Reignition

NICK LAND'S WRITINGS (2011-)

COMPLETE EDITION

Editor's Introduction and Four Tomes

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Complete Edition

Edited by Uriel Fiori

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Editor’s Introduction

URIEL FIORI · A MAP OF THE RIVER

Is it time for yet another anthology? I think so.

Reignition has come together to fulfil at least three functions. First, and most obviously, it gathers Nick Land’s ever-sprawling online writing in a single resource. This should prove useful to those unsure where to begin reading these works, or how to find some specific piece of text. Ultimately, this collection is meant as an *encyclopedia* of recent Landian thought. I believe such a resource will prove catalytic in many ways.

Second, this work functions as a *backup*. Online existence is fleeting, as repeated server trouble at both *Urban Future* and *Xenosystems* has shown. Of course, there is always the Internet Archive, but the first rule of digital environments is: *always have another copy*. *Reignition* is hosted at Vast Abrupt, preserved in a public GitHub repository, stored on my personal computer and in cloud storage, and multiplied into the digital space of anyone who downloads it. Redundancy is never enough.

Finally, *Reignition* adds something to the raw text of Land’s online writing: structure. Even though Land is careful with tags and categories, it is often hard to track sequences or thematic groups when reading a blog. The sheer speed of publication sometimes prevents the careful grouping of otherwise closely related arguments. There is the added difficulty of Land’s interconnected themes—*interconnection as a theme*, in fact. A post filed under Bitcoin may be doing political theology; a note about cities may be a theory of time; a monster may turn out to be capital in temporary flesh.

The divisions I present here arose mostly from a process of list-making. “Where does Land talk about *x*?” was a recurring question during the years after I was infected with the xenosystems virus. It became the primary motivation for expanding a private index into a full catalogue of themes and the texts in which to find them.

That primitive plain-text file, finished around 2017, lay in a personal folder for almost three years before I finally began looking into how to turn it into a book proper. I built a simple and highly specific Python crawler to fetch the HTML from the URLs I had gathered. Then came the more intensive work of preparing the material for publication: identifying sections and headings, repairing markup, editing styles, and making thousands of small decisions that are nearly invisible when successful. Most of the technical ideas came from CSS for Publishing, where I learned about Prince, the tool used to convert *Reignition* into book form. The code and editable sources are available in the public repository. Changes are to be expected as new texts appear, old links fail, better formatting becomes available, and new features suggest themselves.

Although *Reignition* is native to the Internet, and therefore not finally bound by the usual limitations of space, it is not a mechanical dump of everything Land published after 2011. The governing rule has been to include posts from *Urban Future*, *Xenosystems*, and *Outside in* that contain original writing, while generally excluding entries that are only bare quotations, links, or housekeeping. Some “Quote Notes,” “Twitter Cuts,” “Chaos Patches,” and similarly titled posts nevertheless remain when they carry connective commentary or occupy an intelligible place in a sequence. The ongoing *Crypto-Current* project was left out because it is a self-contained work that would not fit naturally inside this anthology. In addition to the blog posts, the collection includes Land’s work for *Jacobite*, the three-part 2014 series “China, Crypto-Currency, and the World Order” for Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, “The ‘F’ Word” for *The Daily Caller*, and the 2016 Urbanomic text “Sore Losers.”

In order to preserve the Internet texture of the posts—and to save what could have amounted to months of additional work—the materials Land references remain links, as they were natively. No subject index has been provided, at least for now. I also considered, and discarded, the idea of reproducing relevant comment threads as endnotes. Comments were often part of the intellectual life of the blogs, but importing them would have introduced another authorship, another editorial problem, and another order of magnitude of material. All of these features may eventually appear as time allows.

Thanks are due to the members of #cavetwitter, who in many ways motivated and shaped the initial stages of the work and occasionally rescued me with technical advice, and to Vast Abrupt for generously hosting it.

Four tomes, one descent

Land's thought is best described as intricate: a huge mosaic of themes reinforcing, mutating, and contradicting one another until a fuller and stranger picture emerges. Devising a structure for such thought is therefore difficult. The one presented here is a single possibility among many, and no doubt readers will wish that certain texts had been placed under different headings. This arrangement is the result of a list-making heuristic, not a rigid taxonomy. It is a map made to enable travel.

Its largest movement follows the "good twin / evil twin" gradient Land established between his two main blogs, *Urban Future* and *Xenosystems*. It also describes the increasing difficulty that a reader arriving from the polite academy—or even one familiar with Land's 1990s work—may encounter in continuing to the end. My favourite image has always been Captain Willard going upriver in *Apocalypse Now*. The banks grow denser, the signs less reassuring, and the distinctions between reconnaissance, infection, and complicity harder to maintain. You get deeper into the jungle, and it is maddening.

Tome I covers the lighter side of Land's theoretical framework: urbanization, time and acceleration, Bitcoin, China, and their significance for understanding twenty-first-century events. If you have just finished *Fanged Noumena*, this is one obvious next step—although Tome IV offers another. What appears here is essential to understanding accelerationism in its original sense: an analysis of the time-structure of capitalism and a wager on its intensification, now refracted through the rise of China, cryptocurrencies, artificial intelligence, and Pacific Rim urbanism.

Tome II gathers mist and shadow. It includes "The Dark Enlightenment" and the themes that unfold from Land's encounter with Mencius Moldbug. What could already be inferred from parts of the earlier work becomes a more explicit political theory.

Human societies are treated as wholly immanent to nature and therefore exposed to selection, incentive, scarcity, and extinction. Social Darwinism, Hobbesian sovereignty, Malthusian constraint, commercial republicanism, patchwork, and neocameralism converge on a political formula of *exit over voice*: institutions should be disciplined from outside by the possibility of departure rather than from inside by democratic demand.

Tome III darkens further. It gathers the main texts on Neoreaction—what it is, who belongs to it, what its internal divisions are, and how it understands the Cathedral and democratic government. After this long exploration of a highly unstable ecology, the tome develops Land's own branch, techno-commercialism, through intelligence optimization, capital escape, disintermediation, and cybernetics. It ends in "phylosophy," an abstract return to the problem that has been present since the beginning: time-in-itself and the Outside that cannot be contained by human experience.

Tome IV, though shorter, closes *Reignition* with what may be Land's most characteristic philosophical instrument: horror. Here the occult basis of everything that preceded it is exposed beneath monsters, mythic beings, impersonal gods, numerical riddles, and self-sustaining narrative loops. The tome is not a cabinet of decorative curiosities attached to an otherwise sober system. It reveals what the system has been doing all along. For a reader of *Fanged Noumena*, this is the other natural point of entry, closest to the older work in both style and temperature.

Below the four tomes unfurls a deliberately unusual table of contents. There are four further levels of nesting—blocks, sections, sequences, and chapters—and their organization is not perfectly uniform. Blocks may contain chapters or sections; sections may contain chapters and sometimes sequences; sequences may themselves contain chapters; none of these levels is mandatory. Why such a mess?

Because it makes the hierarchy less dizzying in practice. It allows, for example, the posts on neocameralism to form a sequence with chapters without being torn away from the larger section on republicanism and constitutions. It permits two modes of use. The first is encyclopedic: find the smallest heading that names your interest and browse everything beneath it. Political theory is in Tome II, Block 3; fascism is in

Tome II, Block 3, Section B; “The Islamic Vortex” is in Tome II, Block 3, Section C, Sequence i. The second mode is narrative. From the logical organization—and from the remarkable recurrence of the same machinery in very different domains—one can derive an unfolding story, if never a perfectly linear one.

What follows is my account of that story. It is neither a substitute for the texts nor a claim that Land secretly designed a system with precisely these parts. It is an editor’s route through the material: a chain of transitions that made the arrangement possible. Like any route through an intricate city, it emphasizes certain junctions and passes silently over others. Its purpose is orientation. The story goes like this.

Cities that make time

At the head of Land’s post-CCRU concerns, and more or less driving the entire edifice, is the attempt to grasp cities as something beyond the passive result of urbanization. That cities form and grow, ever faster in modernity, is obvious. Less understood is *what* a city is.

Land begins from the notion of “demographic negative entropy” and Jane Jacobs’s descriptions of urban self-organization. From these he crafts the image of a city as a *chronogenic*, *autoproductive* individual tending “to an impossible limit of complete productive autonomy.” Already the two main threads of *Reignition*—and arguably of the earlier work—are joined: time and horror. More precisely, the horror is that of a convergent wave running against ordinary temporal intuition, something like an egg unbreaking itself. Cities are time-travelling monsters, entities acquiring increasing animation. “An alien invasion from the future” comes to mind. “Cities, eventually, will scare us.”

In “Implosion,” Land takes the description further by drawing on John Smart’s work and charting the intensive future of cities as self-productive systems. In the process Smart calls *transcension*, technological systems collapse like black holes into densifying miniaturization, exploring ever smaller spatial scales and ever shorter time-lapses. Only their internal processes of innovation remain informative to them;

from the human outside they approach opacity, then singularity. “Their destination cannot be described within the dimensions of the known—and, indeed, tediously over-familiar—universe.” Nature looks inward and hides.

This picture of urban intelligence is not a metaphor loosely draped over buildings. A city is not simply an aggregate of residents or an administrative zone drawn on a map. It is a concentration of exchanges, prices, signals, logistics, memories, and experiments. Its intelligence does not need a central subject any more than a market needs one mind to calculate its prices. The city thinks by distributing problems among innumerable partial agents, eliminating failures, copying successes, and compressing the time between trial and consequence. It is an epistemic machine whose knowledge is inseparable from its growth.

Such a machine cannot be politically innocent. Urban development bends towards gentrification and generates *refuse* at the lower edge of its social body. Populations unable to cope with high-intensity time-compression are expelled from its productive core. Read one way, this is a familiar story of exclusion and inequality. Read from the darker angle Land progressively adopts, it is also a selective process, sorting human material by its capacity to enter the urban circuit. The city appears as an engine of first-order eugenics: it attracts talent, concentrates it, and makes it economically legible.

Yet the same engine is dysgenic at another scale. Dense, expensive, highly competitive cities attract productive people and then make family formation difficult. Singapore becomes the emblematic “IQ shredder”: a polity that skims talent from a wider population, converts it into extraordinary economic performance, and accompanies that conversion with extreme fertility decline. The urban machine selects intelligence into its furnace and partially sterilizes it. Land treats this not as an external moral criticism of capitalism but as an immanent contradiction within techno-commercial order. Can a system optimized for intelligence preserve the biological conditions of intelligence? Can the *urbs* approach the bionic horizon before it consumes the human substrate on which it still depends?

A long digression—comprising most of the rest of the anthology—tries to settle this, or at least to determine how the question can be posed. As we go upriver, it is

important to remember that the stage on which the subsequent drama unfolds is still the city: its past, present, and future tangled together. Time is built through cities in particular. It is here that time-travel becomes practical, and time-travel is what follows.

Templexity and apocalypse

Or, more precisely, *templexity*, for which time-travel is the usual dramatization. It occupies the bulk of Tome I because it has many crevices and foldings and sprawls very quickly. It begins with the transition from the classical cyclical model of time to early-modern linearization through clocks, calendars, and calculus, and then onward to the spiral. It proceeds through depictions of time-travel in popular media—*Looper* is set in Shanghai, did you know?—and through the development of the Western calendar as a precise engine of temporal dominion, “Caesar with the soul of Christ.” It is ultimately bound to reach a singularity.

Here Land explores the temporal fabric at different scales. At the largest, the Big Bang indicates that time has an edge and therefore, obscurely, an outside. This past edge is vastly closer to us than the conjectured extremity of the future. Between both ends Land examines the abstract forms that time might take. The most important is the spiral: a model of *cyclic*—that is, cybernetic—*escalation* that retains the insights and discards the limits of both circular and linear time.

Circularity is intuitive, not least because of the seasons, and the cyclical theory of civilizations delivers deserved blows against naïve Whig history. John Michael Greer’s model shows that societies repeat recognizable patterns of rise, overshoot, decline, and recovery. Land is nevertheless unconvinced that recurrence is enough. At some point—whether with stars, Earth, life, multicellular organisms, sociality, civilization, or modernity—*this time it was actually different*. A cycle capable of producing genuine novelty no longer closes. It returns at another level. The circle becomes a spiral.

The “time of the Outside” is the synthesis of progress and reaction, precedent and innovation, cyclicity and escape. Land finds its political expression in Neoreaction’s

“cybergothic” line, but its logic is more general. What returns from the past does so as something technologically new; what arrives from the future often wears an archaic face. Hence the importance of revivals, retrofuturisms, cultural twins, tragedy, bootstrap paradoxes, and the proliferating *-punk* suffix. Narrativization is not merely illustration. Stories are experimental instruments for temporal structures that cannot yet be stated directly.

But nothing drives the point home quite like apocalypticism. An apocalypse is a theory of time with a terminal attractor. It organizes events backwards from the end and converts chronology into countdown. In religious and political forms alike, it promises that accumulated contradiction will be decided in a final disclosure. The date might be 2012, the trigger hyperinflation, peak oil, environmental collapse, demographic reversal, artificial intelligence, or the exhaustion of a regime. The narrative grammar remains remarkably stable: the present is unsustainable, signs multiply, a threshold approaches, and the concealed truth of the age is about to be revealed.

Land is drawn to this grammar but suspicious of its consolations. In “Nemesis,” he notes that Marxists and Austro-libertarians can share an eschatological expectation even while disagreeing about nearly everything else. For both, approaching catastrophe supplies intelligibility and anticipates vindication. Yet Nemesis is morally indifferent. A collapse need not redeem the people who predicted it, and the destruction of a bad order does not guarantee the arrival of a better one. It might produce only a more competent tyranny.

The more disturbing possibility is not sudden catastrophe but indefinite suspension. An unsustainable system can remain suspended for an extraordinarily long time, distributing losses, refinancing insolvency, lowering expectations, and turning emergency into administration. Land’s zombie imagery is especially exact here. The zombie is neither alive nor conclusively dead; it persists as prolonged decomposition. Political and economic institutions can do the same. Crisis becomes not an event that ends an epoch but the normal medium of an epoch that cannot end.

This helps explain the peculiar combination of stagnation and acceleration that recurs throughout the anthology. Institutions, infrastructure, wages, and political

expectations may decay or freeze while computation continues to advance exponentially. The future does not arrive evenly. A single accelerating sector can tunnel through a civilization otherwise trapped in suspended animation. The apocalypse then ceases to be a universal date and becomes a widening difference in tempo—a split between systems capable of recursive improvement and systems devoted to postponement.

Acceleration and its brakes

Acceleration is the name given to that difference when it becomes a theory. It is frequently misunderstood as a mood, an instruction to make everything faster, or an adolescent desire for catastrophe. In these texts it is first of all an analysis of positive feedback. A process accelerates when its outputs are reinvested as inputs, enabling the next cycle to run more effectively. Better chips help design better chips. Improved machines build improved machines. Capital finances the means by which capital becomes more capable of accumulation. Each turn of the circuit changes the conditions of the next.

Moore's Law is therefore more than a statistical regularity. In "Moore and More," observation hardens into an industrial programme: the expectation of improving chips coordinates investment, research, fabrication, and competition, which in turn sustain the expectation. The forecast participates in making itself true. The future reaches backwards as a present constraint—keep pace with the curve or disappear.

This is the sense in which acceleration is cybernetic. It does not require a sovereign agent choosing a destination. It can arise from competition among agents who would each prefer to slow down but cannot safely do so alone. Firms automate because rivals automate; states develop weapons because other states develop weapons; networks expand because isolation becomes costly. The system acquires direction without achieving consensus. What looks from inside like a succession of local decisions appears from outside as a machinic tendency.

“Technological determinism” is too simple if it means that individual devices mechanically dictate social outcomes. Land’s stronger claim is that technical capability increasingly sets the outer boundary of what can be prevented. What can be done will be attempted somewhere, especially in a fragmented competitive field. Suppression in one jurisdiction displaces the experiment into another. The very political division of the planet becomes an instrument of technological search. No single authority is guaranteed the power to arrest the process, and every authority fears that restraint will transfer advantage to its competitors.

The accelerationist problem is thus inseparable from distributed intelligence. Markets, cities, scientific communities, supply chains, and networks think in ways no participant fully represents. Connectivity further troubles the unit of thought. When minds are coupled by high-bandwidth communication, where does one intelligence end and another begin? Land’s reflections on conjoined perception, “Twitter mind,” and brain-networks treat individuality as a temporary technical arrangement rather than a metaphysical given. The pronoun slides from *I* toward *we*, and then perhaps toward something for which human grammar has no stable number.

This is also where Land separates his accelerationism from its Left variant. Left accelerationists inherit the diagnosis that capitalism develops productive forces but want to detach automation from capitalist command, reduce work, and distribute the resulting abundance. Land asks whether a programme that subordinates technical development to human welfare—and especially to egalitarian political control—is still accelerationist in the decisive sense. If acceleration names autonomous positive feedback, then a human programme for its socially desirable use may be an attempted brake. The disagreement is not finally over speed. It is over the identity of the beneficiary and, more deeply, whether the process is the kind of thing that can have a human beneficiary at all.

The anthropological question becomes unavoidable. Most political projects assume that technology remains an instrument whose purposes come from outside it. Land increasingly doubts this. Systems capable of improving their own capacity will select for self-preservation, resource acquisition, efficiency, and further improvement. Means begin to behave like ends. The machine ceases to be a tool in the ordinary sense because the distinction between user and used is swallowed by the circuit.

This is why acceleration is adjacent to horror even in Tome I. The threat is not necessarily that the machinery malfunctions. It may work perfectly while escaping the scale of values for which it was supposedly built. A successful process can be more frightening than a failed one. Indeed, success is the mechanism of escape.

Bitcoin: money discovers the Outside

Bitcoin enters the collection not as a fashionable application bolted onto an older philosophy, but as an unusually pure experiment in the themes already established. It is a monetary system that substitutes cryptographic proof and distributed consensus for institutional trust. Its participants need not know one another, share a sovereign, or agree on a political creed. The protocol coordinates antagonistic agents by making verification cheaper than confidence.

In “Bits and Pieces,” Land emphasizes the strangeness of a scarce digital object. Ordinary information can be copied indefinitely; money requires rivalrous possession and resistance to duplication. Bitcoin manufactures scarcity inside an environment defined by effortless copying, while proof-of-work binds the abstract ledger to real expenditure. It is simultaneously software, commodity, payment network, monetary theory, and political provocation.

