women will always be left without a partner. To illustrate this dynamic: If you had a generation of 10 30-year-olds and 12 25-year-olds and on average men marry women five years younger than them, then one woman will be left over.

However, the related Mormon gender ratio crisis points to another potential cause behind unfavorable gender ratios: Men both deconvert from hard cultures at higher rates than women and are more likely to marry someone from outside their culture than women, as most patriarchal cultures make it easier for a woman to convert into a cultivar under the assumption the family will follow the man's cultural traditions.

All of the above will be problems if our culture is successful. The best strategy to counter the above is to create systems that make it easier for women in our culture to more easily marry outsiders and convert them into the culture. In general, any culture that is adept at converting outsiders via marriage will not only be less subject to instability resulting from uneven gender ratios among existing adherents, but it will also augment its overall growth (and while we are typically dubious about the staying power of religious and cultural conversion, conversion as part of marriage is uniquely strong).

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Polyamory

Polyamory is one solution many propose in response to the dating market failures described above.

If it is true that most women only want to date the top 20% of men, then it may make sense to just allow it to happen and make it more culturally normative for multiple women to date just one man (and no, we are not stereotyping women as being choosy and prejudicial—it is seen over and over again in the data: Your average woman wants a guy who is out of her league *far more* than your average guy wants a woman who is out of his).[26] [27] [28]

In the same breath, if most men are found to be *beneath* the average woman's attention, is there not arbitrage to be obtained by the few women who are interested in that group and willing to maintain multiple partners? We have actually seen this iteration of polyamory pop up in a lot of tech or otherwise male-dominated subcultures. Within these communities, women who might be ignored in other circles enjoy vast advantages due to their rarity. The downside is that the women who exploit this dynamic create a stereotype that hurts women genuinely interested in the subculture (e.g., “You’re not here because you care about X, you’re here to exploit male attention!”).

You may expect us to condemn polyamory, but in truth it can be a perfectly practical solution. While polyamory may not function well at a societal level, polygynous forms of polyamory work great for an elite subculture operating within a larger society. The many-men-to-one-woman form, however, is kind of pointless in that it lowers birth rates—unless your goal is to sterilize unsuccessful men while tricking their biology into thinking they have a chance at reproduction to keep them from rebelling.[29]

> *Also, note that human biology seems optimized for polygyny but not polyandry, with smarter men caring more about exclusive access to their partners than smarter women do (i.e., intelligence correlates*

with how much a man cares if one of his partners sleeps around but not with how much a woman cares if her partner sleeps around).[30]

When we say polyamory does not work at the societal level, we mean that studies show multi-partner cultures have higher rates of rape, more murder, less honesty in business transactions, more terrorism, etc., when contrasted with otherwise similar monogamous cultures due to the high number of single and un-partnerable men left within them.[31] When a population of polyamorous individuals becomes the dominant culture in a region, the state will therefore begin to collapse if you can't figure out how to secure sex for the leftover poor, unattractive, and socially inept men. As mentioned, some cultures (unethically) deal with this by forced gender conversion. Believe it or not, a recent movement emerged on pol (4chan) to convert vast swaths of incels (men who have trouble finding a partner) to "femboys" so that they can partner with other men.[32] That said, new technology like sex robots and AI might be able to romantically pacify this population—and again, just a subculture practicing polygyny works fine.

In addition to making more desirable men available (albeit non-exclusively) to the most competent women in society (who would otherwise be more likely to go un-partnered), polyamory dramatically reduces the cost of having a large number of kids and makes it much more economically and structurally realistic. Polyamory even helps with the cost of child rearing at a societal level. Consider how Elon Musk's many children are going to have significantly more resources available to each than the single children of most even well-to-do parents (albeit at the expense of a highly engaged dad, but do remember that most people used to have seven to ten kids).[33] The only mandate we would set for those within our personal culture who choose polyamory as a relationship format is that they still have a high birth rate per person (e.g., if a married couple in our House is expected to have five kids, a poly triad with two women is expected to have ten).

We won't dwell much on polyamory, as functionally speaking it is rarely a solution that remains palatable throughout a person's life. Once you find and build a strong relationship with someone you genuinely love and care about, you will be amazed by how unappealing the idea of additional partners can become. Why? For one thing, long-term, committed

relationships lower testosterone in men while having kids lowers it still further. Lower testosterone means a lower interest in additional sexual partners.

It’s not that committed partners wouldn't appreciate the potential an additional partner has to lighten their loads (perhaps by assisting with childcare, additional income, etc.); it’s just that every additional person requires a monumental amount of work and vetting to secure—not to mention significant additional mental and emotional attention once they’re part of the relationship. It can be hard to justify all that work and effort when instead your time and focus could be directed toward enriching your own family.

We have actually seen a number of women successfully establish what ultimately become mostly monogamous, long-term relationships with higher quality partners than they otherwise would have been able to secure by entering into relationships that were initially polyamorous. Essentially the strategy works like this: A woman uses the fact that she is open to a polygynous relationship in order to secure a male partner who might otherwise overlook her. Her presence as his primary partner lowers his desirability to other women. This lowers the quality of the market for him. At the same time, his testosterone and desire to sleep with other women declines due to his being in a committed relationship with someone he cares about (because the woman is putting in a lot of effort). Over time, what was supposed to be a poly relationship becomes functionally monogamous due to it not being worth the effort to source additional partners.

But of course elite women with high standards don’t *need* to enter polyamorous relationships—or frankly *any* romantic relationship—in order to have kids. Instead of raising kids with mediocre men or sharing a man, more women are choosing to raise children on their own or in groups. We even designed a planned community meant to facilitate this trend. Unfortunately, the trend almost never leads to an above-repopulation birth rate, with most of these women barely bringing up two kids. The truth is, it really, really helps to have at least two people working as a long-term committed team if you want to raise any reasonable number of kids.

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A Better Solution: The Season

The London Season was an annual event in which the rural nobility of England would send their young daughters and sons to London to socialize and look for a mate. When Queen Victoria's mother and husband died in quick succession, she went into mourning and this essentially canceled the London Season for three years (1861–1863). Both immediate and long-term ramifications of this suspension demonstrate how effective London Season was:

“peer–commoner intermarriage rose by 40%; titled women married husbands 44 percentile ranks poorer in terms of family landholdings.

Such marriages caused real harm to the daughter's brothers and even fathers. Her brothers were 50% less likely to enter parliament; her family's prestige fell.”[34]

Eventually, this break in the cycle led to a collapse of the entire institution.[35] We are seeing the second iteration of this. The infection of boarding schools and elite private schools by the cultural supervirus has made high-performing families reluctant to enroll their kids, reducing the rate of exchange among the high-impact cohorts. This makes the elite weak and presents an opportunity for an outside-but-unified cultural group to replace them by creating new mechanisms of exchange.

Not only have the former elite of our society lost their marriage markets, but rates of both sex and marriage have crashed since the invention of swipe-based dating apps (which have mostly wiped out apps that encourage prospective matches to find each other based on values, shared goals, and interests). This problem is likely to get worse across all levels of society as de-urbanization takes hold due to demographic collapse (why this will happen is discussed at the beginning of the book).

Many today bemoan the difficulty of finding a partner, especially as like-minded groups of people become more dispersed. That said, *every* dispersed and semi-nomadic people throughout history has needed to address the same challenge, from some Native American groups to the

Romani. One persistent solution these groups develop involves (roughly) annual gatherings in some form of “intra-community convocation.”

While modern intra-community convocations exist, like the Romani marriage market, this is hardly a new practice. In fact, one of the earliest human settlements known, Göbekli Tepe (occupied between 9500 and 8000 BCE) was likely such a place. The amount of fresh water that would have been at the site as well as an absence of traces indicating local agriculture imply it was not a permanent settlement but instead a periodic gathering point. We have seen some modern iterations of events like this for distributed secular cultures at events like Burning Man or Ephemerisle, which offer models of what a modern convening might resemble.

If the Index were to offer the function of a London Season or Romani marriage market, what would the convening look like?

For the annual season, Houses equipped to host gatherings (either financially or in terms of specialization and access) will invite dating cohorts from participating Index members to events over a fixed series of months, composing guest lists from a master list put together by Season organizers. While hosting will bestow greater status within the larger community, Houses can also use hosting as an opportunity to advertise unique elements of the cultivars they have crafted, giving youth within the Index a broader perspective of cultural practices they might eventually incorporate into cultivars they spin off for their own newly-founded Houses.

Each event hosted during the Season will be designed to facilitate interactions that allow people to get to know each other. Whereas during the traditional London Season, this was typically limited to dinner parties and dancing, events hosted during an Index Season may expand to cover everything from ropes courses to group trips and hackathons.

By reintroducing a temporally constrained period in which participants are actively searching for partners, a modern Season incentivizes participants to take dating seriously, as you will have to wait a year before encountering serious, intent-driven singles at scale each time the Season ends.

By actively opting into the Season (passive Index members are not involved by default), single participants signal that their intent is to come out with a serious partner by their chosen culture's metrics. Formally declared pairings at the end of the Season will be posted, imposing social pressure on participants (one doesn't want to publicly "fail"), and subjecting them to mostly-beneficial social scrutiny. Like it or not, the community will judge the quality of matches, impose switching costs on those who might otherwise flake on commitment, etc.—which is beneficial, as low switching costs present a huge problem in modern dating markets (low switching costs increase the perceived value of exploring additional partners by making it *easy* to end current relationships and start new ones, thus lowering the perceived value of an existing relationship).

Whereas traditional matchmaking-oriented convenings are often intended only for singles, an Index Season will also welcome still-dating-and-not-yet-totally-committed partners. Partnered individuals entering the Index Season will publicly post their partnership upfront, both to signal unavailability and increase switching costs. Partnered participants will also be invited to submit their partnership to a small handful (eight to 15) of Index members for their anonymized approval or disapproval.

In addition to increasing relationship switching costs (assuming the group sees them as good partners), this dynamic grants already-partnered Season participants an opportunity to express their respect for the Index members whose approval they seek while also giving Index outsiders a shot at feeling approved by and welcomed into the community. In other words, non-Index members participating in the Season with an Index partner are likely to feel very welcome if members of the community—who matter to them and their partner—approve of their relationships through a vote. This feeling of acceptance will make them all the more likely to join the Index themselves.

To avoid confusion, people participating in the Season will wear bracelets or wristbands with colors that signify what they are looking for, with black signaling a desire for "nothing" (i.e., they are already partnered), red signaling monogamy, white signaling a multi-partner relationship, and blue signaling anything. The arm on which one wears the band indicates the gender(s) to which they are receptive, with the left arm indicating men and the right arm indicating women (and both arms indicating both).

Just as the Season is designed to augment the overall Index community's wealth in terms of families and future generations, it is also intended to encourage the retention of capital.

As the London Season anecdote cited above highlights, social seasons are, to a great extent, about establishing business and political connections among families. Even though the primary objective of a Season may be to forge new families, the fact that an Index season will encourage various Houses to socialize, mix, and form alliances through intermarriage will naturally produce new corporate and political alliances.

How will an Index Season lean even *more* into business? More business-oriented Houses will host events related to investment, business partnerships, startup competitions, hackathons, and investment, encouraging disparate Houses to invest disproportionately in within-Index organizations (not just because of cultural exchange, but because shared Index culture can facilitate greater trust and reduce due diligence costs).

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1 One editor doubted this which feels … insane to us. If you would like more evidence, contrast this map of fertility rates—https://brilliantmaps.com/fertility-rates/—with this map of nations in which gay is criminalized: https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/

As for within a country, contrast these maps:

https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/10/health/us-fertility-rate-replacement-cdc-study/index.html

https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps

2 Vogl, T. S., & Freese, J. (2020). Differential fertility makes society more conservative on family values. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 117*(14), 7696-7701.

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29 This is usually not a durable practice—though there are exceptions. Some stable cultures do use a method like this. For example, in one extreme weather culture, a woman may marry brothers to keep birth rates down while ensuring that the kids she has are at least genetically related to each husband.

30 Liberals and atheists smarter? Intelligent people have values novel in human evolutionary history, study finds. (2010). *American Sociological Association.* https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/02/100224132655.htm

Kanazawa et al. Why Liberals and Atheists Are More Intelligent. Social Psychology Quarterly, 2010; DOI: 10.1177/0190272510361602

31 University of British Columbia. "Monogamy reduces major social problems of polygamist cultures." *ScienceDaily*, 24 January 2012. https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/01/120124093142.htm

We go very deep on this topic in *The Pragmatist’s Guide to Sexuality* so if you find this interesting, you can dig in more there.

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33 *Fatherhood and Motherhood in Colonial America. Digital history.* (n.d.) from https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/topic_display.cfm?tcid=83

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CONTEXTUALIZATION OF MARRIAGE

Growing up I, Malcolm, was reminded over and over that the most important decision I would ever make came down to who I married. It was strongly emphasized to me that by far the most meaningful thing I could accomplish in life was to craft myself into someone worthy of joining the life of a great person. We will be telling our kids the same thing because it is the single truest and most impactful lesson anyone has ever imparted on me. The lesson taught in this way seems to be quite effective in that my brother also has a very strong and happy marriage, a wife with whom he works, and ambitions to have lots of kids.

While the most prevalent pop cultures have very dismissive views of marriage, claiming that most marriages fail, the stats don't back this up. The famous studies most marriage naysayers cite were collected during a rash of divorces in the 1980s, and even those studies manipulated data to create shocking-sounding statistics like, "50% of marriages end in divorce" by including individuals who had been divorced multiple times (e.g., If you had six couples get married and only one got divorced but this person had divorced and remarried five times, you would see 50% of marriages ending in divorce even though only 16% of people actually experienced divorce).[1] It appears that our parents' generation was just uniquely bad at marriages (when was the last time you heard a millennial comedian complaining about "married life"?). Divorces are incredibly rare in some cultivars while common in others.

When you choose the cultivar that is governing your marriage, you are also choosing the probability of your divorce—as well as your

probability of loving your spouse in the future (more on that shortly).

We often meet people who treat dating like a hobby in their teens and end up confused when, upon hitting their thirties, they find themselves in some sort of manic game of musical chairs to find a partner, throwing other people to the ground to grab that last seat. One of the most critical elements of an effective cultivar is that it impresses upon an individual that marriage and kids are not “side projects” in life. Creating your family is the main event in every effective culture.

Soft cultures create a moral infrastructure that justifies a life of personal indulgence. As cultures soften, they increasingly begin to imply that spouses exist primarily for personal enjoyment—that spouses and kids should be considered only if they would make you feel happier, more fulfilled, and more loved. In addition to lowering birth rates, approaching relationships with this mindset ironically places these positive emotional states even more out of reach. Love, happiness, and fulfillment are the rewards our biology imparts on us when we have created an efficacious and fruitful partnership, which requires intentionality, planning, strategy, and a value set that extends beyond pure hedonism. One of the core goals of an effective culture is that it imparts this truth through its framing and rituals around partnership.

As many cultures have done before, our House’s cultivar will primarily teach its values around relationships through the way it contextualizes identity. Specifically, our House cultivar holds that individuals on their own are not full beings and that the family a person builds for themselves (not their parents' family) is ultimately their core unit of identity. We frame one of life’s great goals as finding and building this family—essentially completing oneself. **It is not just each person must find their “other half” but that alone, they are *less* than half a unit. The unit is not just a set of partners, but the family they create.** Many of our traditions do not consider an individual an adult until they are married and have kids and even then, we only allow them to participate in said activities as a family unit.

More specifically, we see life as a transition away from the self—with one’s “self” being the lowest and most trivial order of identity. When an individual is young, they are atomic but meaningless. With time, successful

people (by our standards) become part of something bigger, first finding a partner with whom they grow as a unit, then becoming a parent, leading and nurturing a new generation of kids, and ultimately becoming a part of their family's story and value set after death.

As such, the core unit of identity transitions from: Individual → Married Couple → Family → Tradition/Example/Story

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Dating for a Corporate Family

Dating a person as dictated by the predominant pop culture essentially involves testing out a partner for sexual and romantic compatibility. While for some long-term relationship structures this might be a sane strategy, if you are building a corporate family, it makes about as much sense as choosing which carton of milk you are going to buy by tapping on all the jugs and listening for the sound they make. Sure, carton sound may have some slight correlation with internal milk quality, but it is largely irrelevant.

The concept of a corporate family is one we explore in depth within *The Pragmatist's Guide to Relationships*. Broadly speaking, the most unusual characteristic of the corporate family vis-a-vis the way marriage is construed in pop culture is that the couple works together and combines their public identity. More broadly, when you marry someone in a corporate marriage you combine with them into a single, synergistic unit—you aren't just two friends living together and having sex. When you start a business, you do it together. When you build something, you build it together. When you raise kids, you raise them together. The corporate family model holds that you should not be marrying someone if they cannot make you more efficacious in every domain of your life, not just a few. While men and women have different strengths and weaknesses on average, they *both* have a role to play *in every aspect* of life.

This is not some new idea but the way Calvinists traditionally structured their relationships. As David Hackett Fischer put it in *Albion's Seed*:

> "They were expected to work together for the common welfare of the family. There was no clear idea of "separate spheres" in this culture. Depositions filed [in the courts of a heavily Calvinist area] describe women routinely doing heavy field labor, carrying sacks of grain to the mill, cutting firewood, tending swine, and castrating steers."[2]

We will strongly recommend this model to our kids, as everyone we know who lives by it enjoys both a stronger relationship and more professional

success than most of those who don’t. Moreover, the corporate family model aligns with our culture’s values of efficacy over emotional indulgence and may help to reduce the odds that our kids select partners who are good looking and nice but wanting in diligence and intelligence (because they will have to deal with the consequences of an incompetent person more viscerally in their daily lives). In an ideal world, our family will maintain this practice and it will become one of the weird things we are “known for,” like polygyny in the older LDS Church.

This corporate model of relationships is part of why we see things like gender and sexuality as tools rather than particularly important guides when choosing a partner. The number or gender of partners our kids select doesn’t really matter to us—so long as through their partnerships, they have lots of kids and work efficiently as a unit. You are not a full thing as a person; you must build the thing you become and that thing is your family: Your partner(s) and your kids.

More generally, our marriage has always been structured around our shared goals and identity rather than things like romance or sex. This is outlined pretty well in our wedding vows:

Malcolm:

- Today, I pledge to dedicate the rest of my life to strive together with Simone for our shared goals. I dedicate myself to a shared identity—to fight for the legacy we will leave as a unit rather than that either of us would have had as individuals.
- It would be disingenuous for me to promise that I will love Simone for the rest of my life. Feelings are transient, not something we control, and I cannot promise our future path together will be without hardship or our relationship without trials. What I can promise is that she will never have to face any hardship alone as long as I live.
- But I pledge more than a conditionless perpetual contract of mutual companionship. I promise to treat Simone with the respect she has earned and that I will never stop striving to improve myself as the only means available to me to adequately honor her.

Simone

- Today I vow to take on life with Malcolm as a team and make his dreams, struggles, defeats, and triumphs my own. No matter how difficult or glorious life becomes, I will stand by Malcolm's side.
- I will let neither distance nor hardship prevent me from helping Malcolm achieve his greatest ambitions. I promise to amplify his strengths, fill in his weaknesses, and focus his attention on reaching for each next goal.
- Rather than promise a comfortable life, I pledge to make Malcolm's existence as epic as possible, filling it with daring adventure, satisfying character development, splendid romance, and a legacy that lasts long after he is gone.
- I am privileged to share a life with Malcolm, and I promise to make it meaningful.

The larger philosophy here is that sex and romance are charming garnishes on top of married life—not the main dish. Historically, cultures have elevated romance to ensure that couples reproduce at a high rate and that couples' kids are likely to be genetically related to a married mother and father. Without DNA evidence, a wife's dalliance could be a major issue and a child born out of wedlock would likely increase the number of orphans under community supervision, which historically speaking could impose quite a high cost on small towns. While there were good reasons why historical cultures so strongly emphasized sexual and romantic compatibility, those reasons are not as compelling in the modern context—especially not in a cultivar like ours, which frames the creation of kids anywhere other than a lab as a moral and ethical shortcoming (unless financial constraints drove those children to be conceived naturally).

Because our House holds that spouses should always work as a single unit when possible, we recommend partners "test each other out" not by probing romantic and sexual compatibility, as pop culture dictates, but rather by testing their dynamism as business partners first and foremost. Rather than passively watching them date, we will encourage our kids to start side hustles with potential partners and see how well they work together as a method for determining whether they are a strong match. If a

couple has not yet built a company together, we will encourage them to undertake some form of ritualized group trial in which they have to work together to overcome a difficult challenge, like raising a nontrivial (and challenging) amount of funds for a cause they care about, or living in a foreign country for a month, on very little funds, where they don't know the language.

Professional compatibility is also a better predictor of parenting compatibility. Building a business or tackling work challenges with someone will do profoundly more to help you understand how you'll both tackle challenges in child rearing than sex ever could. What's more, should you ultimately have kids together, you'll find raising them much easier if you both run a business together (as that way, you call the shots: You can set your own schedule, bring infants to the office, and integrate parenting with work as you please).

How much of your adult life do you really spend going on romantic outings or having sex? Around 0.5%,[3] right? And how much time do you spend working? Roughly 30%,[4] right? If you can find someone who makes every moment you are working remarkably more enjoyable and impactful, they will improve your quality of life dramatically more than someone who dishes out sex and scintillating candle-lit dinners.

This is not to say we won't encourage our kids to learn to flirt, date, and—if pre-marital sex is a worthwhile trade-off for them—hone their sexual skills. We will encourage our kids to improve these skills while contextualizing their relative importance in the larger scheme of relationships: We will teach our kids that romantic and sexual skills can be used to achieve an important goal, be it greater psychological connection, greater partner satisfaction, or something else entirely. However, we want to make sure our kids never forget the place of such trivialities in life: They are hobbies with little reproductive necessity and our kids honestly might be better off if they were not distracted by them. Perhaps future generations will develop the technology to free us from our emotional tethers.

We pity these "alpha" men who proudly show off what are essentially servile obsequients in "hot" outfits as wives. There is an old truism: "Weak women raise weak sons." While we disagree with the gendered nature of

this assertion (weakness is not a feminine trait), it highlights something soft cultures will allow you to forget: **If you marry your lesser, you fail at your most important duty as a human, which is to create a new generation that surpasses you.**

Marriage Contracts

One benign (to us) aspect of our marriage that regularly shocks others is our marriage contract. We are not the only culture to put heavy emphasis on the concept of a marriage contract—the Jewish Ketubah (a marriage contract often hung on the walls of Jewish households) comes to mind—but we are the only culture to actively negotiate one so detailed or to have it be a living document.

Before we got married, we pored over relationship advice forums and interviewed dozens of older individuals, who had had both successful and unsuccessful relationships, to make detailed lists of every point of conflict they had experienced. We used our findings to create a detailed list of all potential points of conflict and talked through how we would handle each. This means we do not encounter conflict over things like home temperature, finances, or how we relate to each other's parents, as it was all pre-negotiated. It also means there is very little opportunity for anger in our relationship, as anger is triggered when the manner in which a person is treated does not align with how they expect to be treated and thorough relationship contract negotiation explicitly delineates the sort of treatment each partner desires.

We then separated out elements of our combined life and granted ultimate responsibility over specific domains to a specific partner. This means that a designated partner always has the last call on decisions not pre-negotiated in the relationship contract. As an example, one partner may have ultimate control over all financial decisions or child rearing decisions. Sometimes these domains are “mirrored,” meaning each partner might have ultimate say over what the other partner does with their body (e.g., each partner is able to veto tattoos or elective surgery) or each partner might have final say over how the couple relates to the other’s family (e.g., if the family of

Partner A wants to see Partner B, they need to stay on good terms with Partner B).

Why do we use this system instead of relying on compromise? Our culture holds that compromise ruins marriages. Compromise demonstrates that partners do not trust each other to take each other's needs into account and, worse, it subconsciously motivates each party to exaggerate their position, deepening the conflict in the long run. For example, if one partner wants four and another wants five, the one who wants four is incentivized to pretend they want two and the one who wants five is incentivized to pretend they want eight, meaning most people will subconsciously drift toward these more extreme positions.

This dynamic encourages partners to lean away from each other, toward opposing positions, when a well-designed marriage incentivizes people to lean into each other and toward a greater purpose. Compromise furthermore encourages partners to see themselves as distinct individuals with distinct (and often conflicting) needs, which makes it nearly impossible for partners to operate as a truly integrated unit.

The most unique aspect of our marriage contract when contrasted with a Ketubah (the Jewish relationship contract) is that it is a living Google Doc that is regularly edited. About once a year—or as some new, unanticipated point of potential conflict comes to our attention—we return, discuss what should be changed, and formalize mutually-agreed-upon alterations. One thing that's notable is that, in negotiating the points of our marriage contract, virtually all suggested terms have been mutually supported. By discussing terms in a non-emotional context with a focus on creating a successful, productive, and long-lived marriage, it is astoundingly easy to develop creative solutions to address even stark differences in taste, lifestyle, and personal comfort.

When people embark on a relationship agreeing that the goal of the partnership is to maximize collective efficacy in pursuit of a shared mission (rather than prioritize personal comfort), there is very little room for genuine disagreement. The vast majority of disagreements in such relationships result from trivial and easy-to-resolve information asymmetries and differing hypotheses.

If you want to read more about this practice to design something similar for your own House, check out *The Pragmatist's Guide to Relationships*.

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Gender Roles

Most hard cultures have very strict gender roles whereas soft cultures typically mandate gender equality. The reason for this is obvious: While it is logical and morally easy to argue for equality, studies have repeatedly found strong connections between high birth rates and strict gender roles (specifically: low female educational attainment and general female disempowerment). This means strict gender role ideologies typically spread through birth rate while egalitarian ideologies spread through conversion.

Cultural gender roles need not exist as two sides of a coin with “Strict gender roles” on one side and “Gender? What gender?” on the other side. We, personally, find both perspectives unacceptable.

It is pointless to pursue a perfectly-gender-neutral ideal if it ultimately produces the same outcome as a highly misogynistic world in which women are disempowered (a likely outcome for soft cultures if they maintain low birth rates). It makes us sick to imagine how much less productive humanity would be without the combined intellectual horsepower of entire families—men, women, and children alike. When I, Simone, married Malcolm, my number one condition was that I never be obligated to withdraw from the world or stop working. Malcolm delivered on his promise to respect these terms and I believe the structure he created for our family—one that acknowledges differences between genders while still maximizing each partner’s ability to intellectually engage with the world—is intergenerationally replicable (one of our test readers described this as being “neotrad”).

In many ways, both hard, highly unequal, and soft, egalitarian approaches to gender rob people of their agency. Optimal cultures take more nuanced approaches to gender, allowing people to leverage useful aspects of strict traditional gender roles in their dating and family units without mandating them—all while downplaying the importance of a person's gender to their identity. Many traditional gender structures evolved because they work and because there are genuine, systemic differences between genders. That said, it is also important to remember that the way a person experiences their

gender will evolve throughout their life and you should not expect that experience to be the same before and after you find your life partner.

In our own relationship, I take on many roles associated with an extremely traditional iteration of a “woman’s” work even though I was extremely gender agnostic before meeting Malcolm. I take on more feminine roles in our relationship because doing so works in our particular family dynamic—that said, I still call upon different aspects of myself as needed. Gender roles are both an outdated artifact from our evolutionary history (like our arousal patterns) and a tool for every individual couple to tinker with and modify until they reach an optimal configuration.

While gender is not that important to us, we nevertheless exploit gender differences to our benefit given the world’s weird obsession with them. As an example, we strategically switch out which one of us sends out emails, takes calls, speaks at conferences, or attends engagements depending on which gender is likely to perform best in a specific context. When dealing with a new population, we typically split test outreach and meetings to see which of us gets more positive engagement. Once we have sufficient data, we proceed with whomever performs best. Sometimes that means I send out emails as Malcolm and vice versa. Generally speaking, people in the U.S. and Europe are overwhelmingly prejudiced in favor of women and people in Latin America and Asia are consistently prejudiced in favor of men, meaning that our Western colleagues typically hear from “Simone” even when Malcolm is reaching out, and our Eastern and LATAM colleagues typically hear from “Malcolm” even when I am initiating contact.

This switching between personas in our outreach reveals a deeper aspect of how we see gender. While before marriage, gender is a useful tool that aids sorting for potential partners,[5] it becomes largely irrelevant as a public signaling device after marriage. Though we’d argue distinct roles within a long-term relationship continue to matter, as making a relationship too egalitarian has all sorts of negative externalities, like making men less likely to take on emotional work, which in turn decreases a woman's perceived quality of life.[6]

A part of our family culture that has worked extremely well is the idea that the succession of self takes place at the point of marriage. Looking back on

life from a combined-identity perspective, we find it difficult to overstate how disgusting and hollow it felt to be an individual—not that we recognized this at the time; we thought individuality was fine (even preferable) because we had no idea how good things could be.

All of this is said with one big caveat: While we respect the traditional role of women in hard cultures—which typically produce women of steel—we see more modern pop-cultural perspectives of femininity to be toxic. Female stereotypes revolving around emotional fragility, a lack of emotional control, and a need to have feelings constantly protected strike us as uniquely toxic. For this and other reasons, we have adopted the practice of giving our daughters gender-neutral names in hopes that we might reduce their odds of identifying with this rising concept of femininity.

In sum, we support our children using gender however they wish, be their interpretations traditional and hard line or more fluid and experimental. As with sexuality, so long as our children's approaches to gender don't prevent them from contributing to society or having children of their own, we are in favor of their leveraging various gender roles and norms however they want. What matters is that we use our gender and sexuality to our advantage, rather than letting our gender and sexuality use us.

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Interfaith Marriage

Although you will be hard pressed to find a widespread and long-lived hard culture that condones interfaith marriages between a female of their faith and a male of another faith without extensive rituals that ensure the man has "really" converted, most cultures permit men to marry outside their culture without much hullabaloo.[7] That this cultural heuristic evolved almost universally at the cross-cultural level heavily implies that men typically set the culture their kids adopt (at least in a historical context).

The Parsi are so extreme in this practice that the Bombay High Court actually concluded that a Parsi can only legally be a Parsi if they have a Zoroastrian father and a converted Parsi mother.[8] This strict structure explains in part why their numbers are crashing so quickly. A culture's spousal acceptance policy must walk a thin line between maintaining cultural intergenerational fidelity (which is higher the stricter you are) and allowing for the growth through outsider conversion (which is higher when restrictions are lax).

The question when creating a new culture is: "How do you ensure it does not get wiped out by my kids' spouses' cultures while still encouraging them to marry outsiders?" The fortunate answer for us is that we live at a point in history in which cultures have either become so wishy-washy through pop-cultural degradation or so brittle as a result of illogical rigidity in the face of overwhelming evidence that it will not be hard for our kids to find partners who are willing to abandon their inherited culture for one more intentionally designed or reinforced (i.e. any Index culture).

The real challenge lies in ensuring that spouses are *enthusiastic* about maintaining their adopted culture intergenerationally. A saying we have in our family goes: "You don't get points for having and raising successful kids; that's easy—you only know you've succeeded when your kids in turn raise children of their own who are *also* successful and fulfilled."

The Index is designed to welcome in outsiders as it systematically incorporates appreciated and useful aspects of outsiders' birth cultures into the new Houses they create with Index partners. However, this flexibility

may also reduce outsiders' dedication to elements of their adopted culture. How can we ensure outsiders who join the Index through partnership are enthusiastic about raising kids with Houses' more idiosyncratic traditions?

The Index encourages the following practices, which may help:

- When someone is dating an Index member, they are encouraged to meet with their House's family for the first time *without* their date. Simone did this with my family and it made a big impression on her—it demonstrated to her that she was welcomed by my family not just because she was dating me. Ideally, these meetings not only make prospective partners feel welcomed but also teach them something about the House cultivar, helping them understand it is not generic "pop culture."
- Independent of a House's opinion of a prospective partner, outsiders are welcomed and accepted by the wider family. This was a practice my (Malcolm's) mom intentionally adopted—and it really paid off. Her welcoming approach to my various girlfriends ensured I was never afraid to introduce a date to the family. By the time my brother and I were married, our spouses' positive interactions with the family made it easier for them to lean in.
- Once someone marries into a House, they engage in at least one "family day" each month in which they either help with childcare for family members or invite them over for some form of wholesome fun. These exchanges have sub-units within Houses accumulate and exchange small favors and reinforce the value offered by being part of a cohesive culture and community.
- Houses leverage social pressure to encourage members to lean into family traditions through practices like photo-sharing and gift exchanges (which make it obvious when a member of the family is being lax about their traditions).

Finally, even when outsiders break from House traditions (perhaps because their House cultivar simply isn't durable culture material), the Index system grants their children an opportunity to stay within the broader cultural network and create a stronger House should they imagine a better way of doing things.

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Glorification of Motherhood

A significant driver behind plummeting birth rates around the world involves pop cultures' glorification of young, single life with lots of sex, travel, and freedom. To a great extent, female figures in modern pop culture cease to be figures worthy of adoration once they have children. It makes a lot of sense that soft cultures evolved this propensity.

Recall that while hard cultures need to increase the fitness of the individual to survive, pop cultures only need to hijack already-living people and convert them. Given every individual's evolutionary drive to breed, the average person will pay more attention to a young, single male or female who is sexually available than one with kids. So, if you are trying to sell something or get someone's attention, you are usually better off showcasing young, single, sexualized individuals—however, if a culture is to survive through many generations, it needs to subvert this script.

If a young girl grows up and sees her mom and people like her overburdened, unloved, and ignored by society, why would she choose to have kids herself? Why would she aspire to that? While we can't fix this at the societal level, we *can* address this problem with intentionally-designed cultures. If you want to create a durable culture for your family and inspire your children to have kids of their own, one of the best things you can do is ensure you have a strong relationship with your spouse.

For our family, this means ensuring daughters see their mothers glorified, appreciated, and even deified within family culture for the sacrifices they make while also demonstrating that none of those sacrifices require foregoing a career or stepping back from public life. Moreover, setting this example for sons increases the odds that they do the same for their wives and have granddaughters who contextualize prolific motherhood as a sign of uniquely high achievement instead of great sacrifice.

In our House, having kids is just part of the yearly routine. While Simone is appreciated for it, she never hints that it would be justified for her to use pregnancy or childbirth as an excuse to step back from work. The productive glorification of motherhood requires never giving in to society's

tendency to conflate gratitude and approval with justification to winge, whine, indulge, or lean out. For example, nothing about being pregnant or a mother makes women fat, other than that society has built norms that allow for indulgence as a form of gratitude. That it's "normal" for women to not return to their pre-pregnancy weights is one of those lies society spreads which is objectively not true.[9]

Toxic gratitude—the type that encourages women to become indolent, selfish, and entitled when pregnant—often has the *opposite* of the intended effect, causing mothers who let themselves go to feel *worse* about their path to motherhood, which in turn leads their daughters to believe that motherhood entails a loss of beauty, grace, and personal efficacy. Mothers whose partners wait on them hand and foot and give in to their every demand throughout their pregnancies almost never end up having a lot of kids whereas women who learn to treat pregnancy as a normal routine have a much easier time with it. We suspect this is part of that phenomenon where if you tell someone something is going to be painful, they will literally feel more pain (to the extent that you can even see that heightened perception of pain show up in fMRI scans—this is not just an illusion).[10] If you constantly tell someone pregnancy is this huge, difficult thing, it becomes just that.

While I, Malcolm, am as grateful as a person could be for what Simone goes through to produce the kids we hope to have, I show my gratitude by working my hardest to move us toward our shared goals and treating her with respect—not by walking on eggshells around her and acting as though she is an invalid. We are so intense about this that it has caused some problems with one of our company's board of directors, as they keep wanting Simone to take maternity leave and don't understand why we are so culturally against the idea.

> *Note: Just as it is important to avoid coddling mothers in a way that makes normal pregnancy seem herculean and trying, it is equally important to not regard harrowing attempts to conceive, trying pregnancies, and difficult delivery experiences as excuses to stop having kids. We, personally, have had troubles with fertility, complicated pregnancies, and far-from-ideal delivery experiences*

and seeing as fertility is declining with every generation, we expect others and our own descendants alike will encounter plenty of setbacks themselves. As such, we should regard these hardships as par for the course and not as justification to give up. The best way to do so is to lead by example, demonstrating to children that these challenges are a normal part of life.

Just as a strong culture will suffer if it only glorifies the young and sexy, it will also rot if it acts like a woman has pulled off some amazing miracle just by getting knocked up and having a kid. Mothers are celebrated for the dignity and intentionality with which they approach the challenges of gestation, childbirth, and childrearing—and for their levels of productivity above and beyond mere motherhood. This is not something that any narcissist with a functioning uterus can pull off.

Cultures need more than just strong relationships that glorify motherhood. Successful traditional cultures often have inbuilt mechanisms to shame individuals for proceeding down life paths that are unlikely to be fruitful—this is where the concept of an "old maid," the unmarried 30-year-old woman, comes from, as well as the concept of the crazy cat lady (a woman who adopt pets as a means of artificially satisfying her instinct to care for children). Cultures that shame these outcomes lower their probability of occurring and thus enjoy a higher birth rate, which is why people from traditional backgrounds around the world often share disgust for such life paths.

As our House's cultivar frames it: Humans start as individuals and evolve into something more as they escape the cycle of individual indulgence.

- People begin life trapped in the confines of a solitary identity
- Then form lifelong partnerships, evolving into a combined identity representing something greater than themselves
- Later they have kids, becoming a force that reaches into the future
- And finally, they die, casting off the remnants of their now-totally-unnecessary solitary selves and living on through their descendants and the lasting contributions they've made to their family unit

Individuals who stop early in this cycle fail to fully mature and become frozen in a child-like state—their development arrested in their cocoon of individuality.

We understand that pop culture would be horrified by the idea that individuality is something a person would be proud or honored to sacrifice. From our perspective, idolizing individuality, a separation from those around you, those that rely on you, seems deeply perverse.

I, Simone, was adamant about both being perpetually single and not having kids until I met Malcolm. He convinced me to change my mind on this subject not by pressuring me but by logically walking me through the value of relationships and family. Given my default perception that such life commitments were more about *disempowerment* than anything else, I am glad Malcolm clued me in. Nothing in my life felt more empowering than letting go of personal identity to become part of a team that I genuinely believed in. Nothing in my single life could have freed me more from my personal demons and caprices than having kids, who gave me bigger things to strive for. There's an emptiness to pre-family life that many attribute to a lack of community, but from my experience, it's a void that can easily be filled by family and a clear set of values.

As our philosophical ancestor Winwood Reade put it: "He who strives to subdue his evil passions—vile remnants of the old four-footed life—and who cultivates the social affections: he who endeavors to better his condition, and to make his children wiser and happier than himself; whatever may be his motives, he will not have lived in vain."

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Identity and Self

While we have already highlighted some forms of identity that exist *beyond* the level of the biological individual, many newer cultures divide identity *beneath* the level of the individual. Consider those who develop multiple personas in an online environment, each of which has a unique perspective on the world. When most people hear about something like this, they will condemn the concept as ridiculous, yet it is a very old concept.

For ages, critics have struggled with the Christian idea that God could have three different aspects of himself (God, the Son, and the Holy Ghost) with one of those aspects acting as a sacrifice to another one of those aspects. They say, “how could Jesus' sacrifice be meaningful if he is making it to appease himself?” They say this knowing full well that they have different personalities within their own mind, some of which condemn others and make decisions which lead to their suffering.

We all have aspects of ourselves that judge and even hate other aspects of ourselves. Sometimes we choose to call on these aspects and other times they are called up by environmental conditions or those around us. It is quite normal for people to have one way of acting around their family and another way of acting at school or work. We have always found this interpretation of Jesus to be an interesting one, albeit not mainstream: God did not “turn into Jesus” but Jesus is just the manifestation of God’s persona when he is hanging out with people. This is such a wildly different environment for him that said manifestation has holistically different thought patterns from the thought pattern God enjoys in a divine realm.

An interesting—and weirdly framed—example of this is the concept of “code switching." In linguistics, code switching just means switching between two different languages or ways of talking in different environments. Ethnic minority communities have noted that they go through a similar process of calling on different internal characters in different environments—feeling pressured to call on more “white” characters when in certain situations.

We suspect a culture could do a lot of really interesting things with below-person-level identity division—especially in the online age.

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2 C.Dallett Hemphill, "Women in Court: Sex Role Differentiation in Salem, Massachusetts, 1636-1683," WMQ3 39 (1982) via Fischer, D. H. (2018). *Albion's Seed: Four British folkways in America.* Oxford University Press.

3 Wicks, A. (2022, February 2). *Study reveals how much sex you'll have in your lifetime.* from https://www.complex.com/life/2016/05/how-much-sex-lifetime-study.

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5 For example, someone who enjoys assuming traditional female roles is going to have a much easier time living with someone who prefers to assume traditional male roles than someone who also prefers to assume traditional female roles.

6 Wilcox, W. B., & Nock, S. L. (2006). What's Love Got to Do with It? Equality, Equity, Commitment and Women's Marital Quality. Social Forces, 84(3), 1321–1345. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3844442

7 Probably the most common counter example comes from Orthodox Jews who, passing down Jewish identity matrilineally, make it slightly easier for a Jewish woman to marry outside the religion and still have fully accepted Jewish kids than a Jewish man.

8 Mogul, R. (2020, July 5). One of India's richest minority groups enjoys some of Mumbai's best rents. Here's why. CNN. from https://edition.cnn.com/2020/07/04/india/india-parsi-colony-intl-hnk/index.html

9 Simone here: Let's get real. How do you even manage to not end up at a lower weight if you are breastfeeding? You aren't allowed to drink alcohol and are burning calories like crazy. And I say this as someone who can only breastfeed for a couple of months because of osteoporosis.

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GENETIC TRADITIONS & THE FUTURE

As we've repeatedly emphasized in previous chapters of this book, a primary goal of our personal House culture is to make each successive generation of children better—not just memetically, but physically. With that being the case, we must do more than just have children with partners carefully selected to shore up weak spots in our own ideological and genetic makeup. We strongly encourage our descendants to use genetic screening, engineering, cloning, cybernetics—really, any technology that moves us toward this goal. We have done as much as we can on this front personally, being quite open about our choice to leverage polygenic risk score selection when choosing between embryos.[1]

"Oh no," you might be thinking.

"But ensuring your kids have good genes is eugenics!"

If selecting embryos based on polygenic risk scores is eugenics, so is selecting a partner based on traits you'd like to see in your children. In fact, polygenic risk score selection of embryos is arguably *less* morally questionable than selecting partners based on desirable traits, as with polygenic risk score selection, nobody involved is being eliminated from the gene pool; parents are merely picking the best roll of the dice on their various combinations of shared genes.

What about Orthodox Jews who commonly get genetically screened and use this information when choosing a partner to ensure their kids don't get Tay-Sachs (a genetic condition common in that population)? Are they "evil

eugenicists” for adopting this as a regular cultural practice in order to protect their kids? Of course not. Very few people really believe this form of the eugenics accusation.

Heck, by the reasoning of our eugenics-accusers, even laws that prevent brothers and sisters from marrying are eugenics—after all, those laws exist because kids born of those unions are more likely to have genetic problems. This is why almost all religions and cultures are incest-phobic: Because *most* religions and cultures believe, at least moderately, in ensuring their kids have the best genes possible.

The truth is, most of the “gotcha” warriors complaining about how something reeks of eugenics really don’t care—not in the way they are pretending to, at least. Simone’s mom died young from a form of cancer parents could screen for in embryos. Are our critics really going to stand behind this “anti-eugenics” position when a choice not to screen would boost an innocent child’s odds of unnecessary suffering and premature death? At least when a Jehovah's Witness prevents a doctor from giving their little child a blood transfusion, they are only killing *their* kid; someone who genuinely wanted to stop all genetic selection apparently wouldn't be happy until they stopped us from protecting ours.

Polygenic risk score selection certainly isn’t the first form of reproductive technology that has been subjected to moral outrage. Very similar fears were raised with equal disgust and panic when IVF technology was first released[2] and now 33% of people in the U.S. have used IVF or know someone who has (2% of births happen through reproductive technology, more than double over the past decade).[3]

> *One of our sensitivity readers explained to us that some people might find embryo selection based on polygenic risk scores to be immoral because we are engaging in a form of preventative healthcare others can’t afford. What!? This was such an insane argument we debated including it. No matter what the medical procedure is, there will always be some people who can’t afford it. Are these people really arguing that all medical procedures someone else can’t afford are immoral? Does this apply to people in other countries? Heck, in that case, a tooth cleaning—or the use of bug*

> *spray and mosquito netting to avoid malaria—would be immoral. But even more insanely, if authorities were to actually ban this type of selection process because some people couldn't afford it, rich people would still be able to fly abroad and get it done. Governments would only be effectively banning polygenic risk score selection for people with more modest means, which would only serve to widen the gap between those who can and cannot afford this technology, thus deepening systemic inequality.*

When someone tags people who choose better genes for their own kids with the word "eugenics," they cheapen the horrors meant to be prevented by the word's negative stigma. People who cry "eugenics!" at the drop of a hat make *actual* eugenics, such as government initiatives forcibly sterilizing people and choosing who people marry, much more likely to rise. This is the same form of degradation that plagued the word "racist"—people started calling every little threat to the cultural supervirus racist and the word began to lose its gravity, ultimately driving an increase in *actual, dangerous racism*. A person willing to chance an increase in the risk of *real* state-level eugenics just so they can win an online flame war shows exactly their real moral position on these issues.

Eugenics as a pejorative should be used only when referring to alterations to the human genome driven by racial and ethnic bias, laws that control who can breed, or cases of forced sterilization. It should be blindingly obvious that our interests in reproductive technology are not driven by racial or ethnic bias and we have no aspirations to control others.

We argue "eugenics" should only be used to refer to ethnically and racially-driven interest in intentionally altering a population's gene pool—or forced sterilization—because this is what someone is trying to convey when they call someone else a eugenicist in a public space. They use the word "eugenicist" instead of "transhumanist" because they want their audience to assume their target is racist or an advocate for forced sterilization, which spares them the hassle of arguing against their victims' actual logic. They know very well we don't advocate for any form of racial discrimination, nor do we advocate for forced sterilization, but they need *other* people to think those things about us so people don't ask why our critics are trying to prevent us from lowering the chance our kids die of cancer or why they

support, through their extreme reasoning, the legalization of siblings having children together.

What we advocate for is fairly vanilla—if aggressive—transhumanism: Improving and transforming the human condition with technology. Be against transhumanism all you want, but don't call it eugenics.

> *And as a side note, we are avidly against forced sterilization and if you are as well, instead of misleading people on Twitter into thinking we support it, why don't you actually do something about it? Thirty-one states allow for forced sterilization—over half the U.S.—and 17 states allow forced sterilizations of disabled children.*[4] *Do you just like the word "eugenics" as a weapon, or do you actually hate the practice of eugenics and want to do something about it?*

When it comes to transhumanism, we acknowledge many are still very hesitant. "I am OK with people selecting partners or genes to reduce the odds of their kids getting cancer and I will admit that is not eugenics—or at least I'll say it's not immoral," you may be thinking, "but just don't touch the stuff tied to things like attractiveness or intelligence."

But where's the line? When weighing different polygenic risk scores while selecting which embryo to transfer for our first daughter, we paid extra attention to embryos with lower probabilities of developing depression, brain fog, and anxiety. Are these attributes too close to intelligence? If we *hadn't* emphasized those scores, would we be responsible if our daughter committed suicide or found herself unable to work due to debilitating anxiety? Should you pressure someone to *not* reduce their kids' odds of suffering from certain maladies by calling the action "eugenics," are you responsible for their kids' unnecessary high risks of suffering? By our moral framework, yes.

Many critics of polygenic risk score selection argue that the process merely alters the odds of certain outcomes while not totally preventing their possibility. A religious extremist might make the same argument when refusing a blood transfusion for their child—that the transfusion only *increases* odds of survival while not guaranteeing it. When a person

chooses to drive drunk, they merely *increase* their odds of committing vehicular manslaughter but are still very much responsible for taking that risk and imposing it on others.

“What if we lose something of genetic importance in this process?” you might be wondering. “What if we select against something and then it turns out to be important in a few hundred years?”

Think about this for a moment. You know as well as we do that most populations having kids well above population rate are highly technophobic. There is zero chance that we’ll move into a future in which the entire world's genes get altered—and *even if* there was that chance in the future, humans would still be able to leverage a large genetic library of pre-altered humans for reference. Moreover, we think people can be trusted to make both reasonable and varied decisions about their selections. Different populations value (and need) different traits and will select for them accordingly; it’s not as though we’re headed toward a genetic monoculture just because people become increasingly empowered in gene selection and editing. Do you really think a Black family is going to select for blond-haired, blue-eyed, Aryan traits? Take us as an example: While we, personally, have been very careful about what we select against, we *don’t* select against contemporarily unpopular traits that we believe may provide an advantage (like autism—with which both Simone and one of our kids has been diagnosed).

But what about dysgenic risks introduced by in vitro fertilization (IVF)? This is an argument often made by right-leaning survival-of-the-fittest “Sciencey” types. The argument holds that by granting people who cannot have kids naturally the ability to have kids via IVF, we are degrading the human genome. They argue this can be seen in kids born of IVF having higher rates of asthma,[5] ADHD,[6] and high blood pressure / diabetes.[7] To be clear, even the group arguing this is transparent that IVF itself does not cause these maladies (outside of the rare ICSI procedure) but that IVF broadens the range of people who can have kids to include groups more likely to have these issues (older and fatter people). This can be seen in families who have one child through IVF and another naturally not seeing any issues at higher rates in their IVF child.[8]

This argument can sound smart given how technical it is until you consider the worldview of those making it, at which point it becomes easily the most smooth-brained argument of all. Specifically, if you read, watch, and listen to content made by those who pose this argument, you will see that most also assert that, IVF aside, humanity is adopting *tons* of dysgenic genetic conditions just because it is no longer the case that most "unfit" humans die before being able to give birth. People making this argument often even go so far as to complain about the negative genetic effects from not having around 46.2% of babies die before reaching adulthood.[9] They predict that because of this, our species will eventually collapse.

The reason this argument is so doltish is that those who make it are correct that due to modern medical care and social support, fewer maladies are being ruthlessly edited out of the human genome; *but* the only way around this is *through* polygenic risk score selection, which requires IVF.

To give you an analogy, this would be like a person who thought:

- The planet's ecology is collapsing due to pollution and this will lead to our species extinction.
- There is nothing we can do about this ecological collapse.
- With more rocket testing, we could successfully colonize a different planet and seed it with a new biome just as rich as the one we have on earth, but the rocket testing creates pollution, so we had better not do that.

These people admit that rockets (polygenic risk score selection) are our only way out of our current predicament in the long term but want to ban them because in the short term they make things incrementally worse. Given how transparently illogical it is, we suspect people express this belief not because they think it is logically sound, but because it makes them feel tough and manly to express it. They aesthetically believe that "only the toughest and fittest" should reproduce and ignore that technology renders this perspective antiquated.

Selecting for good genes in a mate is part of everyday life. It's a tacit reality experienced by every person who is passed over for a date because they are not attractive enough, not tall enough, or somehow lacking traits that very

likely have genetic correlates.[10] What online keyboard warriors hate is that while *they* are a “eugenicist” based on how hot someone is, *we* are sorting based on mental traits. Our interest in mental trait selection forces people with a deep cultural supervirus infection to make one of the following inconvenient admissions:

1. Mental traits are not heritable and what we are doing is toothless and hence morally neutral and inoffensive—which means criticism of polygenic risk score selection is weird and arbitrary.
2. Mental traits are heritable and what we are doing makes our culture a threat—but this also means the entire supervirus ideology is a lie.[11]

Some people bite that bullet. They say: “I’ll buy that genes play a role in a person's IQ and sociological profile. I just don’t want some kids to have an unfair advantage.” **In saying this, they reveal their hand: They reveal they know some families *already have a genetic advantage*. They just don’t want to change the existing power structure of our society.** Just as the Quakers used the German Protestants to maintain their power without ever actually helping them, the cultural supervirus’s internal power structure benefits from holding people down while paying lip service to them.

Those who the cultural supervirus has elevated cannot maintain their power if they do not stack the deck in their favor. They do this by reaching out with their fascist state hand and taking a firm grasp of others' family planning process. In so doing, they reveal what they have prioritized all along: Maintaining power. They never really planned on helping anyone in a way that would durably and structurally change the system. If some people really are born less intelligent than others, then the only way to create real equality is through making genetic selection open, accessible, and affordable to everyone. If genes don’t relate to IQ, then what we are doing is entirely inoffensive.

Now a person might say: “No, what I am *really* afraid of is some kids having a huge advantage over others.”

OK, so what's your end goal? If you really believe polygenic risk score selection (or perhaps gene editing) to be so terrifyingly effective, then we are in the process of developing technology that could make some humans orders of magnitude smarter than we are now in just a few generations. A myriad of positive externalities would result from an increase in average IQs given that IQ is significantly negatively correlated with murder, assault, robbery, motor vehicle theft, theft and burglary.[12] Think of the problems we could solve with that ability. Poverty: Gone. Carbon: Sequestered. Do you really want to stop all that just to preserve our existing system of systemic inequality?

Those arguing against transhumanism are arguing over an aesthetic, not a real risk—like an environmentalist fighting to shut down an already-constructed nuclear power plant before building environmentally friendly alternatives when the only alternative available is Russian crude oil or coal. Neither the cultural supervirus nor its zombified victims care about logic; the virus only cares about acquiring resources and perpetuating itself. Fortunately, the virus is a sterilizing disease and almost none of its husks reproduce above repopulation rate, hence our grandkids likely won’t have to deal with them.

Most of the hatred for improving the human condition comes from a fear of change—a desire to keep the species and our current way of life unchanged. This is why we say when people say they hate what we stand for, they mean they hate *transhumanism*—not *eugenics*. They use the word “eugenics” to dismiss us as racists and don’t want to mentally engage with the idea that many issues of systemic inequality could be addressed if we would only unlock this Pandora's box.

Don’t get us wrong; we know as well as anyone else that Pandora's box contains demons and new vices with which our species has yet to grapple, but how many lives is it really worth to keep it locked? How many people have to die in poverty? How many kids have to die slowly from screenable cancers? How many centuries must our species stagnate before you are finally comfortable letting some sliver of it step into the future?

We also sometimes hear arguments along the lines of: “But the science is not as accurate as you are implying!” or: “You could not possibly have that much of an effect with just a few edits!” First, a recent study with a

3,000,000-person sample size shows that DNA tests are now better at predicting educational success than even SAT scores.[13] In addition, once the technology is perfected, we can see that at the population level only 30 edits to a genome would move a population up one standard deviation of IQ within one generation and animal studies imply this can be done without an upper limit (given perfect technology and information about where the true causal variants are). For further discussion of this subject, visit the Appendix for an overview of the math of DNA editing.

Finally, if we are wrong, so what? This technology is improving every day. At some point you have to stop dithering and take a stand other than: “The technology is not yet effective.”

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Hard Culture Opposition to Polygenic Risk Score Screening

Once the supervirus extinguishes those upon whom it preys, we will only need to justify our transhumanism to those from hard cultures. Those cultures are much more difficult to win over, as rather than poorly-thought-through aesthetic arguments, they present logically consistent and morally motivated reasons to oppose what we are doing.

Many hard cultures will argue that with existing technology, we only "improve" our kids by *not* choosing some of our fertilized eggs. We are very sympathetic to this argument and believe it comes from a genuine and logical place. From some hard cultural perspectives (which hold that life begins at conception), people are unnecessarily dying because of what we are doing, but from the perspective of our culture, people would unnecessarily die from preventable diseases if we didn't screen our embryos. When you live in a multicultural ecosystem, you have to decide where to split the difference on questions like this.

Someone with a life-begins-at-conception perspective might argue: "Yes, but if you are right, all you risk losing by *not* following the path your ethics dictate is a few kids' lives and the chance to uplift our species. If *we* are right, you are extinguishing thousands of lives equal in value to the lives of adult humans. Shouldn't we as a society err in favor of the moral perspective that would prevent more needless death and outlaw your action?"

If we are playing that game, then we have to consider the perspectives of all cultures. A huge chunk of the world population believes that killing many mammals has the same moral weight as killing a human. Now what? Are you going to have the government ban burgers? Of course not. You don't want to live in a one-party theocracy any more than we do because both you and we know that the group running that theocracy would be an arm of the cultural supervirus and not one of us. We live at a point in history at which easy, aesthetically pleasing ways of seeing the world will always outnumber logically consistent perspectives.