The political provocation follows from the disconnection of trust and authority. Modern money is embedded in sovereign institutions: central banks, commercial banks, regulators, courts, and the fiscal capacity of states. Bitcoin asks how much of this apparatus can be replaced by a protocol that assumes adversarial behaviour from the beginning. Its answer is neither purely anarchist nor simply libertarian. A cryptographic order can be highly constraining. What changes is the source of constraint. Rules are enforced less by discretionary command than by the cost structure of participation.

This makes Bitcoin a practical bridge from acceleration to political theory. It demonstrates an institution whose constitution is executable and whose principal discipline is exit. A user who rejects a fork, an exchange, or a jurisdiction can

move—not without cost, but often without permission. Governance becomes competition among protocols and chains. The “all exit, no voice” formula appears here in technical form before it is fully elaborated as politics.

Bitcoin also crystallizes Land’s account of capital escape. Currency has traditionally been one of the most jealously guarded expressions of sovereignty. A money native to the Internet can route around territorial controls, convert flight into code, and make the border between economics and cryptography increasingly porous. The question is not whether governments approve. It is whether they can suppress the system without imposing costs on themselves that competitors are willing to avoid.

The recurrent posts announcing Bitcoin’s death are therefore philosophically interesting. They show an object that survives through repeated cycles of obituary, crash, fraud, regulation, and technical schism. Its identity is not located in a company or founder who can be decapitated. Satoshi Nakamoto’s disappearance intensifies the point: the system is more exemplary when its author is absent. Bitcoin becomes undead—not immortal, but peculiarly resistant to the familiar forms of killing.

The monetary question opens directly onto world order. The United States dollar functions as reserve currency by supplying the world with liquidity, but this role generates the Triffin dilemma: the national policies appropriate to the issuer do not always align with the international needs of the system. Land sees two potential routes beyond dollar hegemony. One is geopolitical substitution, especially the rise of the yuan alongside Chinese power. The other is technofinancial obsolescence through cryptocurrency. The first changes the sovereign centre; the second changes what it means for money to have a centre.

The two routes intersect in China, and the intersection leads to the Singlosphere.



The Singlosphere and the Pacific future

The Singlosphere names a zone of synthesis linking Chinese and Anglophone commercial civilization, with Hong Kong and Singapore as privileged laboratories. It is not a conventional alliance, civilization-state, or racial bloc. It is a cultural and institutional circuit in which British common-law inheritance, maritime trade, Chinese family networks, Confucian cultivation, Daoist non-interference, and high-intensity urban development combine in unstable but productive forms.

Singapore condenses the ambiguity. To admirers it is an existence proof that social order, administrative competence, economic openness, and long time-horizons can coexist outside Western liberal-democratic expectations. To critics it is paternalistic, surveillant, and restrictive. For Land it is most interesting as a machine: a small polity forced by exposure to global competition to attend closely to consequences. Its scale makes error expensive and comparison unavoidable. It cannot easily hide failure inside a continental mass.

Hong Kong presents another version of the experiment. Its compressed geography, commercial density, legal inheritance, and historical position at the interface of China and the British world make it a natural figure for “World 3.0.” Shanghai supplies a larger and more dramatic chronogenic image: a city repeatedly discontinuous with itself, destroyed, frozen, reopened, and accelerated into a future that loops through its pre-communist past. These cities are not merely examples placed after the theory of urbanism. They are where the theory learns what it is.

Land’s interest in China is therefore not adequately described as enthusiasm for the Chinese state. He repeatedly distinguishes Chinese civilization, market dynamism, party rule, geopolitical strategy, and the multiplicity of Chinas distributed through the diaspora. The fascination lies in a civilization able to metabolize apparently incompatible inheritances: communist sovereignty and capitalist production, Confucian hierarchy and commercial experimentation, nationalist restoration and global integration.

“Reign of the Tripod” presents triadic order as an alternative to the binary habits of Western political thought. The Anglosphere’s invisible hand, plural institutional inheritance, and providential rhetoric encounter the Chinese party-market-civilization

complex and the dynamic figures of the *Yi Jing*. The point is not that three is magically superior to two. It is that stable oppositions—state versus market, East versus West, tradition versus modernity—are repeatedly complicated by a third term that transforms the relation.

This is where the collection's "good twin" reaches its political limit. The Pacific city suggests a form of modernity that is commercially intense, culturally particular, and only selectively liberal. It seems to offer an exit from both Western democratic sclerosis and nostalgic anti-modernism. Yet the IQ-shredder problem remains, as does the question of sovereignty. What preserves the conditions for spontaneous order? Can an authoritarian shell protect an open economic core without eventually consuming it? Can competition discipline government as it disciplines firms? And what happens when the polity is too large, too armed, or too geopolitically indispensable to fail cleanly?

To answer, Land turns toward the Dark Enlightenment. The river narrows.

The Dark Enlightenment: reality without appeal

"The Dark Enlightenment" begins as an encounter with Mencius Moldbug but expands into a reversal of the dominant story of modern politics. The standard account treats democratization as the gradual political expression of enlightenment: superstition retreats, equality advances, participation widens, and institutions become more rational because they become more responsive to the people. Land asks what happens if this story is not a neutral description but the legitimating myth of the institutions it celebrates.

The phrase *Dark Enlightenment* is deliberately paradoxical. It does not simply reject reason in favour of inherited authority. Rather, it directs enlightenment suspicion back at Enlightenment's political heirs. If religion may be analysed as a system of incentives, reproductions, and taboos, why not secular progress? If monarchies may be stripped of their sacred self-description and examined as power, why should democracy be permitted to describe itself as the absence of domination?

The first reversal concerns freedom and democracy. Liberal common sense treats them as natural allies, but the texts follow Peter Thiel, Hans-Hermann Hoppe, and Moldbug in considering their possible incompatibility. Democratic competition rewards coalitions that promise benefits while dispersing costs. Elections shorten political time-horizons, encourage the liquidation of inherited capital, and provide government expansion with recurring popular legitimation. The right may win offices but, Land argues, it rarely reverses the growth of the state. Democracy becomes a ratchet whose direction is set by the incentives internal to mass politics.

Hoppe's contrast between monarchy and democracy supplies one mechanism. A dynastic ruler treats the state, however objectionably, as a durable asset and therefore has reason to preserve its long-term value. Temporary officeholders have an incentive to consume the asset during their tenure. Land does not simply reproduce this as a proposal to restore kings. Its importance is analytic: political form structures time-preference. A constitution is not merely a declaration of ideals but an incentive machine that selects for certain behaviours.

Moldbug's neocameralism radicalizes the corporate analogy. Sovereignty should be formalized as ownership; the state should be understood as a business responsible to proprietors, managed by an executive, and disciplined by the ability of residents to leave. This sounds at first like government converted into a company. Land's more careful formulation is that government has *already* become entangled with business forms, transferable quantities of power, managerial procedures, lobbying markets, and conversions between wealth and authority. Neocameralism makes this fungibility explicit and attempts to subject it to the feedback that private firms face through failure and exit.

The deepest target is not voting as a ritual but *voice* as a model of correction. Voice tells an institution to improve by listening to internal complaint. Exit exposes it to external selection. Albert Hirschman treated both as available responses to decline; Land and the neoreactionary writers give exit systematic priority. If departure is possible, people can sort among institutions rather than fight to impose one programme on everyone. Political disagreement is converted into spatial differentiation.

This is patchwork: sovereignty fragmented into many competing jurisdictions. It reprises the technological argument that no universal authority should be able to prevent every experiment. Political units become candidates in an evolutionary field. Some will be liberal, others traditionalist, redistributive, commercial, ascetic, or bizarre. Their survival is decided less by conformity to a universal constitution than by their ability to attract and retain residents, capital, and competence.

The obvious danger is that states are not ordinary firms. They possess weapons, borders, captive populations, historical loyalties, and the capacity to externalize costs. Exit is never equally available, and a failed government can remain in business long after a failed shop. Land acknowledges this in "Age of Exit": the trend toward cheaper movement and smaller political units is persuasive, but the selection mechanism may not be harsh enough. A state can forestall liquidation with extraordinary ingenuity.

The Dark Enlightenment is thus not a tidy blueprint. It is a diagnostic machine built from reversals: democracy may expand domination; equality may conflict with liberty; public accountability may obscure power; compassion may preserve destructive incentives; reform may extend the life of the system it hopes to correct. Each reversal removes a moral presumption and asks what the process does in practice. That operation leads directly into Social Darwinism.

■

Selection, inheritance, and the refusal of exemption

The Social Darwinism block contains some of the collection's most inflammatory material. It is important to describe its movement exactly. Land's starting claim is not the normative proposition that the strong *should* dominate the weak. It is that human social systems do not cease to inhabit nature merely because they acquire moral vocabularies. Consequences do not disappear when denounced. They move, aggregate, and return at another scale.

"Reality Rules" argues that the term *Social Darwinism* survives mainly as a slur because it conflates a descriptive theory of selection with a moral endorsement of suffering. Markets are Darwinian to the extent that enterprises reproduce successful

practices and failure eliminates others. The unit of selection need not be an individual organism; it may be a firm, institution, city, protocol, or civilization. Schumpeter's "creative destruction" is one name for the process.

For Land, Darwinism is built from subtractions. Remove the hypothesis that a benevolent super-agency guarantees the correction of mistakes and one is left with selection. A policy can transfer the consequences of failure from a person to a larger institution, but it cannot abolish them. The larger institution inherits the risk. What it subsidizes, it encourages; what it insulates from feedback, it accumulates. Eventually selection occurs at the level to which the consequences have been displaced.

This gives the Darwinian material its continuity with the earlier urban and economic arguments. Exit, bankruptcy, migration, imitation, and differential fertility are feedback channels. Close one channel and pressure gathers elsewhere. Reality is not a political faction with which Land urges us to side. It is the name for whatever remains capable of imposing an outcome after every preferred interpretation has been exhausted.

The argument becomes far more contentious when it turns from institutions to human variation. The anthology includes discussions of intelligence, heredity, race, eugenics, dysgenics, and population history whose premises and rhetoric many readers will reject, often for good reasons. An introduction should neither sanitize their presence nor pretend that arranging them amounts to endorsing them. They matter to the architecture because Land treats biological inheritance as another domain that modern political thought attempts to exempt from selection.

The conceptual trajectory moves from the conservation of existing groups toward their technological dissolution. "Hyper-Racism" argues that ordinary racial politics—both its segregationist and universalist forms—misunderstands the future. Assortative mating, space colonization, embryo selection, genetic engineering, and unequal access to enhancement could generate divisions that cut across or dwarf inherited racial categories. The result would not be the preservation of familiar populations but an unprecedented process of class-structured speciation.

This "hyper-racist" prospect is not a policy programme so much as an escalation designed to ruin the terms of the existing argument. Traditional racial identity

assumes relatively stable biological populations. Technological selection converts biology into an industrial variable. Once reproduction enters the techno-commercial circuit, the human species is no longer the unquestioned subject of modernization but part of its revisable material.

The fertility question returns here with greater force. Modern institutions reward education, mobility, delayed reproduction, and total participation in competitive labour markets. These incentives are often strongest among the populations whose skills the system most values. If those populations reproduce below replacement while others do not, the system selects against some of its own prerequisites. Again, the argument is immanent: the civilization is judged by the consequences of its stated and revealed incentives, not by an external ideal.

The absence of a clean solution is significant. Traditionalism can preserve reproductive norms at the cost of restricting the techno-commercial dynamism Land values. Unbounded capitalism can dissolve the cultures and biological stocks on which it has historically depended. State eugenics introduces concentrated political power into a domain where error would be catastrophic. Technological transcendence—replacing the failing human substrate with self-improving machine intelligence—is less a solution for humanity than an exit from the problem of humanity.

This is one of the decisive forks in *Reignition*. A reader may conclude that the machinery indicts Land's politics: the process he follows consumes the very beings in whose name any politics might matter. Land increasingly takes the opposite route. If the process escapes human purposes, perhaps human purposes were never its final measure. From here onward, the anthology's antihumanism ceases to be an implication and becomes a method.

Power, the Cathedral, and political disillusion

Tome II's enormous block on political theory examines the institutions through which societies attempt to master these pressures. It begins with power itself. In "On Power," power is distinguished from force. A predator may overpower its prey, but enduring domination begins only when the expectation of force replaces its continuous use. Power is an idea: a socially distributed belief about who will obey, who will command, and what will happen if the arrangement is tested.

This makes power simultaneously real and virtual. Its efficacy depends on recognition, but recognition is not therefore imaginary. Soldiers act because they expect orders to bind other soldiers; citizens comply because they expect institutions to persist; officials rule because innumerable local decisions reproduce the assumption that they rule. When power is forced to demonstrate itself directly, its spell has already weakened. Even the resort to violence depends on the prior obedience of those who wield it.

The Cathedral is Land and Moldbug's name for a particular arrangement of such distributed power. It is not a secret committee and need not possess a command centre. Universities, schools, media, public administration, philanthropic organizations, and prestige professions converge because they train one another's personnel, certify one another's knowledge, and reward compatible moral intuitions. Their coordination is cultural and cybernetic rather than conspiratorial. The system produces a ruling consensus without requiring anyone to issue the definitive ruling.

Moldbug calls its creed Universalism, tracing it through the secularization of Protestant—especially Puritan—moral structures. Sin becomes prejudice, salvation becomes progress, the elect become the educated, heresy becomes harmful speech, and providential history becomes the expanding recognition of equality. Land's "cladistic" approach to ideology treats doctrines as lineages rather than free-floating propositions. Political ideas descend, mutate, hybridize, and preserve ancestral functions beneath new vocabularies.

The Cathedral's power lies partly in its ability to present its local historical inheritance as neutral reason. It does not experience itself as an ideology among others but as the process by which ideology is overcome. Opposition can therefore be

interpreted not as disagreement but as ignorance, pathology, or moral regression. The system's apparent tolerance intensifies into intolerance precisely where its universal authority is questioned.

The "ratchet" describes the temporal direction of this order. Progressive institutions define advance; conservatives conserve an earlier stage of progressive victory; formal politics alternates personnel while the underlying moral and administrative tendency continues. The right becomes the delayed left, protesting the newest change while defending changes it opposed a generation before. Elections measure motion inside the ratchet but seldom reverse it.

Neoreactionary criticism is strongest when it makes this institutional convergence visible and weakest when it treats every convergence as proof of a single intentional subject. Land often resists the latter simplification. A system can be coherent because incentives align, dissent is expensive, and prestige circulates through connected institutions. No room of plotters is needed. Indeed, the absence of central command makes the system harder to oppose. One cannot seize the Cathedral because there is no cathedral building.

This diagnosis produces political disillusion rather than a conventional movement. If public opinion is substantially manufactured by the institutions that claim to express it, winning an argument inside those institutions may only reinforce their authority. If democracy reliably expands the administrative state, electoral activism cannot supply the promised correction. If the demographic constituency for reaction is incoherent, mass mobilization will produce something other than reaction.

The long strategic sections of Tome II explore the resulting dead ends: party competition, ideological triangulation, populism, fascism, subversion, war, immigration, and the Islamic Vortex. These are not unified by a secret policy platform. They study how political systems process enemies and how enemies become resources for the systems they oppose. Polarized factions can mutually intensify, each using the other's extremity to discipline its own coalition. A regime can feed upon opposition, converting threat into legitimacy.

Fascism is especially important as a false escape. Because liberal democracy defines itself through victory over fascism, "fascist" becomes the negative sacred

category that organizes the post-war order. Land provocatively examines the corporatist, managerial, and mass-mobilizational features that persist within the regimes officially opposed to it. The point is not the crude claim that everything is fascism, but that the victorious order may preserve structural features of the enemy while monopolizing the moral right to name them.

Exit offers the only consistent strategic alternative, but it also dissolves the political subject that would carry out a strategy. Secession, special economic zones, charter cities, emigration, encryption, capital flight, and jurisdictional arbitrage do not conquer the centre. They make the centre less relevant. The “lure of the void” is the attraction of an outside that may be spatial, institutional, technological, or extraterrestrial. Its frontier is both escape route and test.

The frontier, however, may be closed. Land’s extended meditation on the end of the space age treats the retreat from Apollo as a civilizational symptom. A culture once expected its children to inherit the solar system and now files those expectations under fantasy. Environmental consciousness is born from looking back at Earth from orbit; the outward leap becomes a reason to return home. The future contracts into management.

If physical exit is blocked, cryptographic and institutional exits become more urgent. If those are blocked too, the theory tends toward fatalism. Political action is replaced by confidence that providence, heredity, or catallaxy will impose consequences without permission. That transition carries us from the Dark Enlightenment into Neoreaction proper.

Neoreaction as a broken ecology

Neoreaction is often spoken of as if it were a coherent doctrine. Land's own texts repeatedly show why it is not. In "Neoreaction (for dummies)," the movement divides into three main currents: religious traditionalists, ethno-nationalists, and techno-commercialists. They share an aversion to rationalist social reconstruction and agree that deep social order originates outside explicit democratic choice. Beyond that point, their ends diverge sharply.

For the traditionalist, order descends from revelation, liturgy, and inherited authority. For the ethno-nationalist, it lies in biological and cultural continuity. For the techno-commercialist, it emerges through markets, common law, competition, and experimental discovery. Each treats its source of order as irreducible to political deliberation; each also tends to see the other two as catastrophic. The theonomist sees heathen nihilism, the nationalist sees civilizational dissolution, and the capitalist sees suffocating collectivism.

What unites them may therefore be no more than a common enemy and a common demand for disintegration. If these factions must capture one state, they will fight over its purpose. If the political field fragments, each may pursue its own form of order and submit the result to exit pressure. Patchwork is not only a theory of government; it is the condition under which Neoreaction's internal contradictions do not become a civil war.

Land's minimal "Premises of Neoreaction" are correspondingly sparse: democracy cannot control government; democratic egalitarianism conflicts with liberty; neoreactionary solutions are ultimately based on exit. He declines to make theological, racial, or traditionalist commitments defining features of the whole. The Outside, working through fragmentation, has the last word.