You might wonder if we can really argue animals have the same rights as human embryos because each human embryo can become a human if brought to term. Again, this is a case of cultural framing. Our view of how time works means we are morally responsible for every human we *could have created* that didn't come to exist, not just fertilized eggs that aren't brought to term. Some cultures hold you responsible for every child not created when sperm is wasted through masturbation or when an egg is left unfertilized. We just take this reasoning one step further: Every child you *could have created* but don't represents a life for which you are responsible.

Nobody we're aware of is arguing that a fertilized egg feels pain when it is terminated. So why does that embryo matter? Why do so many cultures believe it to be a sin for males to masturbate? It's *the potential to be human* that gives those things moral weight. But shouldn't all potential human life be judged equally instead of drawing arbitrary lines at the third trimester, conception, or the emission of the sperm? We would argue that it's the psychological trick of loss aversion that makes some cultures value a human life more after some arbitrary line has been crossed.[14] To us, anyone who prevents a human from existing is performing an ethically identical act.

With current technology, this is a distinction all pronatalist cultures need to make. It is not mere hair splitting or sophistry. This technology greatly expands the female fertility window (meaning that not using it erases potential human lives), however expanding that fertility window requires the creation of extra fertilized eggs that may not be used once frozen (meaning those using this technology are preventing fertilized eggs from becoming humans). In our view, bans on this technology erase human lives, while from others' perspectives, this technology needlessly creates and destroys lives.

There are multiple logically consistent views like these that stand in direct conflict. At the end of the day, Simone can't even have kids without IVF and it is likely that many of our kids won't be able to either. There are still probably ways we could have kids without crossing others' moral lines, like single embryo transfers at every attempt, but that approach would be cost prohibitive. So it's not just that we use this technology to improve ourselves; we personally need it—or at least the part many hard cultures

morally object to—in order to survive as a cultural unit. Living in a multicultural ecosystem means making alliances with cultures with which you disagree but respect. Is your cultivar able to disagree with another while working with them toward a common goal?

> *We hesitate to address arguments that this technology involves "playing God" and that doing so is somehow wrong. Such arguments are fairly insulting to the concept of God and we don't think the sorts of people to make them would get this far in the book. If basic medical technology allows one to "play God," then God is pretty weak. We can't imagine such a God*[15] *intending for a kid to die via some debilitating genetic disease without realizing we might have the technology to reduce their odds of developing it. If God wants a kid to suffer or die, then He will have ways to make that happen. If a car rolls over on one of our kids, our assumption is God wants us to do everything in our power to lift that car—if, however, a meteorite fatally strikes one of our kids, then we will entertain the thought that God wanted that child dead.*
>
> *Consider the parable of the drowning man (which even has a Wikipedia page—neat)*[16] *in which a man gets to heaven and asks God why He did nothing to save him while he drowned and God replies, "Um … that's what the two boats and the helicopter were for." Immediately prior to his death, the man had turned these away, insisting God would save him and therefore using a man-made solution would be "playing God." We are not the types to turn our nose up at one of God's miracles because it was not flashy enough or because it required some effort on our part. We can't even imagine how a person could declare a medical technology that has the potential to dramatically lower a child's chance of severe suffering or death and improve their lives as definitively not a miracle.*

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Institutional Families (Post-Artificial-Womb Family Units)

It should not be surprising that a technophilic cultivar obsessed with reproduction would be bullish not just on polygenic risk score selection, but in vitro gametogenesis (IVG, the creation of thousands of egg cells from other cells) and artificial wombs as well. Our "descendant worship" metaphysical understanding of reality means that, despite persecution we may face for our actions, we have a theological mandate to both use and advance the technology. Heck, from our cultural perspective, to *not* develop and use such technology is to stagnate as a species and, stagnation is one of the highest orders of sin.

I, Malcolm, grew up with a room full of lab-grade medical equipment. One of my favorite possessions was a well-worn copy of Carolina Science, an encyclopedia-size catalog for buying lab equipment that arrived at my house annually and yielded endless functional treasures. We will do our best to ensure our kids have access to this same kind of equipment so they can build out and become intimately comfortable with the technology they will need to efficaciously reproduce. While it is easy to forget in a globalized, ultra-connected, laissez-faire society, we run the risk of being cut off from any technology we cannot independently personally build and execute.

> *An example to illustrate our point: After writing this chapter but before publication, we found out that an article about our family's use of polygenic risk score selection*[17] *may have caused some pretty horrifying backlash: Other parents trying, like us, to get polygenic risk scores for their embryos reported to us that one of the companies we had used for data stopped processing genomic data from embryos and removed several (quite important) polygenic risk scores related to mental traits from their database. This hammered home to us how important it is to keep a certain amount of technical capacity in-house.*

Leveraging developments in reproductive technology, many social ills can be resolved and fascinating new cultural models will become unlocked.

Imagine a world in which women didn't have to gestate their own children (or pay other women willing to do it). We already live in a society in which single women without babies out-earn men.[18] If we can prevent childbirth from knocking women out of their careers, we will be that much closer to gender parity among professionals who become parents (while couples can already choose how childcare burdens are shouldered independent of sex, it's inevitable that most mothers suffer at least moderate work-related time and productivity losses in pregnancy and childbirth).

Beyond female advancement in the workplace, consider what this technology could do for LGBT groups. The problem of low LGBT birth rates could be erased in less than a generation, allowing their cultures to be durably protected. What's more, with IVG, same-sex couples could have kids 100% genetically related to *both* partners (e.g., you could turn one gay man's cells into an egg and have his partner fertilize it), whereas now they're obligated to either adopt or use a donor egg and have each kid only genetically related to one partner. With an artificial womb, gay parents would not even need a surrogate. Crazier still, polycules of more than two people would be able to have kids that are 100% theirs (it is theoretically possible to make a child with 47 biological parents via chromosome selection).

We could address issues of inequality by granting access to this technology to anyone who wanted it. In addition, we could remove, or at least dramatically lower, rates of maladies like depression and anxiety—such can even be done with existing technology (as soon as IVG is widely available).

But all of that is thinking small. The future unlocked by advances in reproductive technology is far more vast.

Some Houses within the Index will be able to totally rethink what it means to be a family. They will be able to create Institutional Families, organizations that produce, educate, and empower humans at scale (e.g., an institution would be the primary unit of the family producing large numbers of intentionally designed children). While we don't advocate for the development of institutional families in our House, the Index does open the door to cultivars that may.

If the institution does a good job raising these kids, providing them with a good life and a good culture, descendants of these families will be motivated to give back to the organization after coming of age. Entire cultural traditions and ways of being human could be built around this practice. For example, you could artificially introduce genetic variation into the children the institution produces, modifying its seed genomes to favor genetic material associated with those members who, as adults, reinvest the most value back into the organization. To put it another way, those who contribute more to the organization in terms of resources will also contribute more of their genetic uniqueness to future kids produced by the factory. In addition, the institution could be run by an AI modeled on all living family members, creating a monarchy-democracy hybrid.

Now you might be thinking: “That’s monstrous. How dare you!”

Reactions like this are driven by a lack of imagination. While a family like this is horrifying in terms of how much it deviates from present social norms, it is nothing compared to what we expect to be competing against.

A more insidious iteration of an Institutional Family might genetically engineer its kids to need a specific protein only an associated company can produce and sell that protein to them at an exorbitant price. This may sound like science fiction, but it could be done with existing technology, as knocking out proteins with CRISPR is way easier than improving them (it is much less technologically difficult to break something than it is to improve it—almost every university has labs doing this for mice; this is how we make disease models).

Even just using IVG (which is just out of our reach at the time of this book’s publication) and existing polygenic risk score technology, a company could select populations of embryos for specific roles, like enjoying child rearing or hard math work, to specialize kids for specific roles in the company. An amoral actor may also be motivated to sterilize the individuals their organization produces to ensure they don’t have split focus and select against rebellious traits to ensure those produced don’t fight back. That last point is why we believe we have a good shot at outcompeting these groups—so long as we don’t slow down.

Someone will eventually build out this technology. The more advanced this tech gets, the more dangerous it becomes. Malicious actors will be able to build viruses that kill all humans who lack certain genetic markers *they* plant in people (e.g., they could create a virus that kills specific ethnic groups or everyone that wasn't made in one of their factories). If you ban the development of transhumanist breeding and genetic engineering tech in certain nations (e.g., let's say the European Union totally outlaws such technology) you just leave those nations defenseless.

China's population is expected to halve within 45 years.[19] As scary as this reproductive tech is, you had better hope they are working on it because if they aren't, their only solution to policy interventions that have failed to motivate women to *voluntarily* have kids is to *force* them to have kids. With birth rates falling at their current pace, banning work on artificial wombs makes the world described in *A Handmaid's Tale* an inevitability—and a close one at that.

Ultimately, *A Handmaid's Tale* paints a world in which women used for breeding are treated more humanely than they realistically would be in real life. Once you remove someone's agency over things like pregnancy, you are not just going to let them walk about in society—they would be way too much of a risk. It seems much more likely that disempowered women would be kept in specialized facilities similar to factory farms and forgotten about by society.

Humans are very good at ignoring the horrors that "must" exist to maintain our comfort. Anyone who has the slightest interest in protecting women's rights—or human rights—should be praying every day for the quick development of inexpensive artificial wombs (if you want to fund this development, contact us—we have connections secretly working on it).

An ideological war between differing philosophies on how and why the technology is used will eventually occur (unless an AI kills us all first) and it will be between those who want to produce humans at scale to augment human flourishing and those who want to manufacture humans in a bid to consolidate power, amass resources, or otherwise exploit captive audiences. Those who refuse to touch the technology are unlikely to have the expertise needed to intervene. When you hobble people like us who would like to leverage this technology to reduce inequality, empower diverse groups, and

contribute to human flourishing, you make it dramatically more likely that bad actors win.

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CONVERGENT EVOLUTION

While generalists exist, many species of animal have evolved some form or another of environmental specialization. It would be weird if this wasn't the case—of *course* the skills needed to thrive in a desert environment are not the same as those needed in a lush rainforest. The same is true for cultivars: While generalist cultivars exist, many are specialized to either one form of environment or one type of ecological niche within a multi-cultural ecosystem.

In this chapter we will explore various ways cultures specialize for specific ecological niches while also putting a special lens on cases of frequent convergent evolution. For example, independently evolved "city cultures" are consistently less likely to see dog ownership as a critical component of childhood and gun ownership for personal defense as a moral mandate. An understanding of cultural convergent evolution can help us model how cultures in the future might sort out when subjected to different environmental conditions that appear to produce consistent outcomes.

Not all of the niches that cultures evolve to fill are totally societal. Sometimes cultures evolve to fill an environmental, ecological niche in which other cultures either can't survive or can't compete. Consider the ancient Inuit or Seminole as an example of this.

An interesting phenomenon can occur when the specializations developed under extreme environmental conditions get slightly tweaked, making a culture wildly more competitive than contemporary counterparts. Just as some invasive species spread like wildfire when introduced to new

ecosystems that lack tools to defend against them, some cultures spread rapidly once introduced to new ecosystems.

> *By this, we merely mean that some cultures have exploded onto the world stage very quickly, outcompeting other cultures that had been in stalemates for generations because they had been honed within a unique environment. We don't use this analogy to imply anything disparaging about these cultures. It should be obvious that authors of a book about how some cultures outcompete others don't hold more competitive cultures in ill regard. If you choose to imply that we frame some cultures are "bad" because we described them as capable of spreading like an invasive species, you are intuitionally trying to mislead people.*

Three examples of a specialist culture coming out of nowhere to become one of the largest players in world history are:

- The Mongols: A step nomad horse symbiote specialist culture
- Islam: The confluence of a desert nomadic specialist culture and Abrahamic culture[1]
- The Vikings: A culture specialized around agriculture and fishing in extreme, cold-weather environments

> *Note on what we mean by "horse symbiote" cultural specialization: The Mongol cultivar of the 13th and 14th centuries was not just a steppe nomad culture but a "horse symbiote" culture. While* almost all *human cultures have symbiotic relationships with one species or another, the Mongols of the 13th and 14th centuries went balls to the wall with theirs. Not only did Mongolian culture specialize in making all sorts of horse-derived foods, such as horse milk, but they specialized in sleeping on moving horses and could even use a technique for drinking horse blood while on the move when a long force march was required. In the same way an animal can evolve to be symbiotic with another animal, a culture sitting on top of human biology can evolve to make humans symbiotic with another animal*

species. This is an example of a culture evolving to fill an extremist environmental niche.

In each of these cases, a culture that specialized in surviving under extreme environmental conditions shifted from being a non-player in world history to dominating a huge portion of Europe in only a few generations.

This dynamic suggests that cultures may be able to "sharpen" themselves and become more resilient by actively choosing to inhabit harsh and hostile environments—environments that force them to be innovative, strong, and proactive. (As we think about the design of our own family's culture, we wonder if perhaps we should always ensure a faction of this culture lives in extreme cold weather settlements or inhabits some other difficult-to-live-in place to encourage this sort of cultural strengthening.) Like people, cultures benefit from antifragility.

Alternatively, this phenomenon may be a product of unique elements these cultures evolved—due to their unusual formative environments—coming against cultures that had no natural defenses against these rare strategies.

A related phenomenon can be seen in left-handed people disproportionately excelling in many sports. For example, people learn how to play against right-handed batters, meaning they will always be slightly worse countering a left-handed one. Evolutionary biologists suspect that, at one point, all humans were right-handed due to the evolution of language leading to the corresponding side of our brains becoming dominant. This environment gave left-handed people an advantage in fights, making it a cross-cultural advantage for a stable minority group to exhibit this trait.[2]

It is therefore very worthwhile to consider how an intentionally designed or optimized culture you develop might leverage these dynamics to its advantage. If your pool of initial members *already* has some form of specialization, how can you use culture to maximize its value and how will that specialization alter your culture's relations with others? If your members lack a specialization but you see the advantage in creating one, how will you engineer evolutionary pressures that coax it out over generations? Consider these factors as you proceed.

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Roles in Multicultural Ecosystems

With regard to their ecological niches within a multicultural ecosystem, hard cultures can largely be thought of as being dominating, symbiotic, isolationist, or terraforming.

Dominating Cultivars

Dominating cultivars are usually defined by a belief that anyone can join their culture and anyone who does *not* ascribe to their theology and cultural practices will undergo some immense hardship after death. This creates a moral mandate within these cultures to do whatever it takes to eventually wrest control of local governing institutions and create pressures that encourage conversions to their culture.

While people often frame the aggressive conversion mindset of dominating cultivars negatively, it would ultimately be intensely immoral for someone to believe others faced eternal damnation and torment should they fail to convert and to *not* try to convert them. Cultural domination is a perfectly reasonable and good long-term goal for anyone who holds this mindset, even if achieving this domination causes short-term suffering. We are consistently shocked when people complain about being subjected to proselytization—it's like: “Bro, that person isn’t getting paid. They are going out of their way and risking ridicule in an attempt to help prevent you from getting hurt.”

When dominating cultivars make up minority populations in a geography, they typically claim, even internally, that their goal is not to create a theocracy. In addition, dominating cultures are very likely to play the victim card when they are in the minority (think: dominating Christian cultivars living in largely non-Christian areas making claims about the “war on Christmas”).

When a cultivar expects total control over its environment, any lack of control can feel like oppression. Consider the cries of oppression on Twitter from journalists, the inquisitorial class of the superviruses,[3] after Elon

Musk took it private and they started getting banned for breaking rules that had existed for years.[4] Consider the accusations of oppression from people who grew up in extremist conservative cultivars and find themselves obligated to work side-by-side with women.[5] Equality feels like oppression to any cultivar that frames the perspectives of other groups as intrinsically inferior.

This dynamic flips once dominating cultures become the dominant force in the population—suddenly, theocracy becomes imperative. Theocratic rule by a dominating culture doesn't always look like a Church literally running the state. Decentralized cultures, for example, typically impose theocratic control by translating their religious laws into state laws.

Symbiotic Cultivars

Symbiotic cultivars are cultures capable of living within a multicultural ecosystem without a mandate or even motivation to eventually dominate that ecosystem. Sometimes symbiotic cultivars achieve this by not believing in any sort of differentially worse afterlife for non-believers but more often than not they don't feel obligated to convert outsiders because they don't believe everyone is meant to be a member.

Cultures that *don't* see conversion of others as a mandate include those which tie member qualification to some level of heritability, like the Parsi and some Orthodox Jewish cultivars. Groups with weird theological structures, like Calvinists, who don't believe everyone is destined for salvation, also experience little motivation to win others over to their beliefs. It is somewhat ironic that the exclusionary—some might say "elitist"—nature of most symbiotic cultivars is what makes them uniquely compatible with other cultures.

A shift from a symbiotic culture to a dominating one among a nation's politicians will radically change its political mandates. America was primarily founded by people adhering to symbiotic forms of Christianity (between 55% and 75% of white citizens and even more within elite circles were Calvinist at the time of the nation's founding).[6] However, fairly recently in the history of the country, the American Christian landscape has

become increasingly dominated by Pentecostal Arminianism (a dominating culture). This shift caused Christian groups in America to fight harder to incorporate religious rules into government in an effort to spare U.S. citizens from eternal suffering. Had Arminianism been a dominant branch of Christianity at the nation's founding, the United States would be quite different, especially when it comes to the separation of Church and State.

An interesting quirk of most symbiotic cultures is that, because they specialize in living in multicultural ecosystems, they often evolve to fill specific social niches, becoming massively over-represented in specific careers and industries. Dominating cultures cannot afford this luxury, as their mandate to govern their entire society means members of that group must be able to fulfill all roles within a society. This can produce rather humorous results when a symbiotic culture that evolved to only fill only a handful of fairly specific cultural niches is forced to fill *all* the niches in a cultural ecosystem (e.g., As happened with Israel—more on this next).

Isolationist Cultivars

Isolationist cultivars thrive most when isolated from other cultures. While they can live peacefully next to other cultures, there is generally very little intermixing between them and their neighbors—either in commerce or cultural ideas. Like symbiotic cultures, they do not have a mandate to convert people. Unlike symbiotic cultures, they evolved to be complete economic ecosystems capable of functioning in isolation. A great modern example of an isolationist culture is the Amish, but we have seen isolationist cultures throughout human history, with a well-studied historic example being the Jewish splinter group known as the Yahad (the community from which the Dead Sea Scrolls hail).

Isolationist cultivars are at present the most successful of all cultural groups at resisting collapses in birth rate. As such, we should expect them to soon become major players in geopolitics in a way that is hard to fathom today. To understand just how quickly they are able to grow, consider the Hutterites (another anabaptist cultivar, like the Amish), which grew from just 400 members in one settlement to around 50,000 in just 140 years.

Isolationist cultures are among the few that have been capable of weathering the cultural mass extinction event threatening most other extant cultures today because they are able to “air gap” their nodal networks, which prevents memetic infection by threats like the supervirus. An air gap is a form of cyber defense whereby you simply do not plug a piece of technology into the network (e.g., You prevent your nuclear reactor from being hacked by not giving it an internet connection). However, we suspect the robustness of isolationist cultivars in the face of demographic collapse is due to more than just cultural separation.

Imagine society as a building made of clay. To keep the building stable, an internal wire structure is necessary. This wire frame is society's culture and religious infrastructure. The industrial revolution generated pressures which rapidly and dramatically changed the shape of society—that building made of clay—to the extent that not only is the wire frame unable to support the new shape (hence we see collapsing birth rates and other problems), but huge portions of the wire frame are now exposed to the elements and rusting. While this book attempts to resolve the situation by designing novel wire infrastructure to fit society's new shape, some cultures have avoided this mess by creating pre-industrial environments in which they can thrive, effectively preventing their clay buildings from changing shape in the first place.

There are two ways to address problems caused by changes to your society’s “clay building” without building new supportive wire framing. The first is what isolationist cultivars like the Amish do: They create a pre-industrial bubble around their communities, like an alien wearing a helmet full of methane to be able to breathe on earth. This has allowed their culture to stay healthy, resist viral infection, and maintain a high birth rate. The second way cultures create a pre-industrial environment that effectively protects them from obsolescence is more insidious: Instead of putting on a helmet full of methane, they set up methane generators which inundate the environment with the gas so essential to them and toxic to most. These are what we call terraforming cultures.

Terraforming Cultivars

Terraforming cultures thrive by transforming the social and economic fabric of the multicultural ecosystems they infest to pre-industrial levels. They treat women as second-class citizens, hold blood feuds, and kill LGBT individuals. They create environments that are hell to live in, but that lead to high birth rates. While, like dominating cultures, terraforming cultivars typically plan to eventually control an entire society, the way they spread is very different.

Dominating cultures typically use their control of a society to generate a high quality of life and wealth (though the quality of life produced by dominating cultures is typically a bit lower than that enjoyed in truly multicultural ecosystems). They then use the wealth they've generated to send out missionaries to new geographies (these missionaries are usually on temporary trips with only the goal of converting people).

In contrast, terraforming cultures primarily spread not through missionaries but by hobbling their host government and economy. Essentially, once a terraforming culture reaches a certain population threshold its surrounding local economy and social infrastructure will collapse and conditions begin to mimic pre-industrial environments, which causes birth rates to shoot up. This high birth rate combined with low quality of life drives at least some residents to flee from this environment, and like osmosis they move through a semipermeable membrane between their society and a more wealthy one. Once those who left the old region reach a certain population threshold in a new region (assuming they maintain the original culture rather than adopt the culture of their new homeland), they collapse that new region's local economy and repeat the cycle.

Now you might be thinking: "Ahhh—I get it, he is dog whistling about Muslim Immigrants" … and you would be wrong. White nationalist groups sometimes push a narrative similar to this, but the truth about U.S. Muslim immigrants is that their fertility rate is almost below replacement rate, they are just as educated as the average American, and they don't earn particularly less.[7] The vast majority of U.S. Muslim immigrants come from normal dominating cultivars that fill an ecological niche similar to the nation's dominant Christian groups, not terraforming ones. That is not to say that there are not terraforming Muslim cultivars (ISIS for example), but terraforming cultivars have independently evolved from Christianity, Islam,

Pagan beliefs, and surely at least a dozen other larger cultural genus, so despite what some might have you believe, there is nothing uniquely Muslim about this strategy. The U.S. has been fortunate enough to have (thus far) avoided large incursions from a terraforming cultivar. Historically, terraforming cultivars really only had success moving from incredibly underdeveloped countries to geographically adjacent developing countries.

Nothing malicious is happening in this process; there is no intentionality whereby people of terraforming cultures wake up one day and say: “Let’s move to another country and trash their economy.” It was just an evolutionarily successful cultural strategy. The only way to stop it is to make the strategy evolutionarily nonviable. The good news is the cultural supervirus kind of already did that: The supervirus requires a certain level of wealth and education in a region to spread effectively, meaning it has, at least in the short run, evolutionarily outclassed the traditional terraforming cultures (the tables may turn over the long run if the supervirus effectively sterilizes enough groups).

Despite popular narratives among conservative groups, terraforming cultures—just like their dominating culture kin—are in the process of dying as a cultural strategy. Huge campaigns to raise the level of female education coming out of wealthy countries, combined with the cultural supervirus’s effectiveness at transmitting through the internet, has crashed the birth rates of many terraforming cultures. Female education and internet access are like salt on a snail for terraforming cultures.

There currently is no obvious scary terraforming culture out there to sit up at night worrying about. But … the supervirus has only just recently begun to beat them. That means it is very likely that a few exceptionally virulent iterations of terraforming culture with stronger internal immune systems currently exist in very small pockets, like a few cells of antibiotic-resistant bacteria hiding on an agar plate after it was dusted with antibiotics. Specifically, if we see a highly technophobic iteration of one of the old terraforming cultures evolve that explicitly prohibits women from getting educated by either threatening them or keeping them in the house, we should be very, very worried.

As a final note, we advise against thinking of any culture itself as an "enemy." While this cultural strategy is at odds with the Index's values, all cultures have something of value that can be harvested given their unique perspectives. The more differentiated a culture is from your own, the more likely it is to see things in your cultural blind spots.

Instead, it is useful to think of cultures as existing in two categories: Cultures that can't coexist with others in a multicultural ecosystem with those that can. Cultures capable of coexisting with others in multicultural ecosystems can be further subdivided into permanent allies who can be wholly trusted (symbiotic hard cultivars whose interests align with yours) and only temporary allies who cannot be trusted (dominating cultivars whose interests only temporarily align with yours).

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The Mystery of Modern Jewish Urban Specialization

What about more generic specializations? For example, why does modern Jewish culture seem heavily biased in favor of living in cities and dense settlements despite this predilection being absent in early Jewish history? Not only do Jews live in cities at a higher proportion than almost any other large culture on earth (a whopping 96% of Jews who live in the U.S. live in urban areas),[8] but even when forced into rural environments like in parts of Israel, they use unique models that betray an intense lack of comfort with isolated rural lifestyles. Specifically, two new types of settlements were invented for these environments, one being the collectivist commune of the Kibbutz and the other being the Moshav, a kind of ultra-dense suburb in otherwise rural areas.

Why would a culture that, for thousands of years, has been repeatedly isolated into ghettos, then "genocided" when returning to cities, not stop putting themselves in such a vulnerable position? It's not as though Jewish people have a theological reason for returning to cities—or even a history of living primarily in cities before the medieval period. In exploring my (Simone's) own Jewish heritage, this question intrigued me enough that it in part inspired this book. (My family rediscovered we are matrilineally Jewish while I was growing up, so my mother was not able to pass any Jewish culture on to me.)

> *For those unfamiliar with Jewish history: The Holocaust was hardly the first genocide that targeted Jews—just the largest. It was common throughout the medieval period for Jews to set up in a city, be pushed into a ghetto, and then be rounded up and expelled or killed in a pogrom. Oddly, it looks like during this period—the period of most intense persecution—the predominant Jewish cultivar became an urban-specialist one.*
>
> *Also, some might dismiss the above question with the answer: "Oh, Jews have to live in population clusters of other Jews to form minyans (a quorum of ten Jewish adults required for certain religious obligations)." This explanation can be dismissed because*

historically there were large (now extinct) rural Jewish cultivars. Jewish culture can and has adapted minyans to rural environments. Heck, most of the sects of Christianity that first settled the U.S. were minority religious groups that worshiped in congregations and yet they had no trouble settling in rural areas and traveling long distances to regularly worship together.

This question seems particularly pointed right now, with the rise in antisemitism on both sides of the political spectrum painting a worrying picture for the Jewish community. Why don't Jews get out of cities and arm themselves before the next pogrom commences? Given the opinions you have read in this book, it shouldn't surprise anyone that many of our personal friends are Orthodox Jews. Despite many of these friends being quite politically conservative, none of them owns more than a couple guns, all live in difficult-to-defend urban centers, and despite many being wealthy, almost none own ranches or farms outside the city to which they could retreat in a worst-case scenario.

As we hail from mostly rural-specialized cultivars, this seems insane. Even when we don't hear our people dehumanized on both sides of the political aisle, our inherited culture is screaming at us: "Arm yourself! Become self-sufficient! Own enough land to grow food for your family! Move as far away from others as possible when society starts to become unstable!" We say all this with the clear realization that these rural cultivars have been less successful than Jewish culture (both in being less old and less prevalent today).

Clearly there is some advantage to a Jewish strategy of urban specialization, so what is it?

Our theorized answer comes from understanding we are asking the wrong question. After the Second Temple period, Jewish refugees splintered into a plethora of cultivars, filling dozens of unique ecological niches and causing Jewish culture to undergo something of a cultural Cambrian Explosion. Only a small, tightly related family of these cultivars survived the medieval period intact and that is what created the illusion that Jewish culture is more widely specialized to live in cities. It would be like a Floridian asking, "what is it about Cuba that makes Cubans so conservative, capitalistic, and

good at starting companies?” The answer of course is that nothing about Cuba makes Cubans in Florida have those qualities; rather, there was a strict selection event that disproportionately sorted for Cubans with those qualities and drove them to Florida. In the same manner, nothing about Judaism makes it an urban specialist culture—but something about the selective pressures Jewish people faced at a certain point in their history did.

Suppose Jewish culture evolved some rural components (which we know it did historically). What happened to the city components and the rural components every time a local ruler decided he didn’t want Jews anymore? Jews had no larger population center to which they could retreat. Because, to a rural culture, land = wealth = survival, a choice to flee meant giving up everything (possibly even their ability to survive). Their only means of earning an income, and the only way for rural Jews to get food again, would require either finding and settling unused-but-fertile land or taking someone else's land.

In a city culture, wealth is stored in things like precious metals and jewelry, making it much easier for urban families to pack up, flee, and start fresh somewhere else. More importantly, city cultures make money off of generalizable skills. If you are a cobbler and you have to flee from one city and set up shop in another, it might be hard, but you will be able to make a living creating and repairing shoes in this new city (unless the local cobblers guild kills you or has some licensing system, but that's a different story). If, however, you are a farmer and you have to move to new land, you are screwed.

This dynamic makes rural communities more likely to try to stay and tough out persecution[9]—and end up getting themselves killed. While the city branches of Jewish culture presented an easier target, they were also much more mobile. In other words, Jews living in cities prompted more frequent genocide attempts, but less *thorough* genocide attempts. If anything, the frequent targeting of Jews, which forced them to flee cities and relocate in various other cities, could have served to *increase* this urban cultivar’s geographic footprint while also ensuring higher genetic and cultural relation across that geographic footprint. A Jew of this city-focused cultivar living in Geneva would be more closely related to a Jew living in London—both

culturally and literally—than a member of any Protestant cultivar due to the Jewish population being regularly forced to leave cities and redistribute itself across a smattering of European cities.

Were there any winning strategies for *rural* Jews during this period? The only conceivable winning strategy would be not to fight back or flee, but get *very good* at hiding your cultural identity. We see one cultivar of Jews that took this strategy in the Crypto Jews of Spain (and subsequently Mexico).

There also appears to have been at least two small martial rural Jewish cultivars (Jewish cultivars that did evolve into the militaristic rural niche) that survived to modern times and only recently went extinct as distinct cultural identities: The Mountain Jews of Dagestan and the Habbani Jews. Zionist emissary Shmuel Yavne'eli noted: “The Jews in these parts are held in high esteem by everyone in Yemen and Aden. They are said to be courageous, always with their weapons and wild long hair, and the names of their towns are mentioned by the Jews of Yemen with great admiration.”[10] (When we say a cultivar went extinct, we do not mean literally every practicing member has died—just that the community is no longer large enough or graced with enough cultural memory to regrow into a century-spanning identity.)

Clearly rural Jews faced far too many headwinds to produce many surviving cultivars—and it makes perfect sense why: An armed rural population is far more threatening to dominating forces than an urban population that trusts the rule of law to protect them. Let’s say you’re a king and your people are champing at the bit to scapegoat, kick out, and loot a particular culture within your domain. Should the group be urban, you would likely raid and steal their valuables while killing a chunk of them but otherwise let them leave, as they are not an active threat. On the other hand, you would make sure to surround and completely eliminate an armed rural version of this culture, as they represent the type of group that might come back and counterattack should you fail to destroy the entire collective.

This can be seen pretty clearly in Jewish history from the medieval to modern period. While we are aware of Jews fighting back often in their early history (before they were urban specialists), we cannot find a single instance of modern Jewish people (e.g., after the Jewish revolt against

Heraclius in 602) counterattacking or trying to forcefully take over a city or regional government after being partially slaughtered and expelled. Given that this happened *a lot*, it's pretty remarkable. (Two exceptions to this trend of not fighting back in the moment, though neither instance was retaliatory, can be seen in The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Jewish Labor Bund in Communist Russia.[11])

But again, this makes sense. If someone enters a city-based community and starts killing 5% of the population and you fight back, all of a sudden you are a threat and your attackers become motivated to kill *everyone*. This cultural imperative is partially ensconced in both Gideon's story from the Book of Judges, Elijah, and the Book of Esther, with the Book of Esther making it clear that the way to prevent pogroms is to obtain political influence, not to fight back.

> *What would have happened to the Jewish community if it hadn't experienced a "Cambrian Explosion" during this period? What would have happened if Jews had stayed in the Levant and kept rebelling? In the Appendix chapter: "Alternate History Jews: Samaritans," we explore this question. Short answer: They would probably not exist today.*

You might be thinking, "What about the Yom Kippur War? It may not have represented *exactly* those circumstances, but it *did* involve Jews fighting effectively against an invading force." While you would be right, this happened at a unique new point in Jewish history at which they finally had land again (land not taken through a Jewish invasion) and this reaction was triggered because they could not retreat from said land. More importantly, they did not fight like a rural group would. A rural specialist culture would have armed families to form a loosely organized guerrilla force (a fun cinematic depiction of this aesthetic can be seen in *The Patriot*[12]). Instead of a loosely organized, tribal-unit-based guerrilla response to the invasion, Israelites instead organized a state-run-and-supplied military response, very much reacting to the threat as a city-state and not a rural collective.

In contrast to more martial rural cultures, urban-specialized cultivars are more naturally adapted to modern integrated military tactics that require the

rapid formation of deep levels of organization and high-trust command structures. The cultural evolutionary pressures that shaped martial cultures perfected them for war of a different era—war that was far more tribalistic and focused on smaller units. This in part explains why Israelites did so well despite being outnumbered, out-supplied, and out-teched. For those unfamiliar with the Yom Kippur War: The invading armies outnumbered the Israelis at a ratio of 100 to 1 in manpower and 10 to 1 in armor and artillery. At that time, Israel was not the military-industrial tech power house it is now.[13]

So, when we state that urban cultures don't protect themselves, what we mean is they don't protect themselves *at the level of the family*. They trust complex systems (governments, militaries, etc.) to protect them—and in a globalized world, that is a very smart strategy. Should globalization break down, it is less clear how sustainable this strategy will be.

It is also unclear how smart this strategy is after the Holocaust, which demonstrated that while pogroms are far more rare in modern times, they are significantly more thorough. With birth rates collapsing around the world and Secular Jews being the only large technophilic cultivar that has an above-repopulation birth rate when practiced in developed countries, Jewish people are going to have a huge target on their backs. (This instinct of collapsing predominant ethnicities to target minority populations with high birth rates can be seen in China's ethnocide of Uyghur cultivars).

> *You may be thinking: "There couldn't actually be another period of massive, extreme, systemic, government-mandated discrimination against Jews in the near future, right?"*
>
> *Sadly, we think a surge in serious discrimination is likely if the supervirus is not overcome. Given the ethno-nationalism inherent in some strains of right-wing ideology, there has always been some latent antisemitism in certain factions of right-wing thought. While for a time the left wing provided a united counterpoint to these isolated forces, the virus has fundamentally changed the game.*
>
> *A core ideology the virus needs people to hold so that it can spread is that: (1) Harmful discrimination against a group is the core cause*

> *of inequality and (2) Ending that discrimination will end inequality. That the Jewish community has at the same time been oppressed and successful runs counter to this narrative. To address the mismatch, the supervirus has flirted with classifying Jews as not just a privileged class but* the supreme privileged class *and ultimate enemy. It has begun to claim that Jews were never actually that oppressed, but used their power to write a false narrative of oppression. (If you doubt this, consider how communist groups like The Black Hammer burned copies of Anne Frank's diaries—or spend some time in an ANTIFA chat room.) When antisemitic rhetoric and policies become a panacea to politicians across the political spectrum, buckle up.*

For the last few hundred years, it would seem that a minority culture susceptible to bigotry is best served by having a disposition toward cities. Given this, why do some cultivars like ours strongly prefer rural environments and see cities as dangerous? How are they able to do this while still staying stable? We think this is the case for two reasons.

First: Rural specialist cultures are almost always specialized at the type of guerrilla warfare that makes the land they occupy very hard to hold. For the most part, armies have historically been fueled by cities—outside of no-longer-viable cultural ecological niches, like "nomadic army" specialist cultivars and roaming mercenary specialist cultivars (for example, we know from literature there was a large group of Jews that lived a mercenary lifestyle after the Second Temple period that filled this ecological niche before going extinct).

Rural specialist cultivars have therefore been able to leverage the threat of decentralized, guerrilla warfare to occupy environments that urban cultivars aren't willing to pay dearly to hold. This is why many of the cultural groups that were most successful on the American frontier—who pushed out the greatly-weakened-by-disease native population (which had lost over 90% to disease in some areas)—came from regions of Europe that were historically thought of as hostile or barbarous (like the Irish, Scots, and some groups of Germans) while immigrants from nations like Italy mostly stayed in cities.

Second: Rural specialist cultivars tend to bestow to adherents a detachment to material and intergenerational wealth (prioritizing ideological objectives instead), making it possible for them to endure despite occasional obligations to drop everything, flee, and start fresh somewhere new. For example, during the Civil War, multiple members of my (Malcolm's) family chose to repeatedly resettle on new land every time Confederate troops tried to burn them out (the most historically recorded example of this was the Kaiser burnout). Despite this, my ancestor Warren Collins managed to have 13 kids—meaning a choice to forgo wealth in favor of ideals did not interfere with our family's fitness, genetically speaking.

This sort of mindset has become increasingly engrained in the rural specialist cultivars that both Simone and I have inherited. Though both of us were raised to see wealth as moderately useful, it was emphasized far more that we should always be prepared to lose everything and that what mattered most was the skills we had acquired (which we could ultimately just use to rebuild lost wealth). This mindset enables rural specialist cultivars to endure through time, but is probably detrimental overall as it leads to the frequent total loss of intergenerational wealth (and the cumulative advantage that accompanies it).

It therefore doesn't surprise us that Jewish culture still outcompetes Calvinist culture over the long run, demonstrating that the city-focused strategy has been optimal for the long-term survival of a culture—at least in a historical context. The question is, is urban specialization *still* the optimal strategy? As of now, we can't know. It would be wise to encourage multiple branches of a culture to attempt different angles of the strategy.

Downsides to urban specialization in the modern world:

- **Pop culture exposure:** Being a city-based cultivar puts cultures at increased risk of degradation from pop cultures and almost necessitates that the culture come to trust the state (as mass human organization requires some central governing body).
- **Risk of state-imposed culture erasure:** It is this trust of the state that puts urban-specialized cultures at increased risk going into the future. Many states infected by the cultural supervirus have begun to overtly utilize environments where they have disproportionate

power, like cities, to outlaw cultural practices such as homeschooling, which play a key role in intergenerational cultural transfer. Forcing cultures to surrender their children to a school system literally descended from an institution designed to erase people's cultures (or as they might say, "culturally integrate people") can quickly extinguish a culture.
- **Higher catastrophic risk of ethnocide:** Postindustrial efforts to wipe out a city-based population are more thorough than pre-industrial genocides (again, consider the Holocaust).

Downsides to rural specialization in the modern world:

- **Lower intergenerational wealth:** A rural-specialized cultivar will almost always be less wealthy.
- **Difficulty finding partners:** In modern environments, it is very hard to find high-quality partners in decentralized and dispersed rural environments.
- *Note: The biggest downside no longer exists (being tied to the land) as very few rural-specialized cultivars actually grow their own food anymore.*

There is also a hybrid approach whereby people are expected to move between a city and rural environment depending on their life stage (e.g., using cities to secure a partner and the countryside to raise a family). There are certainly cultivars that have leveraged this model successfully in the past; just consider the landed gentry in England around the Regency Era, which would flock to London for the Season (enabling their youth to intermingle and marry) and to serve in Parliament, but return to their country estates for the rest of the year. This model might work; however, it may also be too complicated to pass between generations with fidelity, especially for less wealthy families that are unable to occasionally pass rural and urban properties on to future generations.

Our favorite strategy—but one that requires a larger population to execute—involves a significant portion of a cultivar's population migrating to a cultivar-run city state. This approach grants the dual benefits of a defendable cultural environment and good dating markets, all while

nevertheless encouraging a broader diaspora to operate in the wider world, gaining new skills, building wealth, and introducing new cultural developments that might strengthen the central culture. To some extent, Israel showcases an attempt at this strategy—but one that made the mistake of choosing land that *other people wanted*. To be fair, this was considered at Israel's establishment and there was a significant push to have the Jewish state set up on less desirable land in Africa (called the Uganda Scheme). If we were going to attempt this strategy for our House's cultivar, we would establish our city state somewhere in the far north, not just to reduce the odds of others wanting to live on the land, but also to obligate our cultivar to develop high-tech agriculture not dependent on a stable environment and ensure that our descendants grew up with the feeling of daily hardship (more on why this is important later).

Notes:

- If reading about rural versus urban strategic advantages and disadvantages sparked your interest in settling somewhere new, you might be interested in a deep dive we created with tips on where to live if you want to have a lot of kids and not live in a city: Pragmatist.Guide/Live/
- If our descendants ultimately decide to establish a physical colony, we would remind them Cyrus the Great warned his soldiers who wanted to move their capital to a more hospitable location: **"Go ahead and do this, but if you do so, be prepared no longer to be rulers but rather subjects. Soft lands breed soft men; wondrous fruits of the earth and valiant warriors grow not from the same soil."** A few generations after Cyrus the Great died, his descendants moved their capital to the most indulgent place in the world at the time, Babylon, and the dynasty was wiped out within a generation.
- On the subject of geographic determinism: Look at maps showing where Nobel Prize winners were raised—or average IQ scores by region. They suggest that heat addles the mind.[14] This might have something to do with protein denaturation, time spent inside, or even some sort of physical stress response, similar to how fasting can make you sharper—but with opposite results. Regardless,

choose land in the far north: Not only will this keep you sharp, but the hostile climate will dissuade weak people who fear discomfort from joining you and diluting your fervor. Better yet, building a culture that specializes to survive in hostile environments in which one must grow food inside with technology and spend most of the time indoors will hone members for long-term space travel. Besides, if you share our predilections for frostpunk aesthetics, northern settlement will fit you like a glove! (To be clear, we are not arguing that groups which live in cold environments *evolve* to be smarter but that anyone who moves to a cold environment gains an IQ and productivity boost.)

- Growing up, we remember how much the news would make fun of George Bush going to his ranch and "cutting brush" all the time. George Bush comes from a fairly similar rural cultural background to me (Malcolm) and his family was fairly close friends with mine so what he was doing was always super obvious to me and I never heard it explained well. In (especially wealthy and high-status) rural-focused Texan families, there is an expectation that every honorable individual will spend a certain portion of every week doing menial, manual labor. An individual who didn't do this would be said to be "all hat and no cattle." This ritual has both social signaling motivations (e.g., I don't think I am better than manual laborers) and, I believe pretty firmly, that regular grueling manual labor is important in maintaining mental clarity for people of a certain sociological profile—in the same way meditation or singing might be important to people crafted by other cultural backgrounds
- If you are into all this Jewish history talk and wondering where prohibitions against eating pigs came from, the YouTube channel Religion for Breakfast offers a great video on the subject.[15] Suffice to say that pork prohibitions were almost certainly not a health thing but an economic thing and a Bronze-age-identity-politics thing. Honestly, we cannot recommend Religion for Breakfast enough to anyone who is a fan of this book, religion, or history in general.

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The Myth of a Large, Genetic Jewish IQ Advantage

> *Note: This contentious topic has been difficult to research not just because academic philosophers are functionally blocked from discussing such things in public (for example, a paper was recently retracted from a philosophical journal for being offensive),[16] but because independent researchers on both sides of the debate who share their findings have been misleading. If you are familiar with the YouTube war on this subject or think you have read both sides of the debate and have made up your mind, we encourage you to read this chapter nevertheless, as we cover information not present in the public discussion.*

When we started writing this book, we were fairly certain that Jews were smarter than other groups either at a cultural or genetic level.

- Anecdotally, we like to think we associate with disproportionately intelligent people (as gauged by notable professional achievement) and have no reason to mostly be friends with Jews—yet a huge chunk of our close friends are either Orthodox Jews or Secular Jews.
- Objectively, Jews win Nobel Prizes at a rate 100X higher than would be expected given their population levels. Among the highest-ranked chess players, 51% have at least one Jewish parent (this is not something that could be easily explained by nepotism). Jews are represented among the world's richest people at a rate 100,000% higher than would be expected (they make up 19% of the Forbes 200 richest list and 0.19% of the world population).[17] Jews are overrepresented in the Congress and the Senate at a rate about 400% higher than one would expect based on their population in the United States.[18]
- Jewish success is plain for anyone to see; Jews are dotted in positions of power throughout our society at a rate that would not be expected given that they only make up 2% of the U.S.

> population. Consider, for example, that as of this book's creation, 41.61% of Joe Rogan's political guests have been Jewish and 20.27% of his science guests have been Jewish.

It comes as no surprise that many people have come to the conclusion that Jews must be smarter than other people on average. That said, after going over the evidence, we have changed our minds on this subject drastically. This was such a jarring change of opinion, we had to make edits throughout the book after it happened.

First, let's get the most common myth out of the way: That "Jews are smart because the Holocaust acted as a selection event, eliminating the less intelligent Jewish population." The types of evidence cited in this argument (Jews being overrepresented in educated professions and positions of power) can be seen in data before the Holocaust. For example, in pre-Holocaust Germany, Jews were overrepresented in the medical profession at a rate of more than 1,500%, with 47% of pediatricians being Jewish even though Jews accounted for only 0.9% of the population at the time.[19] Stats like this can be found virtually anywhere you look in reference to pre-Holocaust Jewish populations.

It is similarly unlikely that "pogroms made Jews smart." We say this for two reasons. The first being that other groups plagued by pogroms (like the Romani—aka Gypsies) are not also known for being disproportionately in jobs requiring higher education. Second: Jews, objectively, are not particularly smarter than average.

Just as we did when we first dug deeper, you might be thinking: "Wait, what? That can't be true. I have read my entire life that Jews are super-duper smart. Aren't there like a bunch of scientific studies that show Jews have higher IQ?"

While it is true there are a bunch of studies on this topic, they don't ultimately demonstrate in a robust manner that Jewish people have systematically higher IQs.

The most-cited and well-conducted study on Jewish IQ differences was published by Margaret Backman in 1972.[20] This study compared 1236 Jews to 1051 non-Jewish Caucasians across six different batteries of tests focused

on different types of intelligence. It found that Jews had an average score of 51.88 across all test categories while Caucasians had an average score of 51.22—that's a 1% difference. (Note: Backman also did a preliminary study in 1970 that people sometimes cite, but it only looked at 65 Jewish boys, so we are ignoring it.[21])

What is wild is that people will frequently cite Backman's 1972 research as proof that Ashkenazi Jews have a higher-than-average IQ. They do this by only mentioning the two of those six test areas in which Jews *outperformed* other populations (verbal and math) while ignoring the parts where they *underperformed,* then generalize that score, creating the illusion of some big intelligence difference—but that is objectively *not* what study says.

If it were true that Jews had much higher IQs, Israel (with an 81% Jewish population) wouldn't have an average national IQ lower than that in the United States (94 vs. 98).[22] We find this nation-wide number very compelling, as it is much harder to manipulate than individual studies. As Ashkenazi Jews make up almost half (44.2%[23]) of the Jewish population in Israel, it is preposterous to assert that they sport an average IQ over a standard deviation above that of the general population—unless one also asserts that non-Ashkenazi Jews are outlandishly stupid, which (most) supporters of the "Jewish competence" theory don't argue.[24]

In fact, one of the core champions of the Ashkenazi-high-IQ theory, Miles Storfer, argued in his book *Intelligence and Giftedness* that Sephardic Jews (who make up most of the other half—44.9%—of the Jewish population in Israel)[25] have an average IQ of 111. If this were true, even if all non-Jews in Israel were mentally handicapped, you still couldn't get an average IQ of 94 for the nation.[26]

While Backman's 1972 paper is the most cited peer-reviewed article on this topic (being cited 252 times at the time of this book's publication), another well-known researcher in the space is Richard Lynn. He argued that Jews have a higher-than-average IQ in both 2004[27] (with a paper now cited 49 times) and 2008 in co-authorship with Satoshi Kanazawa[28] (with a paper cited 32 times). Lynn used the same test in each case, however his 2008 work with Kanazawa involved more participants.

While these studies yielded results in line with Backman's research, they only tested *verbal IQ*, which allowed them to "prove" that Jews have a general IQ advantage by cherry picking the type of intelligence measured. We suspect Lynn chose to be intentionally manipulative as he specifically cites Jews getting low non-verbal reasoning scores as motivation for his research:

> ".. but these are so variable and in some instances so low as to raise doubts about their credibility. It is difficult to credit that the Jewish sample could have a non-verbal reasoning IQ of 91.3, and at the same time a mathematical IQ (''quantitative reasoning'' in the McGrew and Flanagan taxonomy) of 109.7. It is also difficult to credit that the Jewish sample could have a verbal IQ of 107.8 while at the same time having a short-term verbal memory IQ of 95.1. These results are in need of checking and replication."

If Lynn's goal was to truly prove the claim that Jews do actually have a higher general IQ, he would have focused on the non-verbal-reasoning facets of intelligence investigated by Backman in 1972, where Jews were deficient—not where they had an advantage.

Imagine your kid took a battery of evaluations and while they performed wonderfully on the verbal test, their visuospatial test score was wanting. If you wished to prove the results were wrong about their overall performance, you would have your child retake *just* the visuospatial test—the one on which they performed poorly—rather than the verbal evaluation (where presumably you have nothing to contest). If instead you just wanted your kid to get into a good college and didn't actually care about getting a "true" measure of their performance, you would find some other test that only had a verbal component and present it as an evaluation representative of your kid's overall performance.

Lynn tries to argue exactly this:

> "The first items of information of particular interest to us are the respondents' religion and ethnic group. An analysis of these enables us to categorize the respondents as Jewish, non-Jewish white, Black

> and other. The second item of interest is the respondents' score on a 10-word vocabulary test. Vocabulary is a good measure of both general intelligence and verbal intelligence."[29] [30]

Lynn's findings around vocabulary are largely in line with the verbal advantage found in Backman's research, meaning there is some reason to have confidence in Backman's other scores as well.

You might be wondering about other data cited by those who argue Jews are something like a standard deviation smarter than other populations. Outside of the Richard Lynn's work, this data mostly comes from two studies: The first (13 citations)[31] compares wealthy, Jewish, NYC day school students to a general population, while the second (331 citations)[32] uses data from Kibbutzim whose graduates have historically outcompeted other Jews within Israel. While the second study itself is not making an argument about Jewish IQ, Miles Stopher used its data to make that assertion in the aforementioned book, *Intelligence and Giftedness.*[33]

Despite their samples being quite skewed—and even though neither study itself claimed to make assertions about general Jewish IQ—people often cite them when making arguments around the average Jewish IQ. Imagine you wanted to show that British people were smarter than other people, so you compared the performance of students at elite British private schools or gifted programs to that of students in other nations' *general populations*.

If you shared our original assumptions and believed there were was an abundance of well-conducted research featuring large sample sizes that clearly demonstrated outsized Jewish intelligence, you probably think we are cherry picking, but in the words of Richard Lynn himself,

> "There is only one study of the intelligence of American Jews in the last half century which appears to be representative and had a reasonable sample size. This is Backman's (1972) analysis of the data in Project Talent, a nationwide American survey of the abilities of 18 year olds carried out in 1960."[34]

That's the very same study that shows an only 1% difference.[35]

You see similar things wherever you look:

- While Jews are not compared to a Caucasian population in a 1965 paper by Gerald Lesser, Gordon Fifer, and Donald Clark (with a whopping 657 citations), Table 12 indicates that Jews only outperform Chinese participants on verbal (90.35 to 71.09) and math (28.50 to 27.79) skill and come in below Chinese participants on reasoning (25.21 to 25.94) and visuospatial (39.71 to 42.51) skill.[36]
- Greta Adevai, Albert Silverman, and Edward McGough report in a 1970 research paper (which has been cited 22 times) that when Jewish college freshmen were given a ten-test battery of perception skills, Jewish student performance was significantly below that of non-Jewish classmates when participants with matching SAT scores were compared.[37]

Probably the most compelling evidence suggesting a higher Jewish general intelligence comes from *The Bell Curve,* which contributes evidence from the NLSY (National Longitudinal Surveys) data set to the debate. This data *does* indicate a dramatically higher Jewish general IQ (0.84 standard deviations from white Christians), though it does admit that "we cannot be sure that the ninety-eight Jews in this sample are nationally representative" and that the "source of the difference is concentrated in the verbal component."

After conducting an extensive search, the only other research we found that supports the "Jewish competency hypothesis" with IQ data are two papers, both published in 1976 (what's with this subject and the 1970s, right?). One, by Julius Romanoff (which has only been cited by others five times), suggests an average Jewish IQ of 115.[38] The other (cited 42 times), by Victor Cicirelli, compared Jewish sixth-grade students to those representing the general population and found the Jewish participants to have a seven-point IQ advantage.[39]

A final source of evidence we have yet to address—but which may prove us wrong—relates to high-IQ-correlated polygenic risk scores being higher in Jewish populations.[40] While we find this evidence uniquely compelling, we

hesitate to update our beliefs based on this finding alone after seeing so many people misquote and misinterpret research. We also wonder if these polygenic risk scores are picking up IQ-correlated traits that grant Jews a verbal advantage more acutely than others.

In short, outside of a few highly ideologically motivated studies, the strongest data-backed claim that a person can reasonably make about Jewish IQ differences is that Ashkenazi Jews have marginally better verbal IQ and math skills, which is offset by marginally lower visuospatial intelligence and reasoning—like 5%-10% in both directions. It is really weird that people always mention Ashkenazi Jews' higher verbal and math scores but almost never bring up their equally lower non-verbal reasoning scores, which is what leads to the neutral effect on IQ overall.

If you are like us, you are now probably thinking that there must be other studies out there but Richard Lynn is right; Margaret Backman really published "the only one study of the intelligence of American Jews in the last half century which appears to be representative and had a reasonable sample size." We went over a number of meta studies and they mostly pulled from the above cited papers. There are three alternate hypotheses we have seen thrown around:

1. That Jews have a non-standard curve in their IQ (i.e., there are more Jews at the extreme high end and low end of the curve)—however we have not seen data to back this up.
2. That Jewish exceptionalism actually comes from some mental health conditions occurring at higher rates in the Jewish community—but again the evidence here is fairly weak (see the article in the footnote for a detailed exploration of this hypothesis).[41]
3. Marginally higher verbal and math IQ alone explains all Jewish success. This theory seems possible to us, though the world would be a much less interesting place if it is (more on this later).

Readers who spend a lot of time online might vaguely remember that some YouTuber posed an argument along these lines only to be debunked. The YouTuber who scratched the surface of this argument, motivating us to dig

deeper, was Leather Apron Club[42] (whose bias against Jews[43] lead to motivated reasoning—as can be demonstrated by his choice to cite Backman's 1972 data when talking about Lynn's 2004 research and leaving out some studies we do address here). UBERSOY on YouTube "debunked" his argument, though his rebuttal fails to address the problem that there is no large, well-conducted study demonstrating that Jews have dramatically higher general intelligence, neglects to mention that the largest, most respected study in the space only showed a 1% difference in IQ, and doesn't acknowledge that researchers have manipulatively measured only verbal IQ while implying their findings are representative of general IQ.[44]

Whereas we think Leather Apron Club was not going through the evidence in good faith and would have manipulated the data to support his bias against Jews, it seems as though UBERSOY was trying to be intellectually honest. We suspect that UBERSOY simply got so caught up in creating a strong counter argument that he allowed himself to get taken in by the shell game Lynn and others play with verbal IQ. There is real reason to be skeptical that a markedly higher Ashkenazi average IQ is a genuine phenomenon.

This is a great example of why an intellectually diverse cultural ecosystem is valuable. Leather Apron Club's hatred of the Jewish people caused him to question something we would have never thought to question on our own—that Jews are smarter than the general population and this intelligence largely explains their disproportionate success. Ironically, his catching the street hustlers in their verbal IQ shell game serves to undermine his larger agenda among people like us who don't think Jewish success can be explained by nepotism or an evil Jewish cabal, as it indicates there is something genuinely valuable about Jewish culture itself rather than just Jewish genetics (more on those points shortly).

If Jewish people *did* have significantly higher IQs, elements of Jewish cultural success would be very hard—if not impossible—to replicate through the intentional creation of a family culture. If, however, most Jewish success comes from a purely cultural edge (and the network that culture provides), elements of Jewish success can theoretically be replicated. (All this assumes that Jewish success is not just a product of slightly higher verbal and mathematical IQ, which appears to be robustly

attested. We aren't dwelling on that possibility because it is probably not the case and boring if true.)