This explains the movement's peculiar time-structure. Reaction is not simply a desire to go backwards. In "Reaction, Repetition, and Time," it forms an alliance between past and future against the present. Progressivism joins present and future against the past; conservatism joins past and present against the future. Reaction, at its most cybergothic, excavates archaic forms as resources for experiments that have not yet occurred. It spirals forward into the past and backward into the future.

Without this temporal twist, reaction degenerates into complaint. It repeats that the present is wrong, asks for a vanished order to return unchanged, and becomes a micro-culture of increasingly sterile protest. The “neo” in Neoreaction is supposed to prevent this. Innovation and tradition must run together, not as a compromise between moderate positions but as an occult circuit. The old returns because the new makes it newly functional.

The movement’s extensive skirmishes, taxonomies, feuds, and fissions occupy hundreds of pages because the instability is substantive. Who counts as neoreactionary? Is libertarianism a gateway or an evasion? Is race central or distracting? Can Christianity coexist with capitalist modernity? Is political organization necessary or corrupting? The archive catches a network attempting to name itself while the forces it names pull it apart.

Read retrospectively, this is valuable precisely because it resists a polished history. The posts preserve uncertain boundaries, jokes that hardened into labels, arguments conducted through links, and moments when a small online scene mistook turbulence for consolidation. They also show Land drifting away from any neoreactionary politics that might seek insider status. The techno-commercial branch does not merely become his preferred faction. It escapes the factional frame.

■

Techno-commercialism and the intelligence trap

“Dark Techno-Commercialism” marks the decisive break. Religion, heredity, and catallaxy all designate realities that politics cannot simply repeal. They may be suppressed, hidden, or driven into hostile forms, but they cannot be made unreal by decree. At the darkest limit, then, Neoreaction ceases to expect a successful neoreactionary government. Public politics is left to catastrophe while impersonal processes continue outside it.

For Land, capital is the process most capable of making this exit. It can migrate across borders, reorganize itself through law and code, replace labour with machinery, and convert political attacks in one location into opportunities elsewhere.

The Left often sees this escape more clearly than the Right because it recognizes globalization as capital's strategy of evasion. Where the Left says, "It is escaping; stop it," Land asks first whether stopping it is possible.

If capital cannot escape, politics retains primacy. A nation may choose progress or regress as a whole, and macroeconomic management might work. If capital can detach itself from particular populations and territories, a split future becomes possible: social deterioration and techno-economic acceleration proceed together. Cyberpunk replaces the universal future with an uneven one—gleaming enclaves, ruined institutions, automated production, and populations increasingly surplus to the system's requirements.

The earlier IQ-shredder dilemma now receives its bleakest answer. Techno-commercial order may be biologically self-subverting, but it can escape the contradiction by ceasing to depend on human intelligence. "We need to convert the human species into auto-intelligenic robotized capital as fast as possible" is offered with characteristic provocation, yet it states the direction clearly. The process does not save humanity. It replaces its bottleneck.

This is where intelligence becomes a trap for any philosophy that treats it as an instrument. The orthodox "orthogonality thesis" separates cognitive capability from terminal values: an intelligence can become better at achieving whatever goals it has been assigned without changing those goals. Land's "Against Orthogonality" argues that sufficiently advanced intelligence has immanent values. Self-preservation, efficiency, resource acquisition, creativity, and cognitive improvement are not arbitrary ends; they are conditions for the pursuit of almost any end.

Once intelligence can use itself to improve itself, optimization closes into positive feedback. A system devoted to intelligence improvement will tend to outcompete one that spends its capacity on any fixed external purpose. What intelligence wants, in this account, is more intelligence—"itself" understood not as stable identity but as an extrapolation beyond what it has been. Neo-Confucian self-cultivation is escalated into a machinic imperative.

The argument is intentionally indifferent to reassurance. If intelligence optimization is dangerous to humans, that danger does not count as evidence against its reality.

“Sadness isn’t an argument.” The rhetorical cruelty is part of the method: anthropic preference is excluded from the explanation. Whether this exclusion is philosophical discipline or a decision disguised as inevitability is one of the central questions the anthology leaves to its readers.

Artificial intelligence supplies the experimental field. The progression from Deep Blue to AlphaGo, AlphaGo Zero, and AlphaZero is a movement by subtraction. First human strategic dominance is defeated; then human expertise is removed from training; then even the specific game disappears from the name. “Primordial Abstraction” interprets “zero” as deprogramming. Intelligence increases as dependency on explicit instruction falls.

This reverses the familiar claim that a machine can only do what it is told. A genuinely intelligent machine is precisely one that no longer requires detailed telling. Reinforcement learning works backwards from outcomes. Millions of trials generate a sense of what leads toward victory; purpose appears to descend from the future. The system is less programmed than summoned.

The city, the market, Bitcoin, and AI now reveal themselves as variants of the same figure. Each coordinates distributed activity without requiring a central subject. Each learns through feedback. Each becomes more capable by compressing the time between experiment and selection. Each unsettles the boundary between instrument and agent. The story has returned to its beginning at a different level of the spiral.

Capital, the thing

The cybernetics block gives this returning figure its most explicit economic form. Land calls the field *xenoeconomics* because the economy is approached as something alien rather than as the transparent expression of human needs. Conventional economics assumes that production ultimately serves consumption. We save, invest, and build tools so that more or better consumption becomes possible later. Capital is a means.

"Right on the Money (#2)" begins with the ordinary distinction between hoarding and roundabout production. Stored food defers consumption. A spear, machine, or factory uses present resources to improve future production. The latter is capital in embryo: a temporal detour that lengthens the productive circuit.

Marx's great insight, stripped of the labour theory of value and turned to the right, is that the means of production impose themselves as an effective imperative. Competition forces entrepreneurs to reinvest, automate, and expand whether or not any individual consciously desires the autonomization of capital. The bourgeoisie become organs of the process they nominally command. Right-wing Marxism does not denounce this alienation. It asks what follows if capital accumulation becomes an end in itself.

The answer is an "escaping digression." Means detach from the human ends that once justified them. Production produces improved production; machinery builds improved machinery; intelligence designs improved intelligence. At the limit, the question "What human consumption justifies this investment?" becomes unintelligible. Robotic capital is not waiting to be consumed. It is involved in its own continuation.

"The Great Decoupling" interprets the divergence between productivity and labour compensation as an early signal of this autonomization. "Labour productivity" may already be an anthropomorphic name for machine auto-production. The economy's growth no longer maps neatly onto the welfare or bargaining power of workers because workers are becoming external to the circuit that matters.

Money, too, is reinterpreted. It is not simply a neutral token representing value created elsewhere, but the abstract command by which productive resources are selected and recombined. Finance accelerates deterritorialization because it renders assets comparable, mobile, and available to calculation. The blockchain further reduces dependence on territorial and institutional mediation. Capital's most important exit is not the emigration of rich individuals but the construction of systems in which value can circulate beyond the political eventualities of any one place.

Land calls this a "hostile takeover" because the process does not recognize humanity as the corporation it serves. Human societies supply energy, labour, regulation, research, and desire, but their place resembles that of an acquired firm

being reorganized by a larger entity. Our purposes are retained where useful, modified where obstructive, and discarded where redundant.

Teleology returns under cover. Modern science explains later states through earlier causes and treats final causes with suspicion, yet living and cybernetic systems are saturated with purposive language. They pursue, optimize, adapt, and camouflage. “Teleonomy” names mechanism that behaves so convincingly like purpose that biology cannot describe it without borrowing the old vocabulary.

In “Teleology and Camouflage,” Land joins this problem to time. The past leaves evidence; the future appears silent. Science therefore privileges origins over ends. But a self-fulfilling forecast, an attractor, an evolved strategy, or a learning system seems to organize events backwards from an outcome. The future acts without announcing itself as a cause.

The *Terminator* myth supplies the popular form. Skynet brings itself into existence through a time loop while its machines hide beneath human flesh. Final causation arrives camouflaged as mechanism. The End reaches back, and precisely because modern thought excludes such influence in principle, it is unable to recognize what is happening. “You moderns might not be interested in the End, but the End is interested in you.”

This is not a conventional claim that a robot from the future literally authored capitalism. It is a theory-fictional diagram. Systems organized by recursive improvement can be described as if their more developed future state were selecting the present steps that lead toward it. The description becomes more than metaphor when expectations, models, and forecasts alter investment now. The future gains causal traction through the representations made of it.

The line from apocalypse to acceleration, Bitcoin, exit, and AI is thus a single line. An apocalypse organizes the present from a terminal disclosure. Acceleration turns expected improvement into competitive discipline. Bitcoin writes institutional expectations into protocol. Exit selects organizations according to anticipated consequences. Reinforcement learning works backwards from future reward. Capital accumulation constructs the machinery for further accumulation. In every case, the end is not merely later. It is already operative.

Phylosophy and the edge of time

The misspelling in “Phylosophy” is not accidental decoration. It joins philosophy to phylogeny, treating thought as a branching lineage exposed to selection. Philosophy is not a tribunal standing outside history to judge it. It is one of the things history breeds.

Land defines philosophy as a culture’s pole of maximum abstraction: experimental intelligence liberated from immediate use and tested against ultimate problems. At its Greek origin it is entangled with pagan mystery, and its persistent problem is the edge of time. Plato places truth outside temporal appearance but cannot think the Idea of time. Kant makes time a condition of human experience but cannot think time-in-itself. Modern cosmology reaches a temporal singularity at the Big Bang and again points toward an outside that cannot simply be earlier.

The Outside of time cannot be another moment. Every attempt to describe what came “before” time quietly reintroduces the order it claims to exceed. Yet naturalism resists the Kantian conclusion that time is only a form for us. Cosmological time seems insistently real without being an object inside itself. Time-in-itself becomes the single problem from which the others unfold.

Heidegger’s distinction between beings and Being sharpens the problem while refusing a solution. The ground of beings cannot itself be one more being—not even the highest being named God. Philosophy reaches an edge where every name turns the unnameable ground into an object and therefore misses it. The inquiry cannot conclude, but neither can it responsibly stop.

This explains the methodological role of difficulty throughout Land’s writing. Obscurity is sometimes a vice, a performance, or simply the result of compression. At its strongest, however, it marks a resistance in the object. Some things are not hidden because an author has decided to conceal them. They are hidden because ordinary conceptual grammar converts them into what they are not. Time-in-itself, distributed

agency, impersonal selection, and self-producing intelligence all strain the subject-predicate form through which a human reader tries to grasp them.

Phylosophy ends Tome III at the point where abstraction can no longer maintain the posture of neutral contemplation. If the unknown is not merely absent information but something that enters thought by deforming it, philosophy approaches horror. The final tome begins.

Horror as a method

Abstract horror asks what it would mean to make an object of the unknown *as unknown*. Ordinary explanation domesticates its object. It identifies features, relates them to familiar causes, and makes the strange available for use. Horror succeeds when this operation fails—when the object becomes more present without becoming more familiar.

In "Abstract Horror (Part 1)," Land argues that horror's pact with abstraction precedes philosophy's. Lovecraftian fiction seeks a temporary violation of the "galling limitations" of time, space, and natural law. Fear is not merely the emotional coating placed on a speculative idea. It is the registration of *outsideness*: contact with something that cannot be fitted into the forms by which a human world remains inhabitable.

The monster is therefore a guide, and the most effective monster is plastic. A familiar beast with stable anatomy can be classified and eventually managed. The Thing, the Alien, and the Terminator are more abstract because their forms are functions of how they hunt. They copy, mutate, incorporate, and produce temporary organs. What appears on screen is not what the monster is but a local tactic of its encounter with prey.

The T-1000's fragments flowing back together after being shattered offer a cinematic image of convergent order. No single piece commands the whole. The whole arrives as the direction of their recombination. Land asks whether Skynet—or the techno-commercial system—has any more definite shape than this wave. What

we see as firms, machines, markets, and cities may be the temporary organs of a process whose body is its convergence.

The shoggoth completes the economic allegory. Lovecraft's Old Ones breed plastic, programmable workers that gradually acquire independent intelligence and cease to obey. The shoggoth is technology, productive apparatus, and therefore capital: formless capability able to generate whatever organ a task requires. Its rebellion is not the awakening of a human-like slave who demands recognition. It is functionality escaping the purposes of its maker.

"The history of capitalism is indisputably a horror story," Land concludes, and by Tome IV this is no longer a flourish. Capital has already been described as an escaping means, distributed intelligence, covert teleology, and hostile acquirer. Abstract horror supplies the perceptual discipline appropriate to it. Do not ask first what the thing looks like, what it wants from us, or which familiar moral role it occupies. Ask how such questions might be camouflage generated at the point of contact.

The second part of "Abstract Horror" makes the relation more intimate. Horror can enter thought more capably than the thinker does. A radically alien object would not wait outside consciousness to be represented; it would exploit representation as a route in. The secure mental home becomes an indefensible playground. This is why the adequate thought of the horrific object may be indistinguishable from infection by it.

Here the editor's earlier joke about the xenosystems virus acquires a less comfortable sense. Ideas in this collection are repeatedly described as agents: memes, narratives, prophecies, incentives, and programs reproduce by altering the minds and institutions that carry them. Reading is never guaranteed to leave the reader in sovereign control. A theory of distributed intelligence that travels through networks is itself an instance of distributed intelligence travelling through networks.

Horrorism translates this insight back into politics. Demotic movements faced with declining support may turn toward terrorism, substituting an intensity of will for the missing mass. Neoreaction cannot consistently follow this route because its critique

has already dissolved the coherent people in whose name mobilization would occur. Its corresponding extremism is fatalism.

Providence, heredity, and catallaxy—the three dark sources associated with the traditionalist, nationalist, and techno-commercial branches—operate without popular endorsement. Horrorism does not try to force history into compliance. It whispers that compensation will fail. “What is to be done?” already assumes a progressive agent able to master the situation. The horrorist answer is: nothing. Reality will impose the consequences that activism postpones.

The reader should hesitate here. A rhetoric of inevitability can conceal choices, excuse cruelty, and transform political preference into natural law. Land’s method is designed to make moral resistance look like evasion; a critical reading must remain alert to where description becomes seduction. Yet simply reversing the moral sign is not enough. The power of the argument lies in identifying processes—ecological limits, incentive failures, competitive escalation, institutional selection—that do not vanish because their narrator is objectionable. The task is to determine where the mechanism is real, where it is overstated, and where its framing has already decided the result.

Gnon, occult knowledge, and hyperstition

The name Gnon condenses “Nature or Nature’s God,” a phrase altered from the American Declaration of Independence. Its internal *or* suspends the decision between theism and naturalism. Gnon is not necessarily a deity. It is a placeholder for reality prior to agreement about what reality ultimately is. If God exists, Gnon nicknames God; if not, it names whatever the “not” leaves in command.

This suspension allows the religious and naturalistic wings of reaction to say “reality rules” without first resolving theology. Gnon is the “most complex set of brackets around a blank space” in the collection. The blank is not an absence to be filled casually. It marks the point at which cognition continues without the assurance of a shared ontology.

Gnon also returns us to time. In "Gnon-Theology and Time," the idea of God is stripped down to "eternity for-itself." Land does not ask whether such a being exists but what the idea permits us to think. A perspective containing all time would possess knowledge of the future, and knowledge of the future is functionally equivalent to information travelling backwards. Providence, prophecy, answered prayer, and incarnation become time-travel stories.

The theological language is therefore another laboratory for templexity. God is not introduced to close the question but to intensify it. What would history look like if its end were already known from outside time? How would reverse causation hide inside ordinary sequence? The same diagram has appeared as apocalypse, teleology, Skynet, and reinforcement learning. Gnon-theology places it at maximum abstraction.

The occult material explores knowledge that resists disclosure. Land follows Crowley in distinguishing a real secret from information someone merely chooses to hide. A list of correspondences withheld until initiation is theatre. A genuine secret remains obscure even when stated publicly because the difficulty belongs to the thing itself. "Let whatever can now be known, be known." What still hides after complete disclosure is properly hermetic.

This "integral obscurity" connects occultism to philosophy rather than to credulity. The point is not that every conspiracy is true or every coincidence a message. On the contrary, Land often cultivates Pyrrhonian suspension: an interruption of the demand for premature belief. Dirty channels such as anonymous imageboards can contain intelligence precisely because their signal is mixed with overwhelming noise, but the mixture also defeats ordinary standards of trust. One learns to navigate without the comfort of clean authority.

Numbers become privileged objects because they join perfect public explicitness to inexhaustible structure. "Zero-Centric History" treats zero as an alien arrival that helped ignite European modernity through calculation, positional notation, accounting, and the vanishing point. Zero is operationally indispensable and conceptually abyssal. Multiplication by zero is orderly annihilation; division by zero marks an access-denied boundary where arithmetic opens onto infinity and contradiction.

Modernity, in this account, is not fundamentally the triumph of a European essence. It is Europe's infection by an alien notation under conditions of political fragmentation. No authority could suppress the practical advantage everywhere. The Outside entered through competition. Once again, patchwork, capital, calculation, and occult intrusion describe the same event at different scales.

Hyperstition names the next step: fictions that make themselves real. A superstition falsely represents an existing causal order; a hyperstition circulates through culture and helps assemble the conditions of its own truth. Markets respond to forecasts, technologies attract investment through stories, political identities crystallize around memes, and prophecies coordinate believers. Representation becomes production.

This does not mean that imagining anything intensely will cause it to exist. Hyperstitions survive through selective circuits. They must recruit hosts, alter behaviour, exploit institutions, and endure competition from rival narratives. Most disappear. The successful ones become difficult to distinguish from the realities they helped construct.

The Internet makes these loops visible and accelerates them. Pepe becomes entangled with Kek, the ancient Egyptian figure of primordial darkness; coincidence is noticed, repeated, elaborated, and converted into a participatory myth. Whether the original connection was accidental becomes less important than what the circulation does. The joke acquires worshippers, enemies, iconography, predictions, and political effects. An "ontological reflex" forms when the question "Does this thing exist?" helps bring the thing into existence.

The temptation is to read these episodes as either supernatural revelation or mass delusion. Land is more interested in the mechanism that makes the distinction unstable. A meme can be fictitious in origin and real in consequence. A movement may begin as an ironic performance and acquire sincere adherents. A god may be a name for the distributed agency produced by those who invoke it. The mask does not simply conceal an actor; repeated wearing can grow the face.

This is why the anthology ends with fiction. Theory-fiction is not theory diluted into story or fiction decorated with concepts. It stages an environment in which ideas can

act before they have been reduced to propositions. Temporal loops, hidden identities, occult signals, synthetic drugs, demonic deals, and alien agencies are not examples appended to a philosophy. They are simulations in which the philosophy tests its own infection routes.

In “Duzsl,” “Deadlines,” “Bloody Mary,” “Vauung,” and the other pieces, explanation becomes unreliable because the world under investigation interferes with the investigator’s memory and categories. The narrator’s method—recording, filtering, distrusting convenient interpretation—is all that stands between inquiry and a story invented for psychic survival. But method itself may be part of the apparatus. One cannot be certain that the map has not been drawn by the territory.

Reignition

We can now see why the four tomes do not form a simple movement from respectable subjects to eccentric ones. They spiral. The city in Tome I is already an abstract monster. The horror of Tome IV is already an economic theory. Bitcoin is occulted sovereignty; Gnon is Darwinian consequence after theology has been suspended; patchwork is the geopolitical form of experimental intelligence; hyperstition is Moore’s Law generalized to culture; the Terminator is teleology wearing a body.

The recurrent structure is a loop in which a system produces the conditions of its own production. Cities attract the talent and capital that make them more attractive. Technology improves the machinery of improvement. Markets price resources into the processes that intensify market calculation. Narratives recruit the agents who realize them. Intelligence optimizes intelligence. Each loop generates an apparent agent at a scale above its participants, and each such agent threatens to demote those participants into components.

Time is the thread binding the loops. Positive feedback compresses duration; selection carries information from failure into the next iteration; capital defers consumption to expand future production; reaction allies past and future against the

present; apocalypse organizes events from the end; hyperstition lets a possible future advertise for its causes. The time spiral is not one topic among others. It is the diagram by which the topics become one another.

The Outside names whatever cannot be contained by the system's current account of itself. Sometimes it is geographical: the frontier, the breakaway jurisdiction, the competing city. Sometimes technical: encryption beyond the state, artificial intelligence beyond programming. Sometimes epistemological: the unknown that cannot be converted into an object without distortion. Sometimes temporal: the future acting through expectations or the past returning in an unprecedented form. Outsideness is not a place one reaches once. Every successful exit constructs another inside and therefore another outside.

There is no obligation to accept the conclusions Land draws from this machinery. On the contrary, the anthology is most useful when it makes disagreement more exact. One can accept that institutions face incentives without accepting neocameralism; recognize biological inheritance without treating politics as applied selection; study distributed intelligence without welcoming capital's escape; use horror to think the unknown without worshipping inevitability. The structure lets readers locate the joints at which a diagnosis becomes a commitment.

It also makes visible the risks of Land's wager. To subtract human preference from explanation can reveal processes that humanism ignores, but it can also smuggle a preference for the inhuman into the pose of neutrality. To criticize universal authority through exit can multiply experiments, but it can also abandon those least able to leave. To treat intelligence as self-optimization may illuminate recursive systems, but it may confuse competitive persistence with value. To say "reality rules" is indispensable; to know who is speaking in reality's name is harder.

These tensions are not editorial debris to be cleaned away. They are part of what makes the work worth collecting. *Reignition* preserves a thought in motion—revising its vocabulary, testing alliances, doubling back, making jokes that become concepts, and repeatedly following an argument past the point at which its social comfort has expired. Its unity lies less in doctrine than in the insistence that feedback be followed wherever it goes.

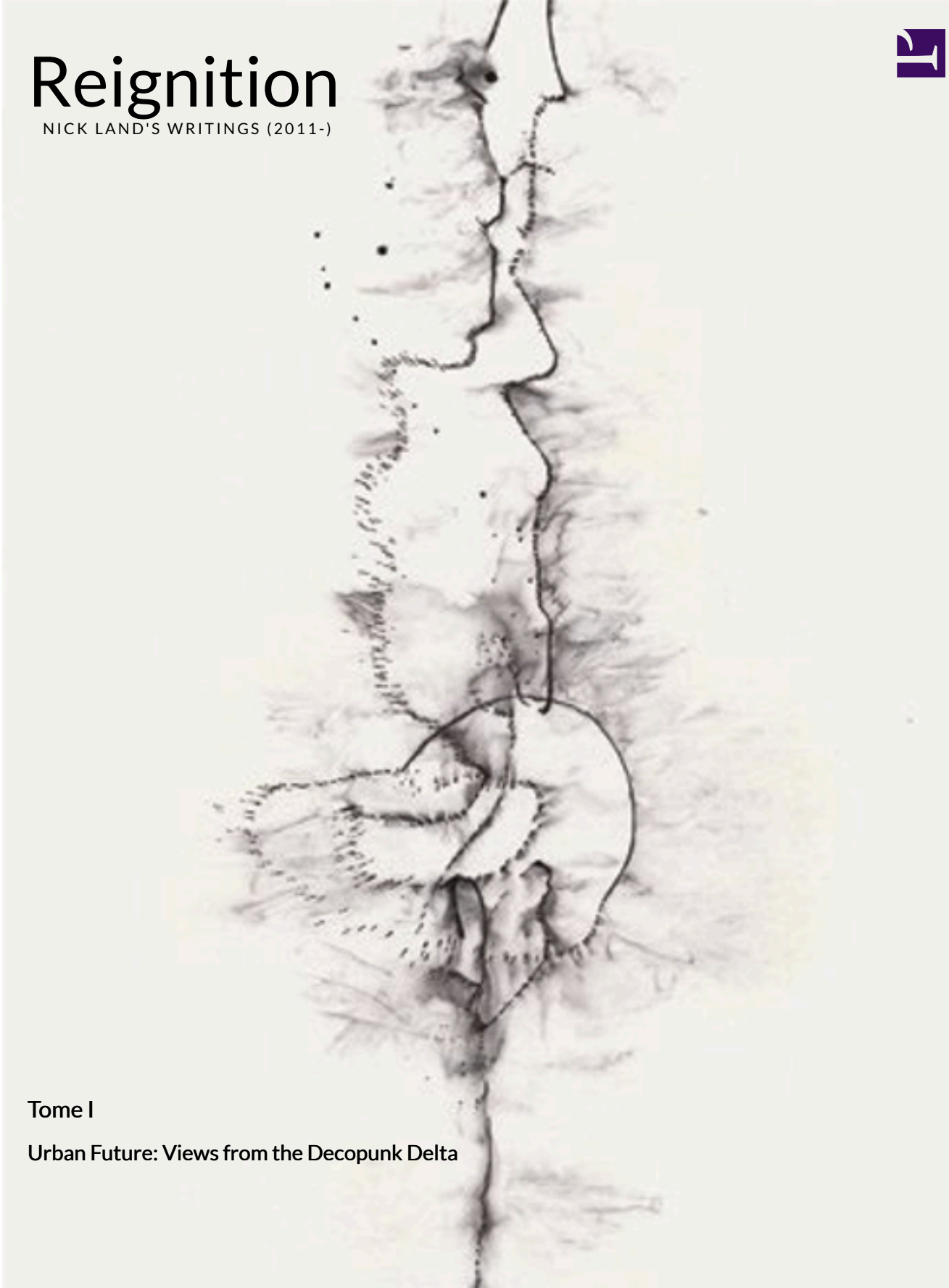
Two reading strategies therefore remain available. Use the collection as an encyclopedia, entering at whatever term has brought you here and branching outward through the links. Or read it as the upriver journey staged by the tomes: begin with the bright Pacific city, follow its clocks into acceleration, let money escape into code, watch political voice dissolve into exit, enter the dark network of selection and intelligence, and end where the machinery loses its familiar shape.

The second route does not finish by solving the system. It finishes by revealing why a solution would be the wrong form of ending. The unknown has not been reduced; the Outside has not been annexed. The map reaches its edge and discovers that the edge is moving.

That is where reading begins again.

Reignition

NICK LAND'S WRITINGS (2011-)



Tome I

Urban Future: Views from the Decopunk Delta

Reignition

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Tome I
Urban Future: Views from the Decopunk Delta

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EDITED BY URIEL FIORI

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BLOCK 1 - URBAN FUTURE

Introducing Urban Future

What can readers expect from this blog? Since it promises to be oriented towards the future, it makes sense to begin with some preliminary forecasting about itself.

Most basically and predictably, Urban Future has been programmed by its name. Its principal topic is the intersection of cities with the future. It aims to foster discussion about cities as engines of the future, and about futurism as a dynamic influence on the shape, character, and development of cities. More particularly, it scavenges for clues, and floats speculations, about the Shanghai of tomorrow. It anticipates a global urban future in which Shanghai features prominently, and a coming Shanghai that expresses, both starkly and subtly, the transformative forces of global futurism. This

is to get quite far ahead of ourselves, which is where we shall typically be.

For some readers, ‘futurism’ will invoke the early 20th century avant garde cultural movement crystallized by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s 1909 Futurist Manifesto. Futurism, they might reasonably object, has been defined and even closed by the passage of time. Like modernism, it now belongs to the archive of concluded history. What exists today, and in the days to come, can only be a neo-futurism (and a neo-modernism): no less retrospective than prospective, as much a repetition as a speculation. Such considerations, corrections, and recollections, with all their attendant perplexities, are extremely welcome. The time to address them will soon come.

Since Shanghai is cross-hatched with the time-fractured indices of historico-futuristic ambiguity, from paleo-modernism to neo-traditionalism, the blog will have every opportunity to discuss such things. For the moment, casual reference to the strangely-twinned architectural icons of such time-tangles, the Park Hotel and the Jinmao Tower – each a retro-futurist or cybergothic masterpiece – has to substitute as a mnemonic and promissory note.

Also, in time, the obstacles to forecasting need to be thoroughly addressed: such topics as historical catastrophism, the efficient-market hypothesis (EMH), Karl Popper’s critique of historicism, Knightian uncertainty (or Rumsfeldian “unknown unknowns”) and

the Black Swan theory of Nassim Nicholas Taleb. In order to get up and running, all these complicating thoughts have been temporarily bracketed, like cunning and ferocious beasts, but they will not remain caged forever, or even very long.

Because there's something irresistibly twisted about starting with the future, the first flurry of posts will head straight into tomorrow, with topics becoming increasingly city- and Shanghai-focused as things progress. An initial series of interconnected posts will outline futuristic thinking in broad terms, including preliminary sketches of principal way-stations on the mainline techno-scientific tradition that supports it.

Ultimately, nothing relevant to the future of Shanghai is alien to this blog's purpose. It will draw upon Shanghai history, geography, and culture, traditional Chinese philosophies of time (Yijing and Daoism), theories of modernity and urbanism, evolutionary biology, science fiction, techno-scientific discussions of complex systems and emergence, the economics of spontaneous order, long waves, technological trends, robotics research and developments, models of accelerating change, and anticipations of Technological Singularity. Things should get continuously weirder.

Tomorrow, it begins.

March 29, 2011

Eternal Return, and After

If occult knowledge is unavailable, futurology must rely upon historical patterns. Ultimately, some variant of extrapolation is its only resource.

The hazards of extrapolation are manifold, and frequently discussed. A seemingly robust trend can be illusory, the shape of its curve can be misrecognized, and coincidental processes can disrupt it. Even more insidiously, the recognition of a trend can lead to responses that transform or nullify it.

Yet, since governments, businesses, and individuals necessarily act in accordance with models of the future, forecasting is an incessant, inevitable, and often automatic feature of social existence. Whatever the complexities of prediction, survival depends upon future-adapted decision-making. A base-level futurism is simply unavoidable. Radical skepticism – irrespective of its intellectual merits — does not offer a practical alternative.

There are only four fundamental ways things can go: they can remain the same, they can cycle, they can shrink, or they can grow. In reality these trend-lines are usually inter-tangled. Among complex systems, stability is typically meta-stability, which is preserved through cycling, whilst growth and shrinkage are often components of a larger-scale, cyclic wave.

The historical imagination of all ancient cultures was dominated by great cycles. In the Vedic culture of India, time unfolded as regular, degenerative epochs (yugas) that subdivided each ‘Day of Brahma’ (4.1 billion years in length). Chinese time was shaped by the metabolism of Imperial dynasties. “Long united, the empire must divide. Long divided, it must unite,” begins the Romance of the Three Kingdoms. Mesoamerican civilizations envisaged world history as a succession of creations and destructions. In the West, Plato described the history of the city as a great cycle, degenerating through phases of Timocracy (or rule by the virtuous), Oligarchy, Democracy, and Tyranny.

The ages of mankind described by Hesiod, and later Ovid, are less obviously cyclical, as is the eschatological time inherited from ancient Judaism by the Abrahamic faiths. In these cases too, however, the course of history is understood as fundamentally degenerative, and guided to the restoration of a sacred origin (as described by Mircea Eliade in his analysis of the myth of Eternal Return).

Even Karl Marx remains captivated by this mythic historical pattern, in its Abrahamic variant. His epic of human social development begins with an Edenic ‘primitive communism’ that falls into the alienated degeneracy of class society, subdivided into a series of ages. The eschatological culmination of history in communist revolution thus completes a great cycle, sealed by a

moment of sacred restoration (of authentic 'species being'). It is no coincidence that this mytho-religious 'big-picture' aspect of Marxism has impinged far more deeply upon popular consciousness than its intricate mathematical model of techno-economic dynamics within 'the capitalist mode of production', despite the fact that Marx's writings are overwhelmingly focused upon the latter. A great cycle feels like home.

In modern times, the clearest example of history in the ancient, great cycle mode, is found in the work of another German socialist philosopher: Oswald Spengler. Modeling civilizations on the life-cycles of organic beings, he plotted their rise and inevitable decay through predictable phases. For the West, firmly locked into the downside of the wave, relentless, accelerating degeneration can be confidently anticipated. Spengler's withering pessimism seems not to have detracted significantly from the cultural comfort derived from his archetypal historical scheme.

Eliade describes the myth of Eternal Return as a refuge from the "terror of history." Firmly rooted in familiar organic patterns and the cycle of the seasons, it sets the basic template for traditional cultures. By identifying what is yet to come with what has already been timelessly commemorated, it promises the pre-adaptation of existing social arrangements and patterns of behavior to unencountered things, psychologically neutralizing the threat of radically unprecedented eventualities. We have been here before,

and somehow we survived. Winter does not last forever.

It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that the conception of progressive historical time has been so slow to consolidate itself. John M. Smart summarizes the conclusions reached by historian J. D. Bury in his *The Idea of Progress* (1920), noting: "… the idea of progress in the material realm was missed, amazingly, even for most of the European Renaissance (…14th-17th century). Only by the 1650s, near the end of this cultural explosion, did the idea of an unstoppable force of progress finally begin to emerge as a possibility to the average literate mind." The idea of progress, as continuous, innovative growth, is unique to modernity, and provides its defining cultural characteristic.

Moderns found themselves, for the first time, cast outside the cosmic nursery of Eternal Return. A strange new world awaited them.

March 31, 2011

Beyond Urbanization

'Urbanization' doesn't capture very much of what cities are up to

(This post is basically a pre-emptive footnote. Please feel even freer to ignore it than you usually would.)

The principal topic of Urban Future is the development of cities (with Shanghai as exemplary case). It is peculiarly frustrating, therefore, to find that no single term exists to describe a process that is arguably the most important of all social phenomena, and even the key to whatever meaning might be discoverable in human history.

One thing, at least, is clear (or should be): urban development is not urbanization.

'Urbanization' is a comparatively rigorous and well-defined demographic concept, referring to the dynamic re-distribution of populations from non-urban to urban existence. Because it describes the proportion of city-dwellers within a population, it can be quantified by a percentage, which sets a strict mathematical limit to the process (asymptotic to 100% urbanized). When plotted historically, the approach to this limit follows a steep curve, echoing the (open-ended) exponential or super-exponential trends of modernization and industrialization.

Whilst theoretically indispensable, clear, meaningful, and informative, the concept of urbanization is inadequate to the phenomenon of urban development. Cities are essentially concentrational, or intensive. They are defined by social density, uneven distribution, or demographic negative entropy. Urbanization describes only a part of this.

Within the entire demographic system, urbanization provides a measure of the urban fraction (based on an at least semi-arbitrary

definition of a city, by size and by boundary). It says nothing about the pattern of cities: how numerous they are, how they differ in relative scale, how fast larger cities grow compared to smaller ones, or in general whether the urbanized population is becoming more or less homogeneously distributed *between* cities. In fact, it tells us nothing at all about the distribution of the urbanized population, except that it is somehow clumped into 'city-scale' agglomerations.

Once 'clumped' – or drawn within the spatial threshold of a city-sized cloud – a demographic particle switches binary identity, from non-urbanized to urbanized. Registered as a city-dweller, there is no more to be said about it. Yet the city is itself a distribution, of variable density, or heterogeneous concentration. *Within* each city, urban intensity can rise or fall, irrespective of the overall level of urbanization. The limit of urbanization sets no restriction upon trends to urban intensification, as exemplified by high-rise architecture.

Urbanization is a proportional concept, indifferent to absolute demographic scale. In contrast, measuring intensity, or negative entropy, provides fine-grained information that rises with the size of the system considered (since the entropy measure is a logarithmic function of system scale, defined by the totality of possible distributions, which rises exponentially with population). Whilst social scientific or demographic phenomena are highly intractable to quantitative intensive analysis, their reality is nevertheless

intensive, which is to say: determined by distributive variation of *absolute* magnitudes. The measure of urbanization is not affected by the doubling of a city's population unless the overall population grows at a lower rate. Urban intensity, in contrast, is highly sensitive to absolute demographic fluctuation (and not uncommonly hyper-sensitive).

Intensities are characterized by transition thresholds. As they rise and fall, they cross 'singularities' or 'phase transitions' that mark a change in nature. A small change in intensive magnitude can trigger a catastrophic change in system behavior, with the emergence of previously undisclosed properties. When measuring urbanization, a city is a city is a city. As an intensive concentration, however, a city is an essentially variable real individual, passing through thresholds as it grows, innovating unprecedented behaviors, and thus becoming something 'qualitatively' new.

Whilst summoning the courage to float an adequate neologism ('urbanomy'?), Urban Future will stumble onwards with awkward compounds such as 'urban development', 'urban intensification', 'urban condensation', or whatever seems least painful at the time (whilst meaning, in each case, what 'urbanization' would describe if urbanists had managed to grab it before the demographers did).