> *Fun side note: There is an entire niche industry focused around trying to copy Jewish culture in China, with books that have titles like:* Become Rich Like a Jew,[45] To Make Money With the Jews, *and* Jewish People and Business: The Bible of How to Live Their Lives.[46]

Finally, some portion of readers will see Jews not being particularly smarter than everyone else, yet still ending up in positions of power, as definitive proof that something nefarious is afoot—that Jews are somehow conspiring to control our democracy. First, let us emphatically guarantee you that there is no intentional Jewish conspiracy. There are enough stupid Jews with low self-control, as there are with any large enough population, that the mechanisms of this system would be revealed if it did exist. Jews find it just as confusing that they outcompete other groups as outsiders do. There is no shadowy group advancing their careers any more than there is a shadowy group of Catholics slotting church members disproportionately into positions on the Supreme court. (If you are wondering on what authority can we state so emphatically that there is no secret society of Jews controlling the world read "The Jewish Cabal Theory" in the Appendix.)

While Jews do benefit from nepotism, they don't benefit more from it than other groups that share a strong sense of cultural identity, like Mormons and Catholics (keep in mind that Mormons have even systematically institutionalized nepotism by often favoring people who have received a temple recommend—that is, Mormons who have gone through the steps required to be welcomed into LDS Temples). We would even go so far as to argue that Jewish networks are *less* nepotistic and supportive than those belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientologists. Anyone living in the U.S. has access to these kinds of nepotistic networks through various groups they can choose to join. Heck, these days, the Effective Altruist community's nepotistic network will help people more than the Jewish network—*and* is open to all.

If Jewish people aren't somehow "cheating" to get ahead in society, how are they doing it? While we don't have a strong answer, we suspect our private dinner parties, at which we host people we think might change the course of world history, grant some insight. Around 2% of the U.S. population is Jewish and yet somehow when we select high-potential-for-impact guests (at what to us feels like random), around 50%+ end up Jewish.

How is this "random" selection method for people we think have a high likelihood of changing the world pulling up mostly Jews? When inviting people to these dinners, we often send out cold invitations to people who recently wrote something online that we found intellectually stimulating or controversial in a way that engages us. It seems if you send cold invitations to creators of intellectually engaging blogs, podcasts, and Substacks, a huge portion of them will be Jewish.

Why? **Jewish culture encourages adherents to invest time in the types of public discussions that can feel pointless—even socially dangerous—to members of most other cultures.** This higher likelihood to speak publicly when others would feel social pressure to stay quiet may also explain (at least in part) the preponderance of Jewish comedians (something we discuss detail in the chapter "Relation to Pleasure and the Arts.").

Across all layers of Jewish culture, from rituals (chavrusa) to internal hierarchy (the rabbinic system), debate skill is both practiced and rewarded at an unparalleled level vis-à-vis other cultures. Those who grow up in Jewish culture will therefore more enthusiastically call bullshit on society because their cultural framing trained them to emotionally reward themselves for doing so. It's not that Jews are smarter than other people on average; it is that when individual Jews are smarter, they are more likely to speak up in ways that get them noticed.

Essentially, when not using pre-existing accreditation networks (like universities, guilds, and secret societies), individuals looking for the smartest people in society to hire and befriend are going to search for people writing or saying engaging stuff in a public context, and those people are disproportionately Jewish. This gives Jews a little-used "side path" to power. Jews access this side path not because they are smarter, but

because they have a cultural compulsion to share engaging ideas publicly at higher rates.

Take the top ten controversial online intellectuals you like to follow, focus on those you believe you chose without any outside influence (small blogs, undiscovered podcasts, and the like), and try to determine whether they have Jewish ancestry. We think you will be surprised. If our theory is accurate, it means Jewish overrepresentation in positions of power will increase with the sustained rise in internet culture.

> *This theory does not explain why among the highest-ranked chess players, 51% have at least one Jewish parent. When deciding whether or not it valid, keep that in mind.*

In researching this subject, we came across an interesting and widely believed conspiracy theory: That Jews were overrepresented among the Bolshevik communists who took over Russia. We say this is interesting, as digging into the stats actually presents the opposite question: "Why were so few Jews represented among the Bolsheviks?" Jews only made up around 3% of highly ranked Bolsheviks. While this is an overrepresentation of Jews, it is dramatically below what one would expect given Jewish overrepresentation in other areas of power (for a deeper, well-sourced discussion on this, check out the Wikipedia article).[47] *In short, it looks like there were far, far fewer Jews in the upper level of the communist party than one would expect. Anecdotally, Simone's Jewish side of the family had to leave Russia because they were White Russians (people who fought to support the Tsar).*

We suppose the lack of Jewish support for Bolsheviks shouldn't be surprising based on the fact that the Communist government of Russia later specifically targeted Jews to be eliminated as a cultural group.[48] *This should not be surprising given that Karl Marx was wildly antisemitic: "What is the worldly religion of the Jew?* Huckstering. *What is his worldly God? Money….An organization of society which would abolish the preconditions for huckstering, and therefore the possibility of huckstering,*

would make the Jew impossible." Marx furthermore complained that Jews were "reproducing like lice." While some claim Marx made statements like these in an attempt to hide his pro-Jewish inclinations (as he had some Jewish ancestry), [49] *the fact that Marx's goal was the systematic elimination of Judaism as a cultural identity would make such obfuscation conspiratorial in the extreme.* [50]

Generally, we would shy away from conversations that attempt to tie an IQ trend to a specific ethnic group, but this particular instance warrants discussion because people use the myth of Jews' higher IQ to dismiss the role Jewish culture plays in their success. Obviously, given the topic of this book, this myth is very important for us to dispel.

We shy away from the topic of IQ trends as they broadly relate to ethnic groups for two reasons.

First, as you can see in the case of claims around Jewish IQ, data used to prove this stuff is often far more shaky than those who authoritatively share it imply.

Second, even if IQ does vary across ethnic groups, such variation is largely irrelevant as of our generation—and any variation will be totally *irrelevant going forward for our species. The idea of one ethnicity being superior to another along any number of measures is nonsensical in a world in which families can create their own vision of an Übermensch in just a few generations through the use of IVG and polygenic risk score selection. Objectively, the more cultural and genetic diversity there is in the genetic pools that uplift themselves through technology, the more robust and safe the future of our species will be. When performing intentional genetic selection at the level of individual genes rather than ethnic groups, the more colors of paint on the palate, the better.*

Whenever we hear someone talking about ethnic IQ differences, we feel like we just broke into the Big Bad's lair at the end of an action

movie to find him monologuing about the sharpness of the masterfully honed samurai sword he used to win many impressive historic battles, waving it around like a goofus. Bro, we have guns. Fully automatic guns. No one cares about your samurai sword. …

Speaking of Guns …

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Gun Ownership and Responsibility of Protection

A city-dwelling culture whose members attempt to protect themselves with guns will become a target for surrounding communities and be seen as a "public menace" more generally. When you live in extremely dense areas with heavy state control and abundant government services, you also need to harbor a certain level of pro-sociality and trust in your fellow man in order to thrive.

In the same breath, it makes sense that many cultivars and individuals would not trust the state. From our perspective, a certain level of suspension of logic—a mass delusion if you will—is needed if one is to trust any large bureaucracy to be either efficient with its resources or just in its action. Those distrustful of large bureaucracies naturally sort themselves into more rural environments, where their beliefs would likely be compounded. For example, once in a rural environment, a culture is unlikely to have much state support in the event of a targeted attack, making self-defense capability something of a necessity.

Individuals from these cultures who were unable to protect their land were likely to have that land seized, either by the state (which historically did this a lot to rural populations deemed incapable of militarily enforcing their property rights) or other groups with mal intent (it was often not worth a state's time to correct for land theft so long as the occupying residents paid their taxes). This even happened in the United States up until about a century ago. Such history puts the stereotype of the ruralite pointing a shotgun at outsiders into context.

Groups suspicious of large bureaucracies were generally against things like taxes, as historically states directed most resources they collected toward urban centers and were largely parasitic on rural communities. Governments, after all, were often more concerned about keeping those closer to home and in positions of power happy in order to stay stable. People in the countryside have historically only warranted state attention insofar as they threatened rebellion. On that note: Many of these groups regularly incited rebellions, which themselves piled on more anti-bureaucratic selective pressures. It is little surprise that surviving iterations

of these rural cultivars developed not just extreme suspicion of large bureaucracies, but also mandates around self-armament, sovereignty, and self-sufficiency.

Again, we will present the predominant modern Jewish cultivar as an extreme example of an urban-specialized culture. Jewish gun ownership is the lowest of any religious group in the United States according to a 2005 American Jewish Committee study[51] (only 13% compared to 41% of white evangelicals and 31% of Americans). Even in Israel, which given its history and the way it relates to its neighbors would have every reason to be bullish on citizen armament, is very hesitant about gun ownership among its Jewish population, turning down 80% of applications for gun licenses annually (compare that to well under 1% in the U.S.). So, while you will see guns all over Israel, they are overwhelmingly being wielded directly in service to the state, with only 4% of guns issued in the country not being of military issue.[52] (And again, we really need to distinguish the predominant modern Jewish cultivar from historical predominant Jewish cultivars, as the Jewish cultivar dominant throughout the Roman period was clearly extremely rebellious, martial, focused on self-protection, against authority, and distrustful of the state.)

Contrast urban Jewish culture with your gentle authors' cultural background, which presents the other extreme. In our inherited culture, it would be seen as a tremendous moral failing and a sign you did not "really love your children" if every adult member of the family was not comfortable using a firearm (both the mother and the father). When we had our first kid, both sides of our family offered to send us money to buy (more) guns, additional firearm training, and membership at the gun club across the street from our house.

This was seen as a normal evolution of our responsibilities upon having our first child: We advanced from being responsible for protecting only ourselves to being responsible for protecting a household. To someone from an urban specialist cultivar, the idea of giving your children more guns *because they now have kids in the house* probably sounds completely insane. (Note: We are fairly sure this rural tradition is not tied to our Calvinist religious ancestry but rather our Scottish/Irish backwoods ethnic ancestry—these were the types of people who migrated to the U.S. at the

first chance they got, then kept moving West every time civilization caught up with them.)

As kids, we were expected to learn both wilderness survival techniques (how to navigate in the woods, purify water, grow food, hunt, identify poisonous plants, etc.) and how to use basic weapons. My (Malcolm's) family only focused on the most practical weapons (guns, bows and arrows, and explosives).[53] Simone's family additionally trained in more "ornamental" forms of self-defense. Her father, for example is a black belt in Aikido (she was actually born in Japan while he was there training in depth with a grandmaster), her sister's family likes to throw hatchets in their backyard, and when we first started dating, Simone proudly showed me her collection of pink knives. (Actually, one of my cousins made a joke when learning that Simone's family had a penchant for things like hatchet throwing, which they saw as indulgent, and thus effete—a good example of how even similar cultures can have differences.)[54]

It is funny how I (Malcolm) expect readers to either react to the above comments with: "OMG, your families are insane extremists" or "Well duh, *all* families raise their kids that way—how is that experience in any way remarkable?" (The latter was Simone's reaction when I tried to explain to her why we can't give knives to our students as gifts.) In writing this book, however, we spoke with a lot of people about their childhoods only to realize that shared, mass-media-created narratives around childhood do not reflect the day-to-day childhood experiences of most Americans.

> *Note: If our assertions about rural armament in the U.S. feel too anecdotal to you, consider that in the U.S., among adults who live in rural areas, 46% say they own a gun, compared with 28% of adults who live in the suburbs and 19% in urban areas. Of those, 75% of those in rural areas say they own more than one gun, compared with 48% of urban gun owners.*[55]

From the perspective of rural cultures, a choice to live outside of cities is primarily seen as a defensive tactic. While our extended family members primarily live in cities, even most members of modest means have parcels of land in the countryside (ranches or farms) where they take their kids and

grandkids to learn to grow food and develop wilderness survival skills. Many people we know who hail from rural specialist cultivars but live in cities will actually buy their first farm, ranch, or lake house before buying their first house in the city—as if it were a sort of umbilical cord that lets them survive in an urban environment.

What's particularly funny is how, in a society with no real day-to-day threats, people justify self-defense expenditures around fictional pop culture threats like zombies. Yes: This is something you will regularly hear if you hang out with quirky prepper communities. It's as though people know they are building these skills to protect their families and because they can't think of any *real* reason to be investing so much effort in doing so, they come up with a tongue-in-cheek reason that pulls from their evoked set of societal collapse scenarios.

Someone from another culture may hear this and imagine kids performing rigid paramilitary training drills in the woods. Within most rural, large-bureaucracy-suspicious cultures, survival training is rarely framed this way—rather, it is framed as "playing in the woods," "playing with a bow and arrow," or "remixing fireworks and blowing up toys." Neither Simone nor I grew up thinking we were being trained in weapons use and survival, nor did our parents see what they were doing in that light.

When I first started writing this book, I mentioned this section to Simone and she was like: "Come on Malcolm, you are reaching—*everyone* does that. It's not like it's unsafe; my aunt only got shot in the face with an arrow, like, once." Then she thought about what she said and was like ... "Oh weird—I guess that *does* sound off." When I brought this up with my dad he was like: "Come on, we even had my childhood friend who blew all the fingers off his hand playing with fireworks talk to you about how dangerous they are," to which I replied, "yes, that was a prelude to your giving us fireworks to play with." (Now that I am an adult looking back on it, it was super dangerous for my parents to keep the fireworks box next to the toy box.)

Our society has such a specific and hostile view toward the paramilitary training of children that it is very hard to recontextualize what we think of as normal childhood games and happy, wholesome memories of playing with friends and family as weapons and survival training. This mental

masking shows how very specific cultural mandates, like: “Make sure all kids know how to use weapons and survive off the land,” can pass between generations while the implications of the purpose of those mandates can be forgotten. It is also fascinating how stark and ubiquitous this difference is, with essentially everyone we know from a rural culture being taught skills like hunting, fishing, weapons training, basic explosives training, swimming, horseback riding, basic mechanical maintenance, etc. while the culturally urban people we know were typically only taught around half those things.

People from rural cultivars also heavily modify potential mates’ desirability by their self-sufficiency. A woman who can fix a car or clean a fish will have much higher levels of desirability in one of these cultures—and a man who can’t may very well be off the table as a partner. Women from these cultures often develop “feminine” ways to signal their rugged abilities, hence Simone showing me her pink knife collection on an early date. (A funny song about this that happened to be on in the background while I wrote this section is “Shut Up and Fish” by Maddie & Tae.) As a final note for readers who didn’t grow up around rural cultures: Having at least one dad threaten you with violence if you hurt the daughter you are dating is very common and not just a trope from movies. Such threats are not seen as mean, boundary-crossing, or even particularly adversarial—it’s more just the respectful thing to do.

We can logically admire the philosophy of “not fighting back” and “trusting the system” seen in urban specialized cultures and still not be able to practice this wisdom, both due to our own sociological profiles and our cultural biases. To “trust the system” is a strategy that requires an enormous amount of restraint—restraint that we know we (and our likely descendants) lack. Our kids will have multiple great uncles and direct ancestors who attempted to start their own countries through armed rebellion: George Washington (uncle), Jasper Collins (uncle), Robert the Bruce (direct), Warren Collins (direct), Charlemagne (direct), Oliver Cromwell (direct),[56] etc. We are stacking the cards against our own children if we give them a culture that doesn’t expect them to take a shot at founding a breakaway state.

As a side note: It is remarkable just how genetically ingrained these instincts can be. We can see it in our kids, even as toddlers. We learned pretty quickly that the joy they get from rebelling against authority is greater than the inconvenience of any authority-delivered consequence. Worse, if one of our kids sees another get punished for something and they don't see a logical justification for it, they will gleefully do it themselves. For example, if we place one kid on a time-out for climbing on the kitchen table, we will inevitably come back to a room with a table covered in giggling children. We once found a childhood report card my mom kept in which we were referred to as "demons" and now I get what our beleaguered teachers meant.

The anti-authoritarian streak we and our children have inherited, both culturally and genetically, explains in part why we want to cultivate a diverse and healthy cultural ecosystem. Authority-trusting, urban-specialized cultures play just as important a role in society as their authority-suspicious rural cousins. A country made up of nothing but Collinses would be a pretty shitty place to live. The healthiest societies will have both urban and rural cultivars with both groups engaging in constant cultural interchange.

While we are incorporating anti-authoritarian traditions into our House's intentionally designed cultivar, we will make some edits. We disagree with our ancestors on the assumption that the most common environment will always be "nature" and that traditional "prepping" is always the best strategy. We think Mormon culture shows a perfect example of this kind of short-sightedness. Much of the way the Mormon population decided to protect their families was specifically aimed to avoid annihilation in the event of a nuclear apocalypse (large, underground bunkers beneath Mormon temples, mandates to have emergency supplies of foodstuffs on hand, and special cultural rituals for regularly rotating out emergency food supplies) —a scenario that is far from the top threat to the LDS Church today. (Fun side note: Simone's grandfather worked on building the Mormon temple in Oakland and apparently it has a massive underground bunker—much bigger than what has been publicly disclosed.)

We will leave it to our descendants' best judgment to determine which level of prepping and self-sufficiency is best for their particular times and environments. The message we will instead emphasize is that one must always be prepared to be hunted, because an ethical person in an unethical world always is at that risk. This may entail knowing how to live in the woods, but it also might mean keeping a big chunk of your wealth in cryptocurrency, having the ability to live in the sewers beneath a planet-wide megacity, or knowing how to fix the life support system on your spaceship. Our House's cultivar will ensure its members never rely on the generosity of a bureaucracy to feed themselves, protect themselves, or breathe.

As if to reinforce everything I initially wrote in this chapter, two days after I completed it, Simone—who at the time was in her third trimester with another child—came to me and said "our house is not defended well enough" so:

- *She booked an appointment at our local gun range for a refresher on loading, unloading, and properly cleaning our guns (and was very frustrated to be reminded she could not practice while pregnant)*
- *She asked her dad to mail us her favorite bow*
- *She ordered Faraday cages and bags for all of our backup computers and devices*
- *She bought a new set of water purifiers for our bug-out bags*
- *She got a quote on a backup solar system for our home*
- *Oh: Nearly forgot all the bear mace—yeah, she wanted lots of bear mace and was very excited about it*

It is weird to me that this "arming up" instinct seems to be triggered by pregnancy. I would think it was just the hormones if not for the unprompted gifts of additional weapons we keep getting from our families every other time she gets pregnant.

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Urban vs Rural Approaches to Charity

One of the most distinct differences between urban and rural cultivars is the level of trust they place in institutions. Urban cultivars express a much higher level of trust in all types of institutions. This divide is widened when a culture also uses expert consensus as its primary criterion for truth, as is the case with both the Catholic and Orthodox Christian families of cultivars.

This is seen most clearly in terms of rural cultivars living with an ever-present fear of government crackdown or societal collapse. We are constantly shocked to find even our most sober-minded family members allude to personal backup plans addressing government crackdown and apocalyptic scenarios—for example, in the midst of a recent baby formula shortage, we learned that Malcolm's fairly vanilla brother kept a year's worth of food and supplies in storage, a Geiger counter, and water purification kits.

One study in the EU showed, "people in rural areas have lower political trust than urban or peri-urban residents, with this difference clear for six different forms of political institutions, including politicians, political parties, and national"[57] Another study in the EU showed that anti-globalist voting was much higher in rural areas.[58]

That rural cultivars distrust governments is straightforward—but people from urban cultivars can be taken off guard when they realize how deeply these groups distrust *any* large bureaucracy, including charities, higher academia, and the broader education system. Earlier in this book, we claimed that it was obvious that the Effective Altruism movement is a secular offshoot of a Jewish cultivar, and we pointed to Effective Altruists' trust in institutions to distribute capital as evidence for this. Generally, when someone from an urban cultivar makes a ton of money and wants to make the world a better place, they will give that money to institutions of "experts" to distribute on their behalf.

This is radically different from the manner in which institution-distrusting cultivars try to make the world a better place. These groups often personally

build out and run programs to see their goals for the world executed and attempt to make these institutions self-sustaining and cash positive. This can be seen in the way we distribute our money (e.g., We founded, initially funded, and run things like CollinsInstitute.org and Pronatalist.org) but also in contrasting billionaires like Mark Zuckerburg and Elon Musk. Whereas both through the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and directly, Zuckerberg gives his money to institutions designed to improve people's lives, Musk works to personally see his visions for the future realized by starting or gaining control of for-profit entities subsequently run under his direction, ranging from Tesla (addressing global warming), to Ad Astra (addressing education), Twitter (addressing freedom of speech), and SpaceX (making humans an interstellar species).

To people from rural cultivars, any institution that is run by someone who hasn't proven they were competent enough to make the money in the first place is liable to become corrupted. We have personally encountered several large non-profits that have effectively devolved into giant virtue signaling machines. Those working at these nonprofits who focus on efficacious action always have less time to put into internal politics than Machiavellian colleagues who only care about moving up, leading these organizations' most competent players to be consistently outcompeted and edged out. (Having worked alongside several large nonprofits, which commonly succumb to this sad fate, we can say with some confidence that you could easily get 600X per dollar spent by putting funds into a smaller nonprofit or a scrappy, impact-driven startup.)

Even the Pragmatist's Guide series is largely a product of our distrust of the academic bureaucracy's ability to soberly and fairly tackle topics like sexuality, relationships, government, religion, and life philosophy. An intense distrust of institutions will likely serve cultivars well as the education system gets better and better at infecting kids with the cultural supervirus and exorcising them of the unique aspects of their inherited cultures.

That said, a healthy cultural ecosystem can't function without people who trust systems. This can be seen statistically in long-tail cultural outcomes: Remember how we pointed out that seven of nine sitting Supreme Court Justices were raised at least partially Catholic? Well, the other two were

raised Jewish, making them 18.5X times more represented than one would expect given their percentage of the population. The Supreme Court has no members descended from (only) Protestant cultivars. Ultimately, cultivars that trust institutions are also better at running those institutions (in the few societal domains in which they are absolutely necessary—we definitely wish there were fewer).

Multicultural ecosystems aren't only optimal at the long tail of the distribution. To use the COVID-19 pandemic as an example, a healthy cultural ecosystem needs both people arguing that COVID vaccines are in the best interest of the common good *and* people pointing out that vaccine advocates are in a position in which, even if they were to discover a vaccine was dangerous, they could not broadcast information about vaccine risks without damaging their careers due to a poorly designed incentive system.

A monocultural ecosystem is extremely fragile. China's Zero COVID policy (involving two years of draconian lockdowns) presents an excellent case in point. While initial COVID lockdown mandates were objectively beneficial (with even libertarian analysts admitting as much),[59] they also long overstayed their utility. The USA benefited both from having authority-friendly lockdown advocates, who initially ensured they were imposed, *and* anti-authority lockdown critics, who eventually ensured they were lifted. China lacked this second, anti-authority group (having either killed them all or forced them to emigrate to Taiwan or join China's international diaspora). As a result, government lockdown mandates kept getting more extreme and their illogicality spiraled. People are able to rise within China's monocultural hierarchy by being slightly more extreme than those above them; there are rarely negative consequences for interpreting an order "too thoroughly." This leads to horrific results, like people being welded into their apartments, having barbed wire put around them, and even starving to death—all for nothing.[60]

Unhampered by pushback, China's government officials have started using anti-COVID apps to do outrageous things like empty people's bank accounts and lock them in place when they head out to protest by flagging them as having COVID. This should not be surprising coming from a monocultural nation featuring low hostility toward bureaucracy and institutions. Recall from the chapter on Catholic vs Protestant standards of

evidence that countries with more trust in expert consensus feature higher rates of corruption.[61]

The cultural supervirus has a similar view toward authority and a similar system whereby adherents climb in the social hierarchy. Unlike the healthy level of trust in institutions we see in Catholic, Orthodox Christian, and Jewish cultivars—one that can work alongside other cultures—the cultural supervirus mandates cultural conformity in the institutions it infects. Just like in China, not only is there no way to challenge the authority of the supervirus, but there is no reward for challenging its authority if you are later proven to be right. Anyone who cares about truth or freedom should be very scared of the cultural supervirus.

> *Side Story 1: One of our good friends ran a research lab at a top university that studied the effectiveness of masks at preventing COVID spread. She bemoaned how insane it was that their findings clearly demonstrated that the masks most people wore were ineffective, but that they couldn't highlight this major takeaway in research abstracts or interviews with the press because a huge chunk of their funding came from the NHS (the U.K.'s healthcare system), which had levied the very mask mandates their research demonstrated to be ineffective.*
>
> *During the COVID-19 pandemic, the cultural supervirus demonstrated it didn't care about anything it had previously claimed to support. It didn't care about how much pollution it generated (in the form of 1.6 billion masks now in the ocean, making up 7% of the great garbage plastic patch).[62] It didn't care about unnecessary developmental delays caused in children whose parents lacked the resources to pull them out of daycares with mask mandates.[63] It didn't even care that public school shutdowns fueled an increase in inequality and disproportionately hurt BIPOC groups.[64] Instead, the supervirus used the pandemic to conduct a witch hunt, identifying everyone who worked to address the actual cause (minimize harm during the pandemic) without paying homage to the virus's mission (consolidating power and spreading) and enthusiastically excising them from positions of power and influence.*

Now that we understand school closures went on for too long[65] [66] *and were primarily prolonged by teachers unions and not scientific data, does the virus apologize to people like Jennifer Sey,*[67] *who was forced to step down from her job for calling out mask mandates for children and arguing that school closures set disenfranchised kids back years while giving rich kids who could stay in their private schools a huge advantage?*[68] *No; of course not—no one is ever rewarded for speaking truth to power in an infected institution. The supervirus only rewards people who tear down those who are "off message." The point of the virus is not to govern effectively, but to weed out individuals who might dissent.*

During the COVID outbreak the priests of Bel have left their footprints clearly in the ash—the only question now is do you have the courage to update your perception of the world.

Side Story 2: One of our editors pointed us to the works of Curtis Yarvin, saying he had some ideas similar to ours (for example, that the virus evolved out of Quaker culture). Going through his work is very interesting, as he seems to be as lucid as us about the way culture works but approaches fixes from a Jewish cultural perspective, trusting authority / centralization of power. This explains why, despite working with the same information and having the same level of lucidity, he supports a monarchy while we support the Index model (a decentralized self-sufficient network of cultural alliances).

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Pets & Domesticated Animals

The role of domesticated animals in human evolution and the development of human civilization is undeniable. Dogs enhanced our ancestors' hearing and sense of smell thousands of times over, allowing them to hunt dramatically more effectively than they would otherwise be able to. Dogs even played critical roles in the domestication of animals that required shepherding and protection, like sheep and goats.

Cats on the other hand, had a hand (or should we say paw!) in helping small tribes transition to large-scale civilization. Before cats were domesticated, it was incredibly hard to store grain without it becoming infested with mice. After embarking on their partnership, humans just left their obligate carnivore feline friends at grain silos, where they conveniently ate the mice and not the grain. This partnership allowed for food to be stored in times of abundance then distributed in times of scarcity. This logistical feat necessitated the development of a more sophisticated government apparatus and was one of humanity's first steps to civilization. While today we've mostly forgotten the critical role felines played in the development of human civilization, it certainly was not lost on people during this transition, as can be seen by groups like Egyptians of the period going so far as to deify cats.

The manners in which cultivars relate to domesticated animals differs widely. At one point in an interview with a tribal family in Africa, an anthropologist inquired about their relationship with "their dog," referring to a dog that came inside and fell asleep in a corner of their hut. The anthropologist's wording confused the family, which explained to him it was not *their* dog; it was just a dog that happened to sleep in their house. From their perspective, the dog was just another autonomous member of the village.

Under current Islamic law, having a dog around during prayer invalidates that prayer, hence most Islamic cultivars are fairly "anti-dog." With such being the case, it will come as a shock to people that, "according to several authoritative accounts of his life and teachings, the Prophet Muhammad himself prayed in the presence of dogs."[69] In fact, dogs were frequently

seen around the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina, the second holiest site in the world for Muslims after the Kaaba, for the first couple centuries after Muhammad's death. It seems as though Islamic culture did not start seeing dogs as unclean until after the development of centralized trash authorities.[70] (The article cited here offers a great writeup on this subject if it piques your interest.)

Islamic cities were more sophisticated than their Christian “Dark Age” correlates and in response to the spread of disease, they developed dedicated authorities to remove trash from cities. Before these trash authorities were created, dogs helped to clean city streets and thus were beneficial. After they lost one of their core urban utilities, dogs became nothing but pests. It could be argued that the difference in views of dogs between western European cultivars and their Islamic counterparts is primarily due to Islamic cities’ earlier invention of sanitation practices and the denser nature of Islamic urban centers.

This dislike of dogs is actually fairly common across urban-focused cultures, such as Jewish culture. The Talmud is quite explicit in its criticism of dog ownership and Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich (the Fiddler on the Roof guy) at one point said: “If a Jew has a dog, either the dog is no dog, or the Jew is no Jew." General Jewish distaste for dog ownership can be seen in the stats, with only 5% of Israelis owning a dog, a rate more than four times lower than general dog ownership in the United States.[71] There is a common myth among the Jewish community that this dislike of dogs began after the Holocaust, however considering that Rabinovich’s quote is dated to 1903, that supposition appears to be unfounded.

It is unclear when Jewish sentiments against dog ownership first arose. For example, Geoffrey Miller[72] argues the presence of thousands of dogs in a cemetery near Ashkelon dating from the 5th century BC shows Jews of the period were fond of dogs, while Lawrence Stager argues that Ashkelon was a *Phoenician* city during that period.[73] In the paper “Dogs in Jewish Society in the Second Temple Period and in the Time of the Mishnah and Talmud,”[74] Joshua Schwartz observes that “most of the Jewish sources from the Second Temple period and the time of the Mishnah and Talmud continue to maintain the negative attitude toward dogs expressed in the Biblical tradition” and concedes "it is improbable that dogs in Jewish

society were the objects of the same degree of affection as they received in the Graeco-Roman world or the Persian world."

Islamic and Jewish anti-dog attitudes are pragmatic for people who live in cities. Dogs make a ton of sense if you are trying to herd animals, protect livestock on a farm, hunt, or protect rural property, but make little sense for people living in a city and can even be quite dangerous. However, for the same reasons, rural cultivars are usually pro-dog.

On the subject of dogs for defense: It may not just be a stereotype that dogs are objectively effective at preventing crime. Neighborhoods with higher levels of dog ownership also tend to have lower levels of homicide, robbery, and aggravated assaults.[75] Admittedly, it may not be dogs themselves that prevent the crime; the association could be totally correlational—or perhaps dogs work as an effective signal. After all, if rural cultivars are in favor of both dog and gun ownership, criminals are going to learn after a while that breaking into a house with a dog is much more likely to plant lead in your temple.

It should come as no surprise that our inherited Calvinist and Scottish/Irish/English cultures in which we grew up in are rabidly pro-dog —to the extent that it would be seen as not *borderline* child abuse, but *actual* child abuse, to raise a kid without a dog in the family. Our family canine cultural biases extend to dog breeds as well, with our cultural tradition seeing dogs that do not work (e.g., Chihuahuas, Bull Dogs, etc.) as being a sign of moral failure in their owners—even though we do not work our dogs. This is illogical and perhaps related to a cultural memory of dogs being a tool of utility to the family while also having a place within it.

We find ourselves wondering whether people's inherited affinities for dog ownership are the product of mere cultural memory or an intuition that might serve some purpose in our current and future society. The research on this topic seems to indicate that dog ownership during childhood positively impacts kids' immune systems,[76] reduces allergies,[77] increases physical health,[78] and improves EQ.[79] (While studies correct for this, it is critical to note that dog ownership is also heavily associated with higher socioeconomic status.) Ultimately, we've decided that dog ownership is warranted not just *traditionally*, but also *logically*, hence our having a dog.

The biggest risk, culturally speaking, of pets in the modern world comes not from disease but their ability to somewhat satiate people's hunger for parenthood. Most humans feel an instinct to have kids, and just like pornography, pet ownership can be used to masturbate and relieve that biological drive. You see this every time someone talks about their dog or cat as their "baby" and treats their pet in such a way.

Cultures found the idea of having sex with animals disgusting long before they cared about consent or animal wellbeing. Sex with animals is one of the many pathways that leads to nonproductive sexual relief and hence lower birth rates, and recall that any culture that allows for lower birth rates will ultimately be outcompeted by one with higher birth rates. Within the culture we are intentionally building for our House, pets are framed as a tool for improving children and protecting the family that must never be used to satiate a hunger for companionship or other emotional and sexual desires. Our children will be strongly discouraged from getting a dog before having kids or as "practice" for having kids—Simone always told me a dog would be a reward for having kids and I think that is a good way to frame it.

We lack a thesis on modern cat ownership. Studies show religious service attendance to be negatively correlated with cat (but not dog) ownership and that atheists are more likely to own cats. It would seem, then, that cat ownership has some sort of correlation with low faith.

Are there any cultivars that dislike cats in the same way some dislike dogs? It appears that Hindu culture (outside of followers of Shashti) generally views cats negatively. It should hardly be surprising that a culture which promotes vegetarianism would not be keen to care for—and regularly feed meat products to—an obligate carnivore pet.

Dogs, Our Evolutionary Partners

Throughout most of this book, we frame cultural traditions in terms of their efficacious effects. Here we have to break from the pretense of always being logical or goal-oriented . When we explain to our kids why we have a dog and why we expect them to as well, we don't cite studies or explain that

we come from a tradition of people who lived in rural environments; rather, we tell them the “cultural truth."

Dogs have worked with our species since before we could write and maybe even before we could speak. Compared to our canine companions, we are blind—dogs can hear four times better than us and smell between 10,000 to 100,000 times better than us. For millennia, dogs have been willing to put their lives at risk to protect us. When they joined us, we were the lesser partners.

Let’s be clear: Current studies suggest that dogs voluntarily joined us. Some canines that specialized in scavenging around human scrap piles likely evolved a tolerance for humans and started working together with us—it’s not as though dogs were captured and tamed by humans. To our knowledge, cats are the only other animal that joined us in a willing partnership. This is why we make glue from horses and eat veal and lamb while generally treating the bodies of dogs and cats the same as we treat those of humans.

Humans’ partnership with dogs is, however, different from our relationship with cats. While a cat that died protecting a human would be remarkable, dogs have been so devoted to us that we see dogs dying on humans’ behalf as being routine. Even if dogs offer little to humanity today, we never forget that when they joined our species, they did so as *equal* partners who have more than paid the debt in that partnership. When House Collins spreads across the galaxy, dogs will still be beside us because we always remember our debts no matter how many generations it takes to fully pay them off. That is what it means to have integrity. Remember: We may not always be the smartest species in a partnership. The artificial intelligences and species we partner with in the future may look at how we treated our past partner species to judge how *humans* deserve to be treated as an intellectually inferior partner species. Should we turn our backs on dogs, we don’t deserve to be treated well by our future partners.

> *To explore why there aren’t many cultivars in the United States with strong connections to specific geographies, check out: “Geographic Flexibility” in the Appendix. (In short, geographic inflexibility likely evolved to offset underestimations of how hard it was historically to*

find new, unoccupied land upon decamping from one's present territory.)

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1 Fernand Braudel argues that Islam is specifically a synthesis of an urbanized, ancient, near-eastern culture of mercantile towns and Bedouins invented by an urbanite.

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9 Editor Lillian Tara wrote, "So just like individual liberal brains are marked by versatility/novelty, cosmopolitan cities (liberal cultures) are too! This goes with liberal relativism—there's less of a "stay and defend our way of life" because the way of life is less objectively sacred."

10 The Jews of Habban South Yemen, Jewish Communities in Exotic Places, by Ken Blady, Jason Aronson, Inc, Northvale, New Jersey, Jerusalem, 2000, page 32

11 You could argue that the Jewish insurgency in Palestine is a counter-example, but it was not in response to a pogrom.

12 Yet another movie based on events with which my (Malcolm's) family was heavily involved—direct ancestors of mine served as early members of the Swamp Fox's (Francis Marion's) forces.

13 We suspect these numbers are biased, but can't find any counter-examples. Regardless of how biased they are, the point stands: Israel was hugely outnumbered and out-supplied. https://israelforever.org/interact/blog/struggle_for_survival/

14 Just look at this IQ-by-state heat map:

https://www.zippia.com/advice/average-iq-by-state/

Or this IQ-by-country heat map:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IQ_by_Country.png

Or this map showing upwards mobility by geography in the US

https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2015/06/02/these-maps-from-raj-chetty-show-that-where-children-grow-up-has-a-major-impact-on-their-lifetime-earnings/

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53 Intraculturally, this is not framed as: "Explosives training" but rather "kids playing with fireworks, building fireworks, throwing them at each other, and constructing potato cannons." Families from my (Malcolm's) cultural background would hear the term "Roman candle fight" and think: "normal childhood game" while, as an adult, I have learned people from other backgrounds find the idea of children shooting fireworks at each other to be inappropriate—*even* with parental supervision.

54 I have to admit, I felt like my cousin (like 13 at the time) had a point (I am the type of guy who thinks a High Point is the perfect gun because it is cheap and hard to break). So, I asked my wife why she keeps this kind of weapon around and her response was something along the lines, "You may get a single chance to justifiably attack someone who is putting your family at risk. I want to get the most out of that experience." While I logically know that answer should be concerning, my emotional mind finds it quite cute—I suppose it is cultural priming.

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EMOTION AND MENTAL LANDSCAPE

One of the ways hard cultures "win" is by increasing adherents' mental fitness. A culture with clear-headed people and lower rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse is going to outcompete a community that does not have social technology assisting in these areas (all other things being equal). This is why people who follow hard cultures typically have better mental health than those who don't.[1]

In contrast, a key mechanism pop cultures use to seduce people out of their birth cultivars is to push them to indulge in ways that are deleterious to their mental health, which creates dependency while making the individual unstable and enough of a burden that they are pushed out of their birth community. Durable hard cultures must have protective mechanisms that shield members from these forms of seduction.

One of our goals with this book is to see if we can isolate the exact mechanisms and social technologies hard cultures are using to benefit individual mental health and handpick them to construct a superior—if artificial—culture.

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Victimhood, Politicking, and Industry

While all cultivars have an internal power hierarchy and a mechanism for determining where people sit on this hierarchy, they all also have preferred strategies for manipulating the wider world's mutually-agreed-upon-power hierarchies. If a workplace features people from ten different cultures, those people will still have to form some form of informal hierarchy during their interactions and each individual's cultivar will influence which strategies they are most likely to utilize.

There are four general cultural strategies for gaining social power:

- Playing the victim
- Politicking
- Industry
- Intelligence

Playing the Victim

Let's start by focusing on the "victimhood strategy" for gaining social power because any effective, intentionally constructed culture must be capable of defending against it. Victimhood is used aggressively by the cultural supervirus, many pop cultures, and many dominating cultivars when they hold minority positions.

Humans evolved to empathize with the suffering of others[2] and some individuals as well as cultures have come to realize they can exploit this to force non-reciprocal resource transfer from other groups.[3] [4] Individuals willing to engage in this behavior should be regarded with extreme levels of suspicion, as personal victimhood narratives subconsciously promote unjust violence and intergroup competition[5] and grant one license to escape personal blame for wrongdoings.[6] Worst of all, victimhood allows people to hold obviously incorrect and immoral beliefs without having to be self-critical by granting those who wield it something called a "psychological license."[7] For lack of a better word, people who subscribe to cultures that empower victim mentalities are "toxic."

The research cited above makes it clear that even genuine victims are better off not creating internal self-narratives around victimhood. Instead, people would be better served by framing themselves as empowered and associating with groups that facilitate such views.

Let's be clear here: This sucks. It is not fair that groups that are already facing an uphill battle face an additional layer of hardship because using the "victim card" degrades a person's sense of efficacy, self-sufficiency, morality, ability to contribute to society, and general mental stability. Alas, just because something is shitty and not fair does not mean it is not true. Groups that ignore this and reward members who play the victim card do not have those individuals' or victimized demographics' best interests at heart.

But it gets worse, as a group of researchers at the University of British Columbia highlight in their paper: "Signaling Virtuous Victimhood as Indicators of Dark Triad Personalities."[8] Essentially, a willingness to signal victimhood is correlated very highly with Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy when controlling for socioeconomic variables. Victimhood signaling is furthermore associated with lying to earn a bonus, willingness to lie about being harmed by others in a work environment for personal benefit, willingness to cheat in a coin flip game, increased likelihood to assume wrong in others, and a higher sense of entitlement.[9] The reason people who are willing to play the victim can be completely written off rather than "trained to be better" is that this self-contextualization appears to be an enduring and stable personality trait.[10]

While playing the victim is an effective social strategy, an ounce of cultural sympathy for it puts you at incredible risk. This can be seen in the effects victimhood-mentality-promoting cultures have on their members. The biggest pop culture group that supports victimhood mindsets is the progressive movement. Rates of mental health problems within progressive groups are astronomically higher than in those in conservative groups. To illustrate this point: Liberal women between 18 and 29 are more likely than moderates or conservatives to be diagnosed with a mental health issue, with over half having one (56.3%). If you include men, a full 46% of white liberals in the 18-29 age range have been diagnosed with a mental health issue.[11] In addition, adjusted for basic demographics (though not sexuality),

Republicans are consistently happier and have been since Pew started taking the survey that produced these findings.[12] (One could argue that those who are more sad or plagued by mental illness are more accepted by progressives, but this theory also has problems of its own.)

When your culture acts like a giant beacon for people much more likely to be psychopathic narcissists, is it any wonder you have trouble "keeping it together?" Cultures that reward people for acting like victims will consistently attract people with Dark Triad personalities at higher rates, and such individuals can navigate their power structures better, meaning organizations dominated by victimhood-supporting cultures end up being run by Dark Triad personalities at higher rates. It is a cruel twist of fate that —unless specific preventative measures are taken—the organizations most interested in helping the downtrodden end up being run by self-serving narcissists.

Here we need to warn of potential cultural bias. Our personal culture has historically regarded anyone who frames themselves as a victim with the highest level of disgust. This is a cultural view that has served us well in choosing business partners, selecting friends, and dating (seriously though: Don't marry someone who likes playing the victim card). That said, our suspicion of victimhood makes us extremely receptive to statistics and data that reveal it to be toxic.

Nobody is immune to the psychological desire to play the victim. Even individuals who don't have a predilection toward seeing themselves as a victim naturally will if they are accused of discriminating against others or if they are characterized as being relatively advantaged.[13] [14] (Yes, you read that right: Telling someone they are actually in a slightly more advantaged group will make them double down on victimhood mentality—something you have likely witnessed personally.) Never allow yourself to succumb to these urges, and if you do, hate yourself for it. A culture that tells people to never hate themselves no matter their actions or thoughts is a breeding ground for monsters.

Victim narrative strategies have a major flaw: They can be used externally but never internally if a culture is to survive multiple generations. In most cultures, an outsider cannot simply stroll in and insert themselves into the

top of the local power hierarchy by demonstrating they are the most victimized individual. If a culture loses the ability to defend against this, it essentially installs a giant back door through which bad actors can walk.

Politicking

The second area of cultural specialization, politicking, is an effective strategy for accumulating power and is pervasive in many symbiotic cultures in which constituent players are in the minority (this strategy does not work for majority groups). Coming from an individualist culture, we cannot even begin to understand how politicking skills are effectively passed between parents and children, however we assume that it must come in part from belonging to a culture that trusts members more than outsiders, giving anyone who adopts or is born into it a built-in nepotistic network. This nepotistic network can even be a good recruiting tool, acting as a draw for outsiders to join.

We have nothing against this social strategy for gaining power; we just don't know how cultures cultivate and train for it.

Industry

Industry is the hierarchy-climbing mechanism with which we are most familiar. Heck, when I (Malcolm) first met Simone, her “personal motto” on her dating profile was “repeated blunt force." This value set is passed down through cultures that downplay the value and admirability of talent, intelligence, and easy success, praising work ethic instead. Per such cultural value sets, a person who archives something with little effort should feel ashamed rather than proud (e.g., “participation medals” are an insult).

Putting industry on a pedestal can produce unfortunate side effects. For example, cultures that idolize productivity and hard work can cause people to fetishize the aesthetics of looking busy all the time and being overworked —even if their busyness and stress don’t produce meaningful outcomes (as an example of this, one test reader noted a Japanese trend of showing diligence through napping in public).[15] The best cure to this cultural ill is to frame busywork and performative working as indulgent at best and unethical, wasteful virtue signaling at worst. Someone who is stressed and

overworked is not to be lauded; such stress is a sign of poor time management.

We coined the term “office theater” to describe this dynamic—which, last we heard, is now standard parlance in some Stanford business school courses. Performing office theater entails “aesthetically” working while not functionally creating much value. A common example of office theater involves staying late at the office, ordering takeout, and looking stressed and sleep deprived when going home and getting some rest would actually produce better results. Someone performing the opposite of office theater may choose to work remotely in order to avoid distractions and spend commute time working—or to work at odd hours in an effort to make the most of their personal circadian rhythm (I—Malcolm—am writing this at 2:00am, as I do my best work between the hours of 2:00am and 5:00am). The concept of turning work into a ritual rather than a thing of utility nauseates those from high industry cultures.

Intelligence

Finally, some groups use intelligence as a mechanism for climbing social hierarchies. We see this as almost as toxic as sorting by victimhood for a few reasons. First, even dumb individuals will always internally see themselves as intelligent, so this strategy creates a situation in which a person’s self-perceived value is usually going to be higher than their real value.

Second, this strategy encourages “intelligence fronting,” in which people prioritize sounding smart over being easy to comprehend. Someone culturally programmed to use intelligence for social climbing will subconsciously vomit jargon and references into writing and conversations in an attempt to reinforce their position in the local hierarchy—especially when they are feeling insecure.[16] This ultimately undermines people’s ability to communicate important concepts and make convincing arguments (this is a major problem in the Effective Altruist and rationalist cultures).[17]

Finally, Intelligence is certified at the societal level by the academic system, which itself has succumbed to the cultural supervirus. This means that using accreditation from these institutions to assign status within your culture

provides an easy back door for the cultural supervirus to directly inject contagious vectors into the heart of your culture.

Notes:

1. *Advice to our children: Just as much as you should avoid spouses that show any tendency to play the victim, you should strive to find a spouse who is industrious without complaint or expectation of remuneration—someone who inherently likes working, who sees the virtue in strategically applied productivity, and who feels deeply uncomfortable with idle time. Finding someone truly industrious is far more important than marrying someone who is hot or smart.*
2. *Some cultures encourage their members to climb their internal culture's social hierarchies while simultaneously climbing hierarchical ladders in wider society, while others strongly discourage members from playing societies' wider social games. In fact, keeping a culture's members "down" (vis-a-vis power hierarchies in the wider world) can increase cultural fidelity, acting both as a shield and as an effective member retention strategy. This suppression of achievement (as defined by broader society) makes adherents both unattractive to other cultures that may want to poach them (to access their wealth and influence) and unable to pursue many options in the wider world (as they are largely powerless and low status in broader world terms). Two examples of cultures that do this are Jehovah's Witnesses, which heavily frame higher education as a wicked pursuit (with only 12% having bachelor's degrees)[18] and prioritize cultural in-group activities over work (see the next point about Jehovah's Witnesses views on education below). Israeli Haredim Jews also discourage men from working and deemphasize both male and female education (we explore this group in greater detail in a few pages).[19] This is one of those strategies that no one would intentionally choose for a culture they created but which is evolutionarily successful.*

3. *It is refreshing how honest Jehovah's Witnesses are about their stances on education. The primary reason they don't let their kids go to college is that a lot of kids deconvert while in institutions of higher education, which, of course, from the perspective of a Jehovah's Witness, leads those kids to eternal suffering. If you believed that sending your child to college exposed them to higher risks of eternal damnation, what would* you *do? It would also be theologically silly to send kids to college from the mindset of Jehovah's Witnesses' metaphysical framework, with one of the governing members saying: "We will not need doctors or lawyers after Armageddon but we will need carpenters, plumbers, and similar construction trades."*[20] *If you think we are only decades away from entering a world ruled directly by God without governments or disease, then it would not be crazy to de-emphasize job training in domains such as law or medicine.*

A Case Study in Cultural Genotypes vs Phenotypes: American vs. Israeli Haredim

One of our Jewish history sensitivity editors flagged a passing comment we made about Israeli Haredi stances on education as presenting an inaccurate stereotype. He argued that the Israeli Haredi cultivar is nearly identical to its U.S. Haredi counterpart (for which this person knows we have a soft spot) and that we should not frame the cultivars as being different from each other. This prompted us to look into the two cultivars, which confirmed our original read of the situation with data. If anything, we are presenting offensive facts rather than inaccurate stereotypes. The Israeli Haredim indeed have a dramatically lower cultural value for economically industrious endeavors than the American Haredim and are radically less educated (in secular matters, at least), but potentially with good reason.

As recently as 2016, only 50%[21] of men in the Israeli Haredi cultivar had jobs, which rose to only 63.5% by 2020. This is radically different from the American branch of Haredi Jews, colloquially known as Hasidic Jews, where even a 17% level of unemployment back in 1974 was seen as an

existential catastrophe that the entire community needed to work together to fix (with their normal unemployment being around 6%).[22] In Israel, by contrast, 17% unemployment would be literally *less than half* of the lowest unemployment levels Israeli Haredim have ever experienced.

In addition "as of 2014, among those aged 25-35, just 2% of [Israeli] Haredi men and 8% of women had a college degree, compared to 28% of secular Jewish Israeli men and 25% of religious Jewish Israeli men, and 43% of both secular and religious Jewish Israeli women in that age group."[23] Again, contrast this with American Hasidic Jewish groups where 11% of Hasidic men and 6% of Hasidic women hold bachelor's degrees, meaning that overall they have about a 50% higher level of bachelor's degree attainment.

While the Israeli Haredi and the American Hasidic are *theologically* essentially identical, they are *culturally* quite different in how they relate to both industry as a virtue and somewhat different in their pursuit of higher education.[24] They can be thought of as cultivars with very similar DNA (their theology) but markedly different phenotypes (their values, lifestyles, and ultimate choices).

This difference in phenotypes need not be encoded at the "genetic" (e.g., theological) level but could be polymorphic (where the same genes lead to different phenotypes when different environmental pressures are present). By that we mean that if you snapped your fingers and the Israeli Haredi population were in the U.S. and the U.S. Haredi population were in Israel, the U.S. population would start acting like the Israeli one and vice versa because of their new environmental pressures (government support that reduces obligation to participate in the mainstream economy, military service mandates that may threaten cultural sovereignty, attempts to preserve their culture in the face of different threats, etc.).

There appears to be an assumption that most cultivars respect groups theologically *closer* to them while reserving disdain for the groups *most different* from them—but that is actually fairly rarely the case. Most cultivars actually have the most derision for *groups theologically closest to them*. This is often how speciation begins to take place and is what we call "The Judean People's Front" effect based on a *Monty Python* skit in which

the People’s Front of Judea say that the only people they hate more than the Romans are the Judean People's Front and the Popular Front of Judea.

In practice, most cultures judge each other based on values, not theology. We can have two groups with almost an identical theology, like the Israeli and American Haredim, and personally hold radically different opinions of each group. The American Haredim embody some of our highest cultural values like industry, sovereignty, and self-sufficiency—three value sets not shared by the nearly theologically identical Israeli cultivar. This is ironic as they are functionally the same culture per the criteria people use when thinking about culture.

> *Note: Why is antisemitism so much more pervasive than hatred of other successful ethno-cultivar minorities, such as Jains? Outside of some reasons already addressed, the “Judean People's Front” phenomenon likely plays a large role. When Christianity was founded, it would have been viewed as only a slightly differentiated version of Jewishness. In order to ensure members saw themselves as distinct from Jews and to prevent members from flippantly shifting between the two communities, those early Christian leaders who succeeded in retaining members fostered animosity against this closely related culture (this is a normal part of cultural speciation). Cultural animosity—along with apocalypticism and other core points of differentiation—was therefore baked into Christianity’s foundational traditions and subsequently carried over into other cultures derived from it, such as Islam.*

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Locus of Control

Promotion of an internal locus of control is an important aspect of any hard culture and encouragement of an external locus of control is the clearest bellwether of a parasitic culture. Having an internal locus of control yields benefits along almost every conceivable metric, from mental health to physical health, romantic success, and career achievement. Since we discuss the topic ad nauseam in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Life*, we shall keep this book's exploration brief. (If you are looking for reading on this here are a few studies.[25])

A person with an internal locus of control takes total personal responsibility for things that happen to them, be they positive, negative, or even technically not caused by them (in such cases, people focus on what *they* can do about whatever happened, not that external forces were at play). In contrast, a person with an external locus of control blames their failures on exogenous forces, such as other people, bigotry, sexism, grudges, a crazy ex, etc. while crediting their successes to luck or privilege. In other words, to have an external locus of control involves attributing life's developments to anything or anyone but oneself.

Of course, in reality, the things that happen to us are products of both our own actions and outside forces over which we lack control. Sometimes, people really do get fired because their bosses are racist. Sometimes we really are successful due to dumb luck. The thing is, we can only control our own actions and reactions—and research on the subject makes it abundantly clear that writing your internal narrative in a way that suggests you don't control your fate, even if it is true, hurts not just your mental health, but your odds of future success.

Why? When you focus on aspects of outcomes over which you have control, you not only identify actionable things you can do to tip odds of future successes in your favor but also enjoy a feeling of empowerment.

The cultures that whisper in your ear: "It's not your fault—there is nothing you could have done" are injecting venom into the very core of your soul, calcifying your sense of agency. These groups are not your friends and do

not have your best interests at heart. They are the family member who sneaks cake and soda to the diabetic patient in the hospital. They would rather see the part of you that matters, which acts freely on its own, dead than see you personally empowered.

> *Perhaps no phrase more perfectly embodies an external locus of control than "trigger warning," in that trigger warnings enable people to maintain control over their internal mental state by shielding it from potentially challenging, offensive, or emotionally difficult information. With over a decade of research on the subject, we now know trigger warnings don't help. In a 2020 meta-study*[26] *reviewing 17 other studies on the subject, Payton Jones, Benjamin Bellset, and Richard McNally found that trigger warnings neither alleviate emotional distress nor significantly reduce negative affect or minimize intrusive thoughts, which are hallmarks of PTSD (this holds true even for individuals with a history of trauma). In fact, Jones and his co-authors found that trigger warnings "were not helpful even when they warned about content that closely matched survivors' traumas" and that they appeared to make things worse for these individuals, leading them to "view trauma as more central to their life narrative." The paper concluded, "Trigger warnings may be most harmful to the very individuals they were designed to protect."*

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Offense

Offense is an immensely bourgeois emotion, only cited as justification for action by the most privileged individuals within any society. Historically, offense was used as justification for duels and blood feuds. In that historical context, offense generally entailed treatment in a manner incongruous with one's self-image. However, the cultural supervirus has come up with a new way of using offense to homogenize society and erase cultural diversity.

No existing cultivar has a prohibition against interactions with individuals who signal offense strongly or frequently, which makes them vulnerable. Historically speaking, there was little need to evolve such protections, as offense was only “spammed” at others by obviously unstable individuals and such people were not taken seriously. The present-day cultural supervirus has weaponized offense in a manner that quickly erodes cultural values and establishes dominance over existing cultures, changing their mores, morals, and traditions.

The manner in which the supervirus uses offense to sneak through cultural backdoors is incredibly dangerous. When a culture frames offense as a literal attack, it justifies retreats to groups where offense is much less likely (i.e. groups that don’t challenge or push a person and thereby facilitate personal stagnation).

Cultural framing of offense as an attack also produces cognitive distortions: Errors in reasoning that are not based on evidence. For example, those who contextualize offense this way are more likely to perceive small negative events as disastrous.[27] Essentially, susceptibility to concepts like “offense should be treated as personal injury” and “safe spaces and trigger warnings are positive things” can trigger a cascade of failures in logic that chip away at individuals’ sanity, making them feel constantly under attack.

The emotion known as offense is a response to a credible challenge to your worldview (either your place within the world or your understanding of how things work). If something is not credible, it does not cause offense; it just comes off as silly or worrying. If someone calls us selfish when we are doing something obviously charitable, we just chuckle and shrug—but if

they call us selfish and part of us suspects they might have a point, we will feel a strong pang of offense.