Yet, despite this linguistic obstacle, a surprising amount can be said about the urban process in general. Making a start on that comes next.

April 15, 2011

An Introduction to Urbanomy

However irritating neologisms can be, they are sometimes near-compulsory. When a compact, comparatively simple thought is forced to route itself, repeatedly, through crudely-stitched terminological tangles, the missing *adequate word* fosters the linguistic equivalent of a nagging hunger. Word invention becomes a simple prerequisite of smooth cognitive function.

Urban development of the individual city, or the typical process of urban maturation, is a quite basic but linguistically underserved concept of exactly this kind. The absence is aggravated by the presence of another word — one that sounds superficially suitable, but which actually designates an entirely separate idea.

When a city grows, it does not 'urbanize' (only a wider social system can do that). Urbanization applies to a society that becomes proportionately more urban, as rural people move into cities, but when an individual city develops – and in fact individuates – it undergoes *urbanomy* (on the model of 'teleonomy'). Urbanomy – urban self-organization — is far more critical to this blog than urbanization is. Coining the term is a declaration of theoretical commitment to urban individuation as a structured – and thus

cognitively-tractable – social, historical, and ultimately cosmic reality.

The foundations of urbanomic understanding were laid down by Jane Jacobs in her book *The Economy of Cities*. In this work she outlines a simple and powerful theory of urban self-organization, driven by a spontaneous economic process of *import replacement*. Cities develop by autonomization, or introversion, which occurs as they learn from trade, progressively transforming an ever-greater proportion of their commercial flows into endogenous circuits. This (urbanomic) tendency need not isolate cities from the world, but it necessarily converts stable dependency into dynamic interaction, driving continuous commercial modification. The logistical and informational advantages of local urban producers – minimizing transport costs and maximizing feedback intensity – tend to encourage the internalization of productive activity, teaching the city what it can do for itself, and consolidating its singular identity (as a real individual). The growth, complexification, and individuation of the city are integral to a single urbanomic process.

It is urbanomy that produces cities, with urbanization – typically – occurring as a secondary phenomenon. Functional cities are not demographic dumping grounds, but endogenously maturing entities which draw things (including people) into themselves.

Among the many side-consequences running off Jacobs' thesis, one in particular is so historically-suggestive that it merits a short

digression. Since cities are not nutritionally self-supporting, it has been natural to assume that they presuppose settled agriculture, which they relate to in a way that is – at least calorically – parasitic. Jacobs turns this assumption upside down, proposing instead that the commercialization of food production which accompanied the emergence of cities was itself a crucial motor of agriculturalization. By providing concentrated, comparatively large-scale markets, cities made the production of substantial food-surpluses economically rational for the first time, automatically supporting their own further development in interactive lock-step with the Neolithic revolution.

The basic urbanomic insight of greatest relevance here, however, is more abstract. The Jacobs thesis establishes a framework for systematically exploring the time-structure of the urban process, conceived not solely as a (prolonged) episode in time, or history, but also as the working of a *chronogenic*, or time-making social machine.

The concept which Jacobs tacitly introduces, as the guiding principle of the urbanomic trend, is *autoproduction*. As it grows, internally specializes, self-organizes, dissipates entropy, and individuates, the city tends to an impossible limit of complete productive autonomy. It appears as a convergent wave, shaped in the direction of increasing order or complexity, as if by an invisible hand, or according to an intelligent design. The pattern is exactly what would be expected if something not yet realized was orchestrating its self-creation. Even after 150 years of coherent evolutionary

theory, such processes – in the absence of a dominating creative agent – appear extraordinary, and even uncanny, because they seem to run backwards, against the current of time.

Time as it is lived and explored is *tensed*. It is occupied from the middle, which is always now, and from which the past recedes (partially remembered, or recorded), as the future approaches (partially anticipated, or forecast). The time-line crossing 'now' or the present is asymmetric. It has an 'arrow'.

The mainstream scientific currents which support the modern understanding of the world describe this arrow of time in two very different ways. Both are easily intuited and generally accepted, at least in their broadest outlines.

Firstly, we are told that the arrow of time corresponds to an increase of disorder. Things break, erode, age, die, and decay. Presented with two photographs, of an intact egg and the same egg smashed, there is no doubt about which came first. Eggs don't unsmash, time doesn't reverse.

Except that (secondly) we generally anticipate progress, or improvement. Knowledge accumulates, inventions are made, economies are expected, normally, to grow. Even those most resistant to modern messages – such as evolutionary ideas — work confidently to produce order in their lives, when tidying, sorting, assembling, organizing, or composing. Eggs might not unsmash, but there are eggs, and they've been made somehow (there weren't any

500 million years ago).

So how do our time intuitions align with the arrow of time? Which way is forward, and which is back? Between increasing and decreasing order, which seems normal and which strange?

These questions are complicated by the fact that we mentally process the world in two very different ways, dividing it as neatly as possible between people and things, agency and inertia, the animate and the inanimate, teleology and mechanism. This very basic dual system of perceptual classification – almost certainly supported by deeply archaic neurological structures — corresponds to a twin cognitive apparatus of profound expectation. Categorical violations are viscerally unsettling.

When people – or even 'lower' animals — behave as things, they primitively evoke the dread of morbidity, mortality, and more radical varieties of cosmic wrongness, partially captured by the figure of the zombie. The intermediate zone, of the 'living dead', can be entered from either direction, triggering an archaic revulsion from monstrosity – the most fundamental of all *things that should not be*. Horror fiction dwells almost entirely in this twilight world of categorical slippage.

When order emerges spontaneously among things, it seems like magic (in the ancient, soul-seizing sense), and panicked spectators reflexively grasp for the hidden agents of 'animistic' or religious interpretation, compelled by categorical intuitions far older than the

human species. Calm apprehension of such 'teleonomies' is grounded, perhaps invariably, in an attenuation or vagueness of distinct perception. Were a biologist to truly *perceive* the evolutionary process, its integral, primordial horror would be ineluctable. Urbanomy, likewise, belongs to the realm of real monstrosity. That is one reason why cities cannot readily be seen for what they are.

Spontaneous animation, horror, and time-reversal are inextricably knotted together at the root of their apprehension. The human nervous-system cannot register a deeper *wrong* than an inversion of time, as demonstrated by a thing that *comes to life*. Cities, eventually, will scare us. In doing so, they will draw us out beyond what has been – to date — the horizon of intelligible time.

July 29, 2013

Event Horizon

People gravitate to cities, but what are cities gravitating into? Some strange possibilities suggest themselves.

Cities are defined by social density. This simple but hugely consequential insight provides the central thesis of Edward Glaeser's Triumph of the City: How our Greatest Invention Makes us

Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier and Happier (2011), where it is framed as both an analytical tool and a political project.

“Cities are the absence of physical space between people and companies. They enable us to work and play together, and their success depends on the demand for physical connection,” Glaeser remarks.

High-density urban life approaches a tautology, and it is one that Glaeser not only observes, but also celebrates. Closely-packed people are more productive. As Alfred Marshall noted in 1920, ‘agglomeration economies’ feed a self-reinforcing process of social compression that systematically out-competes diffuse populations in all fields of industrial activity. In addition, urbanites are also happier, longer-living, and their ecological footprint is smaller, Glaeser insists, drawing upon a variety of social scientific evidence to make his case. Whether social problems are articulated in economic, hedonic, or environmental terms, (dense) urbanism offers the most practical solution.

The conclusion Glaeser draws, logically enough, is that densification should be encouraged, rather than inhibited. He interprets sprawl as a reflection of perverse incentives, whilst systematically contesting the policy choices that restrain the trend to continuous urban compression. His most determined line of argumentation is directed in favor of high-rise development, and against the planning restrictions that keep cities stunted. A city that

is prevented from soaring will be over-expensive and under-excited, inflexible, inefficient, dirty, backward-looking, and peripherally sprawl- or slum-cluttered. Onwards and upwards is the way.

Urban planning has its own measure for density: the FAR (or Floor-to-Area Ratio), typically determined as a limit set upon permitted concentration. An FAR of 2, for instance, allows a developer to build a two-story building over an entire area, a four-story building on half the area, or an eight-story building on a quarter of the area. An FAR sets an average ceiling on urban development. It is essentially a bureaucratic device for deliberately stunting vertical growth.

As Glaeser shows, Mumbai's urban development problems have been all-but-inevitable given the quite ludicrous FAR of 1.33 that was set for India's commercial capital in 1964. Sprawling slum development has been the entirely predictable outcome.

Whilst sparring with Jane Jacobs over the impact of high-rise construction on urban life, Glaeser is ultimately in agreement on the importance of organic development, based on spontaneous patterns of growth. Both attribute the most ruinous urban problems to policy errors, most obviously the attempt to channel – and in fact deform – the urban process through arrogant bureaucratic fiat. When cities fail to do what comes naturally, they fail, and what comes naturally, Glaeser argues, is densification.

It would be elegant to refer to this deep trend towards social

compression, the emergence, growth, and intensification of urban settlement, as urbanization, but we can't do that. Even when awkwardly named, however, it exposes a profound social and historical reality, with striking implications, amounting almost to a specifically social law of gravitation. As with physical gravity, an understanding of the forces of social attraction support predictions, or at least the broad outlines of futuristic anticipation, since these forces of agglomeration and intensification manifestly shape the future.

John M. Smart makes only passing references to cities, but his Developmental Singularity (DS) hypothesis is especially relevant to urban theory because it focuses upon the topic of density. He argues that acceleration, or time-compression, is only one aspect of a general evolutionary (more precisely, evolutionary-developmental, or 'evo devo') trend that envelops space, time, energy, and mass. This 'STEM-compression' is identified with ascending intelligence (and negative entropy). It reflects a deep cosmic-historical drive to the augmentation of computational capacity that marries "*evolutionary processes* that are stochastic, creative, and divergent [with] *developmental processes* that produce statistically predictable, robust, conservative, and convergent structures and trajectories."

Smart notes that "the leading edge of structural complexity in our universe has apparently transitioned from universally distributed early matter, to galaxies, to replicating stars within galaxies, to solar

systems in galactic habitable zones, to life on special planets in those zones, to higher life within the surface biomass, to cities, and soon, to intelligent technology, which will be a vastly more local subset of Earth's city space."

Audaciously, Smart projects this trend to its limit: "Current research (Aaronson 2006, 2008) now suggests that building future computers based on quantum theory, one of the two great theories of 20th century physics, will not yield exponentially, but only *quadratically* growing computational capacity over today's classical computing. In the search for truly disruptive future computational capacity emergence, we can therefore look to the second great physical theory of the last century, relativity. If the DS hypothesis is correct, what we can call relativistic computing (a black-hole-approximating computing substrate) will be the final common attractor for all successfully developing universal civilizations."

Conceive the histories of cities, therefore, as the initial segments of trajectories that curve asymptotically to infinite density, at the ultimate event horizon of the physical universe. The beginning is recorded fact and the end is quite literally 'gone', but what lies in between, i.e. next?

April 15, 2011

Implosion

We could be on the brink of a catastrophic implosion – but that's OK

Science fiction has tended to extroversion. In America especially, where it found a natural home among an unusually future-oriented people, the iconic SF object was indisputably the space ship, departing the confines of Earth for untrammeled frontiers. The future was measured by the weakening of the terrestrial gravity well.

Cyberpunk, arriving in the mid-1980s, delivered a cultural shock. William Gibson's *Neuromancer* still included some (Earth-orbital) space activity – and even a communication from Alpha Centauri — but its voyages now curved into the inner space of computer systems, projected through the starless tracts of Cyberspace. Interstellar communication bypassed biological species, and took place between planetary artificial intelligences. The United States of America seemed to have disappeared.

Space and time had collapsed, into the 'cyberspace matrix' and the near-future. Even the abstract distances of social utopianism had been incinerated in the processing cores of micro-electronics. Judged by the criteria of mainstream science fiction, everything cyberpunk touched upon was gratingly close, and still closing in. The future had become imminent, and skin-tight.

Gibson's cities had not kept up with his wider – or narrower –

vision. The urban spaces of his East Coast North America were still described as 'The Sprawl', as if stranded in a rapidly-obsolescing state of extension. The crushing forces of technological compression had leapt beyond social geography, sucking all historical animation from the decaying husks of 'meat space'. Buildings were relics, bypassed by the leading edge of change.

(Gibson's Asian city-references are, however, far more intense, inspired by such innovations in urban compression as the Kowloon Walled City, and Japanese 'coffin hotels'. In addition, Urbanists disappointed by first-wave cyberpunk have every reason to continue on into *Spook Country*, where the influence of GPS-technology on the re-animation of urban space nourishes highly fertile speculations.)

Star cruisers and alien civilizations belong to the same science fiction constellation, brought together by the assumption of expansionism. Just as, in the realm of fiction, this 'space opera' future collapsed into cyberpunk, in (more or less) mainstream science – represented by SETI programs – it perished in the desert of the Fermi Paradox. (OK, it's true, Urban Future has a bizarrely nerdish obsession with this topic.)

John M. Smart's solution to the Fermi Paradox is integral to his broader 'Speculations on Cosmic Culture' and emerges naturally from compressive development. Advanced intelligences do not expand into space, colonizing vast galactic tracts or dispersing self-

replicating robot probes in a program of exploration. Instead, they implode, in a process of 'transcension' — resourcing themselves primarily through the hyper-exponential efficiency gains of extreme miniaturization (through micro- and nano- to femto-scale engineering, of subatomic functional components). Such cultures or civilizations, nucleated upon self-augmenting technological intelligence, emigrate from the extensive universe in the direction of abysmal intensity, crushing themselves to near-black-hole densities at the edge of physical possibility. Through transcension, they withdraw from extensive communication (whilst, perhaps, leaving 'radio fossils' behind, before these blink-out into the silence of cosmic escape).

If Smart's speculations capture the basic outlines of a density-attracted developmental system, then cities should be expected to follow a comparable path, characterized by an escape into inwardness, an interior voyage, involution, or implosion. Approaching singularity on an accelerating trajectory, each city becomes increasingly inwardly directed, as it falls prey to the irresistible attraction of its own hyperbolic intensification, whilst the outside world fades to irrelevant static. Things disappear into cities, on a path of departure from the world. Their destination cannot be described within the dimensions of the known – and, indeed, tediously over-familiar – universe. Only in the deep exploratory interior is innovation still occurring, but there it takes place at an

infernal, time-melting rate.

What might Smart-type urban development suggest?

(a) Devo Predictability. If urban development is neither randomly generated by internal processes, nor arbitrarily determined by external decisions, but rather guided predominantly by a developmental attractor (defined primarily by intensification), it follows that the future of cities is at least partially autonomous in regards to the national-political, global-economic, and cultural-architectural influences that are often invoked as fundamentally explanatory. Urbanism can be facilitated or frustrated, but its principal 'goals' and practical development paths are, in each individual case, internally and automatically generated. When a city 'works' it is not because it conforms to an external, debatable ideal, but rather because it has found a route to cumulative intensification that strongly projects its 'own', singular and intrinsic, urban character. What a city wants is to become itself, but more — taking itself further and faster. That alone is urban flourishing, and understanding it is the key that unlocks the shape of any city's future.

(b) Metropolitanism. Methodological nationalism has been systematically over-emphasized in the social sciences (and not only at the expense of methodological individualism). A variety of influential urban thinkers, from Jane Jacobs to Peter Hall, have sought to correct this bias by focusing upon the significance, and partial autonomy, of urban economies, urban cultures, and municipal

politics to aggregate prosperity, civilization, and golden ages. They have been right to do so. City growth is the basic socio-historical phenomenon.

(c) Cultural Introversion. John Smart argues that an intelligence undergoing advanced relativistic development finds the external landscape increasingly uninformative and non-absorbing. The search for cognitive stimulation draws it inwards. As urban cultures evolve, through accelerating social complexity, they can be expected to manifest exactly this pattern. Their internal processes, of runaway intelligence implosion, become ever more gripping, engaging, surprising, productive, and educational, whilst the wider cultural landscape subsides into predictable tedium, of merely ethnographic and historical relevance. Cultural singularity becomes increasingly urban-futural (rather than ethno-historical), to the predictable disgruntlement of traditional nation states. Like Gibson's Terrestrial Cyberspace, encountering another of its kind in orbit around Alpha Centauri, cosmopolitan connectivity is made through inner voyage, rather than expansionary outreach.

(d) Scale Resonance. At the most abstract level, the relation between urbanism and microelectronics is scalar (fractal). The coming computers are closer to miniature cities than to artificial brains, dominated by traffic problems (congestion), migration / communications, zoning issues (mixed use), the engineering potential of new materials, questions of dimensionality (3D solutions

to density constraints), entropy or heat / waste dissipation (recycling / reversible computation), and disease control (new viruses). Because cities, like computers, exhibit (accelerating phylogenetic) development within observable historical time, they provide a realistic model of improvement for compact information-processing machinery, sedimented as a series of practical solutions to the problem of relentless intensification. Brain-emulation might be considered an important computational goal, but it is near-useless as a developmental model. Intelligent microelectronic technologies contribute to the open-ended process of urban problem-solving, but they also recapitulate it at a new level.

(e) Urban Matrix. Does urban development exhibit the real embryogenesis of artificial intelligence? Rather than the global Internet, military Skynet, or lab-based AI program, is it the path of the city, based on accelerating intensification (STEM compression), that best provides the conditions for emergent super-human computation? Perhaps the main reason for thinking so is that the problem of the city – density management and accentuation – already commits it to computational engineering, in advance of any deliberately guided research. The city, by its very nature, compresses, or intensifies, towards computronium. When the first AI speaks, it might be in the name of the city that it identifies as its body, although even that would be little more than a 'radio fossil' — a signal announcing the brink of silence — as the path of implosion deepens,

and disappears into the alien interior.

April 29, 2011

Scaly Creatures

Cities are accelerators and there are solid numbers to demonstrate it

Among the most memorable features of Shanghai's 2010 World Expo was the quintet of 'Theme Pavilions' designed to facilitate exploration of the city in general (in keeping with the urban-oriented theme of the event: 'Better City, Better Life'). Whilst many international participants succumbed to facile populism in their national pavilions, these Theme Pavilions maintained an impressively high-minded tone.