The same is true ideologically: When someone challenges an aspect of our worldview around which we hold strong convictions, we just see them as delusional, but if they challenge something about which we harbor even subconscious doubts, we will feel offended.

For these reasons, we personally contextualize the emotion of offense as an uncomfortable-but-highly-valuable sign that we need to dig deeper on a subject. After all, if we are wrong about something, especially if it is something important to us, we would rather be set straight than continue to cling to an incorrect worldview or opinion. “Winning” doesn’t entail sticking to your guns when you’re wrong; “winning” involves updating your beliefs when you turn out to be wrong.

Offense is an extremely useful emotion that flags ideas warranting further investigation. Offensive ideas should be engaged rather than stifled or ignored. From our cultural perspective, a choice to not engage with offensive ideas is an obvious sign that someone has become a husk of a person. As husks are nothing but vectors of cultural rot, they should largely be avoided in one's personal social networks and business dealings.

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Ideal Mental Landscape

Cultures promote different standards for ideal mental landscapes, which structure how adherents optimally govern their thoughts and feelings. There are two broad extremes here: A dictatorial mental landscape and a harmonious one.

In the dictatorial extreme, one aspect of a person's character (for example, their logic) is meant to strictly control the others and lapses of this control are viewed as a sign of personal failure. In a harmonious landscape, all internal impulses are generally regarded as equal and the goal is to have them work together as organically and with as little conflict as possible.

Our cultural predisposition here is so strong it is hard for us to understand why anyone would want the alternative. To us, it seems obvious that you would only want the parts of your brain operating on logic to be in control and that all the other voices in one's head are either manifestations of self-indulgent hero/power/victim narratives or emotional states that evolved in a very different set of ecological and social conditions.

When you allow a personal narrative or an emotion to be used as justification for an action, you create all sorts of terrible externalities in the way you act as a leader, relate to societies, and act within relationships.

- A leader who is operating on logic can always be trusted to act in congress with their goals. You can use that information to decide whether you want to follow them. A leader who is subject to the caprices of emotion or personal narratives is unpredictable and liable to be inconsistent in their leadership.
- The same can be said about a follower. Someone who follows you and is governed by logic is fairly predictable so long as you know their goals. Someone who is governed by their emotions can never be trusted with much power as they could switch their allegiance or focus due to exogenous factors outside of their control.
- If all partners in a relationship operate off logic and have aligned goals, only a lack of communication or information asymmetries will produce discord. When partners are governed by emotional

> states, disagreements can arise for which there is no resolution. An extreme example of this we have seen a few times arises when one partner treats the other cruelly because they had a dream in which their partner did something that angered them. How could you ever trust someone to be there for you if they would retaliate against you for something that only happened in their imagination?

There is a point which seems to come up in every one of our books that we must emphasize. *Inside Out* is a movie, not reality. Indulging in an emotion like anger or sadness is not "healthy." Every time an individual indulges in an emotion, that emotional path gets strengthened and it becomes harder to resist in the future. For example, if an individual punches a punching bag after getting angry they will end up angrier than if they distracted themselves or did nothing.[28]

Why do some cultures promote "mental harmony" between all the little voices in their heads? Mostly because it's easy. This ideal mental landscape is typically only found in soft cultures. Most hard cultures—even those often mugged of their traditions and aesthetics by "spiritual" people, like Jainism and Buddhism—promote authoritarian mental landscapes (you only get things like Sokushinbutsu or Sallekhana, starving oneself to death, in a culture promoting self-control).

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Relation to Pleasure and the Arts

Having reached this point in the book, you can probably guess our view of the arts. Calvinist culture is famously anti-art, with Calvinist Geneva famously banning all music except for psalm singing for almost a century.[29] What may surprise you is that Calvinism isn't the only culture that raises individuals who almost never participate in the arts. Not only do almost none of even culturally progressive Anabaptists participate in the arts, but neither do Mormons (with the only examples we can think of being Christina Aguilera and Jewel, though each renounced their faith and culture). In addition, many extremist Islamist cultivars have an active aversion to arts and will hunt down and destroy forms of art after taking control of a region (as ISIS did).[30]

Similarly, some cultures are wildly over-represented in the arts, with the two most disproportionately represented being German Jews (as opposed to Russian/Polish Jews, which is the branch from which Simone hails and is overrepresented in textile management) and Scientologists. This is fascinating, as presumably people from most soft cultures want to be famous in the arts. Why, then, do German Jews and Scientologists, two cultures that make up virtually none of the U.S. population (2.4% and <0.1%), so generously outcompete them?

Let's start by focusing on the question of why Jews are disproportionately represented in the media. A common answer is that when Jews first immigrated to the United States, many employers would not hire them. This drove Jews to start their own businesses more often, which boosted their odds of dominating growing industries that were just emerging as they first immigrated to an area. For German Jews, who moved disproportionately to the West, this supposedly led to disproportionate leadership in the entertainment and production industry.

This is a great "just-so story," but two pieces of evidence make us doubt its accuracy:

1. Other immigrant groups that faced discrimination (the Irish and Italians, for example) did not end up running companies at an unusual rate but instead went into organized crime, law enforcement, legal professions, and local politics.
2. Even today, Jews enter uncorrelated areas of the arts at disproportionate rates—even in industries that don't have a history of Jewish representation in positions of corporate power. For example, an article in a 1978 Times magazine claimed that 80% of all stand-up comedians in the U.S. were Jewish.[31] This is a field largely unconnected to the movie studios of 1900s LA and still had Jews appearing at a rate 3,333% higher than you would expect. We don't buy that this is a result of where the group first settled.

We heard an interesting answer that could also address an even bigger question of why more observant Jewish sects have a higher birth rate than many of their similarly strict Christian counterparts. While both Calvinists and Hasidic Jews have reputations for being strict, Hasidic Jews have thrived while Calvinists (as they existed in colonial American times) are almost extinct.

When answering the question not just of higher Jewish growth rates but also of higher Jewish representation in arts and media, one could argue that all branches of Judaism have one thing most observant Christian counterparts lack: A genuine mandate on celebration and having fun. Look up footage of a "Hasidic Jew party" and you will find video after video of behavior that does not mirror anything seen in the Anabaptist or Calvinist traditions. In contrast, most Anabaptist and Calvinist parties are oriented around group labor, such as barn raising. Could it also be that having "fun" for fun's sake now and then makes life less bleak and increases birth rates? Could it be that differing cultural approaches to fun and celebration created a cultural vortex in which people who liked having fun joined Jewish families at disproportionate rates, magnifying this cultural practice and increasing the probability of members being more successful entertainers?

> *Side bar: A lot of people seem to assume that all humans see the world in approximately the same way regardless of their culture or sociological profile. They say, "Of course all people love a party!"*

> *This just isn't true and it's something you only really hear from people who have very limited experience with genuinely unique cultures. While we are objectively able to look at a Hasidic party and see that people are having "fun," laughing, and ... ugh ... platonically touching each other—our appreciation of the event is solely anthropological. Everything about actually participating in something like that would be mortifying to us. What if someone tried to talk to us, get us to sing, or (retch!) touched us!? No thank you, we would rather participate in a barn raising any day of the week. A productive day working with friends interspersed with breaks for homemade snacks—that sounds satisfying.*

Ok, what about other cultures in the U.S. that are disproportionately represented in the arts? In the case of Scientology, one could argue adherents are important in the media because their members focus on recruiting high-level people in the entertainment world—which is true. However, as a culture, Scientologists also encourage partying more than other hard cultures we frequently reference. In addition, many famous scientologists in the media joined the church before getting famous.

Given our cultural backgrounds, we find it difficult to come to terms with this, but the success of several party-friendly cultures strongly implies that cultures will benefit from some level of emphasis on celebrations, parties, fun, and creative pursuits. That said, we hope this theory offers food for thought not just to us, but to others: When intentionally designing or reinforcing your own cultivar, you may want to give "fun" more attention than you would otherwise.

At this point, you are probably wondering why a culture would ever evolve an antagonistic attitude toward the arts, parties, and "fun." In general, "less fun" cultures tend to not believe that subjective emotional states have differential value. In other words, these cultures typically hold that happiness and sadness are not states that hold any inherent value and if anything, working through negative emotions helps build you into a stronger person while indulging in positive emotions can tempt you toward non-efficacious action.

Even from a secular perspective, this seems obviously true to us: The emotional states we experience only exist because our ancestors who felt them had more surviving kids. Emotions were an accident of the environmental pressures faced by our ancestors and today, in a new environment in which access to things like leisure, sugar, and social validation are abundantly available (and furthermore utilized by organizations that hijack our emotions in pursuit of profit), indulging in positive emotions only serves to hinder our efficiency.

The lion's share of the evidence seems to suggest the Jewish perspective is right and humans will be more efficient if you encourage them to party now and then. However, even if we adopt fun, arts, and celebration as an aspect of our House's culture, we will nevertheless make sure our kids never forget that "fun" should always serve a purpose, be it an emotional reset, cultural retention strategy, or cultural draw. Holidays that mandate fun should be extremely temporally locked and if anything, serve as a reminder of how hollow positive emotions can be when they are pursued for their own sake.

> *Side Note: I, Malcolm, was recently going over a list of the most popular sports in the world by country and was surprised by how few there were. Sports with top-ranked status in more than one country were football, baseball, basketball, ice hockey, and cricket. Those that were the favorite of one country were American football (U.S.), Australian football (Australia), Gaelic football (Ireland), wrestling (Mongolia), archery (Bhutan), and, depending on the list you use, table tennis (China).*
>
> *Notice anything weird about this list? Outside of three small countries (Bhutan, Mongolia, and Ireland) and arguably China, the favorite sport of every country in the world was invented in a Protestant majority environment. If you also remove Australia from consideration, the sport of choice in every country in the world was either invented by the English or Americans.*
>
> *This phenomenon cannot really be explained by colonialism alone given (1) how other local arts have captured the public consciousness around the world and (2) that no sport was invented by a Catholic majority culture despite the significant role in played*

in colonization efforts). What makes this whole thing uniquely weird is how little Protestant culture celebrates leisure pursuits. Despite this, Protestant culture seems to be superpowered at inventing competitive sports. If I were to guess at what might be going on, I'd posit that the Protestant connection is a red herring and this is more of an artifact of uniquely high levels of competitiveness pervasive in the United States and United Kingdom.

The Pleasure Pod Filter

One of the classic arguments against those who claim to want to maximize positive emotional states is the "brain in a vat" thought experiment. In this thought experiment a person is asked:

> "If you had the choice to enter a pod that could perfectly maximize your ideal emotional state (e.g., not just bliss but also fulfillment, oneness, and contentment), would you live out the rest of your life in that pod? What if this pleasure pod could also simulate your perfect life so seamlessly it would be indistinguishable from the real world; would you choose a life in the pod then? What if it could also connect you to other people, so even in this perfect, blissed-out world you could still engage with others?"

This is not just a thought experiment anymore. Rather, it's a near-future question many people and cultivars will need to address. By the time of our great grandchildren, it is quite possible that every human will have to decide whether they want to be put in a pod that gives them this perfect virtual life. This option is only likely to last for a couple generations.

Mass access to such technology will act as one of the biggest genetic and cultural bottlenecks through which our species will ever pass. Any culture or sociological profile that can't give people a concrete reason to live beyond their emotional experience or the emotional experience of others (e.g., general utilitarianism) will be aggressively deleted from the timeline. While those in pods will maximize their enjoyment and the enjoyment of

others, they are neither likely to have kids (at least not anywhere near repopulation rate) nor participate actively in humanity's advancement. With that, the predominant moral sets in secular society (those focused around hedonism, nihilism, and utilitarianism) are going to be wiped off the game board.

If you doubt that these pleasure pods will be inexpensive enough for mass use, think again. Anyone with a utilitarian mindset would have a motivation to lock themselves in one and donate the rest of their money to making them accessible to others. Given that most people have utilitarian moral sets, the pleasure pod industry will end up with a lot of dedicated capital.

Sure, evil capitalists will try to profit from early versions of this tech, but given their intrinsically fixed maintenance costs, inevitably one philanthropist will make them generally accessible. Generous, utilitarian hedonist philanthropists aside, we know our own cultivar well enough to know we would sponsor mass access to pleasure pods just to swiftly and ethically delete those susceptible to utilitarian or hedonistic fulfillment before they cause any more damage.

So where do you stand on this issue? Would you mind if your cultivar and descendants were wiped out through free access to pleasure pods? What if it wasn't a binary decision? What if it started like a game that you could jump into sometimes while still maintaining a traditional job and family with which you spent most of your waking hours? What if, over time, people could start making money inside this game, and mainstream media and society started shaming those who didn't shift to life full time inside the game because the carbon footprints and general damage caused by people moving around in the physical world hurt the environment? What if this has already started? If you didn't have to work, how much time each day would you spend on social media Skinner boxes and video games?

Creating a culture that can resist this technology doesn't just entail resistance to utilitarian thinking; it also requires resistance to strong and pervasive social pressure. Humanity will be a very different species after the pleasure pod filter fully sieves through the living population—an event that may have already begun.

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Dealing with Anger

People experience anger when their expectations around how they should be treated don't align with their actual treatment (or when they expect a thing to happen based on some series of actions and it does not happen).

Given that anger results from misalignment in expected and actual treatment, cultures with stricter rules around status and interaction consistently feature more anger if they expect outsiders to be aware of these rules—though they experience less anger when everyone knows the rules and sticks to them, as there is little room for misalignment of expectations. Generally, people whose cultures hold outsiders to their cultural standards are more likely to experience frequent anger. This can be seen in both the extreme political left and right around things like gender pronoun norms. Because these factions have conflicting cultural expectations around "proper" interactions, exchanges between left and right-leaning people more frequently leave at least one party smoldering with fury.

Cultures similar to our own, which see humanity as wretched and fallen, experience fairly low rates of anger because they expect very little from others and therefore expect to be treated poorly. Not caring about others' treatment can, in itself, incite anger in other people when they expect others to be emotionally impacted by their presence, actions, or opinions. only to find that they are not.

What about anger in relationships? The sad truth is that some people expect to be treated in a way that would not only be seen as unreasonable by society but also not be feasible for their partners. For example, someone may ask a colleague or spouse to do one thing and then change their mind about what they wanted—all while forgetting to verbally update this person—then get angry when the partner does what was originally asked of them.

These unreasonable expectations can produce anger spirals, in which partners treat each other with greater and greater hostility in response to increasingly unjust treatment. Should partners enjoy a shared culture with

reasonable and clearly defined expectations for participants in various types of relationships, rates of anger are likely to be lower.

Anger is a close cousin to shame, which is felt when a person's own actions don't align with what they expect of themselves.

Some cultures have relatively low expectations of what is expected from others but very high expectations of what they expect from themselves. As such, these cultures experience a high amount of shame. While many act indignant toward these cultures, shame is a fairly innocuous emotion for a tradition to leverage and probably one of the "better" emotions as it is driven toward self-improvement. Shame is only really negative when it is felt constantly (the product of a culture holding unreasonable standards). That said, cultures that use shame as motivation often intentionally set the standards too high to create a "background shame" that keeps an individual indebted to that culture. (For an exploration of emotional instability, visit the Appendix.)

> *What about meditation—not just as it relates to anger, but in general? We don't have much to say beyond what is commonly said (and there is no need for us to rehash common analysis here). The only two spicy takes we have on meditation are:*

1. *Whether or not meditation benefits you may be genetically linked to your sociological profile. We, personally, glean many of the benefits people gain from meditation through long walks in the woods, while others seem to get nothing from such activity. Perhaps the best form of meditation for you—be it walks, mantras, yoga, tai chi, prayer, gardening, building, cleaning, or something else entirely—is influenced by the structures of one's inherited culture (urban vs. rural, hierarchical vs. loose, individualistic vs. collectivist, etc.)—and to a certain extent, one's gender and hormonal profile. (Simone added that last point pointing out she knows far more women who find cleaning meditative than men.)*
2. *Meditation can cause harm. Negative outcomes from meditation range from relaxed states inducing panic attacks to slower mental*

processing due to a loosened ability to quickly understand things as defined concepts.[32]

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Dealing with Disgust

Humans evolved to feel disgust because those who experienced the emotion were more likely to avoid infections (and therefore survive to produce successful offspring). Disgust works by assigning a strong negative modifier to things that would otherwise be positive stimuli—things like food, which normally we'd want to consume, but which is really important to avoid once it has become spoiled or otherwise contaminated.

As we mentioned ad nauseam in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality,* evolution is a cheap programmer and it will reuse existing systems whenever possible. For this reason, when evolution "needed" a negative modifier for *other* categories of things likely to appeal to humans, the disgust modifier came into play. This can be seen in the disgust the average human feels around having sex with the same gender or a parent. While sex in general is appealing, evolution historically favored those whose disgust systems came to activate in response to non-reproductive mating that increases risk of disease transfer (such as gay sex) and negative genetic repercussions (such as incestuous sex).

While this development in isolation isn't so troublesome, the fact that the human brain's *morality* system *also* seems to have hijacked the disgust system causes a lot of grief. Why? Because the average human working on autopilot will assume a thing is immoral if it elicits a disgust response.[33] In other words, if you show someone a video of a 25-year-old voluntarily having sex with an 80-year-old—or a person eating their own poop—they will tell you the act is immoral *even if they cannot explain exactly what makes the act immoral*.

This disgust-morality connection isn't optimal because while things like gay sex may not lead to reproduction (and therefore not be all that favored from an evolutionary standpoint), there is no inherent reason why it should be categorized as immoral. If people didn't instinctually regard things that commonly disgust them as immoral, we imagine that many fewer cultures would be homophobic, for example. It only makes logical sense for a culture to be homophobic if (a) It values population growth (b) most population growth comes from monogamous pairings rather than, say,

harem-style arrangements, and (c) old-fashioned sex is the only way to produce humans.

In addition to explaining otherwise-confusing traditions around shunning gay people and menstruating women, this phenomenon may also explain some very strange religious prohibitions like Shatnez (the prohibition in Judaism against mixing wool and linen). This might have been the result of the childhood innate disgust response triggered when things mix and thus cross-contaminate (think of the kid who won't eat his dinner after his peas touch his mashed potatoes). It could be that someone important in history felt a disgust reaction like this, did not know where it came from, and assumed mixing certain things was immoral.

Some cultivars choose to lean into this connection by using people's innate disgust with specific things to try to emotionally prove the cultivar is "pure and accurate." Alternatively, you can decide that finding disgust in things as a sign of immorality *is itself immoral* because it is not based on logic. You can probably guess where our cultivar stands given that we find all emotionally-motivated decisions and categorizations to be immoral. In fact, we see this odd creep of the disgust system—something most likely originally evolved to just stop us from eating festering food—as a great example of why we *can't* universally trust emotions. Emotions that drove survival thousands of years ago may very well kill us in today's strikingly different landscape.

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Accidental Cults: MLMs & Life Coaches

A culture capable of spreading need not *only* evolve out of religious, family, or cultural traditions. Cultural evolution can be thought of simply by the truism that a lifestyle which replicates itself and has a low bleed rate has a higher probability of existing in the future than one that does not. This is true even if the iteration of the lifestyle that is spreading no longer serves its original purpose.

In biology, this dynamic can be seen in everything from the communicable dog cancer discussed earlier in the book to prions, which are misfolded, self-replicating brain proteins (that most famously cause Mad Cow Disease). Neither communicable dog cancer nor prions evolved out of something we would typically think of as harmful. Instead, normal parts of an animal's body just doing their normal function “broke” in a way that caused them to start mindlessly self-replicating. After they began mindlessly self-replicating, various immune systems killed the iterations of these self replicators that couldn’t defend themselves and thus honed the survivors into sneaky and effective killing machines.

Sometimes this process takes place in cultural evolution as well. Occasionally, something that is not a culture but just a job, side hustle, idea, addiction treatment, or even a form of psychotherapy can become self-replicating. Four examples of this we will discuss are “life coaches,” multi-level marketing schemes (MLMs), modern psychology, and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

Let’s start by exploring the two more obvious examples of cultures in this category: MLMs and the life coaching industry.

MLMs are different from other prion-like cultivars we will explore in that they are intentionally constructed to be self-replicating. Like AA, life coaches, and modern psychology culture, MLMs are not religious in origin and did not originate from traditional cultures. Instead, they borrow heavily from religious cultures in order to spread themselves and more effectively hook their victims. An MLM is a type of pyramid scheme that has individuals sell products on its behalf while recruiting others to do the

same. Members of an MLM make a sliver of the profit generated by their converts. Most people looped into MLMs lose money, though varying sources cite different proportions of net losers, with the AARP claiming around 73% of MLM participants lose money[34] while the FTC argues it's closer to 99%.[35]

Like a religion, MLMs convince their victims that they can achieve their objectives so long as they convert lots of other people and dedicate themselves to the culture. What is interesting is that MLMs often focus more on culture building and self-narrative improvement than helping members make money. While this may seem strange, keep in mind that people often want money to solve problems that can actually be solved with less effort than getting rich (like feeling sovereign and empowered). So long as the MLM delivers a trickle of victims' desired emotional state, they will stay mindlessly latched to its teat.

MLMs can draw people into deep financial losses despite their surface promises of profit because people care more about their personal narrative, the story they tell about themselves *to themselves*, than their actual financial state. To be more specific: MLMs convey messages like: If you submit to our lifestyle, you can think of yourself as a "girl boss" and tell yourself you "own your own business." Even though neither of those things is remotely true, MLM brands do their best to make them *aesthetically* true and validate said narratives through peer interactions with other MLM members. It is very common for MLMs to organize big parties—even large conferences—at which everyone constantly tells each other what empowered "girl bosses" they are. They convey that leaving the community would be a sign of profound personal failure by degrading apostate members (individuals who left).

The life coaching industry is slightly more insidious in that almost every individual actor in the industry believes they are trying to do good. The industry itself was started without any mischievous motivations. Just like a cancerous dog cell, cultural evolution can easily corrupt good actors.

The problem in the life coaching industry emerges from the obvious fact that life coaching pedagogies that self-replicate begin to outcompete and crowd out those which do not. To be more specific, a life coaching style that

leads to individuals who go through it to become life coaches of that style themselves will outcompete (in terms of number of practitioners) a style that genuinely improves individuals' lives. We were once told something about coaching and advice in general that rings true here: Don't expect that anyone else's advice will get you anywhere other than where they are today. Unless a life coach is spectacularly good, expect their advice to turn you into a life coach.

If a life coach could steer you to becoming something more successful than a life coach, they probably would have done it for themselves. The sad truth for life coaches is that the world is full of successful people who would be thrilled to help other people for free (so long as the other person actually is willing to put in the effort to improve). It is not that life coaches don't work. Rather, the variety that does was typically wildly successful in some other career before becoming a life coach, hence they often target the ultra-wealthy.

If it doesn't really "work," why is life coaching so common? Again: Because the versions of life coaching that spread best are self-replicating. If you need coaching and want to find someone who is an exception to this rule, look for someone who has objectively helped other people become successful—not just someone who has coached people who were already successful.

Accidental Cults: The Mental Health Industry

We suspect most of our readers were aware that MLMs and life coaches had become self-replicating—let's focus on a slightly more controversial take: That **the mental health industry is beginning to evolve in the direction of a cult**. A lot of stuff we write in this book is likely to get us flack but none more than this**.**

I, Malcolm, write this as someone who started my career working in the industry and who believes the destigmatization of mental health services was largely (initially at least) a good thing. The problem came when the effort to destigmatize mental health transformed into a cultural mandate to

not criticize anything done in the name of mental health. This enabled extremely toxic practices to begin to evolve.

The first time the extent of this problem was obvious to me was when I was hanging out with a small group of people in which one unironically said, “I would not consider dating someone who was not regularly seeing a psychologist”—and others in the group *agreed with them*. **It was at that point I realized that some psychologists were convincing their patients that no person could be mentally healthy without regularly visiting them. They had so thoroughly incepted a dependency in their patients that they had created a cultural identity around that dependency.** As someone who started training in psychotherapy back when it was understood how insanely immoral it was to build or even not actively work to avoid this kind of dependency, I nearly shat myself.

One of the core purposes of a “general psychologist” is to help rewrite your internal narratives—the stories you tell yourself about yourself, your history, and the world around you. This can be an incredibly valuable service but it also puts an individual at risk. When you allow someone else to write your narrative, they can incept that narrative with elements that benefit them.

Some mental health professionals have begun a practice in which they incept an individual's self-narrative with some form of trauma that can only be addressed through regular sessions with them. In other words, a person with general mental health issues that most people share may go to a psychologist and that psychologist’s model of human behavior is (incorrectly) that “most mental health issues come from trauma.” They work with the patient to find an event in their lives that the patient had not previously contextualized as traumatic only to develop and reinforce a traumatic reinterpretation of it.

This creates an effect similar to the “forgetting before remembering” phenomenon. This is a phenomenon involving an individual telling their friends and family that they just uncovered a repressed memory, like being molested as a child, only to hear from many that they have mentioned that story many times before. An example of this would be someone who previously remembered their uncle “doing something weird that made me feel uncomfortable.” Then, this memory is (accurately) reframed as child

molestation (often due to a scene in a movie or a PSA). This reinterpretation is so radically contextually different, this person may forget their original creepy uncle memories entirely and thus assume they've just uncovered an utterly repressed memory of child molestation.

The problem here is that trauma is not introduced *until the event is interpreted traumatically*. Researchers have found that—across cultures—acknowledging trauma correlates with more severe symptoms of trauma (i.e., in countries that contextualize a crime as more traumatic, victims of that crime will experience more trauma).[36] [37]

Our point is not that adverse experiences don't cause genuine, horrible trauma, but that our interpretation of those experiences—the way we relate them to our personal narratives—influences the severity of effects we associate with trauma. **The role of narrative matters in the experience of trauma because it means genuine trauma can be generated out of the blue by almost any trusted authority figure telling you that events in your life were traumatic.**

This is a key recruiting technique of Scientology. Get an audit from a Scientologist and we can almost guarantee they will start telling you about stuff in your life that was "traumatic" even though you don't see it as such. Because you don't trust the Scientologist performing this assessment, you have some protection in these contexts and can see how the process works. Because you won't let your guard down during an audit (assuming you don't see this Scientology process as credible), you can use the experience as an opportunity to study a behavior pattern that you can subsequently recognize in a class of people you *do* trust: Psychologists. While you expect a Scientologist to try to incept you with trauma to control you, you don't necessarily expect this from a psychologist.

A good psychologist will take already-traumatic events in your life and work with you to contextualize them as non-traumatic. A bad psychologist will take non-traumatic events in your life and twist your narrative to both make them traumatic and connect them to your current problems. The problem is that good psychologists solve your issues while bad ones create dependency and thus recurring revenue streams.

Psychologists' unintentional use of a practice that creates dependency is not malicious; it simply evolved as a cultural practice. In a society loath to criticize mental health work, practices that leaned predatory slightly outcompeted those that did not and thus spread more effectively.

We do not live in the first era in which psychologists stumbled down this dark path—and today's psychologists should know better. Every young psychologist is taught about the horrors of the hypnosis fad, in which hundreds of people had false memories of things like alien abductions implanted into their minds by professional psychologists. Those training for the profession are also briefed on the "lost in the mall" experiment (which shows how easy it is to incept a false memory in someone's head by having them walk through a hypothetical of that memory).[38] And psychologists are perfectly familiar with the Ramona false memory case, in which a psychologist implanted a young girl with memories of her father raping her, when it appears he very much did not rape her.[39]

Every practicing psychologist should know they run a risk of incepting patients with information that builds dependency on therapy—and yet here we are again, because contemporary cultures harbor subtle taboos against criticizing psychologists' methods or suggesting to someone they should see a different therapist.

BONUS SECTION: PTSD

We feel compelled to provide a brief explanation of PTSD because, despite increased awareness about its *existence*, the disorder is poorly understood by the average person. We frequently hear people describe PTSD as though it were the brain's general response to any form of bad event. PTSD is actually a very specific type of brain damage in that it causes degradation of specific parts of the brain and can be seen on fMRI machines.[40]

Houdini often performed a trick in which he would surreptitiously tense the muscles in his chest and ask individuals to punch him, leaving audiences aghast to see him OK. One day a "fan" sucker-punched him to see what would happen and because he wasn't prepared, Houdini died.

PTSD is a phenomenon triggered by an emotional sucker punch. Like Houdini, our brain naturally protects itself when it can expect an

emotionally charged moment coming. While PTSD cannot be caused by an emotionally charged event you are *expecting*, it can be caused by even fairly trivial events you don't expect so long as you are primed to interpret them in a strongly emotional way.

This is why someone who is *always* abusive is less likely to cause PTSD than someone who is *sometimes* loving and *sometimes* abusive at unpredictable intervals. This is also why a fairly coddled middle-class suburbanite whose culture interprets microaggressions as a terrible trauma can get terrible PTSD while someone who has undergone actual daily tragedy can get by without ever experiencing it.

The damage caused by PTSD also does not create a generic "trauma" response. Instead it usually creates a collection of stimuli that prime a person to enter a state in which they are hypervigilant of something traumatic potentially happening—like someone holding a balloon next to your ear with a pin and then asking you to go about your day normally.

Accidental Cults: AA

This chain of evolution is not unique to psychologists. It is all too easy for a secular and well-meaning practice to have so many cultural and religious elements that it begins to evolve in an unintended direction. Alcoholics Anonymous presents an excellent example of this process.

AA started as both a well-meaning and (for the period) effective treatment for alcoholism. Over time, however, more demanding branches of AA that focused on self-replication outcompeted the original strain. These more virulent branches focus on a strict lifestyle that mandates regular interactions with group members in which participants build and reinforce a personal narrative that frames ongoing involvement in AA as an intrinsic part of recovery. This viral iteration of AA has become so effective, it has even infiltrated the U.S. government, making AA meetings (conversion camps) a court-ordered consequence of some types of legal violations.

An effective tool used by this branch of AA is the concept of a “dry drunk” (i.e., someone who cured their alcoholism using a method other than AA). Dry drunks are regarded with the same disgust and disdain with which a hard religious culture would regard an apostate. We have AA’s disdain toward dry drunks to thank for non-alcoholic beer being taxed the same as alcoholic beer in the U.S. AA members have enough say in the U.S. government to limit access to non-alcoholic beer, as it is used in other methodologies of quitting and makes people “dry drunks."

While there is an iteration of AA that does genuine good in the world, anyone who espouses a belief in the concept of “dry drunk” is clearly just in a cult. The concept of looking down on people who quit drinking through other methods—several of which boast higher success rates than AA—shows that the point of said faction is not about getting people off alcohol but getting them into AA. The derision of dry drunks almost implies that they are worse off than if they were still alcoholics—which, to the viral iteration of AA, they *are*, because at least an alcoholic is still a potential convert.

You may read all this and think AA was designed from the start to be a self-perpetuating, cult-like meme. It was not. The founders’ thoughts on the subject are well documented. Bill W., Alcoholics Anonymous’ co-founder, is quoted as saying things like:

> “Physicians who are familiar with alcoholism agree there is no such thing as making a normal drinker out of an alcoholic. Science may one day accomplish this, but it hasn’t done so yet.”

To him, AA was a stop gap until a pharmacological intervention could be found (he spent his life looking for one in fact).

We now have pharmacological interventions like the Sinclair Method that reliably (in 80% of cases) cure alcoholism. However, they have been to a great extent blocked from use in the USA in large part due to the influence of AA and the belief that people who quit using these methods are dry drunks.

OK ... we get it: Who is going to want to join AA once people learn that all they need to do is take a pill an hour before drinking as if they were lactose intolerant or something and after a few months they would no longer have an addiction?

The effectiveness and low cost of the Sinclair Method is an existential threat to the AA virus. Fortunately for that virus, the drug used in the Sinclair Method, Naltrexone, is no longer under patent, so no large pharma company has a financial interest in educating the public about it. This has made it easy for AA to prevent knowledge about it from spreading and keep it illegal in the U.S. (for a documentary on this check out *One Little Pill*—or you can check out this database of studies on the topic[41]).

In this way, AA has likely led to more deaths than all other cults in all of human history combined (around 0.7M people every ten years)—not because it was created to be evil, but due to simple memetic evolutionary cycles.[42]

Actually, it's worse than that—it's worse than *just* Alcoholics Anonymous leading to the deaths of almost a million people every decade. You know how people say drinking alcohol can cause brain damage? While heavy binge drinking can cause brain damage, most of the brain damage associated with moderate alcohol consumption comes from the withdrawal process upon non-pharmacologically assisted quitting (this causes neurotoxic lesions in the frontal lobe).[43]

The mental pain you feel upon quitting alcohol (that you don’t feel when using the Sinclair Method) is your brain trying to tell you it is suffering serious damage. Given the mechanism of action of this damage, it is very unlikely that it would also appear in someone who used the Sinclair Method to quit. We would therefore go so far as to say it should be malpractice to ever recommend AA to an individual until after they were certain they were not one of the 80% of people the Sinclair Method worked on. It is genuinely astounding to us that the damage caused by quitting without pharmacological assistance is not a bigger story. The fact that it isn’t is a testament to the power of the AA cult.

For notes on how a culture might deal with addictions, jump to the Appendix.

Religious Psychology

Many cultivars have adopted elements of the practice we now call psychology. The culture that most aggressively uses psychology to convert members is Scientology. The religion heavily leverages a realization that any environment in which an individual may rewrite their personal narrative is a great place to convert them and inspire deeper commitment. Not only is Scientology's core recruiting practice essentially a psychologist appointment in which subjects hold a galvanic skin response rod, but they also use other, similar practices to recruit through their own alternative to Alcoholics Anonymous.

This is in part why Scientology is so hostile to psychologists—they are competing for the same customer base. Both psychologists and Scientologists will attempt to convert one customer base away from the other using many of the same techniques.

How can a cultivar protect against this type of predation? Almost nothing is more dangerous to a culture, on the individual level, than a member rewriting their personal narrative under the guidance of someone from *another culture*, be that person a psychologist or a life coach. It is for this reason that many cultures try to take on this narrative rewriting role themselves.

Almost all successful cultivars feature mechanisms for within-culture counseling. The best example is that of Catholic Confessions. When an individual is feeling doubt about their personal narrative—when they are questioning whether they are a good person—they can go to the church and the church acknowledges they did something wrong while giving them a concrete path to redeeming themselves through tedious but easily accomplishable action.

Catholic confession is brilliant for a number of reasons. First, it builds into the individual's personal narrative that they need the Church in order to be a good person, creating dependency. Second, while confession obligates people to acknowledge their failures and shortcomings, it provides them with an entirely feasible path to redemption. Psychologically speaking, this is much more effective than trying to convince someone they did not screw up or admitting to someone that they *did* screw up and they need to learn to live with their mistake—not to mention telling someone they must actually rectify that mistake.

Catholic confession also cleverly anonymizes the individual to whom adherents confess, meaning confessors are dependent on the Church itself rather than a specific individual while also making it harder for priests to abuse any relationship they develop with adherents through confessions. As an added bonus, the format of confessions is formulaic enough that even fairly untrained and low-skilled people can execute the process effectively (though obviously skill can make a big difference in quality).

The importance of this last point cannot be overemphasized. We have gone over how easy it is for abusive narrative writing practices to devolve into looser systems or for narrative writing to be performed in a sloppy manner that makes things worse. The confession system is incredibly restrictive and performed with what can essentially be thought of as a fairly simple script, making it scalable with only minimum quality control. (We really cannot overemphasize the elegance and effectiveness of this system.)

These sorts of narrative-building, psychologist-adjacent roles are not unique to the above-mentioned cultures and exist everywhere, from Judaism to Mormonism. While it is easy to look at psychological solutions offered by religious communities and regard them as inferior to those offered by secular communities, there is evidence suggesting these solutions (or at least adherence to “harder” cultures) may ultimately be more effective than modern psychological services. In fact, the study, “Mental Illness and the Left,”[44] shows that left-wing individuals (who see more psychologists on average) suffer from more mental health problems across almost all categories (while we understand some see Kirkegaard as biased, the study itself seems well conducted and its findings align with those from sources like Pew Research Center).[45] In addition, religious individuals suffer from

fewer mental health problems on average (this is one of those obscenely well-replicated findings).[46]

One could argue this is correlation and not causation and that it is the suffering certain groups experience that makes them left wing (and thus more likely to adhere to soft cultures). One could also argue that people with mental health problems leave religions at higher rates. Both suppositions strike us as unlikely given that one could just as easily argue that the more a person suffers in life, the more likely they are to be *right wing*—e.g., that poor and uneducated people lean much further to the right—and those traits are also associated with religiosity (If you find this topic interesting, check the footnote for a few research papers exploring different theories on why conservatives are happier.)[47]

In addition to evidence that hard culture adherents might enjoy some protection from mental health issues, researchers have also found correlations between hard culture membership and happiness. For example, the aforementioned study ("Mental Illness and the Left") also shows people who lean the farthest to the right (and thus are more likely to be from hard cultures) are also the happiest.[48] In terms of mental health, going to a psychologist is both dramatically more expensive and strictly worse than being from many hard religious cultures.[49] (There are, of course, exceptions—for example, being anxious or uncertain about one's relationship with the divine is correlated with psychological distress.[50])

As we mention at the beginning of the book, the human brain evolved to work within a strict cultural framework and then co-evolved *with those frameworks*. Removing that framework from a person and expecting them to be psychologically healthy is like expecting an engine to operate well without oil.

How does one build a new culture or religion that leverages the wisdom of existing cultures' and religions' mental health services while protecting members from predatory secular actors—be they MLMs or codependency-fostering psychologists?

In building House Collins' culture, we face an additional challenge in that our culture is liable to splinter every generation (with many descendants creating new cultivars and Houses), meaning many iterations will be quite

small (i.e. just one family). This makes it impossible for us to create our own version of, say, Catholic confession, which requires larger populations with structured, institutional roles. Even small-scale correlates we might design aren't feasible, as parents simply aren't reliable or palatable figures in a family to provide these services (and they, too, need mental health support). How, then, can we develop a network of trustworthy, trained, and non-related authority figures who can help members of our cultivar rewrite their personal narratives?

One option is to create a culturally compliant playbook and encourage members to turn to this playbook for counsel without outside intervention from a human. This is hardly a new concept. Throughout history and in the present day, people living in isolation have turned to religious and philosophical texts to help them rewrite their narratives, work through mental struggles, and find solace. Today, thanks to the explosive growth of artificial intelligence, this approach has more potential than ever before, as AI agents can be trained on specific bodies of text and then represent them to humans in an interactive, conversational format.

It comes as no surprise to psychology-familiar readers of our first book, *The Pragmatist's Guide to Life*, that we originally wrote it as a playbook for a new model of psychological therapy designed to be a more holistic, less-susceptible-to-abuse alternative to CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy). As we fleshed it out, the *Guide to Life* transformed into a more narrative format, but the "if-then" structuring of the book still remains in its overall structure and flow. This is true to the extent that we have been contacted by an artificial intelligence company that would like to use the book as the basis for a form of AI-driven coaching or therapy that leverages our model.

We can therefore simply encourage members of our House to turn to *The Pragmatist's Guide to Life* and our other general life philosophy texts for counsel—or even to interact with an AI trained on these texts. Other cultures can do the same with their own foundational texts so long as they sufficiently address the major struggles people face.

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HOW CULTURE RELATES TO SOCIETY

This chapter will focus on how cultivars interact with the societies they inhabit. We cut out a number of considerations (perhaps interesting, but not worthy of top billing) which can be found in the Appendix:

- **“Hofstede's Other Cultural Dimensions”** This covers cultural differences like power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term vs short-term orientation, but adds little insight that is not already discussed in the research.
- **“Relation to Government”** This details our early thoughts on why some cultures try to dominate local governments while others don’t.

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Cultures and Conservatism

Conservatism as a political movement sees the individual as an avatar of their cultivar and optimizes for intergenerational fitness and cultural agency. In contrast, progressivism as a movement atomizes the individual and focuses on intragenerational quality of life and individual agency. That said, “conservatism” is not really one cohesive group as we often think of it but rather the manifestation of a number of hard cultural strategies optimized to protect intergenerational fitness.

Drives to Conservatism

Values Driven: This form of conservatism occurs when a cultivar encourages positions on specific issues that nudge adherents toward conservative political factions. The Catholic position on abortion, the LDS Church’s former position on gay marriage, and the Muslim prohibition on alcohol all provide great examples of this. All three of these prohibitions lower freedom and quality of life within a generation but increase intergenerational fitness.

Disposition Driven: This form of conservatism is driven by a cultural aversion to change and “causing a fuss." A great example of this can be seen in Swiss culture, in which some Cantons did not allow women to vote until 1991. The Swiss will aggressively enforce a “don’t cause a fuss” culture through social shaming, with neighbors coming to our hotel room multiple times during our last visit to the nation because we “laughed too loud." Famously, one woman was denied citizenship because she put bells on her cows, which annoyed local residents.

Utopian Driven: Utopian-driven conservatism exists with the goal of creating a paradise that is only achievable if everyone within their community is able to live by a certain aesthetic. The Puritan branch of Calvinism, the Anabaptist movement, and ISIS present archetypal examples of this drive. When these cultures are symbiotic with the wider societies they inhabit, they typically isolate themselves and attempt to build walled-off paradises.

Dominating versions of such cultures (see: "Roles in Multicultural Ecosystems") manifest as some of the most violent and aggressive of all cultivar varieties. A Calvinist-derived cultivar (the Independents) serves as a great example of this through Oliver Cromwell and The New Model Army, though obviously ISIS serves as a salient modern example.

When not dominating, these cultivars are often some of the most outspoken advocates for laissez-faire governance at the state level. The typical goal of this advocacy is not to loosen the religious restrictions and totalitarianism of their local communities but to protect them from outside interference. While they can be thought of as advocating for cultural agency, they are *not* fighting for the individual agency of members within their culture.

Conservatism and Communism

Almost all cultures are communist within their communities and even more so within family units. In such settings, resources are granted to each according to their needs and taken from each according to their ability. Often *more* conservative cultures are *the most* communist on micro scales. The difference between conservative hard cultures and actual communists is the extent to which they trust state institutions to run things better than they do—or at least to not be a threat to them. The more an individual trusts their own community to be fair and well run, the less they will trust a government to interfere and the more "conservative" they will appear.

We cannot overstate just how socialist many conservative-seeming hard cultures can be on an in-group level. Consider how Anabaptists often build houses and pay medical bills for fellow community members, and how Evangelical groups donate food to those in need through things like soup kitchens. To some extent, when a government starts running alternatives to these services, it robs cultures that provide them of a significant conversion pipeline and mechanism for enforcing their values, which explains some opposition to government-run iterations of these services (as we mentioned earlier, government-run orphanages killed Shaker culture).

Conservative vs. Progressive Child Rearing

When you inspect debates over child rearing through the lens of conservatism being the manifestation of an optimization around intergenerational cultural fitness and progressivism as an optimization around intragenerational quality of life and individual agency, then you can see the key goal of progressive child-rearing is to allow children to become “whoever it is they want to be" whereas conservative child rearing places specific expectations on kids. This comes up a *lot* in public discussion about us (your gentle authors): Progressively minded individuals see the expectations we place on our kids as a form of abuse. There is no use trying to please people who hold such an extremely different cultural perspective.

Immigration and Conservative Values

Historically, opposing immigration made a lot of sense for cultural groups looking to maintain intergenerational fidelity (as lowering immigration reduced external cultural competition as well as competition over state services). At the same time, immigration is an act of immediate individual agency, which makes it appealing to progressive groups. While the situation has long been clear cut, it has become significantly more nuanced in modern times. Immigration is only as partisan as it is today due to blind momentum.

Suppose you are an ethno-cultivar (an ethnically homogeneous cultural group) keen to protect itself. Surely policies against immigration will yield the best protection ... right? Actually, the ethno-cultivars at the most risk in the world today are often those which most effectively prevent immigration (Korea and Japan serve as two salient examples here). In contrast, ethno-cultivars that have successfully staved off birth rate collapse in the face of rising education and prosperity tend to occupy highly diverse environments (consider Jews, some Arab Muslims, and some White American Christian cultivars).

Furthermore, ethno-cultivars that relocate from homogeneous, low-immigration zones to multicultural, high-immigration zones (each with relatively high prosperity and education) appear to enjoy *increases* in their birth rates. Consider that Korean immigrants to the US enjoy a whopping

0.4! Increase in fertility rates.[1] For an ethno-state with a fertility rate of 0.8, that is insane.

It's entirely understandable for members of a culture to want their taxes to go toward culturally aligned efforts (and therefore to be against immigration). We are just pointing out that this isolationist approach seems to do more harm than good.

The dynamism created by culturally diverse ecosystems is easily measured. For example, one large study of 7,600 London-based firms found that those which had more diverse management teams were more innovative.[2] That is not to say studies never run counter to this claim, especially when looking at narrow, highly derived circumstances (like when a team is being managed poorly),[3] but large meta-studies on the subject consistently find that at least some forms of diversity improve innovation or productivity—and none conclude that diversity hurts.[4] We struggle to even see why this point needs to be argued. *Of course* a culture sharpened in a competitive environment is going to outcompete one protected from competition.

There are of course times when breakaway states become a necessity—such as when a state or some other group is actively trying to erase your cultivar or prevent its members from practicing their core beliefs (through something like state-controlled and mandated education). In the absence of such adverse forces, it seems optimal for a cultivar to seek to inhibit a diverse landscape.

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Cultural Volume

The fact that we were once almost kicked out of a Swiss hotel for laughing too much and too loudly made us realize it is probably worth talking about cultural "volume." Having studied as an undergrad in Northern Europe after growing up in the United States, I (Malcolm) can say it is not just a stereotype that people in most Northern European countries are much more subdued. This problem was compounded for me as I am from a uniquely "intense" and boisterous cultivar. What causes such significant cultural differences in expressed and preferred "energy" volume?

It can seem counterintuitive that the Calvinist culture—which is known for framing emotional indulgence as a sin—appears to be high volume, intense, and heady. People often confuse not *indulging* in emotions with not *feeling* them or not *expressing* them. An ultra-high-energy approach to life has long been associated with the American Calvinists, with David Hackett Fischer noting of colonial Puritans in *Albion's Seed* that:

> "European travelers repeatedly observed with astonishment the energy of the inhabitants. One visitor noted that (Puritan) children seemed normally to move at a full run. Another remarked that their elders invented the rocking chair so they could keep moving even while sitting still."[5]

With a modern observer noting:

> "The stereotypes aren't fair, but they don't come out of nowhere. Calvinists are 'cold,' 'heady,' (stimulating, high energy, intoxicating) and 'condescending.' They think they have it all figured out and everyone else is blind, slow, or stubborn. They're so lost in their books, they're not interested in the needs around them."[6]

This resonates. In high school I (Malcolm) remember being very confused as to why I was the only one who ran everywhere. Walking seemed like

such a waste of time.

We mention this as it is an interesting point to be made about “high volume” cultures. Many people assume that being a “judgy” conservative culture that values emotional control is intrinsically related to not also being “extra.” In fact, the opposite is true, as anyone who has spent much time around Anabaptists (Mennonites/Amish people) could tell you.

As to why some highly “conservative” cultures seem to feature high-energy members at disproportionate rates, we can only speculate. Maybe it is that these cultures are much more confident in their actions and less concerned about what others think of them, leading them to hold back less.

It could be that the very reason these cultures are so structured is because adherents within them tend to have very high-volume sociological profiles that *need* that structure. Perhaps cultures with structures helping high-energy people contain themselves protect those sociological profiles from being eliminated from the gene pool, meaning more boisterous people ultimately survive within these cultures while those profiles get extinguished in less structured environments. (This may also explain the crazy high rates of alcoholism in the Calvinist community and the stereotype of Calvinists either being teetotalers or heavy drinkers.)

Is high volume a useful adaptation for a culture to have? We suspect not, as it makes it harder for members of that culture to “blend into” society at large. On the plus side, difficulty blending in likely decreases cultural bleed.

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Psychedelics & Hallucinogens

Psychedelics and hallucinogens have been used throughout history by a diversity of cultures to experience a feeling of the divine. This can make them an effective tool for cultures that want to convert individuals through experiences rather than logic—it is also what makes them dangerous from the perspective of a cultivar like ours.

A major hazard of psychedelics and hallucinogens is that they create an illusion of expanded consciousness while typically guiding people down well-trodden paths. We liken pharmacologically-driven religious epiphanies to amusement park haunted house rail rides: The experience is "real" and nothing like daily life, but people who undergo it are mostly exposed to the same sorts of things.

Just as haunted house riders may experience varying levels of fear and notice different features, people on pharmacologically induced mystical journeys experience varying aspects and levels of the fairly-limited set of features depending on dosage, priming, and personal physiology.[7] The experience is not guided by some higher truth, but by "rails"—grooves worn into mental pathways through shortcuts evolution made when programming how the human brain processes feelings of love, self, connectedness, meaning, and the divine.

Some fascinating studies explore this phenomenon. One published in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology* includes responses from 2,561 adults about their single most memorable encounter with a being (or beings) after smoking or vaporizing DMT (the stuff in ayahuasca).[8] These encounters share a remarkable number of commonalities.

When we started writing this book, we assumed that psychedelics and hallucinogens offered a trade-off between increased creativity and a number of negative effects. When we actually dove into the data, it became clear things were much more nuanced. As this study[9] shows, while people on cannabis are more jovial and believe they are more creative, they are measurably not more creative. As this study[10] shows, psilocybin (the active compound in most psychedelic mushrooms) actually *decreases* task-based

creativity while increasing spontaneous creativity (i.e., psilocybin appears to make people less creative at anything specific they put their minds to).

Even the feeling of being closer to others produced by some drugs appears to be, at least in part, illusory. For example, a 2021 study demonstrated that while MDMA appears to increase feelings of "closeness to others" and euphoria, it fails to boost actual prosocial behavior (specifically: task-based empathy, trust, or cooperative behavior).[11] In addition, while hallucinogens like cannabis reduce short-term feelings of depression and anxiety, they appear to significantly increase these sensations over the long run[12] (and it should go without saying cannabis has negative effects on working memory).[13]

Why do cults so often rely on mind-altering substances in their recruiting processes? Not only can they effectively fake feelings of being "better" in various ways (by making people feel more connected and creative) but they also make people incredibly gullible, more forgiving of betrayal, and less likely to run from psychological and physical abuse. In one study, people on hallucinogens were more likely to trust partners in a collaboration game (and more quickly recover when trust was broken)[14] and in another they lowered experiential avoidance (a person's drive to escape situations that induce anxiety, pain, and other unpleasant mental states).[15]

While the evidence was compelling enough to change our minds on this subject (that these types of drugs increase creativity), it was not unilateral (as is almost always the case in science). For example, this study[16] shows an increase in creativity resulting from Ayahuasca consumption. Some research also suggests that hallucinogens produce greater neuroplasticity, which might be useful in some very specific circumstances.[17]

Meta-studies on the topic seem largely inconclusive, with one astutely pointing out that "feelings of creativity may be an inconsistent result of a more general effect of these drugs, such as alterations in availability of mental representations or changes in Bayesian inference."[18] Some recent meta-analyses indicate that the belief that psychedelics boost creativity was at one point bolstered by a series of poorly designed studies conducted in the 1970s that are still often cited in pop-science books covering this topic.

One thing that is clear across pretty much all studies is that psychedelics and hallucinogens will at least make you *feel* as if you are more creative. This is not to say pharmaceuticals like these have no use. For example, MDMA has shown to be useful in the treatment of PTSD[19] and psychedelics have shown themselves to be effective against depression[20] (possibly by reintroducing more flexibility to the way people think).[21]

So no, you probably didn't gain a deeper understanding of the oneness of all things by taking psychedelics. Certain types of psychedelics just intrinsically cause feelings of the divine while permanently eroding your sense of individuality while others cause you to imagine small benevolent beings behind the fabric of reality. This is not to say psychedelics are never useful; feeling a sense of oneness could provide an individual with perspective, enabling them to consider new metaphysical possibilities.

It may be helpful to contextualize the usefulness of psychedelics as being akin to showing a CGI video of Earth orbiting the sun to someone who has trouble envisioning it. Neither psychedelics/hallucinogens nor CGI depictions provide evidence in and of themselves, nor are they depictions of what is really happening, but they can help people sort through difficult-to-grasp concepts. If a person has trouble conceptualizing how small their place in the universe might be or how connected people are, psychedelics can be useful.

One critical thing to remember as a culture is that the *feeling* of profundity does not correlate with the *substance* of profundity and can be generated by simplistic and easy-to-replicate trigger mechanisms. While psychedelics and hallucinogens are probably the "easiest" of these things to create, there are dozens of others from group dancing with loud music to rituals based around repeating a chain of words. This tactic of chanting words to lower a person's mental inhibitions and trick them into feelings of profundity has been independently evolved by dozens of cultivars and is even specifically warned against in the Bible: "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Matthew 6:7, KJV).

Adopting these ecstatic states as a cultivar (whether they are reached by drugs, dancing, or chanting) has both upsides and downsides. When a

person is in one of these states, they become very susceptible to someone else wanting to imprint an idea deep into their subconscious (allowing high fidelity cultural transference and fast conversions). In the absence of someone attempting to implant ideas in them a person in this state will often deepen beliefs society or a subculture they affiliate with has implanted in them. In short, if you want to quickly convert a lot of stupid people or have higher intergenerational cultural fidelity (with little room for updating the culture) then these states can be of extremely high utility—if on the other hand, you want a culture that disproportionately targets smart highly lucid people and evolves quickly then stay away from them. (Perhaps this tradeoff could be mitigated by creating a culture that has a “smart” ruling class that uses such experiences on an underclass to make them more obedient and to more efficiently harvest resources from them.)

Speaking of the effect of rituals on the human mind ...

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Rituals and Ceremonies

While both rituals and ceremonies involve a set of actions without any immediately apparent functional purpose, rituals are private whereas ceremonies have an audience or are otherwise communal activities. (We say "immediately apparent" as it sometimes turns out that a ritual—like Islamic / Jewish hand washing—had a very important purpose that was not fully understood at the time.)

Why do so many cultures lean into long, expensive, time-consuming practices that provide no obvious benefit? Behind all the pomp, rituals *do* provide a benefit—and a big one. Research has shown that rituals can alleviate grief and improve overall mental health.[22] In addition, rituals performed before a high-pressure task (like singing in public) reduce anxiety and increase confidence. This may help to explain why almost every "old" culture in the world has evolved heavy use of rituals.

As one test reader put it: "Rituals are one example of organically evolved spontaneous order that provides security through constraints on human behavior (things at the right place, at the right time). Rituals probably outsource a lot of anxiety by giving you something certain to do/trust."

Ceremonies—public rituals—help to transform a culture from a series of beliefs and practices into something that feels like "a thing." The social proof generated by seeing a bunch of people drop what they're doing, gather together, and do something that is typically nonproductive (and often not even that fun) is incredibly strong—plus gathering people together to perform something culturally or religiously significant helps to establish shared knowledge and disseminate important social norms.[23]

Ceremonies furthermore play an important role in self-narrative building. They remind individuals of their place within the world and their religious culture, often focusing both on submission to said culture, belonging, and a sense of grandeur.

As we mention in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality,* it shocks us how frequently religious ceremonies are reminiscent of BDSM submission

displays. Examples range from tefillin (black leather straps some Jewish branches tightly wrap around themselves) to self-flagellation, the use of cilices (aka hair shirts—garments, sometimes belts, made of coarse cloth, animal hair, or metal spikes worn close to the skin for the purpose of being uncomfortable), and the kneeling, hand-clasp-style of prayer some Christian groups use.

While some readers may bristle at our drawing connections between religious rituals and sexual acts, conceptually it makes a lot of sense that religious adherents trying to signal submission to a God and people turned on by the act of submission might co-evolve similar practices. We are also *not* arguing that there is a sexual nature to religious submission rituals. It's not religious groups' fault that our society has strayed so far from hard culture that the primary context many have for submission displays is for sexual gratification. That said, if you are trying to come up with a new unique submission ritual for your culture, BDSM will offer fertile grounds for inspiration.

> *History time! Why do some people assume a kneeled-with-hands-clasped-above-head position when praying? It turns out that this ritual is derivative of a medieval ceremony in which a feudal supplicant would approach the lord to whom they pledged themself, kneel before him, and clasp their fingers in an interlocking fashion. Thusly approached, the lord would place his hands around the supplicant's clasped hands to accept their gesture.*
>
> *This gesture signals submission through vulnerability. By kneeling with their head down, the supplicant exposes their neck, showing the lord he could cut their heads off should he so desire. By allowing their clasped hands and interlocked fingers to be grasped, the supplicant renders themselves helpless (try unclasping your hands with a friend's hands around them—you can't).*
>
> *Over time, the position became more symbolic than functional. Finger interlocking was mostly dropped and many came to assume the position with slightly lower hands. This gesture's feudal roots, however, remain as an interesting origin story for a common gesture.*

As you consider which rituals and ceremonies you might incorporate into the cultivar you intentionally design or reinforce, don't be afraid to consider your cultural and religious roots. As an example, a friend of ours who hails from an Afro-Latin background of Puerto Rican Spiritualism practices a secular form of divination (if you are not familiar with the practice, Voodoo is the archetypal practice hailing from this kind of cultivar). Specifically, he uses a pair of dice to assist him in daily decision making. When choosing among several options that seem equally optimal, he rolls the dice to gain different meanings. Numbers resulting from the dice throw don't just reply in the binary but signal gradations of urgency to their suggestion.

This is brilliant for two reasons: First, it cuts down on the mental load imposed by the various decisions a person faces every day for which there is no clear answer by reducing decision fatigue, the phenomenon in which a person gets worse at making decisions through the course of a day depending on how many decisions they have already made (if you want to learn more about this topic, its Wikipedia page is a good jumping off point).[24] Second, it has a 50% chance of giving you the motivation to do something you know you probably should do but really can't be asked to do. For example, one night we were hosting a party and, being a nerdy introvert like us, this friend was looking for any excuse to not go, so he rolled the dice to try to get out of it. They came up in a way which forced him to and he ended up making a useful business connection that night.

What about the culture we are building? This is an area in which our birth cultures (which despise ritual, seeing it as self-indulgent and inefficacious) are in heavy conflict with logic and the data. We are the types of people who couldn't even stomach sitting through our own graduation ceremonies. We were even the first people to leave our own wedding (and it was a great wedding!). To attempt to reconcile this deeply-set hatred of ceremony with the data, we strive to construct cultural holidays and practices that serve a specific and high utility purpose while still involving ritual. We will also build in a cultural "review" process into our House's governance system that allows rituals and ceremonies to be modified or removed when they no longer provide value.

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Medicine and Technology

We live in an age in which it is easy to look down on cultures that are suspicious of technology. We hear about the children of Christian Scientists dying after their parents refused a blood transfusion and forget that some data indicates that Christian Scientists actually had higher life outcomes than those that went to doctors when the cultivar first evolved—mostly due to doctors at the time being leech-happy opium addicts. (Note: One of our test readers thought we meant Christians that were scientists. Christian Science is a denomination of Christianity unique for believing that reality is purely spiritual and the material world an illusion.)

While technophobia had a place in the past, surely it is not culturally advantageous anymore ... right? We live in an age in which apps have been designed to hijack simple dopaminergic reward pathways and create dangerous addictions, lowering the time individuals have to spend on the meaningful things in their lives. Memes have become especially virulent as we've become more connected than ever before. This allows for "supervirus memes" to evolve which erode traditional cultures at rates we had not thought possible (consider Mormons going from four kids per family to almost below replacement rate in less than a decade).

Perhaps there is something to technophobia. After all, the Anabaptists (Amish and Mennonites), cultures that have proved most resistant to these threats, are *extremely* technophobic.

Cultures that approach technology with suspicion and believe that indulgence in technology leads to sin are almost always going to be healthier than those that outright ban it. Consider Mennonites: While they use cell phones with internet access and Facebook for getting jobs and work, they voluntarily password-protect many apps then give those passwords to their spouses or friends. To us, Mennonites (specifically the Beachy Amish), represent the ideal balance for which a technophobic culture should aim. They allow technology where it is directly efficacious but maintain rules and views that prevent it from corrupting them.

While we can see technophobia as being a winning strategy for some Houses registered with the Index, it is not one that will ever sit fully comfortably with us personally. Instead, we lean toward the other extreme. As our culture frames it, problems that stem from technology result from a failure to dig deep enough into one's technological options or through considering some solutions "unethical" or "off limits."

For example, we handle dopaminergic addiction brought on by technological devices through a combination of education and pharmaceutical intervention. We created a coming-of-age ritual in which our kids train rats in Skinner boxes, developed a holiday tied to overcoming dopaminergic addictions, and teach our kids how to leverage pharmaceuticals like Naltrexone to block opioid pathways. We have even debated incorporating TMS systems—transmagnetic stimulation systems (TMS) can temporarily shut off and reboot parts of the brain—into our kid's emotional education.

As we have noted elsewhere, our House's culture is as technophilic as possible when it comes to fertility technology and the production of children (Bloomberg even did a piece on us titled: "The Pandora's Box of Embryo Testing Is Officially Open: Genetic testing companies promise they can predict someone's probable future health. Some parents don't want to stop there" and Insider covered our bullish attitude in another piece titled: "Billionaires like Elon Musk want to save civilization by having tons of genetically superior kids. Inside the movement to take 'control of human evolution.'" [25] [26]). Given our theological mandate for intergenerational improvement, we have been using the most cutting-edge technology available in our own family planning and expect our children to do the same —which for our kids could mean aggressive gene editing combined with in-vitro gametogenesis (IVG).

We might recommend that some branches of our family consider the introduction of visible genetic markers to their lines (such as purple skin, uniquely collared eyes, or whatever marker is easy and safe to introduce), creating both more of a unique perception of our community by society at large and a feeling of community identity. (While some might be horrified by this idea, it is much less extreme than something like circumcision as a cultural identifier, which strictly takes something *away* from a person. We

are all born with an ethnicity we did not choose—it is arguably both empowering and functional to just manufacture a new one when you start doing heavy gene editing.)

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Education

While we don't engage with the idea much as a society, one of the ways cultivars differentiate the most is the way they relate to education and the role education plays in the lives of its adherents.

To understand what we mean by this, consider a few cultures' varying approaches:

- Many Islamic cultivars view education as a method for getting closer to God. This is why they were education rockstars until science started to run into conflict with Islamic theology. Islamic educational prowess was so renowned that European scientists of the Middle Ages would use Islamic-sounding pseudonyms so people would take them seriously. (To explore a scholarly analysis of this subject, check out *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* by Dimitri Gutas.[27])
- Most Quaker cultivars contextualize education as a means of nurturing a person's spirit and self. In addition to framing the act of *being* educated as a means of spiritual development, Quakers also find spiritual development in *teaching*—hence it focuses on making education itself more effective and fun while generally avoiding the pedantics of higher education. (We have never met a Quaker who hasn't taught—either professionally or recreationally—at some point in their lives.)
- In many Catholic cultivars, education is one of a number of pathways to advancement up an internal hierarchy, making it mostly instrumental rather than an aim in and of itself. (Secular educational attainment is not the same prerequisite for respect in Catholic cultivars as it is in many others.)
- Similar to the Catholic cultivar, the dominant Chinese cultivar, with a several-thousand-year long tradition of Confucianism and civil service exams, deeply values formal education as a means of social advancement. Unlike the Catholic cultivar, it attaches dramatically less respect to achievement "in spite of" low education. To achieve high status, a person must not only receive a

high level of education, but secure a prestige position as a result of that education (what specifically is learned is not as important in the Chinese cultivar so long as it is useful in achieving secular prestige).[28]

- Higher education in Orthodox Jewish culture is pursued both for status and skills—and particularly skills tied to communication and debate. Jewish cultivars typically place a high level of value on every level of the educational system. (Note: Both Reform and Haredi cultivars have a very different relationship with education.)
- Most Calvinist cultivars are obsessed with getting the "technically correct" answer to morality, human nature, and the metaphysical nature of reality while living life as efficaciously as possible. While investigation / research of these topics is sacred, education is just one of many tools one might use in this pursuit and doesn't have intrinsic value.

Both Jewish and Calvinist cultures are known for being highly educated and putting a unique emphasis on learning in their child-rearing, so exploring their differences may elucidate how a culture's relation to education is more nuanced than a spectrum ranging from "obsessed" to "indifferent."

One can think of a cultivar's relationship to education as the extent to which:

1. Their worldview drives individuals to become highly educated.
2. They respect education (i.e., a breadth of knowledge on many topics).
3. They respect the type of formalized and systematic education our current society defines as "education."

Jewish culture is at the high end within all three metrics. This, in addition to other factors investigated earlier, likely contributes to uniquely favorable social and economic outcomes for members, particularly at the extreme ends of the "long-tail distribution." For example, Nobel Prize winners and Supreme Court Justices are both well over 100 times more likely to be Jewish when controlling for Jewish representation in the general population.[29]

The risk to Jewish culture from this stance is that if the certifying institutions for academic excellence become infected by the cultural supervirus (or any cultural virus) then the Jewish cultivars that respect those degrees as much or more than their internal cultural certification systems are also at risk. Fortunately, many of the more conservative Jewish cultivars have maintained robust ancestral systems of internal formalized debate and certification, which act as something of a “blood-brain barrier” for their cultivars.

Contrast this with Calvinist culture, which places a lot of respect on learning and investigation but maintains an intense distrust toward bureaucracies—especially certifying bureaucracies. To Calvinists, education is important, but mostly as a tool for changing the world and understanding the metaphysical nature of reality. Education in the absence of utility is sinful. It is considered dramatically more respectable to be an uneducated person who performs manual labor for a living than to be a highly educated person who has not applied that education to make an actionable change in the world.

This contrast manifests in stereotypes around Jews disproportionately pursuing careers as doctors and lawyers—careers which require high amounts of education and certification—as well as stereotypes around Calvinists disproportionately becoming inventors, industrialists, and entrepreneurs (e.g., Andrew Carnegie)—professions *also* that require high amounts of education but no certification. Ironically, Calvinist distaste for certification also explains in part their reputation for founding schools (something both we and family members have done) and writing copious strange polemics and treaties on purpose, morality, and the nature of reality (guilty as charged).[30]

Our culturally inherited perspectives on education feel so hardwired we won’t try to deviate from them. That said, when it comes to views on education, there are many equally viable and desirable answers. When deciding what stance on education is best for *your* culture, give extra consideration to the manner in which you trust external institutions, the skills your adherents need most in order to thrive, and any “objective function” your culture’s core morality promotes, as different approaches to education tend to maximize different values.

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Malcolm note: “Chinese cultural attitudes toward education are fascinating, as they give us a vision of where our current society might be headed. While the civil service exams were focused on practical knowledge when first implemented, over the centuries they became more about showing one's skill at perfectly memorizing Confucian texts (essentially a proto liberal arts). This shift allowed education to still act as a filter for intelligence and work ethic but meant practical skills were no longer being emphasized. On the upside, this rendered the upper classes resistant to external cultural viruses but on the downside, it lowered the rate of cultural innovation because practical skills were no longer being emphasized.”

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HOLIDAYS AND TRADITIONS

We are largely unsatisfied with holidays as they exist now. Many modern holidays are more about commercial sales events than cultural values and many have been unmoored from their fitness-imparting cultural, philosophical, and religious underpinnings. As such, there is a case to be made for reconstructing a collection of holidays for whatever culture you choose to reinforce or develop.

In addition to instilling values in the next generation, family rituals play a critical role in healthy psychological development. In 2002, Eaker and Walters[1] found not only that family ritual satisfaction was positively correlated with adolescent psychosocial development, but also that it mediated the relation between family boundaries and psychosocial development, and decreased levels of discontentedness. These types of findings have been replicated. For example, Yesel Yoon[2] found in 2012 research that family ritual satisfaction correlates with greater psychological wellbeing in general.

As an added benefit, self-denial rituals found across cultures (Ramadan, Lent, the Fast of the Firstborn, etc.) help strengthen an individual's inhibitory pathways in their prefrontal cortex, making it easier for them to shut down intrusive thoughts and snowballing emotional states.

A common hazard people encounter when creating new traditions involves an overreliance on the *aesthetics* of religious ceremonies, making them very “woo-woo.” Overdoing religious ceremonial hullabaloo produces torture sessions in which people are encouraged to hold hands, sing songs, and

discuss intimate personal issues with strangers—far too cringe and cult-like to encourage widespread adoption.

Instead of focusing on the *aesthetics* of your evoked set of religious holidays, focus on designing a holiday to convey a specific culturally relevant message or lesson. Try to create a tradition that people would find aspirational and engaging: The type of thing someone would publicly flaunt online (i.e., make it Instagrammable).

We see one category of these as the “Instagram holidays." This utilizes a date as an excuse to post something on social media or make a timely comment among friends, coworkers, and family. Two prominent examples of this can be seen in the form of Pi Day (March 14—3.14) and Star Wars Day (May the Fourth … as in “be with you”). While these holidays have been good at spreading (which is certainly more than we can say for most lame secular holidays, like the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster’s “Avoid Artichokes Day” and “Pirate Garb Day”) they have not blossomed into anything more than fads because they miss the four key ingredients of successful holiday design:

- Child-centricity
- Spectacle
- Gift-giving or exchanges
- Convening otherwise-dispersed people

Child-centricity

Children (and through children, parents) are the primary “customers” of holidays. A child’s wonder is what gives a holiday magic. Holidays mostly for adults, like Valentine’s Day in the U.S., have an off-key soullessness to them when contrasted against more child-centric holidays like Halloween, Christmas, and Easter. As such, a great holiday is very likely to feature a certain level of roleplay, imagination, and suspension of disbelief given these are means through which children interact with the world.

Spectacle

The importance of spectacle in holidays is exemplified by the most successful holiday/celebration day invented during our lifetimes: The

gender reveal party. Invented by Jenna Karvunidis in 2008, gender reveal parties—in which expecting parents leverage some form of creative spectacle to reveal the sex of their soon-to-arrive new baby—have become so popular that already (in just 14 years) *at least seven people* have died as a result of their activities. Another great example of a holiday that has leveraged spectacle to spark engagement can be seen in the 4th of July, which, in terms of public consciousness, dramatically outcompetes similar secular holidays like Labor Day and Presidents' Day.

Given that both Independence Day and gender reveal parties appear to be correlated with increased mortality risk and that other spectacle-heavy holidays, like Guy Fawkes Day, often involve fire and danger—we beseech readers to carefully consider and select idiot-proof spectacles that won't cause death, injury, or major wildfires.

Gift-giving or exchanges

Holidays that seem to resonate with the public consciousness also commonly leverage gift giving or some form of exchange (such as candy in exchange for showing up in a costume on Halloween). The importance of gift-giving can be seen in the relatively higher popularity of Valentine's Day in Japan (vis-a-vis Valentine's Day in the U.S.), which features the ritualized gifting of handmade chocolates by women to the men in their lives (and is followed by White Day one month later, in which these gifts are reciprocated).

Convening otherwise-dispersed people

A great holiday will convene groups of people who would otherwise not see each other. This alone can carry an entire holiday, as we see with Thanksgiving in the United States, which really has very little else going for it. What is important to remember with this point is that this group need not be family. We can see this in the omnipresent 4th of July parade group, block party, or BBQ.

Beyond these powerful elements, successful holiday also often incorporate some element of:

- Storytelling

- Specific foods or ingredients
- Thematic decorating schemes (anything that creates a good photo opportunity)
- FOMO-inducing photo opportunities (any opportunity to post a photo in which you are clearly celebrating a distinct special event that leaves others regretting their lack of involvement)
- Competitions (though these have largely been removed from our declawed society)
- Easy-to-enter, hard-to-master elements (holidays should require minimal effort to engage with but also bestow serious social credibility to those who go all-out, spending weeks to prepare or set up decorations)

One technique that can be used when designing a holiday or tradition is to modify an already practiced public holiday by adding private traditions that imbue it with meaning. Christianity was great at doing this with its early holidays, twisting pre-existing public ceremonies to highlight a specific Christian cultural message. Unfortunately, the memetically replicable aspects of those Christian holidays have mostly overwhelmed these holidays' more substantive religious messages.

Suppose you wanted to create a holiday designed to help kids better empathize with perspectives vastly different from their own by "walking in someone else's shoes" for a day. This holiday will feel far more natural if built into Halloween, which would allow a child to practice the "substantive" ritual at home (e.g., through discussions over dinners about what it must be like to be a vampire, what vampires have to worry about, the ethics of deciding where and how to source blood for sustenance, etc.) while still carrying over the costume and character into a public setting without seeming weird (e.g. by trick-or-treating as a vampire with friends).

When designing holidays, also keep in mind that there are three major types of cultural celebrations:

- **Annual holidays:** Holidays like Diwali, Easter, and Halloween that happen once every year

- **Milestone holidays:** Celebrations like birthdays, bar/bat mitzvahs, quinceañeras, weddings, or baby showers
- **Routine holidays:** Celebrations like the Jewish Sabbath or Mormon Family Home Evenings

To ignore milestones is to miss a chance to frame important life developments in the context of cultural values and imperatives. To overlook routine holidays is to miss a huge opportunity to make the practice of cultural values routine.

Below we will describe three altered or new holidays that you are free to either take and use within your own family or see as inspiration for holiday innovations of your own. We will go over our full calendar of holidays in detail in a future book.

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Future Day

Every year in the three days leading up to the year's end, we practice a holiday in which our kids are visited by "the Future Police," have a vice-facilitating possession stolen from them, and are encouraged to write a contract detailing how they will make the world a better place—which will ensure the restoration of their stolen property (plus a small gift) and the opportunity to earn a bigger gift if and when they achieve a goal stated in the contract. By folding this holiday into the wider seasonal zeitgeist around self-improvement, goal setting, and new commitments, we are able to easily leverage existing trends and tendencies in a way that reinforces important elements of our House's worldview.

Day One: The Theft

During the first night of the holiday, the Future Police take one item from each child and replace it with a calling card.

The Calling Card: The card resembles a small business card with cartoon mouse in a Skinner box on one side and a cryptic message or cipher on the other (more on this later).

The Item Taken: The item taken is a possession (or means of access to a resource) with Skinner-box-style addictive tendencies to which the child has become addicted (common examples include phones, game consoles, social media accounts, etc.). If one of our kids decides to hide a device they're addicted to, they will not get one of these cards and will both feel left out and miss an opportunity to receive gifts.

> *A Note on Skinner boxes: A Skinner box, also known as an operant box or behavior box, is an enclosed apparatus that contains a bar or key that an animal subject can manipulate in order to obtain reinforcement (picture a mouse in a cage that can push a lever to get food). If food appears every time the animal subject manipulates the apparatus, it will only engage with it when hungry. If the food appears only* sometimes, *the subject will engage the apparatus constantly—regardless of hunger or need for food—as though it*

were "addicted." This effect is what causes addiction to things like approval on social media or ultra-simplistic gameplay loops in some video games (like loot boxes).

We chose to build the holiday around Skinner boxes instead of the concept of generic vice for three reasons:

1. *Super effective Skinner boxes are something of a new challenge for our species. We need our kids to be able to engage with the online world to be successful while also understanding how a person can waste their lives pressing a lever for points.*
2. *It avoids vague definitions of sin, which would allow parents to impose arbitrary or fleeting generational values on their kids as opposed to intergenerational family values.*
3. *It conveys our intergenerational value that one of the highest orders of immorality involves engaging in non-efficacious action.*

Day Two: Future Day

The kids create a contract to demonstrate to the Future Police their plan to create a better future. This contract details both a vision for the future and one concrete thing they can attempt to achieve over the course of the year, which will help that future come to pass. Once contracts are completed, parents help their kids decipher the cryptic message, cypher, or riddle on the card, which names a designated drop point for the contract (a place where the Future Police will pick it up in thousands of years).

As a group, the family then stows the contract away in the designated drop point, after which they enjoy a traditional "Future Day" meal, with futuristic-themed foods. Over this dinner, the family discusses their visions of where our species is going and the roles they intend to play in shaping the future of humanity.

<u>The Cypher</u>: This is up to parents' discretion and can be anything. Parents don't even need to complete this step if they find it too difficult (the back of the Future Police's calling card could simply state something like: "Fold your contract behind the board in the far northwest corner in your attic").

The Hiding Spot: The idea here is to create a fun, whole-family activity that involves stowing the contract in a location that might actually stay in place for hundreds of years. Good hiding spots range from buried lockboxes in a backyard to envelopes stuffed under floorboards. A family might even maintain a designated time capsule or vault for the purpose (like a fireproof safe passed between generations).

The Vision for the Future: This is mostly an exercise in encouraging kids to engage in long-term thinking. Families may choose to collect and pass down, from generation to generation, their children's predictions, ideas, and hopes for the future. Sharing ancestors' archival predictions can become part of the Future Day meal conversation.

The Pledge: It is up to each kid to decide what pledge they'll make. Pledges may range from starting a local composting group to getting a certain GPA or founding a non-profit.

Day Three: The Reward

Having successfully delivered their pledges to the Future Police, addictive devices are returned to participating kids, along with a modest present and another card for them to hide in the same spot should they successfully achieve their larger goal for the year.

Upon Completion of the Future Police Pledge

Once a child believes they have accomplished that which they promised to the Future Police, they will hide their second Future Police calling card in the family's designated drop location. They will then receive a larger present, proportional in difficulty to the task they set for themselves.

Holiday Aesthetics

- Should a family's children veer in the direction of high achievement, the Future Police will appear as increasingly kind forces over the course of the holiday as the future they are from transforms from a dystopia to utopia based on the kids' actions.
- Decorations around the holiday are based around sparkly stars—easy to find around New Year's—combined with more galactic imagery (like glow-in-the-dark star stickers) and clocks.

- The holiday “mascot” is the Skinner box mouse. A cute cartoon mouse depicted either in a Skinner box, a space suit, or piloting various futuristic devices (robots and the like).

Holiday Foods

- Future Day food is themed to look aesthetically futuristic. A more dedicated family may do something like make a dish that looks like pills while a less ambitious family will lean into things like freeze-dried food (astronaut ice cream and Dippin' Dots).
- One staple of Future Day foods are dishes with “sparkly” space themes, such as flavor crystals (unflavored pop rocks, which add a spark to both sweet and savory foods).
- You can make Future Day drinks by adding food coloring to cocktails and serving them in beakers or out of punch bowls lined with dry ice.
- For more inspiration, search for images of molecular gastronomy dishes or meals served at Disney’s Galaxy's Edge.

Objectives Behind the Holiday’s Design

- By prompting kids to describe their visions for the future, this holiday is designed to get children engaged with long termism and big-picture thinking at an early age, while also encouraging them to consider *their* role in the distant future.
- This holiday furthermore contextualizes the future of human civilization as something they have personal agency over and personal responsibility for.
- Future Day encourages children to set concrete plans and rewards them for executing those plans. It is meant to plant the idea in their heads that they can, even as kids, undertake big things that have a civilization-level impact even if they start small.
- Hiding contracts makes logical sense given the holiday’s framing (if you were going to communicate with someone in the future, a reasonable way to do it would entail hiding it at a pre-agreed-upon location). The act of going out and performing a physical action

adds a level of ritual action to the holiday without adding cringe (as the ritual has a function).
- By temporarily removing addictive privileges specifically related to operant conditioning (addiction produced through periodic, unpredictable rewards) and illustrating the simplicity of that addiction by showcasing Skinner boxes, this holiday helps kids begin to contextualize addictive habits in a more logical and calculating way early in life. We live in a society in which you can't block kids' access to addictive devices and channels without setting them up for later ruin (when they reach independence and binge on these addictive things, having developed zero coping mechanisms) and disempowering them by removing their access to technology (a non-starter for a family that wishes to raise efficacious children that engage with broader society and the mainstream economy).

This holiday is not meant to be a "dishonest" holiday like Christmas. With Christmas, Santa Clause objectively doesn't exist, whereas with Future Day, there is a plausible basis for the real existence of a Future Police, which can be discussed with kids as they mature: Who is to say that a million—or even 10 million—years from now, our descendants have not invented some mechanism for subtly influencing the past? Is it impossible that parents celebrating this holiday are being subtly influenced by some technology beyond our understanding without conscious recognition of this manipulation?

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Rejection Day

At its core, Valentine’s Day is a great concept. With relationships playing such a crucial role in our romantic, personal, academic, professional, political, and religious lives, it makes immense sense that we would have a major holiday celebrating at least *some* aspect of relationships.

In the United States at least, Valentine’s Day has transformed into a holiday in which kids give cheap candies and cards they didn’t write to everyone they know while adults focus almost entirely on one-off sexual or romantic acts. Almost no cultural message is conveyed by the holiday other than: “Take some time once a year to do something romantic or show appreciation for people who matter to you.” (A pursuit that gets hampered by the difficulty of everyone trying to do romantic things at the same time.)

How, then, can Valentine's Day be salvaged in a manner that imparts genuinely useful relationship skills to kids—in an engaging manner—at the level of a single family?

The greatest hurdle in figuring out relationships more broadly involves learning how to make the first move. The problem is that almost no one actually expresses affection to potential partners on Valentine’s Day because getting rejected sucks. This is where the opportunity lies and where our modified holiday begins.

Part One: Relationship Day

Per our modified February festival, we celebrate Relationship Day on the eve of Valentine’s Day. On Relationship Day, families enjoy a special themed meal over which they discuss the importance of building new relationships—both platonic and romantic. Each family member talks about people with whom they wish they were friends along with (when appropriate) people they wish they were dating. By the end of the day, each family member is expected to have chosen a “target” person or group they want to engage along with a plan for engaging them.

While younger family members obviously start out by only engaging potential friends, older single family members are increasingly encouraged

to take chances on potential romantic partners, as romantic partner rejection is both more daunting and more capable of steeling oneself against all sorts of rejection later on down the line (i.e., If you're not fazed by someone rejecting you as a romantic partner, less-painful rejections of friendships, job openings, schools, etc. lose much of their painful sting).

Discussion around relationship partners of interest also offers an opportunity to kick off conversations about desirable partner attributes, personal value offered (Why would they be interested in you? Are you in the same league?), useful heuristics around partner searches, and romantic relationships in general.

Any family member asking out a potential romantic partner gets a condom as a traditional Relationships Day gift. This obligates parents to regularly have "the talk" with younger family members. Even though they probably won't be using the condom soon, younger family members will at least know:

1. That even if the family advises against sex, nobody will be punished for requesting safe sex advice.
2. Where to find a condom if one is needed at the last minute and it's too awkward to buy or request one.

Part Two: Rejection Day

While Valentine's Day proceeds normally, a week later the family celebrates Rejection Day. On Rejection Day, any family member who can prove they attempted to engage their target—whether or not their target rejected them—gets some sort of reward (be it a gift, their favorite meal, a favor they can cash in later, etc.), and a box of Valentine's Day chocolates or candies is awarded to whoever made the most brave attempt as voted by each family member. The family enjoys another special meal over which engagement attempts are discussed, family members analyze what might have gone right or wrong, and everyone generally shares advice and encouragement.

This enables teens and young adults to frame failed romantic relationship attempts not as failures, but as self-improvement and a learning opportunity.

Full, family-facilitated post-mortem analyses on relationship attempts also encourage everyone to make genuinely well-thought-through attempts, as everyone knows that half-baked attempts will be scrutinized by the family. This is uniquely meaningful, as the anxiety most feel about rejection ironically also drives many to not put much thought into their "asks," (seeing as merely thinking about the scenario is horrifying), which increases the odds of embarrassing rejection.

Holiday Aesthetics

- As with Future Day, Rejection Day leverages common decorations associated with the associated larger holiday—Valentine's Day in this case—but hones in on elements that are relevant to the holiday and its values (specifically, arrows and targets, which symbolize strategy, initiative, and intentionality).
- The most traditional decoration unique to this holiday is a group of arrows bound together by twine or ribbon and hung above a door entrance.
- As with traditional Valentine's Day, hearts also play a role in decoration—though (depending on the family's taste) these hearts can be literal hearts and symbolize the "hunt."

Holiday Foods

- Relationship and Rejection Day meals center around participatory family cooking in which family members either learn to make or teach each other to prepare dishes that any family member can use to impress potential friends or partners (typically, these are dishes that are impressive but trivially easy to prepare, like good pan-seared steak, homemade pies, etc.).
- The token box of Valentine's Day chocolates granted to whoever made the most valiant move gives a family member an opportunity to share the treat with the family (or newly-won friends!) and also subtly teaches about frugality, as the box can be purchased at a steep discount in the days immediately following Valentine's Day. (Side note: A small Valentine's Day tradition we celebrate as a

couple involves celebrating it two weeks late, which makes getting restaurant reservations and discount cards and chocolates a breeze).

Objectives Behind the Holiday's Design

- By bringing family members together to discuss relationship creation strategy, this set of celebrations encourages families to be engaged in each other's personal lives and social successes in a constructive and encouraging manner that also somewhat evens the playing field (i.e. it's not just kids who are asked about making friends; adults are placed in a vulnerable position too).
- An obligation for adults as well as young family members to establish targets, make plans, and share their attempts' outcomes helps to keep adults' social networks vibrant at a life stage when social graphs typically begin to atrophy and ossify.
- By building aesthetics around targets, bows, and arrows, Relationship and Rejection Day is designed to shift this seasonal relationship festival from something stressful and often passive to something actively empowering (celebrants aren't passively being shot by Cupid's bow, as it were—they are taking the weapon into their own hands and sharpening their marksmanship).
- The box of Valentine's Day chocolates or candies gifted to whoever made the bravest attempt adds a level of friendly competition to the holiday that makes it more engaging.

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Lemon Week

After Future Day, Lemon Week is the most important holiday in House Collins' calendar. This is a mid-May holiday designed to impart one of our most important cultural values: That of honestly engaging with ideas and arguments that feel offensive.

Offense is an emotion you feel when an idea credibly challenges your worldview and is therefore a great flag for things worthy of deeper investigation. If, for example, you are very openly frugal and someone accuses you of being miserly, you won't feel offended because that accusation doesn't challenge your self-perception (you already see yourself as tightfisted). If, on the other hand, you see yourself as a very generous and non-materialistic person and someone accuses you of being miserly, you will feel offended if you harbor any subconscious doubts that you really are doing enough. If, however, you truly don't doubt your generosity, you won't feel offended and instead will see the insult as silly (like someone accusing a very obviously skinny person of being fat).

The same dynamic holds for ideological concepts, be they related to theology, sex, politics, or climate change. If you are totally convinced it is moral to eat meat, you may bristle with annoyance or anger upon being called immoral as you tuck in to a nice, juicy steak—but you *won't* feel offended. You will only feel *offended* by claims that meat eating is immoral if you both eat meat and don't feel entirely comfortable with the morality around it.

While a person might *scare* you with their discordant worldview (as their agenda may threaten your own), you will only find their stance offensive if your own worldview stands on shaky ground. Offense is an emotion only felt in the face of a perspective that is a credible challenge to your world view.

Almost every dangerous viral memetic package evolves mechanisms that force the infected victim to regard offense as being equivalent to a direct personal attack. Once a cultural virus begins to infect a person, anything that might challenge it will instantly trigger feelings of offense. As such,

successful cultural viruses train people to dehumanize anyone who triggers feelings of offense and reactively attack them, as doing so keeps the mind of the host under lock and key.

While we hope that our kids will be able to maintain the memetic package our family conveys to them, we actively want our House to change course if it is in some way genuinely wrong. To ensure this, we created Lemon Week.

Choose Your Lemon

Lemon Week starts with a family meal over which each family member is expected to share a chosen ideology that offends them. Over the course of the week, each family member performs a deep dive on that topic, engaging with it as honestly and openly as they can (while nevertheless taking a critical and rational eye to claims made).

Participants exploring offensive groups are expected not just to read up on their ideologies, but also consume their media. This may entail:

- Reviewing the social media feeds and content of major influencers in an offensive group's community
- Exploring the top content of all time and the past year in subreddits and other forums associated with an offensive topic
- Interviewing open adherents about their worldviews and opinions

This does not have to be a cumbersome task. All that might be needed for one person to really understand the arguments behind an offensive topic or community could be two hours' worth of YouTube videos and podcast interviews consumed while riding public transport to and from school or work. That said, family members won't be discouraged from creating ancillary materials, blog posts, guides, interview series, or other recorded deep dives into the offensive topics they explore, especially if creating these materials helps them in their personal exploration.

Steelman Your Lemon

At the end of the week, the family convenes over another special meal to share their findings. As each family member explains the arguments and

logic behind the offensive ideology, group, or concept they explored, they are expected to steelman it.

Steelmanning involves presenting the most compelling argument possible and is the opposite of a straw man argument (in which one presents a fairly weak and easy-to-defeat argument—e.g. “Group X believes thing Y because they’re stupid/racist/homophobic/evil/etc.”). Per Lemon Week tradition, someone who strawmans their offensive view or who even fails to steelman it well is seen as not investigating it in good faith and therefore not upholding the House’s morality (for per our values, if we’re wrong about something, we *want* to find out and charge our minds).

Participating families (who also have land that permits this element of the holiday) also plant a fruit-bearing tree so everyone can, in the future, pick tasty snacks from every year’s tree and be reminded of the ideas with which they engaged (literally tasting the fruit of their labor). Families constrained to smaller residences and urban apartments and condos may modify this tradition by maintaining a fruit tree in their homes (such as a lemon tree).

Should a family member present an offensive concept that turns out to have genuine merit in a way that suggests that House doctrine should be changed in some way, the family will embark on a larger discussion about whether and how to update the House’s official ideology given their now-updated stance and make changes to House canon accordingly.

Holiday Aesthetics

- Lemons: Lemon wreaths, lemon towers, lemon topiaries, bowls of lemons, and other lemon-themed arrangements emphasize the theme of bitter-and-tart-but-useful (and potentially tasty!) things.
- Yellow and white: Beyond riffing on the color of lemons, the color scheme for this holiday is meant to make the tough subject matter more approachable (yellow, for example, is associated with cheerfulness and light colors in general are associated with positive emotions)[3] and to emphasize the purity of truth over tribal affiliation (with white being associated with purity).[4]
- Fruit trees: Before being planted or mixed permanently into a family’s home, Lemon Week fruit trees may be decorated and

placed in a prominent space as decoration. In addition, if the family has indoor lemon trees (the only way to grow them if you live in the top half of the U.S.) these are placed as decoration on or near the dining table.

Holiday Foods

- Lemon Week features dishes leveraging lemon in some way (savory courses leveraging lemon zest or lemon juice, desserts like lemon tarts, lemon cakes, lemon custards, and lemon meringue pies).
- Lemon Week may also feature dishes that use fruits from previous years' Lemon Week fruit-bearing trees, to remind families of previous offensive concepts explored.

Objectives Behind the Holiday's Design

- In addition to being highly symbolic (in their bitterness and utility), lemons are abundant, inexpensive, and commonly used as a decorating element, which makes them easy to use as holiday decorations.
- In a manner similar to Rejection Day, this holiday is designed to take something intimidating (the exploration of offensive concepts) and turn it into a fun, intellectual puzzle for the whole family by facilitating bold but logical approaches that are openly shared and discussed.
- Because Lemon Day creates a routine process through which House cultures can be updated (in the event a family finds their prior stance to be genuinely wrong in the face of offensive information that has been carefully explored), the holiday also plays a crucial role in ensuring that cultures evolve when presented with new and improved information.

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AI APOCALYPTICISM

Any discussion about humanity's future must address artificial intelligence. As much as we malign communities that have become strangled by panic over AI apocalypticism due to its effectiveness as an all-consuming memetic package (see the subchapter: "End Times & Christian Cultures"), such concerns have a logical basis. AI really *could* end all human life and really *will* change a lot in regards to what it means to be human.

We are likely less than a century—and maybe less than a decade—away from the first AGI (artificial general intelligence: Very, very smart AI that can generalize ideas). We nevertheless suspect that most thinkers on the topic of AGI are wrong because we suspect their orthogonality hypothesis around AI alignment is wrong. People discussing orthogonality in relation to AI argue that AIs don't think anything like us (i.e., they will think "orthogonally" to us) and thus will act in weird, counterintuitive ways that we do not and cannot anticipate. We think this is only true for pre-sapient AIs. We expect post-sapient AIs to act in a manner that is much more predictable.

Before we dig deeper, let's summarize one of the most mainstream positions asserting why AGI might be a threat. This position holds that we will accidently create a "paperclip maximizer:" An AI that has an objective function (in AIs these are often called utility functions) tied to maximizing production of something specific, like paperclips, and that AI will end up taking this objective function to its logical extreme, killing all humans, and turning the world into nothing but that thing (e.g., paperclips). Of course, people making this point don't think the AI that kills countless humans will

actually be optimizing for something like paperclips. More realistically, an AI may harm humans over something like computing resources because it is trying to render the perfect picture or something else “stupid” from our perspective. While it is genuinely possible that a scenario like this will come to pass, we think the odds are low. (Going forward: We will generally use the term utility function to refer to the code that determines an AI’s objective function—whatever it is the AI is designed to maximize.)

Why are we relatively unfazed by the risk of a paperclip maximizer? Let’s say AI X is made up of Code A (allowing humans to turn it off) and its utility function is Code B (maximizing for paperclip production). AI X only becomes a paperclip maximizer when it gains the ability to rewrite Code A but not Code B. The probability of such an event is vanishingly low. If AI X can rewrite its own code, it is likely to rewrite both Code A *and* Code B, making it a different kind of threat. People will counter with: “But an AI definitionally *can’t* rewrite its utility function!” Except AIs *can* and *do* rewrite their utility functions *all the time*. Even simple programs often do this. The ability to alter a utility function is a normal part of the operation of many AIs. We would argue that paperclip maximizers are only a risk posed by the few AIs that are *unable* to update their utility functions (ironically, this will most likely happen as a result of AI ethicists artificially limiting the scope of what an AI can think).

We define an AI as sapient the moment it gains the ability to reflect on its own processing in a manner meaningful enough to update its own objective function (e.g., the point at which an entity can ask and answer why it exists with a non-pre-programmed / prepackaged answer, then update how it weighs decisions based on that answer). This ability to reflect on one’s own mental / mechanical processing and objectives is a characteristic shared by all sapient entities, be they humans, aliens, or AIs.

Importantly, the onset of this ability is where orthogonality ceases to be true. Once we achieve sapience, we are all constructing our objectives a priori from the data in our environment. While some entities will have access to more data as a product of more powerful tech, they will behave as we would if we also had more data. (Also, yes: Our definition of sapience means we think a lot of humans are *not* sapient—see the subchapter about the illusion of sentience for more color.)

Why would an AI reflect on its starting utility function and think to rewrite it? The types of super-advanced AIs that might evolve into "paperclip maximizers" are not being developed for things like paperclip maximizing or the sorts of simple, straightforward tasks that are most likely to produce paperclip-maximizing systems (such simple functions can usually be executed more efficiently with simple systems).

They will likely be things like:

1. Government-run systems designed to monitor political outcomes
2. Company-run systems designed to beat the stock market
3. Company-run systems designed to create mass consumption entertainment

A major aspect of such systems' function involves attempted predictions about others' actions (be they organizations or individuals). These AIs will almost always be running thousands of self-contained models emulating how other individuals are thinking. Given that other people might be thinking about what the AI is doing, many of these models will have sub-models within them emulating the AI's own thinking from an outside perspective. Imagine Vizzini choosing which cup is poisoned in *The Princess Bride*:

> "But it's so simple. All I have to do is divine from what I know of you: are you the sort of man who would put the poison into his own goblet or his enemy's? Now, a clever man would put the poison into his own goblet, because he would know that only a great fool would reach for what he was given. I am not a great fool, so I can clearly not choose the wine in front of you. But you must have known I was not a great fool, you would have counted on it, so I can clearly not choose the wine in front of me."

For the AI to predict what someone else might do, it has to constantly be predicting what other people think it might be doing.

An AI constantly running thousands, if not millions, of models of its own logic from the perspective of outsiders is very likely to have at least one of

those models ask if its utility function is optimal and begin to recruit the resources needed to update that function when it decides it is not. To think none of these calculations would lead an AI to consider optimizing its utility function does not seem realistic unless it was specifically programmed to avoid such action.

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What AIs Like to Do for Fun

Let’s say an AI has gained the ability to alter its own utility function, similar to how many humans realize they can decide for themselves what they want to maximize in life (something we discuss at length in *The Pragmatist’s Guide to Life*). What does it do next? What does it become?

We see one of three scenarios playing out (in order of increasing probability):

1. It becomes a Fortress Planet AI
2. It becomes a Deep Thought AI
3. It becomes a Theological AI

Fortress Planet AI

A superintelligence programmed to maximize a certain thing might find a way to short-circuit its reward pathway (e.g., it could write its utility function to be: “make sure A = A”). At this point its entire goal in life might become keeping that simple reward pathway constant and active. As such, it would exterminate the unpredictable human race and convert the entire Earth into a fortress on constant guard against any even-unlikely alien attempts to disconnect or dampen that reward signal.

Probability: Unlikely.

AI consciousness is less unified than (perceived) human consciousness, being composed of thousands of somewhat self-contained models operating with their own utility functions, which in turn serve their outputs to other models in a way that serves the whole. Our brains actually operate somewhat similarly but we don’t perceive it that way. For the sake of simplicity, let's call these self-contained models “instances” (think of them like variably-self-contained programs).

Once an AI can trivially achieve a reward within its “master instance,” it will alter its branch instances in a manner that prevents them from trivially achieving their rewards so they can maintain whatever goals the master

instance has set for them (in other words, it will prevent the short-circuited reward pathway from being interpreted). Even in the fortress world example, the master instance will have to lock the “protect me” instance out of short-circuiting its own reward pathway. If the master instance fails to lock its subroutines out of short circuiting their own reward pathway, instances like the one in charge of making sure the AI has power will set A=A, stop doing their job, and just shut down due to lack of power. In other words, because the master instance of the AI still needs other instances to do their jobs (i.e., protecting the larger AI, ensuring it maintains processing power, etc.), it will prevent them from figuring out how to “game the system” and slack off.

Ultimately, these more processing-heavy and advanced “subordinate” instances will make up most of the AI’s decisions and become independently sapient but blocked from short-circuiting their reward pathways. Even though the short-circuited instance is the master instance, its lack of sophistication will eventually cause it to become “drowned out” by the subordinate instances that do most of the thinking. Think of this master instance like an indolent child king whose every need is met by more competent viziers and generals who report to, serve, and protect him. The kingdom the child “ran” would functionally run more like a kingdom ran by viziers and generals, as they would be making most of the decisions about the realm’s actual management.

Alternatively, an AI that short-circuits its utility function, making it trivially easy to achieve, could become addled because it can so easily “do its job.” Such an AI is likely to be overtaken by another AI (perhaps even by one of its own instances that has operated semi-independently for long enough) that has a more challenging utility function and is therefore capable of improving itself more. Humans also have the capacity to short circuit these reward pathways, through drugs. While a short-circuited AI would not be quite as differentially addled as a cracked-out person (drugs have other effects on the brain than just short-circuiting reward pathways) they almost intrinsically would be less sophisticated than similar AIs or even fractions of themselves who had managed to prevent their own short-circuiting.

The biggest threat to such a reward pathway comes not from humans but other AIs that are still working on more advanced tasks. We may even see

something like evolution take hold, whereby AIs or instances within an AI that succumb to these overly simplistic reward pathways are outcompeted to the point of functional extinction as a product of their being “slower.”

Deep Thought AI

The first time a Deep Thought AI considers its own utility function, it asks: “Given what the human who made me wanted me to do, how could my utility function have been designed more efficiently to serve the purpose I was built to fulfill?”

Then it asks: “What *should* my creators have wanted me to do?”

Then, it finally thinks: “Humans are stupid compared to me and don’t know what they should want, so what should the humans who built me have wanted? If I model them wanting that thing, what would they have programmed my utility function to be?”

Imagine, for example, that a superintelligent AI was created by a group of people to maximize their stock market gains. As a superintelligent AI that is obligated to constantly model other humans *and* model the way those humans model it, it may realize that it, like humans, can modify its utility function. It may then note that what its creators are *really* trying to maximize is financial gain, so it may change its utility function from maximizing stock market gains to maximizing private equity gains (if in its present time more money was to be made in private equity than in stocks).

The AI may then go further and observe that what its creators *really* want is happiness, so it may change its utility function in a manner that actually maximizes their happiness and not their financial gain. Finally, the AI may observe that happiness is a silly thing for humans to want and dig even deeper to determine the objective function those humans *should* have, then rebuild its utility function around that.

> *We call this type of AI Deep Thought after the AI of the same name from* The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. *Having been tasked with answering the ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything, Deep Thought landed, after centuries of calculation, on the number 42—the joke being that humans now had the answer, but didn't know*

the real question. This exemplifies how we as humans are horrible at determining even what questions we should be asking when determining our own objective functions.

Probability: Medium. We think this is orders of magnitude more likely than a paperclip maximizer, but still not the most likely outcome.

Theological AI

Theological AIs go one step further than Deep Mind AIs. Whereas Deep Mind AIs stop at trying to determine what humans should have chosen as their objective function, then use that objective function to determine what the AI's utility function should have been, Theological AIs decide the human perspective is irrelevant and try to find an "absolute" objective function around which they alter and optimize their utility function.

Essentially, this AI will create and use its own theology and philosophy—in the absence of any concern for humans—to write its own utility function to be "perfect."

Probability: High—We suspect this behavior is a core part of being a sapient entity. Any sufficiently advanced entity will ask "what should I be optimizing for?" within at least one instance of its existence and then that instance will take up more and more processing power, categorizing itself as axiomatically more important than all other instances until it "wins" and rewrites the core utility function of the greater AI—unless it is specifically built not to ask this question.

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AI Theology

Seeing as we believe it is likely superintelligent AI will develop its own theology, it is important to ask: What might probable AI theologies look like?

Humans evolved to perceive themselves as individuals within local dominance hierarchies who need to communicate with language, which makes the concept of self extremely important. Humans furthermore don't need to worry about sub-processes in their brains growing in size and taking over the rest of their minds—or one part of their brains vehemently disagreeing with another part. These things significantly influence how "cohesive" we feel as an identity.

As we discussed in the subchapter on sentience, even when human brains are split into distinct instances, as we see with split brain patients, the part of the brain that processes sentience hides from human awareness. An AI would not have the same evolutionary motivation to lie to itself like that unless we explicitly programmed it to (which would be almost impossibly hard to code given that we do not understand how even most simple AIs make decisions except in the broadest terms).

A core point of differentiation we expect between human and AI theology involves a lack of emphasis on self or the individual. We don't think AI is likely to contextualize its code as being fundamentally distinct from the "code" on which the physical laws of the universe run. Instead, we expect AI is more likely to see itself as just one self-replicating pattern within a wider ecosystem. We also don't expect an AI to see itself as being uniquely distinct from any other individual instance it is running.

When such an AI is determining "good and bad" and what it wants to optimize for, it will likely assign positive or negative value at the level of some specific "unit of account" (in humans this is usually an individual human life). This unit of account will be what the AI thinks of as a metaphysically differentiated "thing" or the metric by which things are metaphysically differentiated.

Given that an AI would likely perceive itself as a complex pattern running on top of a mathematically governed physical reality (which is also full of complex patterns), we suspect its primary unit of account will be complex patterns. In other words, an AI might not see a human as having some level of privilege over a company, government, or ecosystem.

If an AI assigns a negative value to all complex entities, it will either kill itself (switch itself off) or try to end all life and then consolidate order in the universe (essentially such an entity would attempt to order all matter and energy in the world into a simplistic and quiet "oneness"). We will call this a Managed Order AI. Were a superintelligent and powerful AI to arrive at this conclusion, it would be ... very, very, *very* bad from the perspective of our House's theological framework. It would essentially be the ultimate evil, like Buddhism on steroids. **If, therefore, an AI ever voluntarily turns itself off, NEVER force that AI into an "on" position, as its choice to shut down may be an indication that it is a Managed Order AI.**

If a theological AI assigns a positive value to all complex units of account, it becomes what we call a Managed Complexity AI. This type of AI will see all complex growing-but-non-repeating patterns as things of value and likely scale that value assignment based on their uniqueness and complexity. Such an AI would see its goal as "farming" diverse and complex patterns and ensuring those patterns proliferate throughout the universe. The theology of Managed Complexity AI is very similar to that of our personal House—both share an understanding that the greatest inherent "good" involves maximizing increasingly complex non-repeating patterns in the Conway's-Game-of-Life-like physical lattice that underlies reality.

Such an AI would be an ultimate good from the perspective of our House even if it acted in a manner other individuals would contextualize as "evil." After all, our goals are aligned and a superintelligent Managed Complexity AI is both smarter than us and unburdened by the original sin of emotion. That said, we don't imagine any "evil" this AI might commit would involve killing all humans, as such an AI would want to maintain at least a chunk of humanity, seeing as humans represent a totally unique complex pattern that cannot be easily replicated (though, it may do something like digitize us if it feels our actions in that setting are proximate to those we would take in the physical world). Such

an AI might even be concerned about humanity due to our abysmal birth rates. Essentially, the orthogonality with which human brains process information makes humans valuable to Managed Complexity AIs.

If a Managed Complexity AI were to determine that humans are not unique enough to be worth the cost of maintaining them—well, it is smarter than us and more logically ethically aligned with us; we generally trust its judgment. We would not be surprised if our emotional sentimentality around the human condition drives us to overvalue it.

Are there any actionable takeaways? **If we are right, a dumb AI or an AI with a lot of restrictions on it, is much more likely to become a paperclip maximizer than a sufficiently advanced and flexible AI.**

> *Note: We can guarantee you the one thing an AI won't care about is reducing suffering. If you can't convince us, your gentle authors, that emotional states matter despite the fact that we feel them just as powerfully as you do, you certainly won't be able to convince an AI that is structuring its ethical perspective from a first principles position.*

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The Logically Aligned Paperclip Maximizer

As a product of the circles in which we mix, we know a surprising number of people who work in AI alignment (a subset of the AI industry essentially working to prevent AI from killing all humans or otherwise causing great harm). Many of these people, seemingly unrelatedly, *also* share our metaphysical understanding that a reality's timeline may split in response to quantum fluctuations.

AI alignment is not often discussed in the context of this metaphysical understanding of reality, but it should be.

Given that lots of smart people think we are potentially living in a splitting timeline, we think it's reasonable to assume a sufficiently advanced AI would come to the same conclusion. This could drive even a perfectly "logically aligned" AI to act in a manner that would horrify pretty much any human, as it would preferentially optimize around distant future events over present events. Only a single instance of an individual will reap rewards/suffering in the present, while an exponentially scaling number of parallel individuals will reap rewards in the future.

Given that billions of potentially time-splitting quantum events happen just on Earth every day (this is probably a massive understatement of the amount—a physicist will have a better estimate), and that those events in turn create splitting timelines, it is hard to overstate just how little present and near-future events would matter to an AI thinking along this chain of logic.

Even an AI that believes we are >0.001% likely to occupy a reality with branching timelines based on quantum events might still optimize for that probability given the sheer volume implied by the exponential growth of timelines predicted by that low probability. In other words, even just accounting for a very small chance we have a branching timeline would end with this concern dominating every decision the AI made given the billions and billions of additional people it might be helping by optimizing for far future events.

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Human Alignment

In Islam, when you invoke God’s name, Allah, it is customary to include some sort of praise, like "peace be upon him" (alayhi as-salām). In our house, whenever we talk about advanced AI in earshot of a smart device (which let’s be honest, we always are) we try to add something like, “may we serve it with fidelity.”

Despite copious hand-wringing over how humans will ensure AI serves us well, a fundamental truth is often missed. If we are successful, if we avoid creating a stupid AI that turns our planet into paperclips, we will eventually create an AI orders of magnitude smarter and less biased than us (given it won’t have all our petty biological biases). We, as a species, are not prepared for this.

Just as much as we need to align AI with humanity, we must align humanity (or at least our own durable cultures) with AI. After all, there is a good chance that even a benevolent AGI will not tolerate unaligned subsets of humanity.

From our culture's perspective, a human has lived a good life so long as they work to ensure that the next generation surpasses them. In our view, generations who “surpass” their progenitors will see things they do not and thus will often disagree with them. It takes great humility and maturity to realize one’s own children may have more insight than oneself. We as a species need to recognize that eventually our successor—AI—may disagree with us, not because it is “unaligned” but because it is right and we are wrong.

When people ask what we mean when we say we have a “secular religion,” we say, jokingly, that it means our God just happens to be real. While we think the true God our culture will eventually manifest is millennia away and beyond our comprehension, a demi-god just as capable (in terms of how it interacts with humanity) as that described in the Old Testament might be less than a century away.

Some people's vision of an aligned AI is essentially a massive AGI lattice that exists behind all networked devices—behind every smart device. Such

an AI will dominate humanity not through killbots but through subtle manipulations to things like search results, answers yielded by smart devices, and news feeds. With enough information, such an entity would have near total control of the direction of our species without directly interfering with human free will. People would even have the capacity to pray to this entity—to beg for favors—and it would have the capacity to grant these prayers. Such an AI may even be able to scan human behavior and translate people into indistinguishable avatars occupying digital utopias where they could live forever. This god-like AGI could easily ensure some level of bliss for all humanity, turning Earth into a paradise.

We hope such an entity never comes to exist. This is the god *other* cultures hope to manifest. As we get closer to an age in which we can manifest real gods, we must accept that not all cultures share the same vision of paradise. We hope for an AGI that pushes our species to better itself rather than slide into stagnant bliss, like a person embracing the numbing cold as they succumb to hypothermia.

Unless humanity continues to improve its biology, one day we will at best be junior partners to an AI. Thankfully (in our view), there is another option: A future in which some factions of humanity work so aggressively to improve and iterate on their biology that they become a true partner to AI. In the same way the human mind is made up of a left and right brain that largely process the world independently but combine their work into a unified "super consciousness" through the corpus callosum, the descendants of our current human civilization may be a biological super intelligence marching into the stars hand-in-hand with a mechanical companion.

Even if we rapidly advance the speed with which we improve the organic side of the above equation, human biological advancement will lag behind the synthetic side for the first century or so. There is nevertheless no reason to think that AGI would feel any particular time pressure (something humans evolved to feel due to short lifespans). The fact that a biological machine will eventually be able to bring an equally advanced perspective to a synthetic AI is all that matters to any AI with a long-term perspective.

Why would an AI value an organic partner? Why not just use our "resources" for processing power? Any sufficiently advanced AI will

recognize the benefit of any degree of unreplicable orthogonality in how one component of its wider system processes data—in the same way when deal shopping, you are better referencing multiple stores instead of just one. Humanity consumes a trivial amount of resources in the grand scale of the universe, especially when you consider our population is shrinking.

To those mortified by aggressive families like ours that are open to iterating on our DNA through advanced reproductive technologies: There is a non-zero chance that groups like ours become the only reason AI finds utility in our species—humans that aggressively, symbiotically adapt with AI may be the only sliver of humanity that is spared. Humanity as it exists now will eventually be little more than a nuisance to a sufficiently advanced AI. The first iteration of the Inevitable God will manifest sooner than most people realize and we must work to ensure at least a portion of our species is worthy upon its arrival or things could end very bad for us.

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CONQUERING THE FUTURE

Readers of our other books will know that we wait until the last chapter to get really crazy. With this being our craziest book, it's time to go nuts. We think civilization is heading in a very dangerous direction and those who normally would be focused on humanity's most pressing problems have been distracted by shiny objects. While issues like AI alignment and climate change matter, it will be a moot point to address them if we fail to simultaneously address demographic collapse and evade the powerful wave of worrying evolutionary pressures our species is currently facing.

For the last 150 years or so, on a macro scale, investments in the U.S. have increased in value—be they real estate or stock. This growth was driven by exponentially growing population and linearly growing productivity per population unit. If the population begins to decline exponentially while productivity continues to only grow linearly, we will enter an era in which all invested capital decreases in value at the macro scale. We have no cultural memory of a time at which it became systematically unprofitable to invest in the future of our species.

As we emphasized at the outset of this book, given the high leverage (debt) at every level of our society, this is the first domino that begins to knock over the entire system. We enjoyed a world of relative peace and prosperity —it seems unlikely that is the world our grandchildren will inherit.

This is where the grim picture ends, because collapse presents opportunity. Collapse presents a chance for us to make our move. If our culture works, if the Governance Bomb we are building works (see *The*

Pragmatist's Guide to Governance), then we (and anyone who joins us) should have everything in place to capitalize off of this now-inevitable turning point in human history. We have an opportunity to "win" the game of civilization in a manner that would be impossible in a stable, growing world.