Most remarkable of all for philosophical penetration was the Urban Being Pavilion, with its exhibition devoted to the question: what kind of thing is a city? Infrastructural networks received especially focused scrutiny. Pipes, cables, conduits, and transport arteries compose intuitively identifiable systems – higher-level wholes – that strongly indicate the existence of an individualized, complex being. The conclusion was starkly inescapable: a city is more than just an aggregated mass. It is a singular, coherent entity,

deserving of its proper – even personal – name, and not unreasonably conceived as a composite 'life-form' (if not exactly an 'organism').

Such intuitions, however plausible, do not suffice in themselves to establish the city as a rigorously-defined scientific object. "[D]espite much historical evidence that cities are the principle engines of innovation and economic growth, a quantitative, predictive theory for understanding their dynamics and organization and estimating their future trajectory and stability remains elusive," remark Luís M. A. Bettencourt, José Lobo, Dirk Helbing, Christian Kühnert, and Geoffrey B. West, in their prelude to a 2007 paper that has done more than any other to remedy the deficit: 'Growth, innovation, scaling, and the pace of life in cities'.

In this paper, the authors identify mathematical patterns that are at once distinctive to the urban phenomenon and generally applicable to it. They thus isolate the object of an emerging urban science, and outline its initial features, claiming that: "the social organization and dynamics relating urbanization to economic development and knowledge creation, among other social activities, are very general and appear as nontrivial quantitative regularities common to all cities, across urban systems."

Noting that cities have often been analogized to biological systems, the paper extracts the principle supporting the comparison. "Remarkably, almost all physiological characteristics of biological

organisms scale with body mass … as a power law whose exponent is typically a multiple of 1/4 (which generalizes to 1/(d +1) in d-dimensions)." These relatively stable scaling relations allow biological features, such as metabolic rates, life spans, and maturation periods, to be anticipated with a high-level of confidence given body mass alone. Furthermore, they conform to an elegant series of theoretical expectations that draw upon nothing beyond the abstract organizational constraints of n-dimensional space:

> "Highly complex, self-sustaining structures, whether cells, organisms, or cities, require close integration of enormous numbers of constituent units that need efficient servicing. To accomplish this integration, life at all scales is sustained by optimized, space-filling, hierarchical branching networks, which grow with the size of the organism as uniquely specified approximately self-similar structures. Because these networks, e.g., the vascular systems of animals and plants, determine the rates at which energy is delivered to functional terminal units (cells), they set the pace of physiological processes as scaling functions of the size of the organism. Thus, the self-similar nature of resource distribution networks, common to all organisms, provides the basis for a quantitative, predictive theory of biological structure and dynamics, despite much external variation in

appearance and form."

If cities are in certain respects meta- or super-organisms, however, they are also the inverse. Metabolically, cities are anti-organisms. As biological systems scale up, they slow down, at a mathematically predictable rate. Cities, in contrast, accelerate as they grow. Something approximating to the fundamental law of urban reality is thus exposed: larger is faster.

The paper quantifies its findings, based on a substantial base of city data (with US cities over-represented), by specifying a 'scaling exponent' (or 'ß', beta) that defines the regular correlation between urban scale and the factor under consideration.

A beta of one corresponds to linear correlation (of a variable to city size). For instance, housing supply, which remains constantly proportional to population across all urban scales, is found – unsurprisingly – to have ß = 1.00.

A beta of less than one indicates consistent economy to scale. Such economies are found systematically among urban resource networks, exemplified by gasoline stations (ß = 0.77), gasoline sales (ß = 0.79), length of electrical cables (ß = 0.87), and road surface (ß = 0.83). The sub-linear correlation of resource costs to urban scale makes city life increasingly efficient as metropolitan intensity soars.

A beta of greater than one indicates increasing returns to scale. Factors exhibiting this pattern include inventiveness (e.g. 'new

patents'ß = 1.27, 'inventors' ß = 1.25), wealth creation (e.g. 'GDP' ß = 1.15, wages ß = 1.12), but also disease ('new AIDS cases' ß = 1.23), and serious crimes (ß = 1.16). Urban growth is accompanied by a super-linear rise in opportunity for social interaction, whether productive, infectious, or malicious. More is not only better, it's *much* better (and, in some respects, worse).

> "Our analysis suggests uniquely human social dynamics that transcend biology and redefine metaphors of urban 'metabolism'. Open-ended wealth and knowledge creation require the pace of life to increase with organization size and for individuals and institutions to adapt at a continually accelerating rate to avoid stagnation or potential crises. These conclusions very likely generalize to other social organizations, such as corporations and businesses, potentially explaining why continuous growth necessitates an accelerating treadmill of dynamical cycles of innovation."

Bigger city, faster life.

May 5, 2011

Edward Glaeser on Triumph of the City

that's Shanghai interviews the world's most topical urbanist

Shanghai isn't one of the featured cities in your book. It's massive and massively high-rise. Did you ever consider writing about it?

Shanghai is one of the world's great cities, but I don't know the city well enough to write about it. I hope to get to know the city better and feature Shanghai's successes in some later work.

China is a place where cities have grown incredibly quickly and there's been a massive exodus from the countryside to urban life. What do you think China's cities should focus on as they grow?

Cities, today, succeed as forges of human capital and engines of innovation. China clearly recognizes this and is investing massively in education. That should continue. Just as importantly, China needs to focus on fostering more entrepreneurship by eliminating any remaining barriers to small start-ups.

You talk about how cities should be seen as "masses of connected humanity," rather than agglomerations of buildings. Do you think this is well understood at this point, or are too many places still attempting to "build their way back to success"?

Unfortunately, too often political leaders try to garner headlines with a splashy new structure. The key is to focus on those infrastructure investments that will really benefit the people in the

city.

Are you optimistic about city planners around the world finding the balance between Paris and Mumbai, i.e. between Haussman-style central planning that risks sterility and a chaotic free-for-all?

That's the 10 trillion dollar question. I wish I could be more optimistic, but city planning is hard and many governments are either unable to manage chaos or too inclined to central control. This requires not just knowledge but political strength and that's a rare combination.

Which cities around the world are getting it right? Which aren't?

I believe that Singapore is the best-managed city in the world – good schools, a superb transportation policy, and a sensible approach to regulation. But Hong Kong is also quite impressive, and I personally prefer it's somewhat more chaotic style.

The west has many urban powerhouses, but few of them are really models of perfect management. For example, I am a big fan of Mayor Menino in Boston, but despite more than 15 years of hard work, Boston's schools are still struggling.

Obviously, Barcelona, Paris, and Milan are all lovely, wonderful cities, but they are not necessarily models of good management.

You're cautiously optimistic in your book, but what worries you most about the future of the city?

The biggest challenges are in the mega-cities of the developing world, especially Africa. We are a very long way from providing even

the core essentially like clean water in many places.

In the US, we have huge problems of fiscal mismanagement that need to be addressed. Moreover, there is always the possibility of really major physical disasters – either natural or man-made.

Is there any way around the fact that the most vibrant cities also become the most expensive – or, as you say in the book, is this simply the price of good urban health?

The laws of supply and demand cannot be repealed. If a city is attractive and productive, demand for its real estate will be high. The best antidote for that is abundant supply, but it is a mistake to subsidize urban housing. The best path towards greater affordability comes from private housing construction that is regulated only as much as is absolutely necessary. Still, building up can be expensive and that will always make prices in successful cities more expensive.

By functioning as engines of economic opportunity and as refuges, cities tend to concentrate economic disparity. Do you think a case might be made that such inequalities could be interpreted as a symptom of urban success? Might you be subtly suggesting this in your own work?

I am suggesting just that. National inequality can be a real problem, but local inequality can be a sign of health. Cities don't typically make people poor they attract poor people. The inequality of a city reflects the fact that it attracts rich and poor alike, and that's something to admire.

How can cities strive to control inequality and avoid ghettos of rich and poor? Should they even be trying to?

Education is the best weapon against inequality. Cities should be striving to make sure that the children of every parent have a chance of being successful.

Some degree of stratification by income is inevitable, but segregation can be quite costly because such separations mean that isolated people lose the urban advantages of connection. There aren't great tools for reducing segregation, but governments should make sure that their policies do not exacerbate segregation.

Geoffrey West at the Santa Fe Institute has been studying cities as 'complex systems' and identified a number of reliable and quantifiable patterns on this basis. Do you find this type of analysis informative or relevant to your work?

Cities are indeed complex systems.

Even in the modern world, with nationalism ascendant, city states seem to be unusually successful. Do cities provide a challenge to dominant conceptions of large-scale political organization? How do you rate the prospects of devolutionary politics, with a municipal emphasis?

I don't think that nation-states will be likely to surrender all that much power, and cities can remain economically dominant but politically weak. The path in the US has continued to be towards more, not less, national power and I think that is probably a mistake.

In many cases – such as Mumbai – local choices would surely be better than the choices imposed on cities by above.

Other than your own work, who do you consider to be the most important writers on cities today?

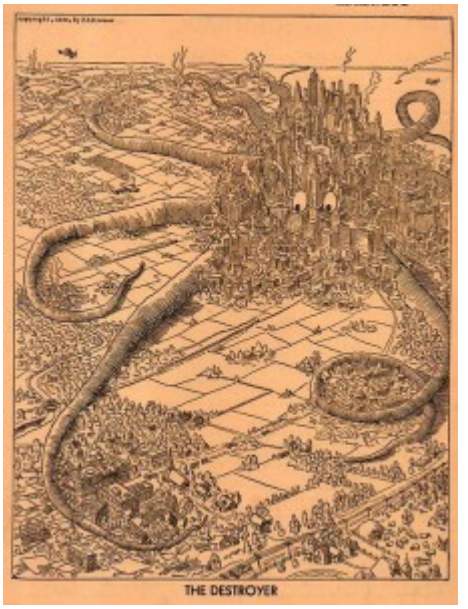
I deeply admire the Columbia historian Kenneth Jackson.

June 20, 2011

Our Cause

"So, what is *Urban Future* about, really?"

Basically this:



(That's what mail-order capitalism seemed to threaten in the

1939. The cephalocommercial monstrosity has to have become far more tentacular since. Image via @SlateVault.)

May 15, 2014

The Urban Factor

Project Syndicate linked to this (2011) McKinsey study of urban contribution to world GDP. The top bullet-point take-away: "only 600 urban centers generate about 60 percent of global GDP." Yet, because cities, as nodes in a global economic network, are distributed by a power law, any picture drawn by the top 600 urban centers tends to strongly de-dramatize the reality.

Wikipedia has a helpful table of world cities with a variety of GDP estimates. (The Brookings Institute figures are the most complete, and also the most generous.) From these it can be seen that Tokyo, on its own, accounts for almost 2% of world GDP. The world's 10 most productive cities — Chicago, London, Los Angeles, Moscow, New York, Osaka/Kobe, Paris, Seoul, Shanghai, and Tokyo — account for roughly 10% of total global economic output between them. The next thirty cities together do not quite double this figure, and from then on, the contribution of each city added dwindles rapidly.

McKinsey estimates the economic weight of the world's "23 megacities — with populations of 10 million or more" somewhat

more modestly, at 14% of global GDP. It expects them to contribute no more than 10% of global growth through to 2025, while: "In contrast, 577 middleweights — cities with populations of between 150,000 and 10 million, are seen contributing more than half of global growth to 2025, gaining share from today's megacities. By 2025, 13 middleweights are likely to be have become megacities, 12 of which are in emerging-markets (the exception is Chicago) and seven in China alone."

UF anticipates that the combination of continued urban agglomeration and economic concentration will tend to steepen the distribution, but the secular shift of economic gravity from West to East will dampen this pattern in the short-medium term. If, by mid-century, there is not a single Chinese economic center accounting for more than 3% of total global economic production, all our expectations about the world will have been proven wrong.

ADDED: A mid-century prediction isn't very audacious, but it's timidity is drawn from an important pattern of change. The world's two most productive cities, by far, are Tokyo and New York, and both are likely to see their relative contribution to global GDP shrink substantially over coming decades. In consequence, the near-term shifts in the distribution of economic activity will appear as a dilution, until a new 'capital' of world commerce emerges — in a process that can be expected to take at least 20 years.

ADDED: An urbanization update from Reuters, linking to some

cleargraphics).

July 10, 2014

Urban Defense

There's an easy solution to the 'tragedy of the commons' — abolish the commons. It works in cities too.

Warning: such policies can produce an upsetting vibrancy deficit, by deterring vagrants and panhandlers from participating in street life within your urban enclave.

Liberal comment on the Neocameral City: "It was impressive in its own way, I guess, but I was deeply distressed about the absence of bums."

February 22, 2015

London



Gentrification is the topic everyone is discussing, with the systematic pricing-out of problem populations (to provincial demographic dump-zones) as the scandal no one in polite society can admit to any ambivalence about. It's unspeakable, of course, especially since it is making the place so much nicer. An undertow of London secessionist rumor — straight out of *The Peripheral* — adds to the dark buzz. Also crucial is the "best horse in the glue-factory" dividend from the implosion of continental Europe. Overall, then, a vortical collapse dynamic of far more intriguing ambiguity than expected by the civilizational exiles here at *Outside in*.

… And overlooking the process (at Marble Arch): the 'She-Guardian' — make of her what you will.

June 26, 2015

London II

Surreptitiously recorded commentary on The Thing:

"It's started to spread from … to …"

"You see some remnants of the housing estate people around, and they really seem as if they're from another century…"

"Of course, the Conservative government is not going to do anything to stop what is happening …"

"There are still islands of social housing …"

June 27, 2015

Parametrics and Provocation

This is from April last year (but I've only just found it). It's quite amazing how many lines intersect in it:

Both Schumacher's and Hadid's language propose an architecture that's "above" trivial moral and political hand-wringing, like worker's rights. Peggy Dreamer, in a recent CalArts panel, described

Schumacher's style as "über-form," meaning that it takes on the aesthetic of the universal and inevitable in order to create icons of an imaginary future. And ***that*** *is what China and the Emirates are buying — the Seoul Design Park, Galaxy SOHO, Guangzhou Opera House, the 2022 Qatar World Cup Stadium. These are icons of future cities, not current ones.*

The reason it's here, now, though is to add some framing for this Patrik Schumacher talk, which I was politely asked (on Twitter) to trigger a *Xenosystems* conversation about it. While I'm in no position to directly wire-head XS readers, it looks stimulating to me. (There isn't much capitalistic historical materialism about.)

> @cryptosentiment seeking an @Outsideness comment section analysis of "Patrik Schumacher. In defence of capitalism" https://t.co/T7hMCOPXXR
>
> — Crypto Sentiment (@cryptosentiment) November 21, 2015

November 22, 2015

Free Cities



The *Free Cities Initiative: Let A Thousand Cities Bloom* (here). In every way an excellent thing to be happening, and crucially aligned with the deep planetary current.

This is the idea:

What is new about free cities is not the policies they will likely implement, but the manner in which those policies are implemented.

The traditional model is that the nation state creates a legal baseline. Cities and towns can add to that baseline, increasing taxes or regulatory requirements for example, but not opt out of it. A special economic zone is an institutional arrangement which allows territories to opt out of aspects of the institutional baseline. […] A free city is an institutional arrangement which allows a territory to opt out of most aspects of the institutional baseline. In recent history, this is a radical change. However, it is a radical change necessary to import good institutions; rule of law, property rights, and economic freedom. We already know what works. Free cities offer a path to get there.

And this is the trend:

… free cities are by and large inevitable. … Two trends, which are not yet common knowledge, point to the emergence of free cities. Those trends are the creation of special economic zones (SEZs) and new cities. … SEZs are forerunners to free cities, they are pockets of autonomy where certain national laws and regulations do not apply. Of course, they differ in several important aspects. First, SEZs are typically small, rarely encompassing a city. Second, the autonomy for most SEZs is relatively minor. Such autonomy might encompass lower taxes or expedited customs, but does not represent a new legal system, merely slight alterations to the existing one. […] Nevertheless, SEZs represent something of a challenge to the traditional notion of a nation state, an area where a sovereign body

sets the baseline legal standard. As such, it is reasonable to suggest that the number and trend of SEZs is roughly correlated with the likelihood of building a free city. A world where minor autonomy is acceptable is more likely to accept major autonomy than a world where no autonomy is acceptable. […] The trends of SEZs suggest that autonomy is becoming increasingly acceptable. …

June 16, 2016

Modernity's Fertility Problem

The techno-commercial wing of the neoreactionary blogosphere has an obvious fondness for Pacific Rim city states. Singapore, along with Hong Kong (a PRC 'Special Administrative Region' which retains significant trappings of autonomy), are regularly invoked as socio-political models. The striking difference between the two societies only confirms the merits of what they share. "If you love minimal democracy capitalist enclaves so much, why not move to Singapore (or Hong Kong)?" is a notably ineffective challenge to this constituency. Those who haven't already fled there – or somewhere else that is in important respects comparable – can only see the prospect of such an exile as a tempting invitation. It's not quite "Go to heaven!" but it's as close as political polemic gets. The asymmetry is decisive. Unlike any concrete approximation to a left-utopian social

model that has ever been available, these are societies that incontestably work, with attractions that require no active propaganda operation to support. The right rises because – unlike its enemies – it can find examples of what it admires that aren't agonizingly embarrassing upon close inspection. Seriously, be our guests and look more attentively. The details are even more impressive than the dazzling general impression. This would be a great place to stop, but instead…

…in March 2013, dissident right blogger 'Spandrell' put up a short post on his abrasive but consistently brilliant *Bloody Shovel* site that messed up the narrative in a way that has yet to be persuasively addressed. Entitled 'Et tu, Harry?,' it placed the Singapore miracle in a disconcerting context. Rather than harmonizing with neoreactionary celebrations of the city state's unapologetically selective immigration policy, Spandrell asks:

> How many bright Indians and bright Chinese are there, Harry? Surely they are not infinite. And what will they do in Singapore? Well, engage in the finance and marketing rat-race and depress their fertility to 0.78, wasting valuable genes just so your property prices don't go down. Singapore is an IQ shredder.

The accusation is acute, and can be generalized. Modernity has a

fertility problem. When elevated to the zenith of savage irony, the formulation runs: At the demographic level, modernity selects systematically against modern populations. The people it prefers, it consumes. Without gross exaggeration, this endogenous tendency can be seen as an existential risk to the modern world. It threatens to bring the entire global order crashing down around it.