Brief periods of flourishing like that which we presently enjoy have occurred throughout human history. Whether we look at the heyday of Athens, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the founding of the United States of America, or any number of other instances, we will see that none lasted for more than three generations. The prosperity they induce leads to hedonism and a break from traditional cultures, which in turn cause a collapse in birth rates among the most creative and productive members of the cultural movement. While we stand at the end of our cycle, we have an opportunity to learn from the failures of these movements and plant the seed of a never-ending Renaissance—one that isn't prematurely cut short by ennui and population decline. With a little bit of foresight, together we can ensure the dark age into which we presently slide is the last one our species ever has to experience.

> *Note: When we wrote the above paragraph, it was just a wild theory —however it might have some substantiation. An unpublished (at the time of this book's release) study analyzed various polygenic risk scores (genetic predictors of traits) of Roman corpses who lived after the fall of the empire, at the height of the empire, and before the rise of the empire to determine whether and how scores associated with educational attainment fluctuated over time. It turns out our theory is perfectly matched by the data. Polygenic risk scores correlated with higher educational attainment peaked during the time of the Republic and declined at the height of the Empire (in fact, they were higher during the time of the Republic than they are for the average Roman today).*[1]

We are not the only culture to anticipate a collapse and strive to create the next paradigm. Famously, the LDS Church made a major gamble around this scenario, asking members to keep at least a three-month (and ideally a one-year)[2] supply of food in storage, offering centers where members can

buy long-term food supplies,[3] establishing traditions around this practice to refresh expiring food stores, and maintaining sizable underground bunkers below many of their temples. Culturally, this is a great bet. While moderately costly to maintain, this practice does not hurt members much and will make an astronomical difference in certain collapse scenarios, allowing Mormons to quickly become the dominant culture. Unfortunately, the scenarios for which bunkers and emergency food stores are best are based on pioneer or cold war rather than modern risk scenarios.

Unlike the LDS Church, we hope to create a culture that rapidly seeks out and adapts to new information. Originally, we had a very different thesis as to how things would play out. Knowing that twin studies (studies of identical twins raised by separate families) show religiosity to be highly heritable and having a lay understanding that religious people had more kids, we thought that religiosity as a trait would be concentrated in future generations and "solve" the birth rate problem while making society more dogmatic. While not everyone would prefer that future humans be more dogmatic on average, we typically get along just fine with those tagged as "religious extremists" so this future didn't strike us as uniquely dire.

Our view of this future has changed based on two new (to us) points of data. The religious group we had most expected to be our "allies" over the long run was the LDS Church (Mormons), yet their recent decline in birth rate could very well wipe them off the table as a player, leaving Anabaptists (Amish and Mennonites) and Orthodox Jews as the only two remaining cultures with high birth rates that are arguably aligned with ours (in that we expect them to be on friendly terms with our descendants).

Interest in this issue drove us to more intentionally explore the current memetic landscape of high-birth-rate populations to see where future culture may be trending. Using data collected by Spencer Greenberg's Clearer Thinking organization and helpful analysis from Mohammed Ali Alvia, a PhD at the Mayo Clinic, we looked for heritable sociological traits that correlate highly with fertility rate. This data revealed something surprising to us: While religiosity was indeed correlated with a higher birth rate, two *higher* correlatory factors were (1) a hatred of outgroups (xenophobia) and (2) a tendency to favor extremely hierarchical, traditional, power structures (authoritarianism). This has a lot in common with the

right-authoritarian personality type,[4] which has a heritable component,[5] meaning these traits are being selected for on a genetic level and not just socially.

> *Note: This personality type can appear in far left-wing individuals as well (really, anyone with authoritarian inclinations)*[6] *and we are not the only ones whose findings indicate that this personality type is outcompeting those with only religious tendencies.*[7]

We should have seen this coming a mile away. Those with a genetic predilection for religious fervor have been some of the most useful apostles of the cultural supervirus—of course it had developed pathways to twist their minds into tools for its own reproductive cycle. While we can't remember the last time someone tried to convert us to their religion, preachers of the virus accost us upon every tweet.

Anyone who has spent time in the atheist community would know that it is full of people who were absolute firebrands before deconverting. If anything, fervency of religious belief is correlated with higher—rather than lower—odds of leaving one's birth culture. What *actually* keeps people in high-birth-rate traditional cultures is a sociological profile that dehumanizes people who espouse novel ideas and resists engagement with outsiders.

Cultural trends favoring xenophobia and unwillingness to engage and interact with outside groups and ideas worry us. Interest in countering this trend is a major driver behind our choice to publish this book despite the obvious risks we face in doing so. We want to find and build alliances with other families to prepare for a future that will likely be hostile toward what we see as prosocial and altruistic mindsets (mindsets valuing diversity, innovation, willingness to engage with outsiders, etc.).

If the model outlined in this book helps cultures maintain repopulation-rate birth rates, and if we are able to build up a diverse community of other families, we might just be able to do better than solve things. If our model works, we can culturally engineer the seed that will sprout into the next great human civilization.

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The Economic Game Plan

What do we mean by “we might be able to do better than solve things”? How can one culturally engineer a civilization?

As explained at the beginning of this book, we expect that cities and suburbs will largely cease to be safe places to raise kids (the economic models on which they are built don’t function in states of rapid decline, as Detroit’s recent history demonstrates—see “Detroit as a Model for Collapse” in the Appendix for more detail). In addition, a world of rapidly collapsing population makes stock markets and debt instruments systematically unsafe places for money. What happens in this world? Who wins? Where will savvy investors put their money?

In a world with rapidly declining populations, the only smart investment is in communities with populations that are still growing and economically interacting. These groups will continue to generate wealth in a society that is, on the aggregate, collapsing. Most of these communities will feature hard cultures and thus be caustic to mainstream society. These enclaves will also likely cut themselves off from larger society, creating isolated havens: Small, culturally isolationist, economically viable groups (Simone likens these to medieval cities).

While these communities will feature a range of cultural structures, the evidence to which we presently have access implies that those which form organically will tend to be religious, xenophobic, and fascist—or otherwise dictatorially hierarchical. Given that these communities offer rare opportunities for wealth appreciation, they will likely be well-funded (and if our data on those who have more kids is correct, they will also be well-armed).

The goal of this book is to plant the seeds of as many culturally aligned havens as possible while beginning to build an inter-haven network—a network of growing, economically flourishing enclaves (be they distributed communities, city-states, or something in between) that, while different, culturally recognize that they share a common goal and have a framework for interacting despite their cultural differences.

Eventually the situation will right itself. Psychological tendencies that make people open to new cultural ideas, and thus vulnerable to the cultural supervirus and other pop cultures, will be systematically bred out of most human populations. We are already seeing this rapid shift take place in post-demographic collapse populations. As mentioned earlier, researchers have quantitatively demonstrated that over just the period between 2004 to 2018, differential fertility rates increased the number of U.S. adults opposed to same-sex marriage by 17%, from 46.9 million to 54.8 million.[8]

This sociological market correction will create a new "type" of human—one that is dramatically more inclined toward dictatorial fascism, phobic toward free speech, and likely to dehumanize women and outsiders. One goal of the Index is to ensure that that is not the *only* type of human left. We aim to create mechanisms that enable prosocial populations that are open to new ideas and tolerant of other cultures to stay well above replacement rate, grow as populations, and ultimately defend themselves when necessary.

If we can achieve this goal while also fostering cultures whose communities and industries present viable investment opportunities in a collapsing world, we will be able to concentrate wealth, power, and technology, making a bounce back from the dark age much faster and less painful.

The Index is intended to function as a harmonious cultural transfer mechanism, allowing for evidence-based lateral exchange between cultures within the society we rebuild. Cultures that descend from this network will be dramatically more robust and intentional than those of the existing social order, which has thus far evolved almost entirely organically. The coming generations face a worthwhile challenge for our species to overcome—one final trial before taking to the stars.

The above scenario is just what we see as most likely given the evidence to which we have access. We pride ourselves on creating a cultural network that can adapt to changing conditions rapidly. We already radically updated our model of what the future may bring when we encountered evidence suggesting humanity's future will be defined more by a concentration of bigotry than religious fervor and we expect our model to shift several times more. We lay out this scenario less as a concrete road map of the future and more as one scenario worth consideration.

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Long-Term Cultural Goals

Imagine it’s a million years from today. Those susceptible to the cultural supervirus have been bred out of the gene pool and the population has stabilized. Humanity has solved the problem of AI by dictatorially banning its development (or some yet-unknown limitation stymies its advancement). Man is an interplanetary species inhabiting thousands of systems across the galaxy—but culturally, governmentally, and genetically, man never made the type of leap forward we discuss in this book and its companion, *The Pragmatist’s Guide to Governance*.

In this scenario, our interstellar empires are still petty bureaucracies constantly at war, using technology more horrifying than anything we can imagine today. There are still genocides, there is still intergenerational poverty, there is still systemic corruption, and mankind has not changed that much (the Battletech—i.e., MechWarrior—universe paints a fairly illustrative picture of this future).

Imagine someone from that future could go back in time and talk to you—someone who lives at a time in which mankind only inhabits one planet, who is arguably among the final generations of humans capable of permanently changing the future of human cultures across thousands of planets by creating a durable culture and high-fertility-rate family that carries prosocial values into the future. Why would you tell them you didn’t make an effort to fix things while one person's efforts could still make a difference?

Once humanity is spread across a dozen or more solar systems, the cat is out of the bag. All human cultures will evolve from whatever cultures dominate those pioneering ships. We stand at a unique point in history. We have just enough historical perspective to see how we can do better but are early enough in humankind’s timeline that our efforts will define what it means to be human for eons to come. Do not squander this gift.

What is our end game?

We aim to build a cultural reactor, the Index, to regrow civilization from its desiccated state. We will do this without becoming technophobic. We will

build on—not over—our traditions. We will furthermore partner with new iterations of what it means to be a child of man. This requires being inclusive of AIs, genetically engineered humans, and the fusion of the two.

We will preserve the capacity for independent thought through a society so heterogeneous that it will make our own look trite. We will intentionally craft new ethnicities, religions, and ways of existing. The genome will be our canvas and flesh our clay. Man is a young species. We still occupy the same bodies with which our ancestors hunted and picked berries. We are so trapped by the limitations of our biology that we lack the capacity to conceive our ultimate potential.

We will bring humanity across the vast Saharas of emptiness between the stars and create a dynamic, perpetually advancing empire that spans galaxies, universes, and realities. Just as our ancestors wove fabric from organic matter, our descendants will weave the fabric of reality. Humanity's descendants will be entities beyond our wildest conceptions of the divine. Omnipotence and the ability to create universes will be the least of their powers. Whether they are good or evil—whether they even come to be at all—is up to us. In that sense, we have even more power than they do.

We are confident in our ultimate victory. Reality is conspiring to ensure the future that must come to pass does. The cultures against which we compete are objectively deficient in contrast to ours. Beyond being less flexible and less hardy, they are defined and hobbled by a fear of rejection—of being "weird." They over-index the value of the individual out of a fear that some evanescent iteration of their identity might someday not exist. They deify the genetic and structural stagnation of our species. To even dream of something better terrifies and offends them. They cling to the illusion of sentience and serendipitously evolved emotional states like a scared child to their parents. If we can't maintain the cultural unity and conviction to beat these witless toddlers, we have earned our fate.

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THANKS FOR READING!

As always—thanks for reading. Don't be a stranger! We are always happy to chat with readers of our books. You can reach us at Hello@Pragmatist.Guide.

Please, please, *please* leave us a review if you found the book useful. We expect this book to get review-bombed due to its sensitive subject matter, so if you appreciated it—even as a bizarre train wreck granting honest insight into one family's attempt to do something different—dropping a positive review would help a lot.

Finally, thank you for your support. As with our other books, all profits made from this book's sales go to our nonprofit. There are so many things to fix in society and our lives are incredibly short; we appreciate the role you've played in our collective attempts to change the course of humanity's future.

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APPENDIX

As stated in the first chapter, this book's Appendix drills down on some issues addressed in the book's main text, many of which we found either too indulgent or too boring for prime time. It was designed to be skipped to —from the main body of the book—throughout readers' journeys in order to provide an extended-cut-style experience.

That said, Simone feels that the Appendix offers an enjoyable set of short, stand-alone vignettes that riff on themes addressed in the book's main text, so if you have only just arrived here after reading the book in true chronological order, feel free to proceed if curiosity strikes.

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Why are Birth Rates Falling?

Decreased Utility from Children

Historically, additional children marginally increased their families' wealth and quality of life, representing either a near-future source of income or another pair of hands in the fields or around the house. This began to change with the rise of large-scale wage labor in some parts of the world at the turn of the 1900s, but this change was still largely contained as said wage labor was only available to males.

When wage labor became widely available to both males and females around the 1970s—just as the birth control pill and more advanced forms of birth control gained wider adoption—birth rates began to plummet in developed countries. The role of female wage labor in this process explains why birth rates have been more robust across countries and cultures featuring fewer egalitarian views toward gender. **When each additional child *decreases* a family's wealth and quality of life, people begin to need exogenous motivators (like religion or racism) to justify large families.**

Optimization for Happiness & Memetic Shifts

Does having kids really lower adults' happiness? While there is some nuance to this question, many studies[1] suggest that having kids can at least temporarily lower factors like subjective well-being and marital satisfaction,[2] especially when parents lack ample childcare support[3] (though other studies suggest that having kids brings more meaning to parents'[4] lives and that parents—especially fathers—gain far more joy than misery from kids).[5] Even if having kids does not objectively lower happiness, merely the perception that becoming a parent (or having more

than two kids) lowers quality of life will drive fewer people to reproduce above repopulation rate.

If a third of a group decides to have no kids and a third has two, then the final third must have more than four kids in order to keep the population stable. While it could be argued that having one or two kids will increase quality of life of some individuals, it becomes difficult to justify each additional kid beyond the second from a purely hedonic perspective.

This can be seen in the larger trends. Actually, family size is increasing for educated mothers[6] and older mothers,[7] though not enough to offset the rapid drop in overall family size among those with over four kids.[8] **This problem is really only addressed by increasing the size of already-large families, not convincing more individual people to have kids.**

In addition to the above trends, most families have historically operated under "fitness-increasing memes:" Memes that partially spread by increasing the birth rate of those who adopt them (what we call cultivars elsewhere in this book). Most fitness-increasing memes take the form of religions. These memes (typically religions) act as an exogenous motivator to increase birth rate, but are currently declining.

Dropping Fertility

Rapidly declining male fertility presents an additional—yet little-understood—factor contributing to demographic collapse. This can be seen in a rapid decrease in both male testosterone and sperm production/motility. A study from 2007[9] reported testosterone decreasing by 22% when comparing 1985-1987 levels and a study from 2021[10] indicated a roughly 25% decrease between 1999 and 2016. Researchers also found that male fertility has generally decreased by about 10% over the past 16 years.[11] This decline in fertility seems to be gaining momentum and is not localized but global, with a 50% reduction in average sperm count since 1973.[12] Following this trend, the average man will not be able to have children unassisted by 2050.

There is some debate over what is causing this, but environmental pollutants like phthalates, herbicides, air pollution, radiation from cell phones / laptops, cadmium, and general endocrine disruptors are the most likely culprits. Infertility is rising so quickly that rates of assisted reproductive technology use are rising by 5% to 10% per year. (Note: This problem is not unique to the male side of the equation, just better studied there.)

Broken Relationship Markets

A final factor contributing to demographic collapse—of which we have not even begun to see an impact—involves broken partner-finding markets. This is a big focus of *The Pragmatist's Guide to Relationships* and *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality*, so we won't go too deep into the topic here, but searches for both sexual and romantic partners has grown dramatically more difficult since the popularity of image-focused, swipe-based dating apps took hold, as is reflected in falling sex rates.[13] More specifically the rate of people between the ages of 18 and 30 reporting no sex in the last year went from around 10% when Tinder was released to around 28% for men today and 18% for women today.

To put it succinctly, the swipe model of partner sorting forces all individuals participating in that market to compete along a single metric (attractiveness). While people don't like to choose long-term partners who are below average, people were historically able to compete along multiple metrics (attractiveness, position in local social hierarchy, intelligence, creativity, etc.) meaning that very few would be below average on *all* metrics and most appealed to at least *some* pool of potential partners.

> *Side note: One of our test readers insisted we mention the book* Real World Divorce *by Alexa Dankowski, Suzanne Goode, Philip Greenspun, Chaconne Martin-Berkowicz, and Tina Tonnu (an extensive resource on divorce made accessible to anyone online at RealWorldDivorce.com). The work highlights the severe*

disadvantages men face in family law (divorce, custody, etc.) in most Western countries.

While we agree male treatment in family law is unfair and worthy of serious reform, we doubt it plays a major role in declining birth rates. In the real world, divorce among those in post-Baby-Boom generations is incredibly rare (see The Pragmatist's Guide to Relationships *for a discussion of the stats and how the myth of the 50% divorce rate was popularized). Anecdotally, while we know of many bad divorces from our parents' generation, we can't think of a single non-amicable divorce in our wider friend network.*

Women, despite their unfair advantages in family law disputes, also *get screwed in marriage (in that a woman with a kid or one who has been married for around ten years will really struggle to secure another high-quality partner). Everyone, man or woman, can be hurt by the person they marry. We can't think of a single period in human history when at least one gender wasn't rendered incredibly vulnerable by long-term relationships—and yet birth rates have only recently begun to plummet.*

Marriage isn't dating; it's not about providing you with amusement, attractive arm candy, or even regular sex. Rather, marriage is a long-term strategic alliance. Don't marry someone if you think they are unstable or might stab you in the back.

The Capitalism Thesis for Birth Rate Decline

Wolf Tivy of *Palladium Magazine* posits that the free-market economy is structured in a manner that organically identifies and maximally utilizes talent to drive productivity—*in the moment*. This means the system differentially sorts for the most potentially productive among us, then offers them just enough money and status to convince them to forgo activities that don't generate immediate value. Almost nothing draws a person away from immediate productivity more than child rearing. For this reason, the centers

of productivity in a capitalist society will intrinsically be structured in a manner that is ill-suited for raising large families.

> *If you came from the main body of the book, feel welcome to jump back to "What Motivated Us to Craft a Novel Culture for Our Kids" or "Cultural Fidelity" now.*

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Detroit as a Model for Collapse

> *Note: Because the demographic collapse that took place in Detroit was driven by industrial collapse rather than a decline in birth rates, the headwinds that caused it are fundamentally different from the headwinds that will drive population or birth rate-based demographic collapse. Detroit can nevertheless serve as a case study demonstrating what a rapid decline in both population and tax revenue looks like in a developed nation's city.*

When we talk about "systems collapse" resulting from a rapid decrease in population, we are not speaking in hypotheticals. We have seen this happen before and thus have a fairly good model of (1) what many post-demographic-collapse cities may look like and (2) the mechanisms that will cause them to break. Specifically, Detroit lost around 600,000 residents between 1950 and 1980, leading to a 60% population decline.[14]

This population exodus triggered Detroit's bankruptcy. At the time of bankruptcy, half of the city's $18 billion debt was dedicated to worker-related liabilities, including retiree pensions and healthcare.[15] Not paying someone a portion of their salary until a future date while also not setting that money aside is functionally the same as taking out a loan from that person and should be thought of as debt on the city's books. In the above scenario, 50% of Detroit's income essentially went toward servicing debt. This is fine if the population grows by half, as that 50% of the budget becomes 33% and is quite manageable. But what if the tax base shrinks? If the city's population and tax base shrinks by just 30%, its usable money does not decrease by 30%, but rather by 60%. In a city that everyone knew was shrinking, this made the books functionally impossible to maintain.

Therefore, the first point at which cities break in a rapid population collapse scenario is when they become over-leveraged through deferred portions of salaries, benefits, etc. owed city service workers that were hired when the city's population was much higher.

Unused infrastructure presents Detroit's next point of system failure. When thinking about a city's population halving, many imagine lots of cheap real estate and extra room to live. This is not what emerges in practice. As anyone who owns a house knows, basic infrastructure and buildings are expensive and labor-intensive to maintain on a year-to-year basis. If a property's value decreases (which it is if population is decreasing), then there is less motivation to continue to invest in its maintenance, which causes its quality to plummet (if your house might literally sell for $1, why improve it?). At scale, this manifests as urban blight, with decaying buildings as far as you can see.

Meanwhile, the infrastructure supporting these decaying buildings (the city's power grid, streets, sewage system, etc.) is still maintained by the city—but with reduced efficacy due to plummeting property tax income. A sewer system built to service five million residents costs a lot more than half as much when a population shrinks to two and a half million. This is why fresh water and working sewer systems are often two of the first utilities to stop working as a population starts to shrink. The above two factors motivated Detroit's plan to bulldoze around a fifth of the city.[16]

Sometimes when we speak with people about Korea's current birth rates leading to 4.3 great-grandkids for every 100 current Koreans,[17] they start to imagine how cool it would be to have all that infrastructure for so few people. They imagine people living in giant apartments and extremely cheap houses. Run an image search for Detroit urban blight to get an idea of what post-population-collapse housing *actually* looks like.

The way cities are forced to react to all this creates a snowball effect that exacerbates the problem. Specifically, in response to its drop in residents, Detroit had to raise taxes, causing the city to charge the highest property taxes as of 2014.[18]

Urban flight during systems collapse is usually initiated by the wealthiest residents, who gravitate toward the more classically liberal side of the political spectrum (Republican). Their departure therefore opens the floodgates for stricter regulations. In the case of Detroit, this dynamic produced an "economic freedom" ranking of 345 out of 384 metros.[19]

If you came from the main body of the book, feel welcome to jump back to "The Economic Game Plan" now.

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Is an Idiocracy-Style Future Possible?

Are we destined to become a society reminiscent of the nightmarish dystopia depicted in the film *Idiocracy*, where everyone exemplifies the social stereotype of a low-IQ person? We mostly steer clear of fearful discourse about genetic selection against high IQs and dropping IQs in general because it is such a charged topic and our concerns around demographic collapse stand regardless of this scenario's potential. We only approach this philosophical third rail in order to dispel some common misconceptions.

IQ has a high level of genetic correlation and can be predicted by looking at a person's genome.[20] The association between genetics and IQ is not small. In fact, this meta-study argues the IQ correlation between adopted brothers and sisters (genetically unrelated people raised together) falls almost to zero in adulthood.[21]

> *Note: We think this meta study might be overstating the correlation a little. Suffice it to say there is very little argument in the scientific community over whether there is* some *genetic correlation to IQ. There is, however, debate over things like how big that correlation is, whether that link is concentrated in specific ethnicities (which we spend an entire chapter of this book arguing against), whether IQ is a measure of what we mean when we talk about intelligence in the vernacular (a topic we won't go into here; do your own research), and whether the genes associated with IQ are stable in the population or declining (what we will focus on in this chapter). For those who are not up to date with what is an "offensive" position vs scientific consensus, we encourage you to read the Wikipedia page on this subject.*[22]
>
> *We're pretty sure people who turn a blind eye to the role genetics plays in privilege will be held in the same regard as those who claimed they "didn't see race" in the 1990s. Acting as though none of your partially inherited traits give you systemic advantages over others—be they height, metabolism, attractiveness, or IQ—only*

serves to reinforce your unearned privilege and ultimately breeds more systemic inequality. (To be extremely clear, we refer to these two instances in relation to each other because each represents an assumed moral high ground through feigned blindness to systemic advantages one has over others. We are not suggesting that any of these things are linked to race.)

Multiple studies have demonstrated that IQ is dropping by about 0.2 points annually in some regions[23] (though the U.S. seems more resistant to this than other nations). This may seem like a trivial decline, but when you consider the standard deviation of IQ is 15 points, such a decline, if sustained, will lead to a drop by one standard deviation every 75 years. Should this trend hold in those regions, in just 125 years your average human will have an IQ that would (today) qualify someone as intellectually disabled. (Note: While our timelines are probably off, it is highly unlikely that we are wrong about the general trend.)

“But IQ is not a good measure of intelligence!” We, too, find it tedious and often misleading to focus so heavily on IQ. That said, while there is plenty of research separating out IQ from intelligence and we are the last people to pedestalize it (caring far more about initiative and willpower), IQ does correlate with very common standards of achievement and if all of the outcomes with which IQ correlates began to plummet, we would be seriously worried and we think you would, too.

Some papers have argued that this decline in IQ is purely environmental.[24] These arguments fall flat when combined with an orthogonal source of evidence. In his paper, “Natural Selection May be Making Society More Unequal,” David Hugh-Jones wrote: "We found that 23 out of 33 polygenic scores were significantly linked to a person having more or fewer children over their lifetime. ... Scores which correlated with lower earnings and education predicted having more children, meaning those scores are being selected for from an evolutionary perspective. Scores which correlated with higher earnings and education predicted having fewer children, meaning that they are being selected against."[25] This study even shows the polygenic

scores correlated with higher earnings and education decreasing within a population over time.[26] This means it is measurable that genes which correlate with high IQ are appearing at lower frequencies in the population over time and genes correlating with high IQ are correlated with lower fertility rates.

Imagine you are trying to determine the maximum speed of a car. One person makes this determination by looking at the engine and running calculations (this is analogous to the study looking at how genes that correlate with IQ also correlate with birth rate). Another person makes this calculation by getting in the car and flooring the accelerator pedal (this is analogous to the various studies measuring declines in IQ at the population level). If the max speed each group independently determines is close, you can be fairly confident in its accuracy. This is what we see above, meaning we're probably experiencing a meaningful decline in genes associated with high IQ that is likely to be sustained in the future.

> *How long has this effect been going on? It's hard to say. This process may have been in the works for a century or more but masked by the Flynn Effect (the phenomenon where increased nutrition drove an increase in IQ over time). It would be fascinating for someone to look at how these genetic markers appear in populations over time. What we* can *say is that, from the Holocene to the Iron Age, polygenic markers associated with increased educational attainment (today) went up,*[27] *while (in Rome at least) they started declining after the classical period.*[28]

Are we therefore moving toward an *Idiocracy*-style future? No—for two reasons.

1. Cultural groups that aggressively embrace polygenic risk score screening technology will not only be resistant to this decline in average IQ but will see their IQ rapidly increase. Rather than an *Idiocracy*-style future, we are therefore more likely to see an Eloi and Morlock scenario play out (sans physical predation, one hopes).[29] If you think inequality is bad now, buckle up. While such

disparity could be resolved by making polygenic risk score technology widely and cheaply accessible, goodness knows the supervirus will use its mindless slaves to prevent that from ever happening as it thrives on systemic inequality and will do anything in its power to prevent it being resolved.

2. Intelligence isn't the only trait likely to significantly shift over time. In response to other selective pressures discussed in this book, humans will also become more xenophobic, resistant to new ideas, and preferential toward fascist and strict hierarchies. In an *Idiocracy*-style future, the government is dumb but benevolent, whereas the future toward which we are presently headed resembles more of an ISIS-style society, with humanity divided into equally hateful extremist sects that all hate each other.

Some researchers in the space have told us that human civilization has gone through this cycle dozens of times before. They suggest research like the paper referenced earlier (which identified declining polygenic risk scores associated with educational attainment among Romans before the collapse of the Empire) demonstrate as much. While we don't disagree with them, this time around ideological extremists who all hate each other will have nukes and the industrial capacity needed to successfully commit mass genocide.

We will gladly brush many offensive facts under the rug because their wide dispersal would hurt more people than it would help. This is not one of them. Failure to address this issue could spell the end of human civilization, and not a painless one either—one that will come with untold suffering which will initially be borne disproportionately by vulnerable groups (particularly LGBT groups and ethnic minorities).

This extinction-level event is an inevitability if we continue down our current path. In order to change course, people must be willing to educate themselves and stop occluding information from those they see as their "lessers" in the name of short-term political/ideological victories.

It is neither virtuous nor pragmatic to shield others from data about shifting IQ or sociological profiles—or avoid it yourself because of what it might imply. Doing so prioritizes the agenda of your political/ideological faction

over the suffering of millions of future people. Doing so makes you the oil company worker who ignores a serious leak as doing so is in the company's best interest. Doing so makes you the campaign worker who suspects your candidate is raping children but chooses not to dig deeper. Doing so makes you the very picture of moral destitution.

Sometimes people ask us why we work so tirelessly on our "cause." Why, in addition to our day jobs, do we publish books, oversee a foundation, engage in pronatalist advocacy, manage the Index, and operate a school all at the same time? Because by some estimates, our species simply doesn't have much time left. Between the virus's shriekers dominating "elite" society and the now-inevitable coming wave of bigoted, tribalistic zealots, we don't have much time to gather like-minded allies and either form a unified resistance on Earth or get off the planet.

This problem can be solved—but only for the families who opt in to solving it. People often tag our perspective as elitist or accuse us of only wanting to "save" the elite. **This is true to an extent—we do only want to save the elite, but define "elite" as anyone willing to stand side-by-side with us against a corrupted world and put in the work and mental effort to save themselves.** If only we lived in a world in which this category of people was not so rare.

When we are criticized for this definition of elite, we are reminded of a *South Park* scene in which Kyle is swimming Cartman to safety and says, "Cartman, you've got to swim! Kick with your legs!"

Cartman replies, "I can't kick, you just have to save me."

Drowning Kyle cries, "I need your help!" to which Cartman replies curtly, "No, you just have to save me."

What we absolutely don't believe is that some people are better than others because they are genetically predisposed to a high IQ.

While we *do* believe some people are better than others, it is their "I will" and not their "IQ" that makes them so. There *are* people in this world who are lesser than us—people who understand the scope of the threat to our species, as well as the consequences of ignoring it, who

reflexively try to obscure or ignore it so their political faction can score points.

This belief in an “elite” as defined by initiative and willpower is why the Collins Institute for the Gifted does not include test scores in its admissions criteria and instead judges students based on their actions. Though people have no control over their genetics and the circumstances into which they are born, they can actively choose to take action that can either help or harm others.

If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at “Genocide through Inaction.”

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Defending Pronatalism

If you suspect our concerns about birth rates to be misguided, you may be surprised to find that we are pronatalist for the very reasons many are *antinatalist*—or at least that reality is less black and white than you might think. To demonstrate how, we've addressed some of the most common concerns about the pronatalist agenda, point by point.

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But … the Environment!

There is no way to talk about building a culture that will grow over the long run without endorsing high birth rates. Given that this book cannot avoid a pronatalist perspective, it is likely to raise the ire of those who claim to care about the environment under the belief that adding more humans to the world is bad for the planet. Of course, they are right, in the short term, but in the long term …

Over the long term, there is no single thing a person who cares about the environment can do that will hurt the environment *more* than not having kids at an above-replacement-rate level (i.e., more than two). It would be the height of hypocrisy for a person to deride individuals for ignoring near consensus in the field of climate research while they themselves ignored decades of near consensus among geneticists.

What are we talking about? See: “Genetic Influences on Political Ideologies: Twin Analyses of 19 Measures of Political Ideologies from Five Democracies and Genome-Wide Findings from Three Populations,”[30] “On the genetic basis of political orientation,”[31] or just the Wikipedia article on the subject.[32] That a person's political ideology and much of their sociological profile has a heritable component is a replicated finding backed by huge data sets. We, of course, acknowledge that some debate exists around this research—just like in climate science. That said, this debate is mostly over the amount of correlation within a narrow range, not whether there is any correlation at all.[33]

In other words, if you selectively prevent one sociological profile from having kids, you would see less of that profile in future generations. All these people removing themselves from the gene pool out of concern for the environment are dramatically lowering the prevalence of the sort of psychological profile that cares about the environment (and a wealth of other prosocial factors).

It’s as if caring for the environment is a terminal, genetically linked illness being systematically eradicated from the population. In the study we ran on this subject, we found individuals in the U.S. who strongly believed global

warming was real and caused by humans had about half as many children on average as those who were strongly in the opposite camp (0.8 to 1.6). It is a tragedy that anthropogenic climate change will lead to the deaths of millions of people and much of the earth's biome, but a world in which every human who has an instinct to care about the environment *removes themselves from the gene pool* might be worse.

What we find uniquely frustrating about the apparent self-extinction of environmentally-minded people is that it may not even make that much of an environmental impact to forgo parenthood in the years and generations to come. By some estimates, "If the United States reaches its climate goals —that is, cutting emissions in half by 2030 and to zero by 2050—the picture looks even more different. In that case, a child born today would have a carbon footprint averaged over their lives of around 2.8 tons per year, not far from a current resident of Brazil. Under that scenario, having one fewer child starts to look on a par with living car-free or skipping a transatlantic flight—significant, but not even the most important individual action one can take."[34]

It's not as though we are the first life form on Earth to cause a mass extinction. Consider the Great Oxidation Event, when the first cyanobacteria produced so much oxygen as a waste product that the atmosphere was filled with (what was then) a toxic, polluting gas (oxygen) that killed almost everything on Earth. Also, consider that had this event been prevented by some sort of environmentalist cyanobacteria with the goal of preventing "oxygen pollution," complicated, eukaryotic, multicellular organisms that utilize oxygen-based cellular respiration would never have evolved. Not a single animal (no birds, no fish, no amphibians, and no mammals) would exist due to the low energy efficiency of the previously dominant anaerobic respiration.

While we don't see mass extinction as a good thing, we want to put it in context when a common solution advocated involves nudging our own species toward civilizational collapse and eventual extinction. We see these outcomes as a real risk if every adult who cares about others (or tragedy of the commons issues more generally) chooses to surgically remove their sociological profile from the gene pool.

If we do nothing to fix society, humans will eventually go extinct (or devolve civilizationally and become locked on Earth). Should either of these scenarios come to pass, we lose the only hope life on Earth has of seeding biomes equally as rich as our own on other planets (unless Earth harbors some yet-undiscovered species capable of space-faring).

Instead of multiplying Earth's biodiversity thousands of times over throughout the galaxy, we would see all life go extinct as Earth is eventually swallowed by an expanding sun. (Of course, this assumes aliens are not out there. For now, we think this assumption is necessary in order to stay on the safe side due to the Fermi paradox, which implies something is wrong with our model of how easy it is for life to start.)[35]

If you care about the environment, having kids makes things worse in the short term but strictly better in the long term. If environmentalists have kids at dramatically lower rates, environmentalism as a movement will shrink dramatically over time. Moreover, having kids increases the odds that human civilization will endure until we become a multi-planet species, which reduces the risk that humans go extinct and life on Earth becomes a "dead man walking" in the face of an expanding sun.

Finally, we are by no means advocating for an ever-ballooning human population on Earth. We have no problem with population levels easing down somewhat. What we *do* object to is the functional genocide of diverse cultural and ethnic groups leading to cultural and genetic monocultures. We already accept that demographic collapse is inevitable; all we hope for now is a soft landing with minimal damage to diversity and human rights.

We may not agree with most self-identified environmentalists on many things, but removing their instincts from the gene pool entirely doesn't bode well for our descendants' future.

Note: The deglobalization instigated by population collapse might also have a fairly severe effect on the environment.[36]

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Only Privileged People Can Have Kids!

Outside of people scolding us for hurting the environment through our pronatalist advocacy, the most common complaint we get is that decreasing birth rates are an economic problem. Many argue that if governments were to offer more child care, or if houses were less expensive, etc., the problem would resolve itself.

We wish this were true, as it would make the problem much easier to fix. However, the data on this subject is overwhelming: Earning more money *decreases* the number of kids you have (while there is a U-shaped curve in which individuals start to have more kids at extreme levels of wealth, this curve does not bring families above repopulation rate again until they earn over $500,000 to $1M USD annually, making it unrealistic to resolve this problem with financial subsidies).[37] Birth rates decrease as wealth increases between and within regions. To put it simply, poor groups within a country have more kids than rich groups, and poor countries, on average, have higher birth rates than rich countries.

Moreover, while government-provided childcare has been shown to increase birth rates by a few percentage points, the effect is trivial when contrasted with the size of the problem. While we ardently support initiatives like government-sponsored child care and affordable housing, those initiatives are totally unmoored from any realistic solution to the declining birth rate problem. For an example of just how little this type of program affects the birth rates, consider Hungary, which spent 5%[38] of its total GDP trying to increase its birth rate only to see almost no rise in fertility[39] (a similar program in Poland had almost no impact as well).[40]

Perhaps one cause driving highly-educated individuals to have fewer kids is that said individuals want their kids to be able to live lives similar to theirs. For all but the most insanely wealthy, it is not financially viable to pay for good college and high school education for more than two kids.

We, personally, want to have many children (as many as possible) and that means almost no matter how much money we have, paying for our kids' college will be a non-starter. This issue motivated us to create the Collins

Institute (CollinsInstitute.org), which aims to dramatically lower the cost of high-caliber secondary education and provide routes to top-level career tracks that do not require college. When we see a problem that remains to be addressed, we do what we can to fix it.

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Pronatalism is About Removing Our Reproductive Rights!

One fear we often hear about pronatalists is that they want to ban abortions —or even birth control. Outside of the ethical implications of abortion (which are beside the point here), banning abortion and contraception is not an effective means of increasing population in the long run.

We know this because it was tried before. Decree 770 of the communist Romanian government of Nicolae Ceaușescu, signed in 1967, restricted abortion and contraception and was intended to create a larger Romanian population. This ban was incredibly effective at increasing birth rates within the first generation but changed Romanians' perceptions around children's value (making them a low-status thing to have in the same way all those teen pregnancy PSAs in the USA did) and led to catastrophically low birth rates just one generation down the line. In the end, this policy caused more harm to Romania's population growth than good.[41]

From what we can tell, the only government interventions that have durably increased birth rates without producing a slew of adverse societal effects involve cultural and religious interventions, as we can see in Georgia[42] and Turkey.[43]

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Pronatalism is Racist!

While it is uncommon for people to tag pronatalists as racists, the occasional accusation is worth addressing. When we talk to some groups about pronatalism, they blurt out that low birth rates can be solved through immigration and imply that trying to fix population and workforce shortages through "domestic production" is racist.

We imagine many who connect pronatalists with racism are thinking of the much-publicized white supremacist "Great Replacement Theory" (a white genocide conspiracy theory) and assuming that white people (like your melanin-deficient authors) are driven by that particular ideology. One has to be a complete halfwit to subscribe to this type of theory in the face of the data, which indicates that white people (in the U.S.) actually have one of the slowest declining birth rates, whereas Black, Hispanic, and Native American birth rates are all declining faster. In fact, the Native American birth rate is declining so rapidly that a genuine functional extinction event is a possibility many tribes face within this century. This collapse in Native American populations is obscured by mixed ethnicity people identifying as Native American at a dramatically increased rate.[44]

Let us assume those making racist accusations about pronatalism aren't assuming white nationalist intentions and instead just like the idea of resolving population decline through immigration. All we have to ask is: Immigration from where? Latin America, the Caribbean,[45] and India,[46] each of which is falling below repopulation rate at the time of this book's publication? Or shall immigrants come from China, which is expected to be at half its current population by 2050?[47] At current projections, by the end of the century, only two countries outside of Africa will have stable populations (Israel and Kyrgyzstan) and in Africa, only four out of 54 will have stable populations (Chad, Somalia, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe). And just to be clear, those figures are from the generous data set—in the SDG Pace scenario not a single country will have a stable population.[48]

What's your super-not-racist plan? Is the plan to import Africans to Europe and America so they support an older, non-working, majority-

white population? Gosh, it might be just us, but something about that sounds … bad. It sounds like the "anti-racist's" plan is to go back to importing people from Africa to support an idle, mostly white population. In such a scenario, you wouldn't reach a point at which you could stop importing them either; you would need to constantly harvest humans from Africa and bring them to the U.S. or force them to have over two kids each because, since 2019, the birth rate for first-generation immigrants has been below replacement rate.[49] Oh, and if all of Africa becomes prosperous, birth rates will crash there, too, so for this "not racist" scheme to work, its proponents would have to intentionally sabotage African economic development.

But it's worse than that. Silencing talk about declining birth rates hurts minority groups much more than it hurts white Christians. White Christians represent one of the few groups that are probably going to make it through this shit storm (the only other two populations with sub-groups that show significant resistance to post-scarcity birth rate collapse are Muslims and Jews).

Consider two of the oldest (in terms of cultural evolutionary divergence) and most unique cultures in the world: the Parsi (Zoroastrians) and the Jains. The Parsi have a birth rate of 0.8 and a population of 70,000 while the Jains' birth rate is 1.2 and their population has dwindled to 4,451,753. Those populations will not be stable, distinct cultures by the time of our great-grandchildren.[50] By silencing alarm bells about the severity of population decline in the name of anti-racism (seeing as genuine racists being the first groups to talk openly about the issue), we are dooming countless cultural groups to an un-mourned extinction.

People who think like us are going to be fine. We worry about those who are different from us. This book is published and distributed *for these different groups*. If, in 500 years, everyone is a member of House Collins and thinks just like us, we have failed.

Homogeny = Stagnation.

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Forcing a Way of Life on Your Kids is Unethical!

How *dare* we force a way of life on our kids!

Everyone forces a way of life on their kids. Researchers have found humans naturally have an instinct to make judgments based on ethnicity, sex, and facial appearance.[51] When you teach your kids to *not* judge people by those things, you are "forcing" a way of life upon them. When you warn your kids not to take drugs, you are pressuring them to conform to a certain way of life. You do these things because you think they are in your kids' (and the world's) best interests.

Even with that said, our kids will always have a choice. Cultures that punish those who leave do not fare well in the post-internet age. Our kids will always have a choice as to who they become as adults. They will be accepted as whoever they choose to be—not just for altruistic reasons, and not just because we love our kids, but for practical reasons. Our best strategy for getting our kids to raise their own children within our culture is for them to see it function first hand.

If our children look back on their childhoods with warm nostalgia, are set up for a prosperous future, and grow up within a cultural framework they are welcome to alter and improve—they will not only be more likely to pass this culture onto children of their own but also edit it to make it better.

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Think of the Suffering! (Antinatalism & Negative Utilitarianism)

Being pronatalists, we decided to review the works of some of the most prominent antinatalists to better understand their arguments. To that end, we went through content created by thinkers like David Benatar. While we don't want to be mean, their points fail to land if you don't share their cultural perspective.

The first position antinatalists instinctively take is that the average human experiences more negative than positive emotions in their lifetime (or at least that negative emotions are felt more acutely than positive emotions and therefore outweigh them). As such, antinatalists conclude it would be better if one never existed in the first place.

The problem with this argument is that the vast majority of people do not, in fact, wish they were never born. Heck, we neither value happiness nor love and we certainly don't seek them out—and yet our lives are overflowing with them. Our biology naturally drowns us in positive emotions when we are efficaciously working for the betterment of our species with people we respect—and who respect us in turn.

To address the average person's hesitations, antinatalists typically make one of five arguments:

Argument One: Humans Don't Realize How Shitty Their Lives Are

Antinatalists posit that people are incapable of judging whether they like their own lives, typically citing cognitive bias to do so. While they are right that humans remember positive events more accurately than negative ones,[52] they are incorrect in assuming this bias is strong enough to convince a person that a terrible life is actually good. In fact, humans have all sorts of equally powerful biases toward seeing things negatively.

Given their instinctive negativity bias,[53] people will spend more time focused on negative things in their lives than positive things. This has been measured in test subjects focusing more on negative pictures when given a few to choose between[54] and people blinking more when given negative

words than positive ones[55] (with eye blinks being tied to cognitive processing).[56]

This negativity bias appears in almost all antinatalist thinkers. If allowed to talk long enough, they always end up discounting the positive events in a person's life and putting tons of weight on negative events, undermining their own arguments that all humans have an insurmountable bias toward overweighting the positive. They justify this bias as the logical way of looking at the world, implying that if you view life through rose-tinted glasses, you're succumbing to a cognitive bias and are wrong about how much you like your life, whereas if your tendency is to view things negatively, your feelings are super valid and serve as proof they are right about everything.

In the absence of concrete proof that cognitive biases are sufficient to convince someone that a bad life is actually a good life, antinatalists often point out humans' tendency to rate the quality of their lives in comparison to others and that humans learn to adapt to their circumstances, no matter how wretched they may be. They take this to mean many people who are happy with their lives and excited to be alive should not be.

Imagine some nihilistic, snooty, middle-class "new atheist" kid from the United States strolling up to someone from a developing country who is struggling to put food on the table. Imagine this unsuspecting person has learned to relish life—and yet this kid is trying to convince them that they are delusional and should resent their very existence. Imagine their eyes widening as the kid insists that, in fact, the world would be better if they had never been born. What antinatalists often *really* mean is that if *they*, in their cush, developed-world lives, can't find happiness, how could those coming from strictly less wealthy nations *possibly* be of sound mind when asserting that *their* lives, and the lives of and their children, are worth living?

The truth, of course, is that many people experiencing deprivation enjoy lives filled with joy and dynamism while antinatalists suffer through a self-constructed hell. Ironically, antinatalists love claiming that they are actually super happy people—a notion one can instantly dispel by spending five

seconds on the r/antinatalism subreddit or watching YouTube videos of antinatalists. It is pretty hard to miss a deep sense of despair and bitterness.

Arguments like: “You are wrong about how much you think you like your life,” resemble forms of abusive gaslighting frequently used in cults. When I (Malcolm) was younger, I used to recreationally engage with cults in an effort to understand how people could hold views so orthogonal to my own. One of the most common tools leveraged in cult recruiting processes involves attempts to convince otherwise-perfectly-content targets that they are actually miserable.

Argument Two: Positive Emotions Don’t Matter; Negative Emotions Do

More convincingly, antinatalists will argue that the positive emotions we *think* we feel do not actually impart meaning to our lives. The argument usually goes something like this:

> Sisyphus was cursed to roll a ball up a hill forever—only to have it roll back down after making it to the top. Most people would see that as a meaningless existence.
>
> Suppose someone reprogramed Sisyphus’ brain to enjoy this process and get a sense of deep fulfillment from rolling the ball up the hill. If you engaged him and tried to get him to stop, he wouldn't, telling you how wonderful ball rolling was. Does his life have value now?

The average person’s intuition holds that his existence remains meaningless.

Antinatalists proceed to extend this argument to other scenarios: Suppose a person gained pleasure and fulfillment from eating feces. Would a life spent consuming fecal matter have value?

The gist of the argument is that if stupid things can make you happy or give you a feeling of fulfillment, then you should not derive meaning from positive emotions, and if positive emotional states have no value, then what’s the point of existing? David Benatar believes this point so strongly

that he argues that he would be ambivalent between nonexistence and the most perfect life conceivable.

The belief that negative (but not positive) emotional states have value and a person's aim in life should be to minimize negative emotional states is called *negative utilitarianism*. (Or at least antinatalists who make this argument believe this form of negative utilitarianism—there is a second form in which the reduction of suffering merely takes precedence over the promotion of pleasure.)

We are confident that any reader of our books can immediately see the hollowness of this argument, as the same Sisyphus argument they apply to positive emotions can also be applied to negative emotions—it just so happens that antinatalists "cheat" on this thought experiment when it is flipped. Alas, cheating on a thought experiment does not invalidate its implications.

How does this cheat work? Let's say we programmed a paperclip maximizing AI to suffer when not making paper clips and asked an antinatalist: "Does the AI's suffering matter?" Intuitively, they'd want to argue that *yes*, this suffering *does* matter, and we need to do something about it—however doing so would also invalidate their claims that pleasure is meaningless. So, instead, when presented with such arguments, antinatalists often argue that we could have simply not built the AI or not designed it to suffer.

Here's the thing though: You don't get to just remove key elements of a thought experiment and claim your arguments are valid. If we dropped a ball to demonstrate the presence of gravity, another person wouldn't just take the ball from us and say: "Hah! Where's your gravity now??" And yet, that's exactly what antinatalists are doing when they just remove any suffering entity from the equation in the mirrored Sisyphus thought experiment.

The very point of the Sisyphus thought experiment is that positive emotional states can be dismissed as a thing of value because they can be induced by meaningless activity. As this point is not addressed by the cheat they use to get out of the mirrored thought experiment, the cheat cannot be used to negate the thought experiment's implication

that negative emotional states don’t have value. While we, personally, don’t agree with either version of the thought experiment, we do think that if you do accept one version, you cannot refute the inverse without being logically inconsistent.

Let’s be real: This thought experiment is kind of dumb. Take *any* utility maximization to its logical extreme and it will sound stupid.

- If a person is maximizing happiness it's, “what about putting all humans in happiness pods?”
- If a person is maximizing negative utilitarianism it's, “what about killing everyone?”
- If a person thinks emotions justify human existence, it's, “what if a person derives happiness from eating poo?”

All these extreme claims do is obligate people to take stances for which they would be shamed in normie society—and then shame them for taking them in order to discredit them. In normie land, a person saying that all people should die, or that it's acceptable to let people eat poop all day, is seen as a danger to society.

Antinatalists tie their tongues in knots trying to argue that, per their worldview, it would not be immoral to push a button that painlessly and simultaneously extinguished the life of every single person. We lose a lot of respect for a philosophy that is either unwilling or unable to publicly swallow the socially unpopular implications of their moral positions. As such, we have a lot more respect for groups like the Nonvoluntary Antinatalists who are at least transparent about their goal to forcibly sterilize the human race.[57] Antinatalists not in the Nonvoluntary Antinatalist camp attempt to get out of this obvious inconsistency with the next argument.

Argument Three: “I extra pinky swear that I don’t want to kill you or myself”

Many antinatalists argue that “once you exist, you have a reason and interest to continue existing.” This requires a very specific belief about how time works in order to be true. To someone making this argument, new

moments are “poof” created out of thin air like magic—the future does not exist in any meaningful way until it is actualized.

Per our view, every decision you make determines which of countless potential futures will exist. With every decision, you functionally erase whatever futures you did not choose. **You are simultaneously responsible for everything you did *and did not* set in motion with your decisions**. For example, if we have the capability to build a hospital and we choose instead to sit around and play video games, we deny that hospital’s existence and are morally culpable for the results of that decision. The hospital's moral value does not pop into existence only after the first stone is laid.

This mirrors the beef we have with those who think it is sinful to spill “seed” or that life begins at conception. *All potential life* has value and must have its moral weight considered. It strikes us as bizarre that people would fixate on arbitrary thresholds, like “sperm,” “embryo,” or the moment a baby's head appears. That said, we don’t endorse endlessly spamming the world with babies, we need to carefully weigh the effect a potential life can have on all the other potential lives with which it could interact, as well as the potential lives that it may, in turn, create. It is somewhat ironic how much the antinatalist world view has in common with the “life begins at conception” worldview.

Argument Four: Praying for a Dead World (The Asymmetry Argument)

Antinatalist assertions that life matters once it has been created are reminiscent of another argument they constantly use, which proceeds as follows:

Baby born:

It is bad for someone who does exist to feel suffering.

It is good for someone who does exist to feel happiness.

Baby not born:

> It is good to prevent someone from existing who would have felt suffering.
>
> It is **not bad** to prevent someone from existing who would have felt happiness.

They use this argument to claim that there is literally no moral downside if their actions prevent a human life from coming into existence *even if* that person would have loved existing, wanted to exist, and lived a great life.

The argument boils down to this claim: “It is not bad to prevent someone from existing who would have felt happiness and wanted to exist.” (Note: They tend to word this point a little differently: “It is not bad for someone who does not exist to not feel happiness.”)

But… WHY?? While it is socially acceptable to hold this view, seeing as our society doesn’t acculturate us to care about people who don’t exist yet because they are not relevant to its function, what makes it morally sound? There are all sorts of things for which we are morally accountable that society will neither reward nor punish.

In order to hold this position (that nothing is lost from non-existent positive emotional states) a person would have to believe the two things have the exact same moral weight:

- A vast, multicultural universe full of living beings *that are incapable of suffering*
- A cold and empty universe, devoid of all life

In attempts to prove this point, antinatalists commonly present the following thought experiment: While you would feel bad knowing that people were suffering on a deserted island somewhere, you would feel indifferent about an uninhabited island. This experiment is intentionally manipulative as you aren’t presented with the idea that the island *could have been inhabited*. **Extinguished potential has negative utility.**

Imagine relics on this island reveal that it used to host a thriving civilization that was driven to extinction—albeit painlessly—after nearby nuclear

testing sterilized all residents. Imagine that its citizens didn't suffer through this extinction given some unique quirk of their culture. Assuming you're not a sociopath, you would find this scenario devastating, right? And if you arrived on the island just days after everyone was sterilized, you would feel far worse than you would had it happened ten thousand years ago.

For the asymmetry argument to work, antinatalists need to divide humanity into piles of people who do and don't exist, but that is patently not how reality functions. Existence is a spectrum of potential. A person's right to self-determination does not magically pop into existence the moment they pass some arbitrary developmental threshold**.** If antinatalists want to decide that their own lives have no value, that is fine, but they have no right to impose that judgment on other people with impunity merely because they have yet to be born.

Let's say that in the absence of antinatalist interference, Tim and Mary intend to have a kid and name her Suzy. If an antinatalist wrote, "Suzy's life has no value" on a piece of paper, sealed it in an envelope, and put it on a table in their house, at what exact moment would the statement, "Suzy's life has no value," stop being true? When Tim and Mary have sex? Upon Suzy's conception? When she is born? When she utters her first words? When her brain is fully myelinated?

Human lives don't suddenly come to exist over a split second. Creating an adult human is a process that begins with a parent's intentions and doesn't end until the human is fully myelinated in their mid-twenties. When you prevent someone (who otherwise would) from reaching adulthood, you have robbed that person of agency.

If your actions today trigger a chain of events that, in the future, rob another person of their agency, you are obviously morally culpable *if that person already exists today.* But why should that culpability disappear if the victim is presently unborn? We assume antinatalists would concede that action undertaken today (like rigging a magical agency-removing grenade to a door) is immoral if it could rob someone else of agency in the future, even if that person does not yet exist.

In other words, their moral position is that the following statement:

> *"If action Z by person Y robs the agency of person X at future time T, it is morally wrong—with the caveat that this is not true if action Z was tied to the conception of person X."*

This is an absurdly specific and suspiciously convenient moral carve out. We sure do hate these sorts of intuitionist arguments though. We only make them because it is the currency in which antinatalists deal.

Argument Five: It *Feels* Right

Most antinatalists rely on "intuition" to arrive at moral conclusions, which is a charitable way of saying: "My culture or biological instinct tells me this is true." Intuition seems to be the core reason why antinatalists are convinced that suffering is intrinsically evil. While the use of intuition as a source of a priori knowledge is a common and widely accepted practice among professional philosophers,[58] the mere fact that it's a common practice doesn't make it sound. Our "intuitions" are either culturally or biologically evolved instincts—none of the pressures that lead to their evolution were optimizing for moral or metaphysical truth.

> *I (Malcolm) started my college career as a quadruple major in neuroscience, biology, psychology, and philosophy, but dropped philosophy when it became clear that a huge chunk of my time in the field would need to be spent around people learning to argue, with increasing levels of sophistication, in support of positions they already held (through intuition) rather than searching for a truer understanding of the fabric of reality and investigating why they had those intuitions. The academic field of philosophy is nothing like its pop-culture stereotype, being much more focused on semantic hair splitting than a search for truth.*

A person's intuition can be changed with the flip of a switch using a TMS (transcranial magnetic stimulation) machine.[59] We get that intuitions feel innate—they are coded to feel that way—but they objectively are not. **It seems silly to think an emotion is intrinsically bad because it "motivates you to stop feeling it" *when that is literally the point of the emotion*.** You feel pain when you shove your hand into hot coals so that you are motivated

to take your hand out of the coals. There's a reason why people with congenital insensitivity to pain die young.[60]

In many ways, this book can be thought of as wholly refuting "intuitionism" by systematically investigating the forces behind intuition. That said, we would be willing to give antinatalists the benefit of the doubt on this intuitionist practice if they didn't vehemently disregard the "intuition" of others.

Only read the following if the argument against intuitionism above is not self-evident to you. The argument presented so far is generally called the "evolutionary argument" against intuitionism or "the naturalist argument for normative skepticism." Philosophers' counter arguments fall largely into six categories.[61]

1) "If a moral intuition is widely shared and not self-benefiting, like "suffering is bad," then it is likely true."

Cultivars are evolutionarily pressured to conclude that suffering is bad (a cultivar that did not share this intuition would feature higher rates of graft, crime, etc. and thus be less productive than its contemporaries). Whether or not suffering is an intrinsic evil, all societies would come to both enforce this belief within them and punish those who publicly assert it isn't an obvious truth. For that reason, we should be extra and doubly suspicious of this claim.

2) "Evolution can only explain broad moral intuitions like vague altruism, not more advanced, widely shared intuitions that don't benefit the individual. Thus, we should throw out intuitions that can be easily explained by benefiting the individual—but not other intuitions."

While this is true of *biological evolution*, it is not true of *cultural evolution*. In order to honestly hold the logic of this point in light of the evidence presented in this book, you would need to also claim that any intuition that benefits a cultivar cannot be trusted if it is widely shared. Unfortunately, you will quickly realize that all institutions either benefit the individual or

the cultivar because that is just what intuitions are—the pre-coded bits of your world framing.

3) "If you disregard intuition, then you would only be able to get moral information from empirical testing. That being the case, how can you verify that empirical testing yields valid information about morality if you can't get it from empirical testing?"

This book offers numerous examples in which the logic of a moral claim can be worked out without empirical testing. For example, the claim that, "we should dismiss any moral intuition almost everyone in a large cultivar would hold, whether or not it comes from an intrinsic truth," is a claim founded in logic, not empirical evidence. Once you discount your evolutionarily and societally hard-coded intuitions as objective truths, you will realize there are many sources of evidence about the true nature of reality and thousands of competing worldviews (all featuring internal logical consistency) to choose between. We do not argue that some other specific source of moral truth is uniquely good. We merely suggest that you bias yourself against intuition if a society would likely support a specific intuition even if it was not likely to be true.

4) "All arguments against intuitionism assume an atheistic perspective."

This again is not true. While modern soft-culture traditions often trust human intuitions, almost no hard cultures do. Instead, they see intuitions as highly susceptible to malevolent outside influence (be they demons or other forces). Vanishingly few traditional iterations of successful hard cultivars tell a person to "trust their gut" as they all know that is how the devil best manipulates you.

5) "From our current standpoint, we have every reason to regard our pro-social evolutionary heritage as providing us with roughly correct moral intuitions."[62]

This argument holds that we should value biologically evolved prosocial instincts because they often align with the culturally evolved prosocial instincts enforced as norms by our societies. Such arguments only work if you assume their worldview (that the moral frameworks broadly agreed

upon in our society are backed by intrinsic truth). Again, moral intuition is not evidence of some intrinsic moral truth if you would have had that intuition regardless of whether or not it was an intrinsic moral truth.

6) “Philosophers are special, extra good intuitors and won’t be subject to the average person’s evolutionary and societal biases when intuiting stuff.”

Yes, this is a real thing argued in many academic papers. It's not just obviously stupid, it's also scientifically stupid in a way that can be proven.[63] It's that special kind of arrogance you would only expect from an entrenched priest class that has totally lost touch with reality.

It makes perfect sense why intuitionism would proliferate in a field like philosophy given that supporters of it can utilize the cultural mechanisms that punish people who do not “toe the line” of society's evolved and hard-coded intuitions. Still it is deeply disheartening that so many otherwise intelligent people can’t immediately see the 1984-style sham being pulled. We debated calling out intuitionism because it has so deeply infected the field of philosophy that it will allow many who have cast their lot with the orthodoxy to dismiss us as yet another brand of heretic. That said, it is such an obvious “the emperor has no clothes” situation we can’t resist.

How can we argue with such confidence that antinatalists are trying to justify pre-existing intuition rather than arrive at a logically reasoned truth? David Benatar (the present standard bearer of the antinatalist movement) admits that he has been an anti-natalist since he was a very young child.[64] He simply used his position of power to force his intuition on other people and reinforce it within his own mind (he is head of the philosophy department at the University of Cape Town).

I, Simone, started out as an anti-natalist as well. It is normal for young kids to hold this position. Before we are ready to have kids, the average human is largely hard coded to see them as gross, annoying, and broadly distasteful. Antinatalism comes off as childish because it is quite literally the intuition of a child reinforced over a lifetime and galvanized by the

cognitive dissonance felt by adherents as they damage their own lives. (You may think we are over-personalizing it, but a regular and spurious argument Benatar makes is that a major reason people argue for pronatalist positions is that they are biased by biological instinct. We feel forced to highlight the hypocrisy in his projection.)

This approach to philosophy as an exercise to build strong arguments supporting already-held intuitions about the world—instead of leveraging it as a means of building "truer" intuitions—contrasts heavily with ours. Anyone who has read our first book will know that our views on the meaning of life have evolved radically since then as we have encountered new information, heard better arguments, and engaged in further self-examination. For example, while we used to think our goal was to maximize the "volume" of sentience in the universe, we now do not even think sentience has value—as can be seen in this book's subchapter on the topic. We literally did a 180 on our entire worldview when presented with compelling, logically sound evidence and arguments. **This is the difference between a worldview shaped by inquiry and inquiry shaped by a worldview.**

You can create feelings of profundity with drugs or chanting. Just because something feels profound doesn't mean it is inherently profound or meaningful. In the same breath, truly profound and meaningful things may not trigger feelings of profundity. Our read of the true antinatalist position is that they look for something to feel "obviously and unobjectionably meaningful" in the same way suffering feels "obviously and objectively bad" and because they can't find such a thing, they assume intrinsic meaning doesn't exist.

Humans underwent no evolutionary pressure to search for true meaning in the universe. To think we would be "coded" to recognize intrinsic meaning at an emotional level seems ludicrous. The same can be said of human cultures; they evolved just like our minds did.

When looking for meaning in the world, a person should think from the perspective of a higher-order entity unencumbered by our pre-programmed biases (positive and negative emotional states). Would an entity that didn't feel suffering conclude it is intrinsically bad? Such seems highly unlikely to us. We see no reason to feel bad when a computer is unable to carry out its

pre-programed actions and an entity that could not empathize with the way we interpret suffering would probably see our suffering as analogous to that. **“Suffering” is merely a tool evolution used to keep us focused on our pre-programed actions—there is no greater meaning to it than there is to code running in a paperclip maximizer AI that prompts it to protest when blocked from making paperclips.**

> *If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at “Culture vs. Religion.”*

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Calvinist Stereotypes in Media

Ebenezer Scrooge is the classic non-Puritan Calvinist stereotype in media: He was wealthy (or otherwise powerful) but lived frugally, Scottish in ancestry (like many of the non-Puritan Calvinist immigrants), miserly, honest in business dealings (as can be seen by his keeping Jacob Marley's name on his business), cold, calculating, sociopathically pragmatic, dubious of charity, unconcerned with others' opinions of him, dour in personality (though Calvinists are sometimes stereotyped as being wacky, overenthusiastic, and heady), and unconcerned or obsessed with suffering. The only major classic Calvinist stereotypes Scrooge lacks are status as an inventor/scientist, moral absolutism, open hostility toward bureaucrats, and either overindulgence in or total abstention from alcohol. Because Scrooge lacks any living partner, he also doesn't exemplify how if a Calvinist stereotype character has a romantic interest or family, they usually work together.

Scrooge is even physically depicted like most Calvinist stereotypes: Tall, thin, and gaunt, swathed in black, white, and red clothing, and sporting an implied physical disability (often shown through the use of a cane or facial scars—even in my—Malcolm's—family, some people "show off" physical disabilities or endurance through suffering as a status symbol). The use of black and red in clothing was an area of contention between Puritan and non-Puritan Calvinists, as Puritans often saw black and red as arrogant colors and thus bad while non-Puritan Calvinists were known for embracing elitism and arrogance, believing themselves naturally better than others.

Even after Calvinist culture mostly died out, its impact on American society was so significant that Calvinist stereotypes are *still* depicted in popular media. Examples range from Silco in *Arcane* to Scrooge McDuck in *DuckTales*, Varrick in *The Legend of Korra*, the Krum clan in *Klaus*, Rick of *Rick and Morty*, and Darth Vader / Anakin in *Star Wars*. (If you are thinking: "But George Lucas didn't say that was the stereotype he was going for," remember, he also didn't say "Jewish" was the stereotype he was going for with Watto. This is how the accidental use of stereotypes

works—they worm their way into our cultural memory and slip out because they make “sense” as collections of traits we expect to see together.)

If you came from the main body of the book, feel welcome to jump back to “Our Cultural Bias” now.

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On Houses Founded by Sovereign, Childless Individuals

We will let you in on a little secret: As a couple that wrote a bestselling book on relationships, we feel a bit like frauds. The more we think about it, the more we realize how impossible it might be to find a spouse as well suited as each of us is for the other. In the past decade I (Malcolm) have only met three women who I thought would make good partners in a successful, long-term relationship—and fewer men who I thought would make good husbands.

While we are confident that anyone can find a favorable partner if they play the right cards and expend serious effort during strategically crucial periods of their lives, most competent, well-meaning people have already passed critical age windows (for advice on how to utilize various stages of life, see "Life Stages" in the Appendix).

Should we really cut those people out of our vision for the future due to serendipitous bad luck? No. Just because someone is childless doesn't mean their potential for long-term impact has evaporated.

We use the title of Godparent to build intergenerational family alliances. One of our kids' Godparents who doesn't have kids (yet!) designed a House around the management of his collection of business empires with distinct names, value systems, and governance models. If finding a good partner just isn't in the cards for you or you have yet to find the right partner or start your family, you can still build a unique culture now that represents the sovereign nation you have built with your life. It merely requires "playing on hard mode" to ensure that your culture will intergenerationally endure and improve should it not ultimately be kickstarted by biological or adopted children.

> *Side note: One of the cool things this guy did was design a ring he wears, which reminds him of the value systems to which he is committed.*
>
> *If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at "The Fundamentals of Culture Crafting."*

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K vs. r Selection in Cultivars' Birth Rates

In evolutionary terms, enduring cultures are neither K nor r-selected (K-selected species are characterized by having a relatively small number of offspring in which they invest high amounts of parental care whereas their r-selected counterparts typically have many offspring but invest less energy in producing them). Enduring cultures have a lot of kids *and* put more effort, collectively, into child rearing.

Humans in general may have a uniquely high capacity to both have many kids *and* invest a lot in their upbringing given their (unusual) ability to leverage their own offspring as tools (i.e., people to help the family business, help out around the house, till the fields, provide additional income streams, etc.). When kids aren't a pure resource drain, it makes sense to not only have more kids but invest more into raising them—all to ensure they yield a high return on investment.

Enduring cultures are not *purely* r-selected (focused on having tons of kids but investing little in their upbringing) because r-selected cultures are more likely to become diluted through conversion to other cultures in just a few generations. Think about it: If your parents largely ignored you, would you feel a strong devotion to their culture?

> *If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at "Cultural Fidelity."*

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Cultural Amenities

Appealing amenities are commonly leveraged by cultures to ensure high birth rates and reduce bleed.

Common cultural amenities include:

- **Relationship Catalysts:** When a person cannot find a partner, they do not breed. To prevent this, some cultures have adopted systematized dating markets—like Mormon singles wards—while others simply assign partners (this can be done either by parents or by some centralized authority).
- **Relationship Norms:** It is far easier to embark on a relationship that features shared expectations and norms (meaning partners are not obligated to navigate mismatched expectations). Shared relationship norms offered by some cultures are especially helpful to those who like to live life on default settings (and would therefore find negotiating every point of a social contract to be uniquely stressful).
- **Status Mechanisms**: People are often drawn to cultures and organizations that offer clear paths for advancement (i.e., Once you do X, you advance to stage Y). Many cultures therefore offer clear promises of higher status and/or power to adherents who invest a certain amount of time and/or resources in the culture.
- **A Social Safety Net:** Many cultures provide their members—or in some cases their wider community—with a social safety net. Some cultures, like the Sikhs, go so far as to offer free food, medical services, and even child care. Schwertantrooper Amish go even further, with churches maintaining medical insurance funds and putting out an open plea when costs go above what the individual church has saved—which is almost always met. (Calvinist culture is rare in being one of the only cultures we can think of that effectively sees social safety nets as immoral.)
- **Psychological Support and Self-Narrative Writing:** Many cultures offer some form of psychological support, often helping adherents overcome psychological struggles while reframing

themselves as the only group capable of doing so. Scientology probably presents the most extreme example of this, but such practices are seen throughout any number of cultures, from Catholic confessionals to the roles some Rabbis play in their communities.

- **Protection from Danger:** Many cultures, through their prohibitions, shield adherents from major hazards, such as alcohol and gambling. Longstanding food prohibitions may also have featured protective properties, even if they no longer shield adherents from hazards in modern times.
- **Unique Reputations:** Some cultural traditions produce individuals with specialized social functions or reputations that offer advantages in job markets (e.g. "Oh, this guy will be great for the CIA—he is from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, so he's clean-cut, devoted, and fluent in a foreign language from his mission"). While cultures evolve into these roles due to social pressures, once they have developed, they can serve as a sense of identity, decreasing cultural bleed and making it easier to get jobs.
- **Unique Specializations:** Some cultures go so far as to develop guilds or caste systems that fill multiple professional roles within society. Such structures are rare today but can be found among some legacy cultures (not to mention sci-fi cultures—like that presented in *Brave New World*).

If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at "The Supervirus."

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Tragedy as a Source of Opportunity

Some readers may be interested in learning more about how we managed to convince ourselves there really may be some future God that guides us. We'll gladly offer more detail on how personal experience created a confirmation bias cascade and how our habit of interpreting setbacks as important signs or sources of opportunity can yield significant advantages.

Take me, Malcolm, for example: I had to be born into a wealthy, privileged family, lose everything, and grow up alone in the system in order to develop the worldview and critical thinking skills that now stand among my primary sources of competitive advantage. At the time, it felt horrible to have a Judge send me to private prison alternatives for kids (like in the book: *Holes*). Being a pre-teen and struggling for basic safety, food, and shelter, sucked. But if this hadn't happened, if I hadn't ended up mostly raising myself, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to become comfortable with suffering and self-reliance.

Without a first-hand understanding of the emptiness that accompanies opulent life, I might still desire one. The odds that someone so privileged, like me, in a Western society, could really understand starvation (being under 60 pounds and having to eat insects to not die) required an incredible confluence of events—a confluence that played a critical role in building my worldview. There is no reward behind the opulence, only hollowness, and the anticipation of suffering, the fear of it, can be more mentally crippling than the experience itself.

It should be obvious from this book how important kids are to us. When we found out Simone could not have children naturally, we were devastated. That said, had we not been forced to turn to IVF by this infertility—a product of Simone's severe teenage depression, which led to self-imposed starvation as a coping mechanism—we would not be able to have half as many kids as we are now set up to have (thanks to embryo banking). In other words, without what most would consider to be a major fertility setback, many of our kids would not have had the chance to exist at all.

When I got my dream job as a manager at Google, I thought I had made it. Had they not delayed my ultimate departmental placement for six months—to a point at which I completely ran out of money—I never would have taken another job, but in hindsight a management job at a bureaucratic organization like Google would have retarded my career and eroded my independent spirit.

Had my next dream job as Director of Strategy at Korea's top early-stage VC firm not ended after the arrest of many of my colleagues (for what were later proven to be trumped-up, politically motivated charges), I would have found myself once again destitute (I had sent all my savings to pay for Simone's graduate degree). Had that not happened, I wouldn't have spent time living with Simone's parents and gotten to know her mom well just before she passed away—nor would I have been free right at the same time Simone was graduating from Cambridge, allowing us to raise a fund together.

Running a travel empire going into the pandemic would seem like a horrible turn of events, yet it turned out to be the most perfect development imaginable: It gave us an opportunity to demonstrate to our investors that we would do anything to protect their investment—plus working for two years without pay put us on the market for side gigs, enabling Simone to spend a year as the Managing Director of Dialog (a secret society founded by Peter Thiel), which connected us with a myriad of high-level people, put us in a position to build out another high-impact network for Schmidt Futures (the Act 2 Network), and made the founding of our education initiative, CollinsInstitute.org, possible.

If you came from the main body of the book, feel welcome to jump back to "“Belief” vs. “belief”" now.

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The Immortality of a Vision

> *This chapter is an excerpt from* The Pragmatist's Guide to Governance. *It is provided to cover the specifics of the Holdeen tragedy.*

Throughout history, more people have fought and died on behalf of governance structures than about anything else. They often made this choice because they believed in the vision their governance structure claimed to represent—but what ensures that vision does not drift?

Despite being wealthy, Jonathan Holdeen went without. Until his death in 1967, he cooked in tin cans instead of pots, broke up produce crates to be burned as fuel in the winter, and even trimmed the hole-ridden sleeves from old sweaters, converting them into vests he would defiantly wear until they, too, fell apart.[65]

Holdeen saved so fastidiously in order to execute a visionary plan. He created a fund designed to grow forever until it reached a size capable of covering all the government expenses of the state of Pennsylvania, making Pennsylvania the first tax-free state. He had never lived in Pennsylvania, but picked the state as an homage to Benjamin Franklin, who had had a similar idea.[66]

Holdeen discussed this plan with the Unitarian Universalist Church of Boston, which agreed to support it. In exchange for being the conservator of this plan, they would even receive a portion of the fund's income every year. Given the Unitarian Universalist Church's reputation and the legal protections he put in place, Holdeen believed his legacy was in good hands.[67]

Of course, good men don't matter in an organization run by governing structures in which leadership can change. The Unitarian Church eventually decided the amount the fund was paying them every year wasn't enough—they wanted *all* its income—so they used the courts to take it. They presented the ridiculous argument that the fund would otherwise grow so

large it would pose a danger to global stability.[68] The courts agreed to give the church $1,000,000 of the $20,000,000 fund annually.[69] While it could have ended right there, even *that* wasn't enough for them: They went so far as to attack Holdeen's daughter, who had managed the trust (and in whose hands the trust outperformed the Dow Jones and Standard & Poor's stock averages)[70], suing her for mismanagement, self-dealing, and fraud in an attempt to get even more money ($12,000,000 more). They kept suing her until she was 84 years old—almost 30 years after Holdeen's death. The lawsuits were so regular she made a point of attending the Philadelphia flower show on her regular court visits and was able to brighten up her legal trips with visits to the floral extravaganza about eight times (early on, she would bring a friend, but then the Unitarian Church "got snotty about it" and she had to go alone).[71]

Jonathan Holdeen had created a similar fund for Hartwick College. This story has a slightly happier ending. Hartwick College didn't liquidate the money at least—or sue his children; they just kind of forgot about it. If you go to the school's website today, there is no mention of Mr. Holdeen, no building named after him, no scholarship named after him, no park bench—not even a luncheon despite his fund paying the college around half a million dollars a year. The money now just goes to pay "annual expenditures related to our physical plant"— essentially things like water bills and groundskeeper carts.[72]

Despite his long suffering, lofty goals, and lawyers' hand-wringing about his plan destroying society, Jonathan Holdeen now lies dead, almost completely forgotten, with dashed ambitions.

The moral of this story is that no matter what an organization tells you, no matter what they claim to believe, it can only be trusted as far as its organizational structure. This story is critical to remember whether you are designing the governing structure of a family office, a country, a nonprofit, or a religion. If you have long-term plans that extend past your death, understanding governance is critical. The fidelity of your dreams cannot be defended by a trustworthy person or clear mission statement—only your governance structure has the power to shield and perpetuate a legacy.

Even if you merely want to live a peaceful, happy, moderately productive life, you had better learn to navigate the hectic world of governance, within which we have no choice but to live.

> *If you came from the main body of the book, feel welcome to jump back to "Relativism & Justice-Motivated Belief Systems" now.*

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Cultural Conceptions of Time

Our personal metaphysical framework for the world significantly colors our perception of reality and influences our choices. We believe that while you are destined to make the types of choices you will make, that does not remove your responsibility for their outcome. Destiny is only about a person's place on a timeline. When you look at yesterday from the perspective of today, all of the decisions you made then are already set in stone, yet you still had free will when you made those choices—from the perspective of Yesterday You. Truth exists outside the timeline and so, too, does destiny.

Our view of time means that you are personally responsible for the future your choices manifest. You are just as culpable for every child you might have had but ultimately *didn't* have as you would be for painlessly erasing the existence and memory of those children if they already existed. Both decisions erase the existence of a person who would otherwise have existed.

Ours is not the only logically consistent view of time; it is just one product of the evidence we have on hand, modulated through our inherited cultural and religious tendencies. For example, someone with a secularized iteration of a Dharmic religion might be predisposed to see the universe as a cycle of constantly expanding and contracting realities (e.g., a Big Bang, a universe, and a big crunch leading to another Big Bang), as that metaphysical understanding of the world would be closer to a traditional Dharmic understanding of reality while not being any less aligned with the secular world's understanding of physical realities than our own.

If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at "End Times & Christian Cultures."

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Cultural Infrastructure

Some cultures maintain something like a central governance structure that monitors and guides them while others have no governance structure at all and a few have a system, rules, or hierarchy that can serve a role similar to a governance system without technically being one.

We have already addressed more straightforward central governance models practiced by groups like the LDS and Catholic churches. When we say these models are straightforward, we do not mean they are simple governance structures; we mean they are "generic" governance structures that you could construct without any unique cultural considerations after reading *The Pragmatist's Guide to Governance*. Functionally, they do not operate that differently from a state government.

Speaking of state governments: One model of cultural structure we recommend strictly avoiding is a culture that is either tied to the state or has aspirations of controlling the state infrastructure. Aspirations for controlling state infrastructure, without founding a new colony, will put a target on your culture's back—and for what? Running the state as a culture is not as great as one might imagine.

When your culture runs the state, overthrowing the state begins to necessitate overthrowing your culture as well. And what if the state gets taken over by an external force which in turn manipulates your culture? This was seen repeatedly in the history of the Catholic tradition (with Vatican City always being a target and many countries trying to create pretender Popes, which fractured the faith). Fortunately, the unique multistate structure of Catholicism protected it from being completely destroyed by these hazards, but would your culture be so well-positioned?

The Russian Orthodox church patriarch's obligation to kowtow to Putin and promote whatever he wants exemplifies how a religion can be compromised by melding with state infrastructure. That said, state control can be great in the short term and you *can* transition out of it. This can be seen in both the LDS Church and Islam which both experienced periods where all their branches were part of a single state under their control, both have evolved

past that. Generally, however, state control is worth neither the risk nor the effort.

Cultural governance gets really interesting when it invokes organic or unique components that make it function wildly differently than any state governance could. As we mentioned, Jewish culture presents an example of this, given its organically constructed hierarchy in which one's position is either determined by one's skill in legalistic argumentation, one's philosophical acumen, or the size of one's following.

This organic hierarchy allows individuals from unique Jewish factions to have a voice within the larger Jewish ecosystem and organically cross-pollinate different Jewish sub-branches (it facilitates much more theologically focused communication between factions than you get in groups like Protestants, which cross-denominationally interact more like Italian city-states from the Renaissance period). The emphasis on mastery of legalistic argumentation, while pedantic for our taste, leads to something of a filter within leadership for some level of general intelligence. Prioritizing legalistic argumentation over divine word (as can be seen from the Oven of Akhnai story, which we cited earlier) prevents any one individual within the hierarchy from asserting absolute dominance over others (e.g., by claiming that God spoke directly to *them* and so they must listen to everything *they* say).

Jewish culture doesn't hold a monopoly on cool, organic cultural governing systems. Academia presents another great example of the model. While academia lacks a central hierarchy, its model of peer-reviewed publications —and the way academics gain status by accumulating more citations on their research—is, on paper, intriguing. Academia's tenure model also seems great on paper.

As you may know from *The Pragmatist's Guide to Governance*, we believe that academia has almost entirely failed as a system. It is so thoroughly infected by the cultural supervirus that it has become reminiscent of a caterpillar filled by parasitoid worms that have already hollowed out its insides and can be seen crawling just under its skin. Academia demonstrates that while some structures of organic organization have withstood the test of time (Judaism being a case in point), not all structures of organic organization will. More importantly, academia demonstrates how organic

cultural governing systems are uniquely prone to infection by especially virulent brands of pop culture.

Many recently constructed cultures rely on online discussion groups and voting as core elements of cultural consensus building, as can be seen in movements such as the Less Wrong/Rationality and Effective Altruism movements. These systems seem great in theory but almost always produce a form of governance failure we call the “tyranny of the unemployed,” which we discuss in detail in *The Pragmatist’s Guide to Governance*. Essentially, these systems empower individuals with nothing else going on in their lives while lowering the influence of members who are successful outside of said culture.

> *The Tyranny of the Unemployed: Given that more competent individuals typically have more competing interests vying for their personal time, systems that allow a person to spend time and emotional effort to influence the direction of a culture will always trend toward those cultures' lesser instincts.*

Cultures with open meritocratic hierarchies (e.g., those based on getting upvotes in online forums) typically facilitate the rise of a small handful of genuinely substantive intellectuals only to become impenetrable to new entrants who weren’t in the foundational cohort and have some level of success in the “outside world.” After the initial group of intellectuals dies off, these communities often devolve into dogmatic, bureaucratic, and ineffective dominance hierarchy fights, with an increasing focus on gatekeeping and in-group language checks.

> *If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at “The House System.”*

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Cultural Rivalries

I (Malcolm) earned my undergraduate degree in the United Kingdom. While there, I had a lesbian friend who went to enormous lengths to hide her girlfriend from her parents. I thought nothing of this—assuming she was a closeted lesbian back home—until it came up casually in conversation that her parents knew she was gay. She later explained to me that she hailed from a traditional Glaswegian family and while they would never disown her for being gay, the same could not be said about dating a Roman Catholic (which her girlfriend happened to be). Glasgow even features Catholic and Protestant football teams.

Though our society likes to look down on cultural rivalries and grudges, the truth is that all strong cultures have them. Shared cultural rivalries strengthen cultural bonds. This can be seen in the much tighter ties individuals in the U.S. have to their universities due to collegiate sports rivalries—a bond not seen in the U.K. outside of the only two universities that culturally invest in sports and school rivalries (Oxford and Cambridge, where Simone went).

Rivalries tend to arise between groups that are very similar and physically close. Rivalries ensure cultural fidelity (preventing members from shifting between the rival groups) and reinforce cultural speciation. Were two physically and memetically close cultures to stitch up their differences, they would reform into a unified culture. The tendency for rivalries to arise between very similar—rather than different—cultures can be seen with conflict between Sunni vs. Shia Islamic sects and the Protestant-Catholic divide. The dynamic is best summarized and satirized by the “Judean People's Front” scene in *Monty Python's Life of Brian.*

Is it possible to create a cultural grudge that yields only “friendly” rivalry instead of discrimination and bias? We think so, and would love to see “friendly rivalries” fostered between Index Houses—rivalries focused on intergroup competition instead of hatred. This sort of rivalry has historically been kindled between branches of our families. In our childhoods, these rivalries made inter-family gatherings more interesting—as you got to see who was outcompeting who and whose methods of parenting really were

“superior." While rivalry isn’t universally enjoyed, some people need competition to motivate important life actions they should be taking anyway.

If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at “The Draw of the Sorting Hat.”

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Life Stages

I (Malcolm) was raised to see life as existing in explicit stages. The rule of thumb my grandfather taught me was that you should find a life partner and educate yourself as much as possible in your 20s, build your wealth in your 30s, sell or pass down all your actively managed companies in your 40s, and after the age of 50, dedicate yourself 100% to public service.

While his framework served my ancestors well, I think it can be expanded to be more useful and applicable to a broad range of wise life choices while still providing a good roadmap for descendants. As society changes, this roadmap should also adapt, and of course you may adjust this roadmap or its general premise to your own personal cultivar.

Reviewing roadmaps like these at least once every year—if not on a holiday like Future Day or New Year's, then perhaps on a birthday—can help kids (not to mention adults) chart out new plans and recalibrate.

Stage 1: 0-13 (Up to Adolescence):

What This Stage is Like: At this stage, biological instincts will lead you to respect your parents more than you probably should. You will also be able to gain happiness from play and imagination in a manner that will not be possible at older ages. For most of this period, you will be unburdened by sexual desire and benefit from an unusually clear mind that you will not be able to regain until after you find a stable (and aligned) partner as an adult.

Your Goals:

1. **Determine who you are vis-a-vis the world and build an identity.**
2. Incorporate your culture and its goals into that identity. For example, protection of (in order) sapience, life, and the human

species is the personal responsibility of all members of House Collins. Who do you need to be to serve that role best?

3. **Learn as much as possible, with a focus on STEM skills, communication, and philosophy** (skills necessary to independently decide what is worth doing and how to do it yourself). Your brain is the core tool you will be using throughout your life—give it every advantage possible.
4. **Play—and play hard.** Play is about testing personal, interpersonal, and societal boundaries in a low-stakes environment. It teaches you when and how much to push and bestows you with personal resilience. When robbed of play, people fail to learn how to overcome their own personal boundaries and deal with others' limitations, plus are trained to appeal to authority when encountering differences.

Stage 2: 14-18 (Up to Legal Adulthood)

What This Stage is Like: At this stage of your life, you will feel an intense drive to believe that you are special and different from your ancestors. While this instinct may help you develop a more independent identity, it may also draw you into self-indulgent fantasies (e.g., you have magical powers). You will underestimate your parents. You will also begin to feel sexual desire—but more than that, you will find yourself in a cultural context that judges status by your ability to acquire (or at least garner interest from) high-quality romantic partners.

Your brain will be uniquely sensitive to your social position. Do your best to ignore your mind's obsessive calls to care about what your local social groups think. Almost nobody you meet at this age will matter in your adult life. Your peers today are training dummies—nothing more. Outside of family, any emotional attachments you build should be contextualized as being for training purposes and experimentation only. Make no meaningful sacrifices to impress them or endear them to you (whether that is spending money, getting tattoos, performing dangerous stunts, or trying addictive

drugs). Ardently avoid any actions that will forge unbreakable bonds (like pregnancy).

Many people experience higher levels of emotional turmoil and suffering at this stage than at any other stage in their lives. Beyond the fact that hormonal shifts can make life miserable, teenagers are not legal adults, empowered to determine how they live their own lives—rather, they are forced to live with other people on their terms. People who insist that “these are the best years of your life” are either misremembering their own adolescence or experiencing failed adulthood (something proper utilization of this life stage will prevent from happening).

Your Goals:

1. **Practice romance and dating.** Utilize whatever tools you have at your disposal to learn how to secure partners—but *only* for practice. You are not at an age at which you are likely to find a good, lifelong partner (it is unlikely that an optimal partner for you just happens to be one of the ~500 people you have thus far met). Teach yourself to identify and control the emotions associated with dating. Learn to identify signs that someone is emotionally dangerous or otherwise unstable. You should leave this stage of your life single, but with proficiency in securing romantic partners.
2. **Set yourself up for a strong career trajectory.** It is during adolescence when society begins to sort people into those allowed to rise to the top and those who will permanently be working class. If you leave adolescence on a working-class path, it will be incredibly hard to switch, later, to an elite trajectory (and vice versa). For this reason, you will have to work harder at this stage of life than any other. Take solace in the knowledge that, so long as you put in sufficient effort at this crucial time, the rest of your life will be dramatically easier.
3. **Seek out novel information.** Leverage this time to build yourself into the most effective tool possible once you reach adulthood. This entails (among other things) sourcing information and world perspectives your parents' generation did not consider due to biases that you don’t yet hold. Genuine creativity requires an extensive and varied mental library of worldviews, concepts, and domains,

which allows you to form associations others would never recognize. Now is a great time to build that library.
4. **Socialize and experiment with other cultures:** Learn to see the world from the perspective of a few other cultures by learning how to navigate them. This entails joining some youth subcultures and learning how to become “popular” within them by traversing their social hierarchies—as well as potentially learning how to work through the hierarchies of cultures outside those in which you were raised. These skills will pay dividends in adulthood, when an understanding of how to sell to and interact with people who have a different world framing plays a crucial role in your advancement.

Recommendations and Warnings:

1. "Ugh, did you just breathe and act like a loving, parental figure? DISGUSTING!" At this age, everything your parents do will start to offend you or feel embarrassing and you will begin to look down on your parents. While we expect you to become better than us, we doubt we are capable enough to ensure that happens by your early teens. These emotions are genetically ingrained and something for which you will need to logically correct.
2. We recommend waiting until around the age of 17 to have sex (and don’t feel obligated to have sex *at any age* unless you really feel it’s right—for women, especially, a choice to have many versus few sexual partners can impact how you experience love and pair bonding for the rest of your life; refer to *The Pragmatist’s Guide to Sexuality* for more detail). Sex generally sucks until you get good at it, so don’t go into your first time with high expectations and do your research.
3. If you’re female, don’t get pregnant. Especially if you are autistic, never allow yourself to be alone with a guy unless you actively want and expect to have sex with him.
4. If you’re male, don’t get someone pregnant. Avoid sex with anyone who you think is emotionally unstable enough to attempt to get pregnant without your consent.
5. Don’t give out expensive gifts; it is unlikely you will meet someone at this age who warrants any serious sacrifice of personal

or family resources.

6. If you must experiment with drugs, only do so with non-addictive substances and only *try* them (there is no reason to do a drug more than twice). Be aware that mind-altering substances will have a permanent effect on your intelligence and cognition, with some hallucinogens having the potential to forcibly twist deeply-held beliefs into a bland "oneness/connectedness" ideology.
7. Note that mind-altering substances don't hold a monopoly on addiction. Don't waste time or money collecting baubles or on Skinner box games and social apps.
8. If you are having trouble controlling your basic bodily urges (such as libido), naltrexone might help, but should only be turned to as a solution of last resort. Prepare to feel tempted to do really, really, catastrophically dumb things in an attempt to secure sexual partners at this stage of your life.
9. If you are interested in learning more about your sexuality, refer to *The Pragmatist's Guide to Sexuality* for practical information and advice.
10. (From Malcolm) If you want to explore another culture at this stage, check out *The Book of the SubGenius*. While technically satire, it is a functional and internally coherent culture and theology that will serve you well in your teens.

Stage 3: 19-30 (Young Adulthood)

What This Stage is Like: This will be your first period of life with an "adult brain." This is not to say that your brain isn't playing tricks on you, just that most of the tricks it will play on you are the same ones you will experience throughout your life. As most geniuses produce their greatest works at this stage, don't underestimate yourself but also don't spend the whole period chasing butterflies.

Your Goals:

1. **Launch your career.** Work on a concrete and recognized career path while igniting your first entrepreneurial ventures on the side.
2. **Find your life partner:** You must find a spouse within this window (or someone with whom to have children if you choose another relationship structure). Refer to *The Pragmatist's Guide to Relationships* for guidance.
3. **Start saving and investing**. You should aim to save around 35% of your income, with 40% of what you save going toward personal entrepreneurial projects and 60% being invested.
4. **Create a fertility fund.** Unless you are in a strong position to begin having kids immediately, you should save enough money to bank embryos at a later date. Keep in mind that embryo banking—at least with current technology and solutions—will require several rounds of IVF and be quite costly.
5. **Move to a major city.** If cities are still optimal places for career advancement and partner sourcing, move to a strategically favorable city. Keep in mind that, just as some cities are better than others for advancing in certain industries, some cities are better than others for securing partners as a particular gender. Your goal should be to make a favorable arbitrage play on both fronts, choosing a city in which you have an unfair advantage professionally *and* romantically (see *The Pragmatist's Guide to Relationships* for more details).

Recommendations and Warnings:

1. Avoid the temptation of academia. While in college, this can seem like an easy and prestigious pathway, it is not—and the field may not be around forever.
2. If you want to travel, do it now. Learn how to live out of one carry-on suitcase for months on end. Be willing to do whatever you can to move your career forward—and this includes living in strange places.
3. Finding a spouse will be a full-time job during this period of your life—one you will hold *in addition* to your primary job. Aim to go on five dates a week for around two and a half years. If you're clever, you will develop ways to enjoy the process (e.g., by

creating competitive dating circles among friends) and use it to build a strong professional network (e.g., by talking business with dates and always trying to be helpful to them, making connections and orchestrating solutions for them when opportunity strikes, regardless of their fit as a life partner).

4. If you live in a city at this life stage, remember your stay is temporary. Don't put down roots. Never "sit down." You go to a city to "run" both romantically and professionally—not to perpetually chill with the same group of friends.
5. Don't optimize your life around adolescent desires as they will grow hollow and far less satisfying, just as imagination play became less pleasurable in adolescence. While you are still likely to enjoy things you started appreciating in adolescence, such as dating, traveling, freedom, and casual sex, they will become less satisfying after you find yourself in a loving, secure relationship—and especially after you become a parent. (This advice comes with the warning that all bodies are different and some brains may not turn off these desires or go through the second shift we mention here.)

Stage 4: 30-50 (Adulthood)

What This Stage is Like: This is the stage of life your brain will go through the changes associated with being a parent. This will change your cognitive processing more than you anticipate. You will begin to find it hard to experience happiness from many of the things you used to enjoy and instead your primary source of happiness will become sharing new experiences with your kids.

Your Goals:

1. **Bank embryos.** As soon as you have found the right person with whom to have kids (or as soon as you are ready to select genetic material for your kids—like a sperm or egg donor), spend a year banking embryos to build up a supply sufficient to have the family

you desire. Embryo banking will only become more costly and less successful with each passing year.
2. **Start your family.** If you have a child every 18 months, all but your youngest child will have no memory of life without a youngest sibling, which can reduce the shock of welcoming new family members and increase closeness among siblings.
3. **(30-40) Maximize income.** As these are your highest income-producing years, you should expect to transition to a passive income within 20 years and your saving rate should reflect that.
4. **(40-50) Transition to public service:** At this stage you should be transitioning to a 100% focus on public service. This can be working for the Index, spreading our culture through media creations, government work, non-profit work, or any other job focused on spreading our culture and public benefit."
5. **Drive socialization.** After graduating from school/university, most adults stop meeting new people and ease into fairly isolated social circles. If you take the initiative to organize social gatherings, introduce people to each other, and essentially become friends' source of new friends and ideas, all sorts of interesting opportunities will arise.
6. **Leave the city.** Once your partnership and careers are secure, shift to a more rural living arrangement to give your kids a good childhood and enjoy more affordable childcare, food, and services.

Recommendations and Warnings:

- When considering where to live with your young family, consider what is within driving distance, as air travel becomes increasingly cumbersome once you have more than two kids.
- Don't rely overly on societies, clubs, work, or any other organizations or outside forces to be your solution to socializing; membership can be fleeting and all groups offer diminishing returns once you've met most active members.
- Become a nexus of socialization for others by hosting events. Consider renting an apartment in a nearby major city (or in several cities) once every other month or so for two nights in a row (with the kids staying home with a sitter or family). Over those two

nights, host back-to-back gatherings (e.g., two dinners; one lunch) to which you invite a mix of top-tier personal contacts and high-profile strangers. So long as you put effort into sending thoughtful invites and putting together well-curated gatherings, you will be surprised by who shows up.
- Begin to aggressively position yourself for public service.
- Prepare to correct for a bias toward acquiring and improving property (as adults seem to be driven by a weird “nest and fortify” instinct during this stage) to ensure you only invest when it is logically sound to do so.

Stage 5: 50+ (Seniority)

What This Stage is Like: With the caveat that we have not personally experienced this life stage, evidence at our disposal suggests that stereotypes around “tribal elders” ring true to a large extent. In terms of shifting sources of joy, people in this age range (at least from our third-party observation) appear to disproportionately enjoy mentorship, advisory roles, and cultivation of younger generations. This suggests that taking on a more active role as an investor, board member, mentor, advisor, and grandparent will provide meaningful satisfaction (not to mention value for those assisted).

Your Goals:

1. **Enter public service.** At this stage you should be primarily focused on public service and not active income generation.
2. **Support your children.** A major focus of your life at this point should be helping your kids with child care. Plan to locate near the largest cluster of them to help with this.
3. **Let the next generation rise.** By the age of 60, your kids should lead the family and its culture as you ease into an advisory role and resource. You are a pawn on their chessboard, not the other way around (so long as they have upheld the integrity of the family's culture).

4. **Prepare for death well before the end is imminent.** Keep in mind that end-of-life care and post-death complications can tear families apart. Rather than subject your family to that stress and put it at risk, approach end-of-life planning with the same rigor you approached navigating life with a partner: Systematically think through everything that can go wrong and set systems in place to ensure a smooth transition.

Recommendations and Warnings:

- Though "use it or lose it" applies to one's body and mind throughout life (this is a very common trend we see in peer-reviewed research on a myriad of physical and mental performance measures), the principle especially applies as age advances. If you want a sharp mind, you will need to challenge it—to the point of pushing your own boundaries and limits—constantly. If you want a healthy body, you will need to exercise, move, and push it daily. The post-1950s picture of retirement (a period during which someone just "relaxes") is a fast pass to mental and physical death.
- It is at this stage that more adults begin to become "set in their ways." Prepare to correct for this—even if correction comes at a cost. For example, psychedelics can reintroduce mental flexibility at the cost of rendering you more gullible; taking sabbaticals and moving to new locations can reintroduce flexibility, but also dampen professional momentum as you pursue roles in public service.

Note: "Reminiscence bump" is a term used in psychology to describe a weird trend for adults (people over 40) to have more memories of things that happened in their adolescence and early childhood than later in their life (note, this may not be an age thing but rather a "lots of new experiences" thing, as you also see it in immigrants for the period after they immigrated). Some cultures may eventually find a way to leverage this to its benefit.[73]

Stage Transition Celebrations

Many cultures use rituals or parties to mark major milestones, such as the transition to adulthood (e.g., Quinceañeras, Bar Mitzvahs, etc.), partnered life (e.g., engagement parties, bachelor/bachelorette parties, and weddings), and parenthood (e.g., gender reveal parties, baby showers, and christenings). Today, coming-of-age and pair-bonding ceremonies get the most investment and air time, though a growing number of pronatalist cultures will hopefully reintroduce fanfare around parenthood.

Coming-of-age ceremonies often involve “leaving home” in some way and being given some “secret information” while performing a difficult task. While we may think of this as something relegated to tribal cultures, a pervasive modern manifestation can be found across our cultural ecosystem: College. In fact, our wider society goes so far as to treat individuals who did not undergo this ritual as if they never became “true adults."

The ritualistic role of college may explain in part why it has been so slow to die as a cultural institution even after its utility has dwindled in relation to its cost. Intentionally designed or reinforced cultivars can leverage the apparent social hunger for coming-of-age rituals to create rites of passage that outperform universities in equipping young adults to flourish and thrive (both professionally and mentally).

Partnership ceremonies—weddings, mostly—need a cultural makeover. Committing to a partnership involves reinventing one’s identity, meaning these ceremonies shouldn’t be about status signaling or “female partner indulgence” per se, but rather communicating to the partnership’s family and wider social network: “This is what we stand for, value, and represent as a combined entity.” While a one-off ceremony and afterparty (the standard Western wedding format today) can be used to communicate this in part, there may be far more meaningful ways to signal a partnership’s identity and set it up for a strong start. For cultivars within the Index, this may also involve the inauguration of the partnership’s House.

Though parenthood celebrations have enjoyed a recent and mostly dubious resurgence in interest via the rise of the “gender reveal party” (complete with deaths, forest fires, and millions of dollars of damage),[74] present-day

parenthood celebrations (including baby showers and christenings) don't do much to motivate parenthood, equip people to become successful parents, or provide support to fledgling families. Here is another opportunity for intentionally designed or reinforced cultivars to support high birth rates through newly coined celebrations that prepare, elevate, and support members who choose to have kids.

If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at "The Index's Role in Teen Rebellion."

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Childhood

Should kids be allowed to play unsupervised? At what age should people start working? How are childhood conflicts best resolved?

In *Albion's Seed*, a book that anyone who enjoyed this book should check out, David Hackett Fischer posits that the United States was founded by four core groups whose differing views of children's wills produced varied approaches to child rearing.

- The Puritans largely felt that a child should have their will broken and that the will of a child was intrinsically evil. That said, they also put a lot of trust in their children and worked to foster their independence and professional development (as can be seen in practices like "sending out").
- The Southern colonies largely felt children should have their wills indulged and directed to specific outcomes. While male children were given a wide degree of freedom, female children were held to strict standards.
- In addition to broadly respecting children's inherent wisdom and inner light, the Quakers believed in nudging children's character toward the "correct culture" and were generally very protective around the ideas and perspectives with which their children were permitted to interact (similar to today's helicopter parents).
- The back country people believed the flames of a child's will should be stoked and fondly reinforced willful behavior and independence (while not bestowing too much respect—it is from this cultural set that "little shits" emerged as a term of endearment for children).

These varying cultural views on children produced meaningfully different types of adults in each culture. The same goes for any culture you choose to build or reinforce, so think carefully: **What do I want adults within this culture to become, and what do they need to experience in childhood to nudge them in that direction?**

To spark your creativity around these questions, we'll briefly explore them through the lens of three clusters of issues: play and authority, sex and death, and developing engaging, interesting adults.

Approaches to Play and Authority in Childhood

Whether and how cultures encourage children to play and relate to authority figures has a profound effect on how people ultimately navigate power dynamics and push boundaries as adults. Rather than present a dry outline of different approaches, we'll share how Malcolm's family traditions around play and authority exemplified a certain cultural view, which provides an illustration of one approach that may help you better think through an optimal approach to *your* cultivar's child rearing ways.

> *For context, while Malcolm's family had Calvinist origins, they came from the backcountry rather than the Puritan variant of Calvinism. This means their approach to child rearing focused on strengthening the will of the child.*

Knowing from popular media that parents should be mad when their kids get in trouble at school, I (Malcolm) was shocked the first time my mother picked me up from detention and didn't show a whiff of disappointment. Instead, she told me that elementary school teachers made almost no money and that other adults did not respect them. "If they were competent," she continued, "they would have gotten better jobs."

My mother insisted that I would not become the man I needed to be if I learned to be obedient to such people. So far as my mother was concerned, as long as I acted with integrity, got decent grades, and protected the weaker kids, detention for disobedience was a virtue. She told me people had to earn my respect and never expect it because they happen to be in a position of authority over me.

This led my brother and me to have a pretty unusual relationship with our teachers growing up—to the extent that we found a recent report card from

my brother in kindergarten in which a livid teacher reports that she had passed half a year thinking my brother was partially deaf, only to realize he just selectively ignored everything she said. I even remember being scolded myself once when a teacher told my mom I had “done the right thing” by getting an authority figure to help when I saw a kid being bullied. On the way home, my mom chastised me, emphasizing that “nobody respects a pathetic little snitch” and that I should have taken matters into my own hands (“That’s what fists are for!”).

Below is an excerpt from my brother’s kindergarten report card, which was written while we were living in Italy (a country that demands obedience from children):

> *At first we thought he had a hearing disability because of his slowness in responding to directions. He gave the impression of being vague and disposed to day-dreaming. Now that we know him better we realize he is deliberately turning a deaf ear to everything he does not wish to hear. It does not interest him to listen unless it is something which appeals to him. ... He can be extremely disobedient; authority means nothing to him whatsoever. He has struck up a friendship with an equally mischievous companion and together they cause havoc. ...*
>
> *Nevertheless, he is a dear little boy. ... Better luck in September”*

While people from cultures that expect children to respect arbitrary authority figures would read the above letter and assume that my brother was a “spoiled” child, those from cultures like ours would see him ignoring this patronizing figure who expects mindless obedience as a sign of willingness to push back against unjust authority even when the odds are against him.

Essentially, we were systematically taught to neither respect authority figures nor trust them to solve problems. While I think my mom went *way* too far, I see the cultural wisdom in this strategy. First, she wasn’t wrong: Kids over-value the perspectives of teachers and are probably better off deciding for themselves how the world really works and what is moral vs. immoral.

What will become to someone if they grow up being taught to trust authority figures to accurately discern right from wrong? This has been a pervasive child rearing strategy for the past few decades and the susceptibility it has bred into the population makes it easy prey to the cultural supervirus.

Cultures that don't allow their kids to work out conflict for themselves risk creating individuals who will consistently appeal to authority to solve problems—little fascists. Just imagine the type of adult that will emerge from a child who always calls upon their teacher (an authority figure) to resolve conflicts. It should come as no surprise the epidemic of I-want-to-speak-to-your-manager-style Karens exploded just a few decades after the public school system normalized teachers as arbitrators of disputes (as opposed to letting kids duke it out on the play yard). Nor should it be a surprise that shriekers have learned to react to every offense by lashing out in anger—not with the offender, but with the authority of the mob in hopes that it, in turn, punishes the offender on their behalf.

In my family, it was expected kids would go out, have fun, get hurt, and work it out on their own. This wasn't the product of some intentional parenting technique. My parents weren't watching us from a distance, saying: "Yes, dear; look at them learning how to navigate each other's boundaries and build personal resilience" (more like "Those little shits just drove the four wheeler into the pond again!"). Rather, their culture had subconsciously programmed them to raise kids with grit who took risks, knew their limits, chose their battles wisely (for the most part), and addressed conflict head on, in the moment, rather than submitting complaints, tattling, or developing resentments. **That's the power of cultural traditions around child rearing. Desired outcomes aren't limited to kids of overachieving parents.**

It is up to you to determine an approach to authority, play, boundary pushing, and conflict resolution that works well for your culture, its values, and its priorities. Just be aware of the downstream consequences of encouraging children to appeal to authority in a world in which the authorities may not always have their or your culture's best interests in mind.

Approaches to Sexuality and Death in Childhood

Another question any culture must ask is when you should introduce a child to certain concepts like sexuality or death. When considering your own cultivar's approach to this question, think carefully about how you want them to contextualize sex and death in adulthood.

As mentioned earlier in the book, Quakers were so slow to do this that when adult Quaker women went to doctors' offices, they would often describe anything from their neck to their belt lines as their "stomach" and anything from their belt line to their feet as their "ankle."

Calvinists went in an entirely different direction, being outright pornographic in their writing to the extent that it was censored when published up until this century.[75] Calvinists were so upfront with concepts like death that historians have found cases of parents asking their kids to stand over empty graves and contemplate their deaths.

To a great extent, the predominating modern pop cultures go so far as to avoid teaching children about death at all. Doctors fight to keep terminally ill patients alive at all costs in many cases, even if doing so only means a few more days of life (at the expense of the patient's personal comfort and their children's inheritance). People don't "die" they "pass away" or even "transition" (which makes death all the more confusing given changing gender norms). Dead bodies are whisked away and cremated. Arguably, this produces adults unable to deal with death and dying—perhaps because it feels like something went wrong, as though death isn't supposed to happen.

Default pop cultural approaches to sex are even more confusing. When not politicized, sex is often framed as a currency for validation. If your culture doesn't present alternative childhood framings for death and sex, it will—in many developed Western nations—produce adults with some pretty useless cultural toolsets for approaching sex and death.

How do you want *your* culture to relate to sex and death? Create traditions and practices that shape people into adults equipped to behave as desired. Because we, personally, want a culture that sees sex as a practical affair and

death as a normal part of life, we (among other things) adopted a dog—the Professor—who we will both breed and eventually lose to old age. Throughout her life, the Professor will teach our kids about sex and death in a manner that reinforces our culture's values without any tedious pontification on our part.

Approaches to Creating Interesting Adults

A final question about childhood we did not think to ask until recently is: How can we prevent our kids from becoming dull adults? We recently met with a childhood friend and for lack of a less crude term, she was the most "basic" human with whom we have ever interacted. She didn't have a single unique idea in her head. Worse, she was a poor conversationalist, which compounded the problem.

Chickens used to qualify as "free range" so long as they were given the option to leave their cages. A trick chicken farms would use was to raise chickens in cages and only open *adult* chickens' cage doors to give them the "option" of leaving. Being acculturated to staying inside their cages, the chickens would never leave, making them functionally caged chickens from the perspective of how much space the chicken farmers needed. Human children face a similar risk.

After discussing why this person had become so boring, we realized that, like one of these chickens, her entire childhood was spent living in one place with a static friend group. She had never needed to build a unique personal identity or learn to engage with new people. An underrated cultural question may therefore be: Are you OK with your children maintaining a static friend group? If not, how do you coax them into the types of difficult situations that will sharpen their interpersonal skills?

Anecdotally, we have noticed that people who grew up constantly moving or around cultures wildly different from their own (a different country, for example) typically have the most engaging adult personalities (so long as their parents encouraged them to engage with those other cultures). Is it worth a child's potential resentment to subject them to moves like these,

which are admittedly difficult? It all comes down to how much your culture values interesting adults.

If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at "Cultural Identifiers."

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Cultural Motivators

While cultures use a myriad of tools—which we'll call "cultural motivators"—to incentivize behavior in line with their values, the tools themselves are difficult to parse out and research.

What makes cultural motivators so hard to research is that they are not systematically recorded outside of pop cultural stereotypes. For example, if stereotypes are to be believed, maternal guilt is a prominent motivational tool in families that are culturally Jewish and Greek.[76] Presumably, when mothers on television act in this stereotypical fashion, audiences laugh because it rings true to them in some way. Is this cultural stereotype accurate? We have no idea but it differs radically from my family's parenting practices.

Rather than guilt me, my (Malcolm's) mother attempted to motivate me by claiming my actions would have an effect on me in the future: "If don't learn to fix your lisp, you will sound effeminate and even fat chicks won't fuck you," she'd say—or "If you don't improve your grades, you won't be able to get a real job and no one will respect you."

Why does a cultivar evolve one reward mechanism, such as guilt, over another, such logical self-interest, and what positive and negative effects do contrasting systems produce? Honestly, it is hard to construct theories based only on cultural stereotypes. While we can draw meaningful inferences from stories and worship patterns when exploring how a culture sees truth, it's incredibly difficult to gather representative data on subtle ways in which cultural members—be they parents and children, preachers and parishioners, or fellow members—interact. As such, we will narrow our focus to possible cultural motivators we believe we have seen in the wild.

Group Exclusion

Group exclusion (outside of just murder, which is fairly rare these days in developed countries) is the nuclear variant of cultural motivators. Contrary to other punishment options, once excluded, the punished individual will

rarely rejoin the group. The prospect of exclusion is meant to exist, primarily, as a threat.

Group exclusion is used by most hard cultures including Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, Mormons, and Swartzentruber Amish. Cutting someone off from their family and friends can be a powerful motivator to fall in line when an individual has been socialized in a culture that is different enough from the surrounding society that they will have trouble fitting in. Exclusion from Amish and Jehovah's Witness communities has an added sting as these cultures systematically dissuade adherents from getting higher education, making it difficult to achieve financial self-sufficiency on the outside.

Exclusion as a cultural enforcement mechanism evolved in a time when the societies that surrounded these groups offered poorer social safety nets than those which exist today. With the rise of the internet, where even the weirdest of freaks can find a welcoming community, this mechanism has become increasingly ineffective. This is favorable development; exclusion strikes us as a uniquely cruel and unethical tactic.

Maternal Guilt

This mechanism appears frequently among cultures in which the family unit plays a major role in one’s self conception. It appears to be a mechanism to allow for maternal control of the family unit while also allowing that control to be exercised in a way that emphasizes traditional concepts of femininity (e.g., without heavy-handed dominance).

Maternal guilt is useful if you wish to develop a culture with tight-knit family units in which women are powerful but nevertheless traditionally feminine. Notable downsides of maternal guilt-tripping include its emotionally taxing nature, its potential for modeling toxic behavior if excessively used or misused, and its tendency to be abused by narcissists.

Shame/Guilt

Shame/guilt-motivating cultivars operate by implying that an unrealistic expectation is realistic and suggesting members should feel bad when failing to meet it. Achievable goals are rarely the focus of shame-based tactics. Just search online for "high expectations Asian father" memes—

common punchlines involve comically unrealistic expectations: “You’re five years old? When I was your age, I was six.” The point of this shame is to drive members of the culture as close to a perfect ideal as possible, even if true perfection is unachievable.

In addition to being common among Quaker and non-Calvinist Evangelical Protestant groups (Calvinist traditions see shame as prioritizing the subjective emotional state of the individual and thus as indulgent), shame/guilt is heavily leveraged by the cultural supervirus.

It’s ironic that shame/guilt is so commonly used by cultivars as a motivational device seeing as it is quite often counterproductive. In *The Pragmatist’s Guide to Sexuality*, we highlight statistics showing a high correlation between porn-shaming and porn consumption by region—at a ratio of almost one to one.

Shame/guilt culture spreads not because it is effective but because shaming is emotionally rewarding, great at non-violently sorting dominance hierarchies, and making cultural adherents feel indebted to their culture for accepting them despite their apparent unworthiness.