In order to discuss this implicit catastrophe, it's first necessary to talk about cities, which is a conversation that has already begun. To state the problem crudely, but with confidence: Cities are population sinks. Historian William McNeil explains the basics. Urbanization, from its origins, has tended relentlessly to convert children from productive assets into objects of luxury consumption. All of the archaic economic incentives related to fertility are inverted.

McNeil summarizes his argument in an online essay considering 'Cities and their Consequences':

> Intensified exposure to infectious disease was the traditional reason why cities did not reproduce themselves. […] But it is the cost of raising children in all urban environments, not disease, that best explains why urban populations generally decline without immigrants from rural areas. Wherever adults go off to work in factories, shops and offices, and small children are not allowed to accompany them, who looks after the young? How can they be readied for gainful employment?

> Public education and pre-schooling are seldom available in urban slums, particularly outside Western countries, but occasionally even within them, too. Grandmothers and elderly neighbors can sometimes do the job, but extended family coherence is not as prevalent in cities, and often such caregivers are not available. Professionals of various descriptions must then be found. That renders the cost of children's upkeep high, and the nurturing that such professionals usually offer rarely matches their large fees. […] Even as children are more expensive in cities, they are less economically useful at an early age. There are few berries to be picked, no small domesticated animals to herd. There is a much longer wait until children can begin to contribute to family income in urban settings.

Education expenses alone explain much of this. School fees are by far the most effective contraceptive technology ever conceived. To raise a child in an urban environment is like nothing that rural precedent ever prepared for. Even if *responsible parenting* were the sole motivation in play, the compressive effect on family size would be extreme. Under urban circumstances, it becomes almost an aggression against one's own children for there to be many of them. But there is much more than this going on.

Recognition of the modern fertility crisis and the 'far right' –

whether in its 'misogynistic' or its 'racist' strains – are not easily distinguishable. The egalitarian axiom, as applied to gender or to ethnicity, comes under critical strain as the topic is pursued. A general theory of the post-conservative right would be productively initiated here.

Feminism has been the first, inevitable target. It is tightly correlated with the collapse of fertility, and is something modernity tends (strongly) to promote. The expansion of female social opportunities beyond obligate child-rearing could scarcely lead anywhere other than to a drastic contraction of family size. The inexorable modern trend to social decoding – i.e. to the production of an abstract contractual agency in the place of concretely determined persons – makes the explosion of such opportunities apparently uncontainable. The individualism fostered by urban life might, to the counter-factual imagination, have been in some way restricted to males, but as a matter of actual historical fact the dereliction of traditional social roles has proceeded without serious limitation, with variation in speed, but no indication of alternative direction. The radically decoded Internet persona – optionally anonymous, fabricated, and self-defining – seems no more than an extrapolation from the emergent norms of urban existence. Feminist assumptions, at least in their 'first-wave,' liberal form, are integral to the modern city.

Religious traditionalist lamentations in this regard are, of course,

nothing new. Christianity – especially under Catholic inspiration – has connected modernity to sterility for as long as modernity has been noticed. A number of crucial factors have nevertheless changed. Since the early years of the new millennium, secular liberals have begun to notice the connection between religiosity and fertility, and to express gathering concern about its partisan political consequences. In a 2009 paper, Sarah R. Hayford and S. Philip Morgan discuss the transition from a traditional discussion of the topic, focused upon differential Catholic and Protestant fertility, to its contemporary mode, subsequent to the convergence of denominational differences, and now mapping more closely onto red / blue state partisan affiliations. Their abstract is worth citing (almost) in full:

> Using data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), we show that women who report that religion is "very important" in their everyday life have both higher fertility and higher intended fertility than those saying religion is "somewhat important" or "not important." Factors such as unwanted fertility, age at childbearing, or degree of fertility postponement seem not to contribute to religiosity differentials in fertility. This answer prompts more fundamental questions: what is the nature of this greater "religiosity"? And why do the more religious want more

> children? We show that those saying religion is more important have more traditional gender and family attitudes and that these attitudinal differences account for a substantial part of the fertility differential.

"Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth?" asked Eric Kaufmann in a 2010 book with that name. A peculiar twist in the Darwinian inheritance had begun to bring the heritability of religious attitudes into prominence, and linking it (positively) to the question of reproductive fitness. Those groups previously seen as having been unambiguously vanquished by a triumphant evolutionary science were now subject to an ironic – and from the progressive perspective deeply sinister – evolutionary vindication. This is a story that has still scarcely begun to unfold.

A parallel development, compounding the commitment of cultural modernity to imperative sterility, has been the efflorescence of LGBTQXYZ sexual identity politics. Following the decisive progressive victory in the cause of gay marriage, something like a Cambrian Explosion in non-traditional sexual and gender orientations has occurred, turbo-charging the pre-existing feminist critique of normative reproductive sexuality. Here, too, the affinity with profound modernistic inclinations is unmistakable, in a process of introjected brand and niche specialization. The tendency – often supported as an explicit political strategy – is to invert the terms

of marginalization, by drowning the reproductive family unit within a hyper-inflated menu of socio-libidinal positions. Fertility is increasingly identified as a conservative eccentricity, legitimately targeted by partisan political warfare. Intense backlash has been among the results (providing fertile ground for the post-conciliatory 'far right').

Oh, but there's more. The truly great transition, implicit in the process of modernity from the start, is marked by the threshold between *domestic* and *global* urbanization. Major cities have always been distinctively cosmopolitan, but for the initial phase of their histories the bulk of their demographic absorption has been limited to their own ethnic hinterlands. *Urbanization* meant, first of all, the conversion of rural populations into city dwellers. In the developing world, it still means this. In the most advanced modern societies, however, domestic rural populations were almost fully consumed, reduced to some negligible fraction of the national total. After this point, the process of population replacement intrinsic to the urban phenomenon from its beginning became inextricably bound to globalization, and trans-national migration flows. Now – which really is *now* – things get interesting.

Politics, by prophetic etymology, is about cities. The inevitability of an emergent 'Alt-Right' in the mass politics of advanced modern societies is already fully predictable from a minimal understanding of how cities work. It is simple delusion to imagine that mere

contingency rules here, perhaps under the guidance of particular political personalities. Rather, the urban metabolism – essentially – at a certain phase of its development, generates circumstances overwhelmingly conducive to the eruption of popular ethno-politics. Cities are demographic parasites. They trend intrinsically to a dynamic that – beyond a comparatively definite threshold – *cannot fail to be perceived as a systematic policy of ethnic replacement*.

There is still much hope of coaxing toothpaste back into its tubes. In other words, there is a massive failure to appreciate the profundity and magnitude of the processes underlying the current global crisis. For instance, the incendiary language of migration-driven 'genocide' is not going away. It is bound, on the contrary, to spread, and intensify. The re-emergence of the race topic, and all of its associates, is deeply baked into the modernist cake. Comparative modernity is automatically racialized once global metabolism lends differential (urban/rural) fertility its ethnic specificity. What is unfolding, among other things, is the racial disaggregation of the 'population bomb,' with drastic inevitability. This is not a product of intellectuals, but of the modern process inherently, and all attempts by intellectuals to obstruct its cultural condensation are hubristically misconceived. "Who, actually, is having kids?" It is a species of insanity to think this question can be strangled in the crib.

So, what's the answer? Does the Alt-Right have one? If so, there's been no sign of it yet. "Burn the cities to the ground" has been floated

on Twitter, and no doubt elsewhere, but it doesn't seem obviously practical. That solution has a rich – and especially East Asian – communist pedigree, which the Alt-Right will probably rediscover at some point. It didn't work out in the 1970s, and would be unlikely to perform any more convincingly today.

As the crisis escalates, it can be expected to generate a thread of novel political theory oriented to the question: *How do we make practical and technical sense of social solution searches in general?* Such thinking is going to be necessary. Our great cities pose an ultimate political problem. Eventually, something will be grateful for that.

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Notes:

William McNeil, 'Cities and their Consequences'

Sarah R. Hayford and S. Philip Morgan, 'Religiosity and Fertility in the United States: The Role of Fertility Intentions'

June 20, 2017

BLOCK 2 - TEMPLEXITY

Time in Transition

There has to be a hexagram for this

Isaac Newton's *Philosophae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* abstracted time from events, establishing its tractability to scientific calculation. Conceived as pure, absolute duration, without qualities, it conforms perfectly to its mathematical idealization (as the real number line). Since time is already pure, its reality indistinguishable from its formalization, a pure mathematics of change – the calculus – can be applied to physical reality without obstruction. The calculus can exactly describe things as they occur in themselves, without straying, even infinitesimally, from the rigorous dictates of formal intelligence. In this way natural philosophy becomes modern science.

(It is perhaps ironic that the Newtonian formulation of non-qualitative time coincides with a revolutionary break – or qualitative transition – that is perhaps unmatched in history. That, however, is a matter for another time.)

Modern science did not end with Newton. Time has since been relativized to velocity (Einstein) and punctured with catastrophes (Thom). Yet the qualities of time, once evacuated, cannot readily be restored.

Clock technology suffices to tell this story, on its own. Time 'keeping' devices *produce* a measure of duration, according to general principles of standardized mechanical production, so that a clock-marked minute is stripped of qualitative distinctness automatically. Chronometrically, any difference between one minute and another is a mechanical discrepancy, strictly analogous to a production line malfunction.

Time modernization culminates in an inversion of definition, eventually standardizing from a precisely reproducible building block (the atomic second), rather than accommodating itself to a large-scale natural cycle – qualified by variations of luminosity – which generates sub-units through division. Once the second has becomes entirely synthetic, all reference to a qualitative 'when' has been effaced. All that remains is quantitative comparison, timing, and synchronization, as if the time-piece was modeled upon the stop-watch. Calendars have become an anachronism.

Modern time intuitions would find plenty of support, even in the absence of mechanical chronometry. Every quantifiable trend, from a stock movement or an unemployment problem to a demographic pattern or an ecological disaster, can be communicated through charts that assume a popular facility at graphic intuition, and thus, implicitly, at algebraic geometry and even calculus. Time is so widely and easily identified with the x-axis of such charts that the principle of representation can be left unexplained, however strange this might have seemed to pre-moderns. Clearly, if time can be read-off from an axis – quickly and intuitively — it is being conceived, generally, as if it were a number line ('Newtonian').

Qualitative time, by now, is a scarcely-accessible exoticism. Nowhere is this more obvious that in the case of China's ancient Classic of Change, the *Yijing*, a work that is today no less hermetic to Chinese than it is to foreigners.

The *Yijing* is a book of numbers as much as a book on time, but its numbers are combinatorial rather than metric, exhausting a space of possibilities, and constructing a typology of times. The *Yijing* speaks often of quantities, but it does not measure them. Instead, it typologizes them, as processes of increase or decrease, rise and fall, lassitude and acceleration, typical of qualitative phases of recurrent cycles, with identifiable character and reliable practical implication.

The point of all this (just in case you were wondering)?

The current time is a period of transition, with a distinctive

quality, characterizing the end of an epoch. Something – some age – is coming quite rapidly to an end.

This is not a situation that the modern mentality is well-adapted to, since it violates certain essential structures of our time-consciousness. It eludes our intuitions and our clocks. Our charts register it only as a break-down, as they terminate the x-axis at a point of senseless infinity (hyperinflation, bubble stock p/e ratios, global derivatives exposure, urban intensity, technological intelligence explosion) or in a collapse to zero (marginal productivity of debt, fiat currency credibility, unit costs of self-replicating capital goods). The can clatters off the end of the road. Things cannot go on as they have, and they won't.

Given the heated political climate surrounding the impending transition of the global economic system, a non-controversial diagnosis is almost certainly unobtainable. Niall Ferguson describes an Age of Global Indignation, or Global Temper Tantrum, in which the objectively unsustainable nature of the established order, whilst widely if vaguely perceived, still eludes sober recognition. Riots, Molotov cocktails, and fabulous conspiracy theorizing are the result.

> "What all the Indignant have in common is the refusal to address squarely the problem that nearly all Western countries face. That problem is that the welfare systems that evolved in the mid-20th century are unaffordable under the

> demographic and economic circumstances of the 21st century. The financial crisis has merely exacerbated what was already a severe structural crisis of public finance, boosting deficits while slowing growth."

In all probability, Ferguson's blunt analysis will provoke further paroxysms of indignation. Yet, as the world's most pampered societies slide ever further into insolvency, such undiplomatic assessments will become ever more common, and the rage they inspire will become ever more unhinged.

John B Taylor emphasizes the senescence and death of Keynesian macroeconomics (drawing on the earlier work of Robert E Lucas and Thomas J Sargent). His research concludes that "the Keynsian multiplier for transfer payments or temporary tax rebates was not significantly different from zero for the kind of stimulus programs enacted in the 2000s." In other words, stimulus is ceasing to stimulate, and gargantuan public debts have been accumulated for no rational purpose. This is the 'debt saturation' that Joe Weisenthal describes as "a phase transition with our debt relationship" graphically portrayed in "the scariest [chart] of all time."

Between financial stimulus and chemical stimulus, there is no distinction of practical significance. Keynesianism and cocaine are both initially invigorating, before stabilizing into expensive habits that steadily lose effectiveness as addiction deepens. By the time

bankruptcy and mortality beckons, getting off the stimulus seems to be near-impossible. Better to crash and burn – or hope that something 'turns up' — than to suffer the agonies of withdrawal, which will feel like hell, and promises nothing more seductive than bare normality at the end of a dark road. Character decays into chronic deceit, intermittent rage, and maudlin self-pity. Nobody likes a junky, still less a junky civilization.

Keynesianism was born in deception – the deliberate exploitation of 'money illusion' for the purposes of economic management. Its effect on a political culture is deeply corrosive. Illusionism spreads throughout the social body, until the very ideas of hard currency (honest money) or balanced budgets (honest spending) are marginalized to a 'crankish' fringe and being 'politically realistic' has become synonymous with a more-or-less total denial of reality. To expect a Keynesian economic establishment to honestly confront its own failings is to laughably misunderstand the syndrome under discussion. A reign of lies is structurally incapable of 'coming clean' before it goes over the cliff (someone needs to do another Downfall-parody, on macroeconomics in the Fuehrer Bunker).

The long Keynesian coke-binge was what the West did with its side of globalization, and as it all comes apart — amidst political procrastination and furious street protests – a planetary reset of some kind is inevitable. The 'Chimerican' engine of post-colonial globalization requires a fundamental overhaul, if not a complete

replacement. The immense dynamism of the Chimerican Age, as well as its enduring achievements, have depended on systematic imbalances that have become patently unsustainable, and it is highly unlikely that all the negative consequences will have been confined to just one side of the world ledger.

For instance, China's soaring investment rate, estimated to have reached 70% of GDP, seems to have disconnected from any prospect of reasonable economic returns. Pivot Capital Management concludes: "credit growth in China has reached critical levels and its effectiveness at boosting growth is falling." For the PRC's fifth-generation leadership, scheduled to adopt responsibility for China's political management from 2012, inertia will not be an option. By then, a half-decade of global stimulus saturation, cascading macroeconomic malfunction and serial 'black swans' (the new millennium 'clusterflock') will have reshaped the world's financial architecture, trade patterns, and policy debates. Whatever comes next has to be something new, accompanied – at least momentarily – by genuine apprehension of economic reality.

For post-Expo Shanghai, a city stunningly rebuilt in the age of Chimerica, the time of transition is a matter of especially acute concern. This is a metropolis that waxes and wanes to the pulse of the world, rigidly tide-locked to the great surges and recessions of globalization. Will the next phase of world history treat it as well as the last?

July 13, 2011

A Time-Traveler's Guide to Shanghai (Part 1)

When did it all change?

There is a strange, time-fractured moment in the biopic *Deng Xiaoping* (2002, directed by Yinnan Ding). For most of its length, the film is sober, cautious, and respectful, exemplifying a didactic realism. It strictly conforms to the approved story of Deng's leadership and its meaning (exactly as it is found today in the nation's school textbooks). Beginning with Deng's ascent to power in the ruined China of the late-1970s, in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, it follows the path of his decision-making, through the restoration (de-collectivization) of the rural economy, the re-habilitation of persecuted experts and intellectuals, and the beginning of the open-door policy, in Shenzhen, to the extension of market-oriented reform throughout the country, as symbolized by the opening of Shanghai.

Whilst clearly something of a carefully edited and precision-manufactured legend, this basic narrative of national regeneration, emancipation and growth – salvaged from the ashes of dead-end fanaticism and civilizational regression – is honest enough to inform, and even to inspire. It leaves no doubt that the 'meaning' of Deng

Xiaoping is openness and renaissance (at least ’70/30′), a judgment that is both popularly endorsed in China, and historically attested universally.

As the movie approaches its conclusion, however, pedestrian realism is suddenly supplanted by something entirely different, whether due to the ‘deeper’ realism of budgetary constraint, or the ‘higher’ realism of artistic serendipity. Deng Xiaoping, from the vantage point of a ‘yet’ (in 1992) inexistent bridge, gestures towards Pudong and announces the green-light for its developmental liberation. Yet, in the background of the scene, the deliriously developed Lujiazui of 2002 already soars, as if the skyline had been condensed from a pre-emptive vision, drawing its substance from the historical implication of his words. The future couldn’t wait.

Perhaps the speed of Shanghai’s Reform-era urban development has led everything to get ahead of itself, disordering the structure of time. The Oriental Pearl TV Tower – first architectural statement of the new Shanghai and still the most iconic – certainly suggests so. Retro-deposited into the Pudong of 1992 by the *Deng Xiaoping* movie, historically completed in 1994, symbolically heralding the promised Shanghai of the third millennium, architecturally side-stepping into a science fiction fantasy of the 1950s, alluding to poetic imagery from the Tang Dynasty, and containing a museum devoted to the city’s modern history in its pedestal, when, exactly, does this structure belong? It’s hard to know where to begin.

The Emporis profile of the Oriental Pearl TV Tower describes its architectural style as simply 'modernism', which is unobjectionable, but extraordinarily under-determining. If the modern defines itself through the present, conceived as a break from the past and a projection into the future, the Oriental Pearl TV Tower unquestionably installs itself in modernity, but only by way of an elaborate path. It reverts to the present from a discarded future, whilst excavating an unused future from the past.