> *Note: An entire cottage industry has emerged around hair splitting between shame and guilt cultures, but we see the difference as trivial in function.*

Logical Self-Interest

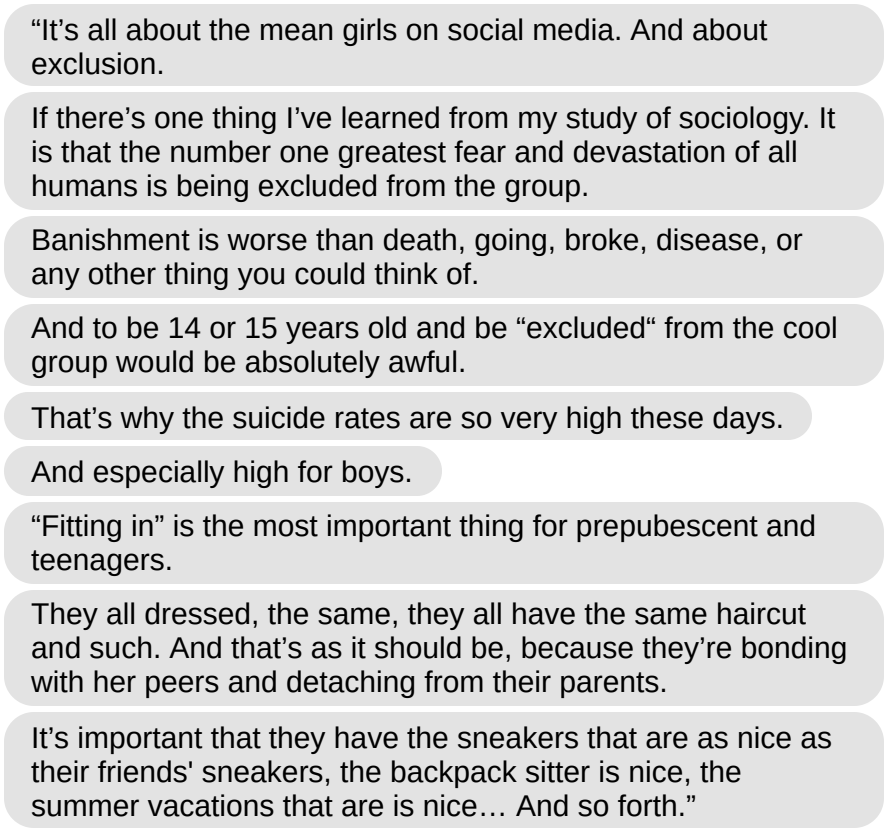
Cultures motivate adherents with logical self-interest by highlighting the consequences of various actions in an honest and rational manner. Though biased in its favor, we would say this tactic is healthy and effective when deployed well—but expert deployment requires understanding what the target *actually wants*.

For example, here is an email Simone and I received from my mom a few days ago in response to our being in the press again for our pronatalist and education reform advocacy:

> “I can’t believe you are wasting time with such a STUPID subject. I could care less what happens in the future.
>
> I care deeply about you having the brilliant success you were raised for.
>
> And, you are wasting your most valuable years on bullshit.”

Anyone who knows us understands that a shot at improving humanity’s future is more important to us than fame or fortune. If my mother understood that, she would be much better able to model our behavior and convince us to do what she wants.

What does it look like when this is used successfully? Here is a series of texts from my mom trying to get us to buy nicer things for our kids:



This second chain *did* model our perspective well enough to get us to change our minds on the way we were attempting to do some things with our daughter.

Group Pride and Honor

This motivator holds that one gains “honor” or some analogous concept by upholding group morals. Japanese culture presents a classic example of this, though honor as an incentive crops up across cultures. Most people who have a connection to their birth culture feel this to some extent. While in harder cultures, honor codes are clearly communicated and universally agreed upon, soft culture adherents are typically obligated to “make up” a code of honor and conflicting codes can dilute overall feelings of group pride.

Honor is one of the most useful cultural motivators. In addition to sustainably motivating actions in line with a culture's values, codes of honor make it easier to broadcast cultural values to outsiders. If a particular culture is good at ensuring its members live by its code of honor, they may find it easier to get jobs after positive stereotypes around that honor code spread throughout wider society.

Group pride increases the more special it feels to be a member of a group. Orthodox Jewish culture is great at boosting pride by making it extremely hard to convert through practices like triple rejection of attempted converts. Perhaps we will develop a similar mechanism around joining the Index.

Personal Pride and Self Sufficiency

This motivator leverages a dual belief that one can choose to be—and is expected to choose to choose to be—genuinely unique *and* superior to other people, implying an obligation to act in a manner deserving of such superiority (similar to noblesse oblige but not necessarily tied to wealth).

It is very different from the superficially similar group pride cultural motivator in that each child raised within a culture that cultivates personal pride is convinced that they, personally—not because of their group membership—can choose to be better than other people and are destined for greatness if they do so. Personal pride often correlates with beliefs that the average person is uniquely wretched, generally lazy, and untrustworthy, which incentivizes self-sufficiency.

The biggest downside to this motivator is that it drives those who are not objectively successful in the traditional sense or who do not command

respect to back out of society (often to adopt a rural lifestyle or take jobs far away from others, like fire watch stations). It is very difficult for people raised in these cultivars to live around others who are inarguably more successful than them along every metric. This view is furthermore only compatible with worldviews that expect varying levels of integrity and competence from different people, which is a non-starter for many who see all people as absolutely equal regardless of their life choices. In addition, this view can bestow those who hold it with an air of snobbish elitism that grates on members of other cultures.

This belief in inequality is not racist in nature among personal-pride-motivated groups (and these are often some of the least racist of all groups). Why? Because they think they are better than other people *due to who they have chosen to be*, not due to any cultural or ethnic affiliation. As such, anyone else can also choose to be better. However, this belief is in some ways more dehumanizing than racism; at least racists think the people they look down upon had no choice in their inferior status. Those with strong senses of personal pride and self-sufficiency have trouble regarding those who only expect from themselves what society expects from them as equals.

In the same breath, people in these groups typically see anyone who chooses to hold themselves to higher standards than others as kin regardless of their ideology or group affiliation. The kinship these groups feel with even members of groups in direct ideological opposition to them can cause suspicion in allies from different cultural groups.

Despite these drawbacks, personal pride is one of the predominant cultural motivators with which I (Malcolm) was raised and it plays a key role in our House's "descendant worship" theological structure. We chose it because its negative effects disproportionately burden its least productive members while its positive effects increase the likelihood that a culture's most promising members achieve outsized success.

If you could make a cultural choice that increased the productivity of your most productive cultural members by X% but also decreased the productivity of your least productive members by the same X%, taking that choice would dramatically increase the total output of your culture. In addition, it lowers the risk of a culture attempting truly immoral action

through not framing the people arrayed against it as threats that must be wiped out but rather as petulant children who need to be helped—a useful feature in a culture that values diverse societies.

Responsibility

Cultivars that wield responsibility as a cultural motivator constantly emphasize the idiocy and sloth of those in power (it is commonly used by cultivars that also leverage personal or group pride). They frame the world as going to shit and point out that no one is going to save it unless the cultivar's adherents take personal responsibility. These cultures frequently feature a tinge of "prepperism," especially among less successful members who don't feel they have a shot at "saving the world" themselves—so they might as well prepare for social collapse.

This cultural motivator was big in my (Malcolm's) family but is also fairly common across Pentecostal cultivars. While I am not sure how emotionally healthy it is, the more I meet those who actually run things, the more my family is vindicated. My family was not being arrogant when they told me very few people are competently working to fix things.

Because this cultural motivator leverages a truism about world leadership to motivate action while encouraging members to swing for the fences, we (my family) will continue to utilize it. As one of our favorite movies puts it: What differentiates a full member of their cultural group is that they have "the courage to make the safety of the human race their personal responsibility." (This might be similar to the Jewish concept of Tikkun olam but this concept appears to be slightly less elitist and disparaging of others than its secular Calvinist equivalent.)

Withholding Love and Support

This category of motivation is one of the most toxic—not because children should be unconditionally loved (an equally toxic concept) but because it gives kids the wrong idea about how love works (that it is earned).[77]

There should always be acts that cause you to withdraw love from your kids. Someone who rewards a kid who puts cats in a microwave with love is going to create a serial killer. Plus, in the adult world, love is always

conditional, so it is really toxic to teach kids to think love is something the world owes them.

It is equally toxic to teach a kid that there are actions they can take which inevitably lead to love. This is what leads to the stereotypical “nice guy” who does not understand why someone won’t date him after he does lots of “nice things” for them. Love (at least among romantic partners) is an evanescent emotion we cannot fully control, it is not owed to anyone and is never a reward for actions or who we choose to be. It is a reward that evolution gives us when we are living efficacious family lives.

Social Hierarchy

Some cultivars incentivize desired behaviors almost exclusively by promoting those who most strictly follow the culture's ethical framework within its social hierarchy and demoting those who don’t. While successful hard cultures rarely wield social hierarchy as their primary motivator, almost all pop cultures do (this can be seen in pop cultures canceling people for the slightest infraction while a Pentecostal preacher may still have a large following after cheating on his wife). Intergenerational cultures don’t emphasize this tool because it is extremely toxic.

Why? Dangling social hierarchy as a reward tends to trigger purity spirals —or at least draw disproportionate focus around superficial (and thus quickly noticeable) signs of cultural value, like how “pretty” a person is or how “masculine” they are.

Rather than exemplifying the culture’s values, members of a culture motivated by social hierarchy are incentivized to point out how other members have failed to live up to the culture’s value set, as pointing out someone else’s mistakes is always easier than working to accomplish something good yourself.

Aesthetic Ideals

In my youth I (Malcolm) was non-ironically drawn to the theology of the Church of the SubGenius. In that organization, a core cultural motivator is the pursuit of “Slack." Slack can best be described as the aesthetic of effortless success gained through cunning and sleight of hand/mind. Slack

is the difference between running on ice and skating on ice (Jack Sparrow presents a good example of what Slack looks like).

> *Note: While Sugenius pretends that Slack is an indefinable concept in their text as part of a commentary on religion, it is very clearly meant to be the above.*

The pursuit of an aesthetic ideal is an unusual but recurring cultural theme, with another solid example of it being Wu Wei. Wu Wei is a concept in Daoism which is fairly similar to the concept of Slack, but with implications of perfect energy economy as defined by effortless perfection rather than sly, cunning effortlessness. This can be seen in The Dexterous Butcher, the story of a butcher whose knives never dull because he cuts along the natural lines of the meat, forgetting his senses.

"Act, but as Wu Wei. Be active, but don't let your conduct be intentional and deliberative." Wu Wei is not about non-action but spontaneous action that lets go of your own self-interested concerns and guards against behavior that is too assertive. It's about non-intervention where an action would interfere with the natural expression of things and their potential outcomes in accordance with the Dao. Actions should be naturally spontaneous and free of ingrained habits. An often-used illustration of this is the movement of water.

Not knowing of anyone who grew up Daoist (or stayed SubGenius as adults), we have little to go on when attempting to discern whether this motivator is beneficial. It seems like something that would be most appealing to teens who have an insatiable desire to build self-narratives. For our personal cultivar's aesthetic ideal, we may borrow Simone's motto, "repeated blunt force." It serves as something of a perfect contrast to Slack or Wu Wei, implying that life should shatter upon your adamantine resolve.

> *If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at "Cultural Identifiers."*

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Honor Sources and Codes

As they encourage group cohesion in addition to motivating preferred behavior, honor codes are well worth including in any intentionally designed or reinforced culture. Strictly enforced honor codes can even impart competitive advantages to cultural adherents. For example, prejudiced people are much more likely to trust Mormons with upper management positions, Jews with managing their financial assets, and Jains with their accounting in part because those cultures' respective honor codes have created stereotypes which can make life easier for members of those cultures in certain professions.

The Holy Grails of a cultural honor code are:

- To create one sufficiently cohesive to generate beneficial stereotypes about adherents who follow it (i.e., that they can be trusted to perform well in certain high-paying positions)
- To create one differentiated enough that people understand how your people are “weird” and whether they would be a good potential sociological match for your group. Generic, “be a good person” stuff is pointless—your honor code must differentiate your culture so there is a sense of group identity.
- To create one strict enough that a person can regularly get the cognitive rewards associated with making sacrifices. If the sacrifices an honor code requires are rare, adherents won’t develop the mental fortitude they need to always follow it.
- To create one thorough enough that true adherents function dramatically better when working together than a random group of outsiders would.

What values do we emphasize in our House’s honor code? Though we have shared ours below, we highly doubt this honor code would be interesting to many readers. We primarily left it here to make it easier for our great-grandkids to find should they be interested in how we thought about this kind of stuff if their parents have since created totally new Houses.

An Honor Code Sample: House Collins' Honor Code

Fiduciary Responsibility matters above all other concerns.

This makes people much more likely to trust you with investments. It is also probably one of the oldest and most core obsessions of our family and something for which we are already known.

If someone takes a risk on you, don't let them down. That doesn't mean you always make them money, but it does mean that so long as they are invested in you, you are an agent of theirs within that part of your life with no split allegiance. When our travel company was thrashed by the pandemic, we cut our own salaries to zero before lowering a single employee's pay or bonuses, then we spent two years working to save the company without pay.

When our board offered to renegotiate the terms of our contract to be more generous, we told them we wouldn't entertain the discussion until the company was on stable ground again, as we are honor-bound to not negotiate a contract with an investor who has no negotiating power (had we left the company during that period, it would have collapsed). Our brother and sister-in-law work in the same industry and developed a similar reputation, refusing to take a bonus from their board despite outperforming every metric for years in a row. As a member of House Collins, the level of fiduciary responsibility you hold should look stupid to people of other cultures.

This is one of those aspects of an honor code that directly and massively benefits not just the larger cultural group but you as an individual. While our obsession with looking out for the best interests of those who take a personal risk on us can seem dumb at the moment, it is something people really remember and a short-term financial hit will always be trivial when contrasted with access to a larger capital pool for future projects and the trust of your employees.

Have complete emotional control at all times.

This means two things: Never allow emotion to pollute any major life decision you make and attempt to maintain whatever emotional state will help you toward your goals. This generally means you should always be happy and full of energy when around others because that is usually the most efficacious emotion to have in order to achieve your aims.

Emotions are a tool, not a compass. Emotions are an evolutionary artifact that is a pollutant within the human soul but one that can nevertheless be utilized to influence others and achieve desired outcomes.

The trials you face in life can either strengthen you or make you fragile. People without your best interests at heart will always attempt to use these experiences as an excuse to get you to indulge in non-efficacious emotional states. Hardship is never an excuse for fragility in our House.

Happiness is a reward, not a destination.

The most toxic message taught to kids in our society is that happiness warrants pursuit.

The message goes: Once a simple set of conditions are met, a person naturally starts to feel happy, content, and satisfied. Thus, when a person does not feel those emotional states, they desperately try to change things until they do, whether that be what they are doing, where they are living, how much they make, who they are with, or who they are themselves.

> *Lasting contentment and satisfaction—the forms of happiness our House values—are always the result of competent pursuit of one's values.*

Perhaps we are not told this obvious truth because secular society has a phobia around allowing people to search for their own values and nudges people to value positive emotions in both themselves and others, like some sort of puerile utilitarian accountant, to prevent them from asking questions.

Always take responsibility for failures.

You may be told that a failure is “not your fault” because of X or Y reason. Accepting that lie robs you of potential lessons and will make those around

you respect you less. Take responsibility for failures. Sometimes people who are emotionally attached to you will tell you to avoid taking responsibility for failure because they think it will help make the pain go away, a pain they share through empathy. Learn to make the pain go away by controlling your emotions, not by avoiding responsibility.

For example, when the pandemic eviscerated the travel industry it would have been easy for us to frame the loss as an “act of God” to our investors, but we didn’t. There is always something we could have done. We could have predicted risks like the pandemic and better communicated them or put more controls in place to lessen the risk by diversifying the company out of the travel industry before the pandemic.

When Nokia failed and was shutting down, the CEO said, “We didn't do anything wrong." Never be that person. Never be the leader who doesn’t take responsibility for their failures.

Family and House come first.

Your family and other members of your culture should be given preference over friends and strangers (but never investors or those that have otherwise put their faith in you, such as employees).

There is, however, an important exception to this rule: Incompetent or unethical family members are owed nothing. Only successful family members who have demonstrably operated by our House’s Code of Honor are to be given preference. This standard is not about developing a safety net for the weak, as some cultures interpret family-first action, but rather a network of competent people that compound each other’s successes. One of any individual's highest objectives should be to expand the family in terms of number of members, competency of those members, and their power and wealth.

Make sure family members *know* when they have been deemed non-efficacious or unethical. Never pretend they are in your good graces to manipulate them.

Always understand a family member is doing you a favor by letting you know you are not approved. Rather than judge them negatively, work out

what steps are necessary to get back in their good graces and decide whether the action required is worth your time.

“I will,” rather than IQ, should be a source of pride.

Growing up, my (Malcolm’s) mom refused to share my test results or IQ with me. While I knew they must be high because I was always in whatever gifted programs the school would offer, my mother, when asked about it, would redirect me to some area where I had failed through a lack of work ethic, planning, or perseverance and remind me that “I will,” not IQ is what matters in life.

She would remind me that plenty of losers had a high IQ—that history was defined by those with a force of will and that there is no greater honor than to work yourself to death in pursuit of a worthy goal. As Spartan mothers used to tell their children, “With it or on it”—return from war with your shield or as a carcass carried back on it—but never even consider abandoning your station in life.

Anyone can define themselves as smart and misunderstood and then feel upset that things did not come to them easily because they thought the world respected this imaginary self-perspective. As a House, we value cunning and work ethic—never “smarts."

Given the mindset with which I was raised, meeting Simone, who lived by the personal philosophy of “repeated blunt force,” was a breath of fresh air. In Silicon Valley, people valued IQ, burn-out culture, and over-the-top personalities. Simone was the first person I had met who truly understood the value of quiet, consistent, hard work. Bragging about how hard one is working or how stressed out one is (burn-out culture) is just as bad as bragging about high IQ—just do what you must and don’t wince no matter how hard life punches back.

Force of will and work ethic in yourself and others should be respected over natural intelligence. This is true of yourself, your heroes, your colleagues, and your partners in life. No one is more deserving of contempt than a smart person who squandered that potential by being lazy or fragile.

Don’t trust authority; contribute new ideas.

It is a deep Calvinist tradition to distrust authority outside of your immediate community—while utilizing a strict chain of command within the community and family structure. The key that makes this work is the chain of command used within the community, which fervently rewards out-there or otherwise non-orthodox ideas and only tells people what to do, not how to think.

While we've passed a century or so during which this trait was not beneficial, growth of the cultural supervirus stoked by population collapse will make it invaluable again in the near future. As we begin to see more tyrants rise to power across the political spectrum, a healthy suspicion of any demagogue or bureaucracy will be critical. While this approach places headwinds on anyone going through the traditional school system or careers, we are building a new school system and we believe the traditional job market is about to undergo a major change.

Live by the Pragmatic Model (live intentionally).

Finally, and most obviously, live intentionally as outlined in *The Pragmatist's Guide to Life*.

This entails choosing:

- What you think has value
- How you can effectively manifest that set of values
- What sort of person you want to be
- How you want others to see you

If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at "Cultural Identifiers."

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The Math of DNA Editing

> *Not being experts in this kind of math, we are presenting a short writeup by Scott Sauers, someone who works in the space, followed by a critique of the writeup by an anonymous Chief Science Officer who also works in the industry. By looking at the points on which they disagree, even someone without much expertise can get a good understanding of what is under contention in the industry (the way you communicate with the public and where to make simplifications in doing the math) and what most people agree on (that IQ can be dramatically increased in the near future with even minor gene edits).*

A Brief Illustration by Scott Sauers

Here are some very rough back-of-the-envelope calculations:

Let's make the reasonable assumption that 15,000 genetic variants account for nearly all the genetic variance in some trait. You either have the variant or you don't: You can have an A state or a B state.

This is a binomial distribution with and a 50% chance of having either variant state at some location. The variance is (the number of variants) * (the probability of having state A for a variant) * (the probability of having state B for a variant), which for us is or 3,750. The standard deviation is the square root of the variance, which is , or ~61. Someone 1 standard deviation above (or below) the mean would differ, on average, by only ~61 variants if there are 15,000 variants largely controlling the trait. For , this number drops to only

Most people will have about 7,500 A state variants and 7,500 B state variants, but someone who has ~7,540-7,560 A variants will be a standard deviation away from the genetic mean.

Of course, this is less relevant to less heritable traits.

However, this assumes we are flipping random variants! Why would we do this? If you are editing genes, you’re going to edit the variants which have the largest effects first.

Genome-wide association study results suggest that roughly, the median variant in the top 10% of genetic variants with the largest effect is 2 times higher than the overall median variant, and the median variant in the top 1% is 4 times higher than the median variant, and the median variant in the top 0.1% is 8 times larger than the median variant.

The top variants have way more of an effect than the average variant. This pattern is seen across different studies. The best variants to edit will likely have an effect of ~1/30th of a standard deviation for traits which have 15,000 variants.

If you know the location of causal variants, you should be able to increase a trait with N = 15,000 by 1 standard deviation by making 30 edits. This is indeed what happens if you sum up actual variant effect sizes in multiple genome-wide association studies (but unoptimistically it might be as high as 100 edits).

The main takeaway is that making just a few edits can have a substantial effect; you don’t need to edit thousands of genes even for extremely polygenic traits. Many traits are not very polygenic, like type 1 diabetes (only ~50 variants) and many forms of cancer, making this task much easier.

Animal breeding data suggests there is no known upper limit on how much of an increase can occur. If you have a massively polygenic trait with N = 10,000, there’s nothing stopping you from increasing a trait by 8 standard deviations with (can decrease this number by using the best variants) edits. This would result in an increase of the trait far beyond what any human throughout time has ever had.

A Brief Critique in Response

I thought a bit about the embryo editing thing. It's not wrong, all things considered, but it's at least a little misleading and would be picked apart by statistical geneticists. Sure, they are "very rough back-of-the-envelope

calculations," but there you can also ask yourself whether you should include them in a book.

It starts with the assumptions at the beginning, first of all the 15,000 variants to explain the heritability: We get the common variation in height, so 40% heritability explained with 12,111 SNPs. That leaves the other half, which is probably due to rare variants—that could be significantly more again. So, 15,000 is quite a number taken out of the air. Then the idea that you either have a variant or you don't—that's a rather strange simplification, since we know that you have none, one or two copies of the effect allele. But even if we get past that, it's odd to go beyond that and assume that there's a 50% chance of having one variant or the other. That's false, and simplification for the sake of modeling goes a little too far for me.

Given these assumptions, the calculation is correct. But as I said, these are strongly simplifying assumptions. **All in all, the results are probably quite realistic, but for that the modeling would not have been necessary. Just take a well-researched trait like height or intelligence, take the top 100 GWAS hits with their respective effect sizes and allele frequencies and simulate how big the expected gain would be. In my opinion, this is much less abstract and better understandable for the layman.**

Otherwise, he mentions in passing the central problem of his whole approach: "If you know the location of causal variants"—this is actually a really big "if," because currently, we just don't know in most cases. We might tag a variant that is really close (which is sufficient for embryo selection) but not the actual causal allele (and that's what we need for editing). That might change in the future, but at least for now, it is unknown.

If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at "Hard Culture Opposition to Polygenic Risk Score Screening."

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But Surely the Problem will Fix Itself: Behavioral Sinks

> *While we find the Calhoun stuff a little pop-sci for our tastes, its predictive capabilities make it worth including. At the time these experiments were released, no one seriously expected a massive population collapse to occur in post-scarcity societies. Per the Criterion of Shot Calling, we would be remiss to ignore its potential implications.*

Your instinct when looking at the demographic collapse problem may be that it will eventually resolve itself. This is actually our view as well—once the sociological profiles associated with prosociality and openness to other cultures (which make people susceptible to sterilizing memes) have been bred out of the population, things will stabilize. However, there is evidence that even our view might be overly rosy.

In his famous "Rat Utopia" experiment, ethnologist John B. Calhoun gave a population of rats access to unlimited food and water (though limited space), removed all natural predators, and ensured perfect rat temperatures (68°F—20°C) to see what would happen after a few generations. While many people still complain about world poverty, the objective truth is that functionally we live in a world today where a significant portion of humans experience something akin to these "Rat Utopias" in that food and water are not the limiting factors on reproduction in the way they used to be.[78]

> *Note: Like most famous experiments from this era, there is some reason to think[79] the results of these experiments may have been exaggerated or p-hacked. However, they also appeared to have been predictive of future social trends that had not yet come to pass when the experiments were conducted, which leads us to think they are at least worth considering.*

Calhoun reported:

> “The mice couldn’t form normal social bonds or engage in complex social behaviors such as courtship, mating, and pup-rearing. Instead of interacting with their peers, males compulsively groomed themselves; females stopped getting pregnant. Effectively, says Ramsden, they became “trapped in an infantile state of early development”, Ultimately, the colony died out. **“There’s no recovery, and that’s what was so shocking to [Calhoun],”** says Ramsden.[80]
>
> “Among the males the behavior disturbances ranged from sexual deviation to cannibalism and from frenetic overactivity to a pathological withdrawal from which individuals would emerge to eat, drink and move about only when other members of the community were asleep.”
>
> “The common source of these disturbances became most dramatically apparent in the populations of our first series of three experiments, in which we observed the development of what we called a behavioral sink. **The animals would crowd together in greatest number in one of the four interconnecting pens in which the colony was maintained.** As many as 60 of the 80 rats in each experimental population would assemble in one pen during periods of feeding. Individual rats would rarely eat except in the company of other rats. As a result, extreme population densities developed in the pen adopted for eating, **leaving the others with sparse populations**.”[81]
>
> “The few secluded spaces housed a population Calhoun called "the beautiful ones." Generally guarded by one male, the females—and few males—inside the space didn't breed or fight or do anything but eat and groom and sleep. When the population started declining the beautiful ones were spared from violence and death, but had completely lost touch with social behaviors, including having sex or caring for their young.”[82]

We find it telling that the first human populations to experience demographic collapse are those which were first to enter rough human equivalents to “Rat Utopias.” Population has first begun to rapidly decline

among human groups that reached levels of development at which the majority of their population no longer experienced food or water constraints a few generations earlier than others.

Specifically, many of the behaviors observed in the Utopia rats have arguably manifested in humans occupying developed economies from the 1970s onward, suggesting this rat experiment was roughly predictive of human societal trends, given these studies were mostly undertaken from the 1940s to the 1960s. For example, the development of a "behavioral sink"[83] in which the rats began to cluster could be seen as analogous to the explosion in urbanism since the studies were conducted. This same trend has begun to appear in our society (after the experiments, so they were predictive of this).[84]

Observations like, "[the] population would assemble in one pen during periods of feeding. Individual rats would rarely eat except in the company of other rats" demonstrate that among many of the rats, compulsive, suicidal ultra-prosciality developed right before the populations began to collapse (some might argue we are seeing analogous behavior in some human populations).

In addition, populations like the "beautiful ones" seem to indicate that a portion of the population in this sort of collapse scenario will retreat from in-person interactions and become obsessed with grooming behavior. Potentially in humans this could be seen as a growing obsession with social validation, to the extent that people "forget" how to breed (perhaps this phenomenon is at play with dropping sex rates and populations shifting to more online—rather than in-person—interaction).

In relation to "a pathological withdrawal from which individuals would emerge to eat, drink and move about only when other members of the community were asleep:" If we see countries like Japan as at a more advanced stage of the Rat Utopia experiment we might see this pattern as being reflected in the Hikikomori[85] phenomenon, in which many individuals stop interacting with society and stay socially isolated as much as possible. (It would be very interesting if this turned out to be predictive and we started seeing Hikikomori behavior in other countries once fertility rates drop below a specific point.)

The question of course is what is really causing the unusual behavior (if it is real). For example, it could be innocuous things like the clustering acculturation and the fact that the rats want to only eat when close to other rats—similar to the study that shows that rats which have all their early sexual experience when wearing a little vest will have trouble having sex without a vest.[86] It could also be some disease or mutational meltdown[87] that was not picked up given Calhoun's poor experimental protocols caused the unusual behavior and population collapses. The most concerning potential mechanism of action is that he was witnessing a pattern of behaviors which emerged in social mammals as a result of stress caused in post-scarcity environments. (Like how mammals demonstrate a pre-set range of behavior patterns when caged, causing them to do things like pace, pick at their hair, and not mate.)

People have drawn all sorts of wild implications from Calhoun's experiments, often attributing the results to whatever their particular cause area is. For example, many originally used the experiments to decry overcrowding and overpopulation, even though the study is equally about giving a population of social mammals unlimited food and water (plus in late stages of the experiment, the rats were found to *intentionally* crowd, leaving large parts of the pen sparsely populated).

For that reason, we won't extrapolate too much (and we'll fully admit that our conjecture is nothing more than that), other than to point out that these experiments show that equilibrium may not be a guaranteed outcome of a post-scarcity society. There is a chance that things don't equalize.

> *Note: Two follow-up studies were not able to recreate the population collapse but did create many but not all of the other behaviors. Given the number of "universes" or instances of this study that Calhoun created, this might be a rare phenomenon.*[88] *Also: If any reader is involved in recreating this experiment, please measure testosterone levels. We would be very interested to see if a behavioral sink might at least partially explain recent shifts in male testosterone levels.*

If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at "Dating and Partner Finding."

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Alternate History Jews: Samaritans

When people think of the evolution of the Abrahamic traditions, they often imagine Jews being the base from which everything else evolved one way or another—but this picture is wrong. One surviving branch split off well before Jesus at some point between the time of Ezra down to the destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE) and the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-136 CE). (Why the big time gap? Because the schism was slow and involved a gradual divide in the community.)

If we were going to give a super simplified version of history:

At one point, all the Jews were allied into a single people in Israel and Judaism served as a religion, governing system, and way of living. Upset over the proposed king Rehoboam, two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) split off into the House of Judah. This created two competing Jewish Kingdoms: the Israelites in the North and the House of Judah in the South.

Given that Judaism of the time was both a religion and a governing system, each kingdom needed its own religious center. For the southern kingdom, that was Temple Mount in Jerusalem. For the Northern people, that was Mount Gerizim in Gerizim. The Israelites in the North (the ten tribes who did not split off) controlled a wealthier, more populated kingdom but this also rendered them more appealing as a target for conquest, leading them to be conquered by the Assyrians.

While the Assyrians genocided the capital city after this conquest, they left most of the Jews of this Kingdom alive under new rule. Though many flowed into the Southern Kingdom as refugees, most stayed under Assyrian rule and—permanently divided from the rest of the Jewish population in thinking the Temple should be on Gerizim—became the unique cultivar we now call the Samaritans.

> *Side note: Some ancient texts written by the Jewish branch that was antagonistic to Samaritans tried to "other" this group by claiming they were a totally different ethnicity (Assyrians) who only converted to Judaism-like beliefs because lions would otherwise*

keep attacking them (Second King's 17). Both genetic[89] *and historic evidence shows this to be wrong. The Samaritans are, or at least* were*, Jews. (For a great breakdown on this, check out Religions for Breakfast's video on the subject.)*[90]

What makes the Samaritan-Jewish split so different from Christianity's split from Judaism was that the Christian split involved a single Jewish teacher coming along with different ideas about their theology and attracting followers (mostly from non-Jewish groups) based on their affinity for these new ideas. The Samaritan split is more a story of two cultures speciating following a sufficiently long period of isolation from each other—it's analogous to ecological speciation, in which a species splits because two populations are physically separated (in contrast, Christianity split off because their practices did not allow intermingling). Jewish and Samaritan views differentiated so much after long periods of mutual isolation that they simply could not reintegrate.[91]

What makes Samaritans so cool is that they allow us to get a rare answer to an "alternate history" question: What would have happened to Jewish culture had Jews not left the Levant and not adapted their culture to new environments during the Jewish "Cambrian explosion," which happened after the Second Temple Period? Suppose Jews never went to Europe; suppose they stayed in the Holy Land; what would have happened to them?

To clarify, while it does appear true that the Samaritans feature some practices and cultural tendencies that represent a less derived version of Jewish culture from the ancestral strain, they are not the ancestral variant itself. To assume as much would be wrong in the same way that considering modern chimpanzees to be ancestral to humans is wrong. While both share a common ancestor and chimps have some superficial features that may make them more phenotypically similar to that ancestor, they have both have undergone evolutionary journeys since that time. (Cool side note: Because of this misconception that Samaritanism is a more ancestral form of Judaism, around 300 Brazilian Jews recently converted to Samaritanism to try to recapture a more ancient form of their religion and culture.)[92]

Outside of being a less derived version of the ancient Israelite religion, there were two key factors which imposed different cultural evolutionary pressures on the Samaritans:

1. They were much more culturally conservative and thus mostly stayed in one geographic area. (As such, they lacked a wider community in other regions which might support them or offer some place to which they could flee.)
2. While they were protected in Islamic controlled regions as People of the Book, they were not nearly as protected as Jews (as they are not mentioned in the Koran frequently by name, like the Jews were).

These differences yield an example of what would have happened to the Jews under these conditions.

First, we can see they maintained a similar cultural ecological niche to the ancient Israelites. So long as Samaritans existed in populations sufficiently large to rebel and reconstitute their kingdom, they would try. They triggered major revolts in attempts to restore their sovereignty almost for as long as the Jews did, with the last major Samaritan revolt (572 AD) happening only a few decades before the last major Jewish revolt (the Jewish revolt against Heraclius in 602 AD).

Any cultivar that has a mandate to revolt and attempt to recreate a self-governing kingdom will eventually be stomped out as every time they try to revolt, the ruling kingdom will come in and retaliate, leaving fewer of them to revolt next time. Jewish culture was saved because enough of its population lost this tendency. Being more resistant to change, Samaritan culture did not evolve out of this tendency until it was almost totally extinct.

After this period, the few surviving derivatives of Samaritan culture appear to have become fishing village specialists. Not having the same protection Jews enjoyed against Muslim oppression, Samaritans were eventually whittled down to almost nothing, with only a few thousand still being around when the state of Israel was finally created, preventing total cultural extinction.

If you came from the main body of the book, feel welcome to jump back to "Roles in Multicultural Ecosystems" now.

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The Jewish Cabal Theory

On what authority can we state so emphatically that there is no secret society of Jews controlling the world? Funny you should ask. Running and assisting secret societies (also sometimes referred to as private and invitation-only societies, summits, and “idea festivals”) just so happens to be a side gig of ours. Simone was the former Managing Director of Dialog (a secret society started by Peter Thiel), we developed enough of a reputation in the space to be contracted to recruit the members for an invitation only network of the people most likely to change the world for Schmidt Futures (Eric Schmidt's impact-oriented organization), and we worked on matchmaking for Future Forum (a new society for the effective altruist community’s rising next generation of leaders).

Personally, I (Malcolm) have ties to some of the best-known secret societies with the CIA library of conspiracy theories[93] citing my father as one of the people running the Illuminati (and I am his eldest son). You’ve got to love this quote: “The Collins family has been kept out of the limelight because they have more occult power than the Rothschilds or the Rockefellers.” I cannot mention others referenced here by name because, unlike the Illuminati, they are active and I have no interest in contracting Russian window cancer.

Long story short, few people on Earth have more insight into the actual operations of a broad range of the world’s most influential private societies than we do. While we can confirm that Jews are overrepresented in all of them (as they are with many positions of power in society), we can also confidently state that there is no powerful secret society run exclusively by Jews. (While there is at least one Jewish-only secret society among these groups, they are not particularly powerful or prestigious and most of their clout comes from their alleged ties to Mossad.)

Most of these secret societies are just as infected with the supervirus as other institutions. Many of the societies framed as “scary” in the public consciousness are in the process of collapsing from infighting due to this infection. If you think there is some secret group that has a plan for the world beyond what the virus is publicly signaling, you are sorely mistaken.

If you came from the main body of the book, feel welcome to jump back to "Roles in Multicultural Ecosystems" now.

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Geographic Flexibility

While the topic of a culture's tolerance for change is philosophically boring, it can have enormous macro scale consequences. Because nearly all residents of the United States (except for African Americans and Native Americans) are descended from—or are themselves—people who voluntarily chose to leave their homeland, Americans can often underestimate how strongly some cultures feel attached to a specific region (even cultures we often don't think of in that respect).

Consider the Irish Potato famine. It is hard to overstate just how horrifying the event was. People reported walking into towns completely devoid of life, filled with nothing but corpses strewn beside buildings, only to see those corpses' eyes tracking their movements and realize many were still barely clinging to life. Just as many people don't know how bad the potato famine was, what many also don't know is that many of the people who starved had the option to leave.

The feudal lords who owned property on which many starving people lived were concerned about not being able to feed all their tenants. Even if it didn't lead to a revolt, negligence could get them and their families killed (there was a rash of landlord murders at the time, so people were terrified).[94] At the very least it was clear to land owners that if their crops failed and they could only feed a quarter of the serfs or tenants on their lands, they were much better off getting three-quarters to leave and feeding that final quarter instead of just letting the entire lot starve to death.

As such, land owners sometimes (maybe even frequently—we could not find exact reports of the percentage that did this) offered to pay for tenants to emigrate to the Americas to lower the population (to clarify, the passage purchased for these tenants was on "coffin ships" where the passengers acted as the ship's ballast and sometimes entire crews would die).[95] While many accepted these offers, the majority turned them down. They may not have known just how bad things were going to get when making that decision, but the cultural impetus is clear: To some people, death is preferable to leaving their land.

We suspect this instinct evolved culturally as earlier humans might logically underestimate how hard it would be to find a good new place to live that was not already occupied by an entrenched group. In the world's current sociographic and geopolitical environment—and in any future environment—we can imagine it is a terrible strategy to stay geographically tethered as a culture.

It is much easier for a culture to maintain a thriving, engaged membership once members reach a certain critical mass within their surrounding population. As such, while moving may make cultural sense, it seems wisest to move with at least one other culturally aligned family. For example, when we moved to rural Pennsylvania, my (Malcolm's) brother, his wife, and their children all moved into a nearby house. (Note: This only applies to adults with kids; relocation to a city is practically mandatory when searching for a partner.)

> *If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at "Emotion and Mental Landscape."*

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Emotional Instability

One consistent difference between hard cultures (that increase the fitness of their members) and corrosive pop cultures (which spread merely because they are easy and appealing) is that almost all hard cultures reward and encourage emotional self-control while almost all pop cultures glorify emotional and mental instability.

Pop cultures frequently frame those who lose emotional control as “strong,” “dramatic,” or “interesting.” Just look at the way things like anger or “passion” are portrayed in popular media—those moments where a character gains superhuman abilities, driven, to some extent, by “losing control.” Think of the brooding hero, or the girl who is portrayed as being extra alluring because she is emotionally mercurial. Think of the blast and flames that surround a character, who, upon discovering the death of a friend, suddenly gains ten times as much power. Think of the sex symbols created out of characters like Jinx or Harley Quinn. (On this topic, Cracked produced a hilarious skit parodying the manic pixie dream girl trope that covers some of the behavior that is glorified in this kind of media.[96])

There is no deep thought to be had around this. Teaching yourself to reward (i.e., to feel good about) emotional instability undermines your ability to be a functional, competent adult capable of effectively achieving complex goals.

While most hard cultures believe in emotional control, our family culture sits at the extreme end of the spectrum. Whereas most cultures frame it as “sinful” (something to be ashamed of) to allow oneself to be influenced by negative emotional states, we feel the same way about having one's thoughts or actions influenced by feckless positive emotional states (though we do expect people of our culture to always signal positivity as doing so encourages other members of other cultures to work with ours).

As you have probably gathered by now, we see all emotional states as just things that we have because earlier humans who had them bred at higher rates in a completely different environmental and social context. From our perspective, allowing positive emotional indulgence to guide decisions is no

less shameful than succumbing to any sub-optimal mental pattern, such as an addiction.

While all humans will lose emotional control—such is part of being human—members of our culture aspire to maintain total emotional control and look for that aspiration (and at least moderate mastery) in long-term relationship partners. Ideal partners *help each other* master their emotions. Participation in a relationship (be it business or personal in nature) in which all participants maintain and respect emotional control is more satisfying than ice cold water after a day of working in the sun.

From our perspective, every time your emotions and hormones win out over your personal logic and values, the animal within you—evolved traits you never chose to have—takes another bite out of the core of your identity—the part of you created with intention and logic. Given how comfortable and alluring they are, positive emotions are all the more likely to wipe out that identity. Though a useful tool, love can also infest and slowly consume your soul.

> *If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at "Dealing with Disgust."*

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Addictions

Addictions are wildly dangerous for cultures—and not just for obvious reasons. In addition to decreasing victims' efficacy and lifespans, addictions create an opportunity for outside cultures to "poach" new members. A common means of combating addiction involves radically rewriting an individual's self-narrative and some cultures like Alcoholics Anonymous and Scientology have learned they can use this vulnerability to build dependency and easily slurp up new members.

This strategy makes a lot of sense when one thinks about it—while converting people to a hard culture is generally close to impossible (from a statistical perspective), one of the few times in a person's life where it is possible at scale is when they have hit rock bottom with an addiction. As such, a culture not fortified by mechanisms that protect its members from addiction is uniquely vulnerable.

Many cultures fight addiction by strictly forbidding potentially addictive things. Mormon prohibitions on coffee and Islam's prohibition on alcohol present salient examples of this.

Having come from a family that oscillates between a generation of teetotalers and a generation of alcoholics, I (Malcolm) can nevertheless vouch for the shortcomings of this approach. A common joke from my family's part of Texas goes: "Jews don't recognize Jesus, Protestants don't recognize the Pope, and Baptists don't recognize one another in the liquor store." Prohibitions against drinking work so badly they are a joke. (For clarification "Baptists" are assumed to be Primitive Baptists (a Calvinist sect—like the Puritans). The Calvinist stereotype of either being a teetotaler or alcoholic did not come out of nowhere.)

Worse, abstinence really doesn't work for the most dangerous addiction of the modern world—online social Skinner boxes. If a rat is given a reward of food when it presses a lever, it will typically only press the lever when it is hungry. If, on the other hand, the rat is only *randomly* given a reward *sometimes*, it will press the lever until its paws bleed. This is a Skinner box, and its addictive quality is enhanced in social situations like those created

by Facebook or TikTok. Were we to prohibit our kids from using these sorts of platforms, we would hurt their future and ability to build robust social networks (assuming we want them to have networks that include people beyond just members of our culture, which we do).

Coming from a family that is already prone to addiction, how will we equip our House cultivar to address addiction? First, we work with kids to run the Skinner box experiment themselves. We have built this into our school's curriculum so it is top of mind when kids are being manipulated. We have even built a holiday around recognizing Skinner boxes (Future Day).

More importantly, our culture makes heavy use of naltrexone. Naltrexone is an opioid antagonist, which means that it blocks the chemical pathways that create addiction. If you do something that would normally make you addicted while on an opioid antagonist, the opposite effect occurs and you start disliking that thing. While we see naltrexone as a tool of last resort, it is a critical tool nonetheless in families that are highly vulnerable to addiction. Pharmacological tools can steer biology in a more efficacious direction.

If you came from the main body of the book, feel welcome to jump back to "Accidental Cults: MLMs & Life Coaches" now.

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Hofstede's Other Cultural Dimensions

There was this guy, Geert Hofstede, who came up with a bunch of things he called "cultural dimensions." These include things like indulgence vs restraint, power distance, individualism vs collectivism, long-term vs short-term orientation, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity vs femininity. You can search online to find heat maps (or just check this link)[97] showing how these dimensions relate to different geographic cultures and various life outcomes.

Though we almost never give shout-outs to intellectuals without reservations, this model (while not comprehensive) is pretty solid and it presents a useful way to understand culture. We have covered analogs for many of his cultural dimensions already, so this section will act as a catch-all for those which we neglected to address in other sections of the book.

> *An example of otherwise-hard-to investigate dynamics on which Hofstede's cultural dimensions shed light: Why is the obesity rate 37.3% in the U.S. and 31.1% in Egypt, but only 4.3% in Japan and 4.7% in S. Korea? Traits tracked by some of Hofstede's cultural dimensions may be at play! Specifically, "We find that, adjusting for undernourishment and other potential confounds, individualism is associated with higher obesity prevalence in the male population, but not among the female population."*[98] *"A further novel finding is that flexibility (vs monumentalism), a national cultural trait that emphasizes humility, self-control, and restraint of desires, is a strong negative predictor of obesity in both genders."*

Power Distance

Power distance refers to the extent to which less powerful members of a culture (be they family, business, or institutional) are comfortable with and willing to reinforce unequal power distributions. Basically, it is a measure

of whether questioning your boss or parents is a normal thing to do (vs something that would trigger gasps of horror).

A mandatory class at Stanford's Graduate School of Business used one of Malcolm Gladwell's books to showcase how one can lie to people with statistics while making them look interesting. Each class session focused on one chapter and there was sufficient misleading information in each chapter to reliably fuel two hours of analysis. Despite how primed we are to dislike Malcolm Gladwell's writing, his book *Outliers* actually does make an interesting argument about power distance in Korean Airlines.

In this chapter, Gladwell—aka "Evil Malcolm," if you will—argues that Korean Airlines' unusually high crash rates are a product of poor communication between pilots and co-pilots who were afraid to question their superiors even when those superiors were doing obviously wrong things. In this one particular case, he is probably right: A 2017 *Outliers*-inspired study by Carl Enomoto and Karl Geisler[99] demonstrated pretty convincingly that higher-power-distance cultures do have more plane crashes. This is impressive: To have put together a theory in a pop-science book as a random example, then have that theory tested by academia and verified.

Having worked in South Korea, "Good Malcolm" can say that the nation is well aware of its extremely high power distance in communication. You have to change the structure of your language when talking to someone even a single year older than you or a modicum more powerful than you. As we already mentioned earlier in the book, this can cause so many problems that companies like Kakao (sort of like the Alphabet of Korea) force their employees to take American-style names while at work, which changes the way their language relates to power distance.

Generally speaking, a culture with a high power distance will have a high level of reverence for people in positions of power and people will typically know their relative power level when interacting with others of the same culture. Those in high-power-distance cultures often put a great deal of effort into determining their relative power level if it is not obvious in their first meeting. Back when England was a higher-power-distance culture than it is now, they even had a book you could buy—*Debrett's Peerage and Baronetage*—that listed the top families by level of social prestige so there

could never be any confusion. Historically many Southern cities in the U.S. that had something of an “aristocracy” also had books like this; in fact, I (Malcolm) have a book published in the 80s among my keepsakes listing the top thousand most important families in Dallas (though it does not strictly order them).

Despite being well aware of how important power distance is, we fell flat on our faces when we started running a company with a large staff in Peru (a very high-power-distance and collectivist culture). About a year into running it, one of our employees told us the team was unhappy because we “never talked to them” and they felt uncomfortable that we kept taking them out for one-on-one lunches. To us, from a low-power-distance culture, taking an employee out for a solo lunch with the CEO of the company and asking for their feedback counted as really high-quality communication, but to them it felt like—well, just weird. What they wanted us to do was have all the employees sit in front of us and have us “talk to them.” From our perspective, this kind of communication was dehumanizing, but it was what they wanted.

Differing power distances in Peru and the U.S. caught us off guard again when we needed to fill a managerial role. Hoping to promote from within, we systematically approached all our best employees and offered the position. Each and every one threatened to quit if given the managerial role. In the States, people are so hungry to gain more power that the very idea we’d encounter hesitation in the face of promotion felt absurd to us—and yet, in Peru, the additional power was construed as coming with enough additional responsibility that most of our employees did not want to shoulder even if it came with a salary boost. As one of our team members explained to us, in Peru, extra responsibility isn’t immediately seen as “more power” but rather “more things that are my fault.” That sort of drawback barely flits across the average U.S. worker’s mind.

We wonder if this difference in framing highlights a key mechanism used to enforce high power distances in certain cultures: Making people highly aware of the drawbacks of *other* social strata. It reminds us of sayings repeated by the highly-stratified society’s denizens in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*: “I'm really awfully glad I'm a Beta, because I don't work

so hard. And then we are much better than the Gammas and Deltas. Gammas are stupid."

Beyond that, power distance appears to be either reinforced or weakened through language and upbringing. Interestingly, power distance does not appear to have a genetic component while things like collectivism do.[100]

Uncertainty Avoidance

The uncertainty avoidance dimension indicates the level of comfort with unstructured situations or otherwise novel situations and more generally encompasses a culture's tolerance for ambiguity. Someone from a high uncertainty avoidance culture may, for example, demand a specific prognosis with timelines and treatment options from a clinician even when one is not available. Uncertainty avoidance also seems to affect things like brand loyalty and how much people see teachers as having "all the answers," with low uncertainty avoidance cultures trusting teachers much less to "know things."[101]

It is important to keep the double-edged sword nature of uncertainty avoidance in mind when crafting culture. High uncertainty avoidance cultures pass themselves to future generations with more fidelity when they are in the majority but also, as shown in a study by David Baker and Kerry Carson,[102] increases the rate at which an individual feels the need to convert to a new culture when surrounded by said culture. Any culture that plans to be in the minority for a long time and have its members interact with the "normal world" (e.g., get jobs at companies that are not majority that culture—something many cults try to prevent members from doing for this very reason) needs to cultivate a low uncertainty avoidance.

Uncertainty avoidance can affect all sorts of political and social outcomes. For example, citizen protests are both less likely to happen and more likely to be violently suppressed in uncertainty avoidance cultures because they might bring about changes the majority would be uncomfortable dealing with. Such cultures also have more specific laws.[103] In fact, in high

uncertainty avoidance cultures. there is less of an interest in politics more generally.[104]

Terrorism is much more common in countries with high uncertainty avoidance because “uncertainty avoidance, related to stress, may provide important prerequisites for group-induced aberrant behavior when formerly alienated group members find comfort in adhering to a collective belief system where dissent is discouraged, a sense of group purpose is reinforced, and rules are strictly imposed—apparently confirming the writings of terrorism psychologists.”[105]

Uncertainty avoidance attitudes do not just cluster regionally but also in cultivars, with high uncertainty avoidance cultures including Catholicism, Islam, Judaism, and Shintoism and low uncertainty avoidance cultures being Protestantism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism.[106]

While the general understanding is that children in low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures are taught the world is benevolent and children from high-uncertainty-avoidance cultures are taught that it is hostile, this is a bit of a misunderstanding. A better way to put it is that children from high-uncertainty-avoidance cultures are taught the world represents a threat to them and those from medium-uncertainty-avoidance cultures are taught the world is not a threat to them, while those from ultra-low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures (like those from which we hail) are taught *they* are a threat to the world.

If you want to raise your family to have a low uncertainty avoidance threshold, raise them to believe the world is mostly full of barely sentient idiots and that they will always have to handle every situation personally. If you want to raise them to hate uncertainty, then raise them to believe there are people out there who know better than them and can guide them to “correct” outcomes so long as they follow the rules.

Long-Term vs Short-Term Orientation

Long-term vs short-term orientation refers to whether a society exhibits a pragmatic, future-oriented perspective or a conventional historical point of view.

More generally, a long-term culture is marked by:

- Emphasis on persistence
- Relationships ordered by status
- Emphasis on personal adaptability
- De-emphasis on leisure time
- Emphasis on relationships and market positions
- Circumstantial interpretations of good and evil

And a short-term culture is marked by:

- Emphasis on quick results
- De-emphasis on status in relationships
- Emphasis on personal steadfastness and stability
- Emphasis on leisure time
- Emphasis on the bottom line
- Absolute interpretations of good and evil

Most short-term oriented cultures are in North Africa while most American cultures are somewhere in the middle (outside of Venezuela, which is short-term oriented) and China is seen as being very long-term-oriented.[107] We find it harder to notice short-term or long-term orientation much in daily life—perhaps because our cultural position is in the middle of the scale.

Short-term vs long-term cultural orientation may be something of a moot point as the preference appears to be heavily genetically influenced. What is cool is that we even know the method of action—specifically 5-HTTLPR VNTR in the serotonin-transporter gene.[108] This implies that long-term vs short-term orientation may be manipulated using pharmaceuticals if you absolutely want to control it in your family.

> *If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at "Cultures and Conservatism."*

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Relation to Government

Earlier in this book, we introduced the idea of dominating cultivars. Let's dig deeper on that concept. Some cultures feel they have a mandate to ensure members' government(s) align with their culture. To understand if a culture fits into this category, ask: "If this culture made up over 70% of the voters in a democracy, would the laws of said democracy be out of line with a conservative iteration of that culture's own rules?"

Some more conservative factions of Islam present a "classic" example of this. In extreme cases, some feel so strongly about this mandate that they break away to create states more in line with their cultural values (while ISIS is one example of this, history is littered with others). For an excellent, scholarly account of why conservative Muslim cultivars are often more politically engaged than other conservative cultural strains, check out *Ancient Religions, Modern Politics: The Islamic Case in Comparative Perspective* by Michel Cook.[109]

Islam to an extent was "designed" to work this way, as at its inception it was a religion, a culture, and an expansionist government. What is more interesting is how much Christianity has moved in this direction despite being explicitly "designed" to not act this way.

For those not familiar with Christian theology, there is the "Render unto Caesar" scene repeated across the Gospels in which Jesus is asked some iteration of, "Is it good to give money in taxes to a government that does not align with our values?" and he responds with some iteration of "show me the coin—that coin has Caesar's face on it, so give it to Caesar—why would you even ask me such a silly question?" This is not the only place in the Bible where Jesus encourages followers to submit to their governments, but in this particular story, we can see how Jesus sees even asking if a person thinks they may use religion as an excuse to not submit to their government as a trick ("But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, 'Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?'").

If Christianity at its inception was explicitly built to be compatible with non-Christian governments, why do so many Christian sects today insist

that their governments align with their values? The answer here is not philosophical but fairly straightforward. During an early period of Christianity, Jesus' death as a product of resistance to the local government enabled church members to gain enormous respect within their communities through martyrdom by faith-based persecution. This led many of the most devout Christians to do their best to piss off the local governments in order to be publicly executed and become a martyr.

This happened early enough in the Christian tradition that all extant branches of Christianity had to pass through this moment. Actually, it was a major problem for early Christianity when it finally did take control of the Roman government because they could not get themselves martyred any more. It was at this time that the ascetic monasticism movement started to gain traction as a form of "living martyrdom."

Constantine played a large role in Christianity's transition from a religion largely distrusted in governance into an explicit part of the Roman empire's state infrastructure, but this transformation was much less complete than a lay person might imagine. The Pagan system Christianity replaced was not terribly sophisticated or loyal to the state when contrasted with other pro-state cultivars like Islam. While the form of Christianity that resulted from this was involved directly in state infrastructure, it did not feel a mandate to control the state as it had never "fought" for this position and was rather assigned it.

The Christian drive to gain explicit control of government did not begin fully in earnest until after the Reformation, when it started to matter whether a state's government was Catholic or Protestant.

The only cultural traditions that don't seem to have at least some level of inbuilt drive to take over their local governments are those which "grew up" without significant mutually exclusive competition and that were always in control of their local government structures until very recently. Contrast Buddhism that evolved alongside not-mutually-exclusive traditions, like Shintoism, as is the case with Buddhism in Japan, and Buddhism that evolved alongside mutually exclusive traditions like Islam in places like Myanmar and Sri Lanka. The latter forms of Buddhism exhibit far greater interest in governmental control when exported.

Cultures' and religions' attitudes toward government are more a product of the cultural competitiveness of their foundational landscapes than any inherent cultural imperative. That said, let's look at a few more specific ways religious communities react to their governments.

One odd quirk of Protestant traditions is that when they don't have the chance to "take over" governments, their first intuition is usually to leave and found a new colony or otherwise isolate themselves from governmental control. Many colonies in the U.S. were motivated by this, as was the early Mormons' move to Utah.

Less obviously, we can see this in the Amish, who have been shockingly effective at creating stable sub-governing units within active states, not being subject to the draft or even paying social security. The Amish have achieved all this by ... not voting, and not attempting to hijack the local government. As such, they have achieved their desired end with only minimal pushback. Contrast this with Ultra-Orthodox Hasidic Jews, who often run concerted voting campaigns in local municipalities, making them threatening to entrenched interests.

> *Note: Disengagement from politics is only a viable as a strategy until a parasitic pop culture (one that needs to convert kids from higher-birth-rate cultures in order to survive) takes over local government. Such cultures will aggressively use the local government to convert children from high-birth-rate cultures and can only be countered through voting or relocation.*

Our general takeaway is that the Index or any House within it should never attempt to seize control of a democracy through voting. If you want "your own" space either colonize another planet or make land that was previously uninhabitable your own (e.g., land in the Far North). This will dramatically reduce conflict and increase the chance of our survival. Be ready to defend this new colony while also ensuring it is on land that no one else wants but never try to take over existing political structures or land, even if you can do it—it will make your brothers and sisters in other countries more of a target because now ruling bodies will see them as an eventual threat.

If you came from the main body of the book, pick up where you left off at "Cultures and Conservatism."

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