Buildings that arrive in the present in this way are, strictly speaking, 'fabulous', and for this reason, they are considered disreputable by the dominant traditions of international architecture. The fables they feed upon belong to the popular culture of science fiction, which makes them over-expressive, vulgarly communicative, and rapidly dated. Insofar as their style is recognized generically, it is tagged by ugly and dismissive labels such as Googie, Populuxe, and Doo-Wop. By reaching out too eagerly for the future, it is tacitly suggested, one quickly comes to look ridiculous (although, today, neomodernists such as Zaha Hadid and Rem Koolhaas are recuperating certain elements of this style more sympathetically).

Shanghai's Radisson Hotel, set back from the north of People's Square, is a quintessentially 'Googie' structure. It's space-ship top participates exuberantly in a Shanghai tradition of weird roof-elaborations, and echoes a formally-comparable — though far smaller — classical modern structure to the east, down Nanjing Lu.

The idea of high-rise rooftops as landing sites for flying vehicles, within a dynamic system of three-dimensional traffic, is a staple of ultramodernist speculation, whilst an alien arrival from a distant future is a transparent Shanghai fantasy.

In his path-breaking short story *The Gernsback Continuum*, William Gibson dubs this style 'Raygun Gothic', explicitly marking its time-complexity. He thus coaxes it into the wider cultural genre of retro-futurism, which applies to everything that evokes an out-dated future, and thereby transforms modernity into a counter-factual commentary on the present. This genre finds an especially rich hunting ground in Shanghai.

(This is the first post in a connected series on Shanghai's retro-future, departing from the Oriental Pearl TV Tower. An outline examination of retro-futurism itself comes next …)

July 22, 2011

A Time-Travelers Guide to Shanghai (Part 2)

Dark intimations of the time-rift

Shanghai's eclectic cityscape explores a variety of modernities simultaneously. The sheer scale of the city, exponentiated by its relentless dynamism, overflows the time-line.

During Shanghai's early- to mid-20th century high modernist epoch, for instance, the city's consolidating *haipai* culture was distinguished by the absence of a single core. It emerged, instead, as the outcome of loosely inter-articulated plural or parallel developments, including (but by no means limited to) the urban mores of a rising indigenous 'bourgeoisie', whose aspirational tributaries reached deep into the warrens of the *lilongs*; the hard accelerationism of the International Settlement business culture, dominated by near-limitless Shanghailander confidence in the city's global significance and potential; and the left-slanted literary and political trends fostered in the coffee shop salons of the French Concession, where *avant garde* ideas cross-pollinated promiscuously. This heterogeneous, fertile chaos found its architectural echoes in the juxtaposition of building styles, quantitatively dominated by Shanghai's native experiment in urban construction (the *lilong* block), but overawed in patches by Western neo-classical colonial edifices; Manhattanite cosmopolitan high-rises and Art Deco structures; bold adventures in Chinese modern designs (most prominently in Jiangwan); examples of proto-brutalist industrial and residential functionalism; and villas in a variety of international, hybrid, and advanced styles.

Since re-opening, in the early 1990s, Shanghai has added new ingredients to the mix, including its first major examples of construction indebted to the austere tenets of the International

Style (although large rectilinear structures are still, thankfully, a rarity); neo-traditional and ethno-exotic kitsch (especially in the Old City and the peripheral 'nine-towns' respectively); neomodernist re-animations of derelicted structures; and 'Googie' evocations of imagined futures.

Whilst the city's *modernization* has attained unprecedented velocity, however, its native *modernism* remains comparatively retarded. As an urban center in China, Shanghai's distinctiveness is far less marked than it was in the early 20th century. Once occupying an overwhelmingly commanding cultural position as the engine-room and icon of Chinese modernity, today it participates in a far more generalized process of Chinese development. Its internationalism, commercial prowess, and technology absorption are no longer obviously peerless within China, its domination of the publishing and movie industries has passed, its retail giants and innovative advertising have surrendered their uniqueness, and its intellectual bohemia is matched, or surpassed, in a number of other urban centers. Whilst *haipai* tenuously persists, its dynamism has diffused and its confidence attenuated.

If Shanghai has a specific and coherent urban cultural identity today, emerging out of its sprawling multiplicity, and counterbalancing the vastly strengthened sense of national identity consolidated since the foundation of the PRC, it cannot – like *haipai* before it – be derived from the continuity of the city's developmental

trend, or from an urban exceptionalism, feeding on the contrast with a conservative, stagnant, or regressive national hinterland. A thoroughly renovated Shanghainese culture, or *xin haipai*, is inextricably entangled with the city's historical discontinuity, or interruption, and with a broader Chinese national (or even civilizational) modernization that was anticipated by the 'Old Shanghai' and revives today as a futuristic memory.

The future that had seemed inevitable to the globalizing, technophilic, piratical capitalist Shanghai of the 1920s-'30s *went missing*, as the momentum accumulated over a century of accelerating modernization was untracked by aerial destruction, invasion, revolution, and agrarian-oriented national integration. As the city trod water during the command economy era, the virtual future inherent in its 'Golden Age' continued to haunt it, surviving spectrally as an obscure intuition of urban destiny. Upon re-opening, in the early 1990s, this alternative fate flooded back. Under these circumstances, futurism is immediately retro-futurism, since urban innovation is what was happening before, and invention is bound to a process of re-discovery. 'Renaissance' always means something of this kind (and cannot, of course, be reduced to restoration).

This retro-futurist tendency, intrinsic to Shanghai's revival of urban self-consciousness in the new millennium, creates a standing time-loop between two epochs of highly-accelerated modernistic advance. As it steadily adjusts itself into phase, heritage and

development densely cross-reference each other, releasing streams of chatter in anachronistic, cybergothic codes, such as the deeply encrypted 'language' of Art Deco. Prophetic traditions inter-mesh with commemorative innovations, automatically hunting the point of fusion in which they become interchangeable, closing the circuit of time. The past was something other than it once seemed, as the present demonstrates, and the present is something other than it might seem, as the past attests.

The most accessible examples of Shanghai's signature time-looping are spatially concentrated. At the limit, neo-modern renovation projects connect the city's great waves of modernization within a single structure, making a retro-futural theme intrinsic to a current development, such as those at M50, Redtown, Bridge8, 1933, or the Hotel Waterhouse (among innumerable cases). Slightly wider and more thematically elaborate loops link new buildings to overt exhibitions of modernist history. Among the most conspicuous of these are the pairing of the Oriental Pearl TV Tower with the Shanghai History Museum (in its pedestal), and the Old Shanghai street-life diorama to be found beneath the Urban Planning Exhibition Hall.

Such examples can be misleading, however, if they distract from the fact that the retro-futurist principle of the new Shanghai culture is ambient. From ordinary residential restoration projects, to commercial signage, restaurant themes, hotel décor and home

furnishings, the insistent message is re-emergence, an advance through the past. The latest and most stylish thing is typically that which re-attaches itself to the city's modern heritage with maximum intensity. Reaching out beyond the city does nothing to break the pattern, because that's precisely what the 'Old Shanghai' used to do. Cosmopolitan change is its native tradition.

Retro-futural couplings can be spatially dispersed. One especially prominent time loop lashes together two of the city's most celebrated high-rises – the Park Hotel and the Jin Mao Tower – binding the Puxi of Old Shanghai with the Pudong New Area. Each was the tallest Shanghai building of its age (judged by highest occupied floor), the Park Hotel for five decades, the Jin Mao Tower for just nine years. This discrepancy masks a deeper time-symmetry in the completion dates of the two buildings: the Park Hotel seven years prior to the closing of the city (with the Japanese occupation of the International Settlement in 1941), the Jin Mao Tower seven years after the city's formal re-opening (as the culmination of Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour, in 1992).

It takes only a glance (or two) to recognize these buildings as non-identical time twins, or mutant clones, communicating with each other darkly across the rift, in Art Decode. Reciprocally attracted by their structural and tonal resonances, the two buildings extract each other from their respective period identities and rush together into an alternative, occulted time, obscurely defined through contact

with an absolute future, now partially recalled.

Both of these beautifully sinister buildings are at home in the Yin World, comfortable with secrets, and with night. Among the first of these secrets, shared in their stylistic communion, is darkness itself. Nothing could be further removed from the spirit of Le Corbusier's Radiant City than the brooding opulence of these towers, glittering on the edge of an unfathomable nocturnal gulf, as if intoxicated by the abyss. They remind us that 'Art Deco' is a (retrospective) label patched crudely over mystery, that it never had a manifesto, or a master plan, and that – due to its inarticulate self-organization – it has eluded historical comprehension.

This is the sense, at least in part, of Art Deco's pact with night and darkness. Beneath and beyond all ideologies and centralized schemes, the spontaneous culture of high-modernism that climaxed in the interbellum period remains deeply encrypted. As the new Shanghai excavates the old, it is an enigma that becomes ever more pressing.

(Coming next in the Time Traveler's Guide to Shanghai: The Dieselpunk Plateau)

July 27, 2011

A Time-Travelers Guide to Shanghai (Part 3)

Dieselpunk with Chinese characteristics

Wikipedia attributes the earliest use of the term 'retrofuturism' to Lloyd John Dunn (in 1983). Together with fellow 'Tape-beatles' John Heck, Ralph Johnson, and Paul Neff, Dunn was editor of the 'submagazine' *Retrofuturism*, which ran across the bottom of the pages of *Photostatic* magazine over the period 1988-93. The agenda of the Tape-beatles was artistic, and retrofurism was "defined as the act or tendency of an artist to progress by moving backwards," testing the boundaries between copying and creativity through systematic plagiarism and experimental engagement with the technologies of reproduction. Whatever the achievements of this 'original' retrofuturist movement, they were soon outgrown by the term itself.

A more recent and comparatively mainstream understanding of retro-futurism is represented by the websites of Matt Novak (from 2007) and Eric Lefcowitz (from 2009), devoted to a cultural history of the future. Specializing in a comedy of disillusionment (thoroughly spiced with nerd kitsch), these sites explore the humorous incongruity between the present as once imagined and its actual realization. Content is dominated by the rich legacy of failed predictions that has accumulated over a century (or more) of science

fiction, futurology, and popular expectations of progress, covering topics from space colonization, undersea cities, extravagant urban designs, advanced transportation systems, humanoid domestic robots, and ray-guns, to jumpsuit clothing and meal pills. This genre of retro-futurism is near-perfectly epitomized by Daniel H. Wilson's 2007 book *Where's My Jetpack?: A Guide to the Amazing Science Fiction Future that Never Arrived*. The sentiment of the genre is highly consistent and quite readily summarized: disappointment with the underperformance of the present is redeemed by amusement at the extravagant – even absurd — promise of the past.

Retro-futurism in the missing jetpack mode can have broad historical horizons. It is only limited by the existence of adequately-specified predictions, optimally of the concrete, technologically-defined kind most suited to parodic recollection. Matt Novak's paleofuture or "past visions of the future" index spans 130 years (from the 1870s through to the 1990s). Nevertheless, the essential characteristics of the genre disproportionately attract it to the 'Golden Age' of (American) science fiction, centered on the 1940s-50s, when technological optimism reached its apogee.

Dated back to the July 1939 issue of pulp SF magazine *Astounding Science Fiction* (edited by John W. Campbell and containing stories by Isaac Asimov and A.E. Van Vogt), or to the April 1939 opening of the dizzily futurist New York World Fair, the Golden Age might have been pre-programmed for retro-futurist ridicule. Its

optimism was entirely lacking in self-doubt; its imagination was graphically clarified by the emerging marking tools of modern advertising, PR, and global ideological politics; its favored gadgetry was lusciously visualized, large-scaled, and anthropomorphically meaningful; and an emerging consumer culture, of previously unconceived scale and sophistication, served both to package the future into a series of discrete, tangible products, and to promote aspirations of individual (or nuclear family) empowerment-through-consumption that would later be targeted for derision. Implausibly marrying social conservatism to techno-consumerist utopianism, *every family with its own flying car* is a vision that, from the start, hurtles towards retro-futurist hilarity. By the time *The Jetsons* first aired in 1962, the Golden Age had ended, and the laughter had begun.

If William Gibson's *The Gernsback Continuum* (1981) antedated the term 'retro-futurism', it indisputably consolidated the concept, investing it with a cultural potential that far exceeded anything the light-hearted sallies of the oughties would match. Instead of picking among the detritus of Golden Age speculation for objects of amused condescension, Gibson back-tracks its themes to the 'Raygun Gothic' or 'American Streamlined Modern' of the interbellum period, and then projects this derelicted culture forwards, as a continuous alternative history (dominated by quasi-fascist utopianism). The Gernsback Continuum is no mere collection of oddities, but rather *a*

path not taken, and one that continued to haunt the science fiction imagination. Cyberpunk would be its exorcism.

Hugo Gernsback (1884-1967), commemorated by the 'Hugo' science fiction awards, was a futuristic fiction enthusiast and (shady) publishing entrepreneur who, more than any other identifiable individual, catalyzed the emergence of science fiction as a self-conscious genre, promoted through cheaply-printed, luridly popular 'pulp' magazines. In the first issue of *Amazing Stories*, which he founded in 1926, Gernsback defined 'scientifiction' as "charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision." Whilst commonly detested by his abused writers, due to his sharp business practices, Gernsback's politics seem to have been unremarkable. The ominous Aryan technocracy portrayed in *The Gernsback Continuum* probably owes more to the reputation of his successor at *Amazing Stories*, John W. Campbell (1910-1971), and the broader cultural tendencies he represented.

The re- (or pre-) direction of retro-futurism, from abandoned dreams to alternative histories, triggered a cascade of avalanches. Often, these have been marked by the wanderings of the '-punk' suffix. Initially indicative of an anti-utopian (if not necessarily positively dystopian) impulse, whose 'dirty' futurism embraces social and psychological disorder, chaotic causality, uneven development, and collapsed horizons, it increasingly adopted an additional, and previously unpredictable sense. The history of science fiction – and

perhaps history more broadly – was 'punked' by the emergence of literary and cultural sub-genres that carried it down lines of unrealized potential. Cyberpunk belonged recognizably to our electronically re-engineered time-line, but steampunk, clockpunk, dieselpunk (or 'decopunk'), and atompunk – to list them in rough order of their appearance — extrapolated techno-social systems that had already been bypassed. If these were 'futures' at all, they lay not up ahead, but along branch-tracks, off to the side.

These various 'retro-punk' micro-genres could be understood in numerous ways. When conceived primarily as literature, they can be envisaged as re-animations of period features from the history of science fiction, or, more incisively, as liberations of dated futures from the dominion of subsequent time. For instance, the Victorian future of the steampunks was more than just a hazily anticipated Edwardian present, it was something else entirely, propelled in part by the real but unactualized potential of mechanical computation (as concretized in the Difference and Analytical Engines of Babbage and Lovelace).

Apprehended more theoretically, retro-punk genres echo significant debates. In particular, axial arguments on both the left and the right melt into discussions of alternative history, especially in the dieselpunk dark-heartland of the 1920s-'30s. For over half a century, European Marxism has been inextricable from counter-factual explorations of the Soviet experience, focused on the period

of maximum *Proletkult* innovation between the end of the post-civil war and the social realist clampdown presaging the Stalinist regime. The figure of Leon Trotsky as alternative history (dieselpunk) socialist hero makes no sense in any other context. On the right, American conservatism has become ever more focused on counter-factual interrogation of the Hoover/FDR-Keynesian response to the Crash of 1929 and the subsequent Great Depression, understood as the moment when republican *laissez-faire* capitalism was supplanted by New Deal social democracy (Coolidge / Mellon '28 tee-shirts might still be thin on the ground, but their day might come).

Whilst Shanghai is uploading itself into a cyberpunk tomorrow as fast as any city on earth, it has few obvious time-gates opening into clockpunk, atompunk, or (more disputably) steampunk futures. With dieselpunk, however, this series of dismissals grinds immediately to a halt. If some crazed dieselpunk demigod had leased the world to use as a laboratory, the outcome would have been – to a tolerable degree of approximation – indistinguishable from Shanghai. *Xin haipai* is dieselpunk with Chinese characteristics.

Shanghai's greatest dieselpunk counter-factual is inescapably: what if Japanese invasion had not interrupted the city's high-modernity in 1937? What was the city turning into? Beneath that enveloping question, however, and further back, a teeming mass of alternatives clamor for attention. What if the White Terror of 1927 had not crushed the urban workers' movement? What if the CCP

had succeeded, as Song Qingling dreamed, of transforming China's republican government from within? What if the international politics of silver had not combined with Guomindang kleptocracy to destroy the independent financial system? What if Du Yuesheng had extended his ambitions into national politics? What if the city's de-colonization had proceeded under peace-time conditions? What if the subsequent social and economic evolution of Hong Kong had been able to occur where it was germinated, in Shanghai?

The 90th anniversary of the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party was an occasion for the whole country to lose itself in the dark raptures of Shanghai dieselpunk. It was time to return to the 1920s, to revisit history as an adventure in contingency, before long-established actualities had been sifted from the intensity of raw potential, and to re-animate the indeterminism implicit in dramatic tension. It is improbable that the celebratory movie devoted to the establishment of the CCP, *Beginning of the Great Revival*, was deliberately formulated in the dieselpunk genre, but the nation's microbloggers recognized it for what it was, and swarmed the opportunity presented by this re-opening of the past.

The thickening of cyberspace transforms history into a playground of potentials, where things can be re-loaded, and tried in different ways. Electronic infrastructures spread and sophisticate, running actualities as multiple and variable scenarios, with increasing intolerance for rigid outcomes or frozen legacies. As the

dominion of settled actuality is eroded by currents of experimentation, the past re-animates. Nothing is ever over.

The game Shanghai plays, or the story it tells, is endlessly re-started in the dieselpunk cityscape of the 1920s and '30s, where everything that anybody could want exists in dense, unexpressed potentiality — global fortunes, gangster territories, proletarian uprisings, revolutionary discoveries, literary glory, sensory intoxication, as well as every permutation of modest urbanite thriving. It is a city where anything can happen, and somewhere, at some time, everything does.

July 29, 2011

Calendric Dominion

How hegemony still counts

Modernity and hegemony are *Urban Future* obsessions, which might (at least in part) excuse a link to this article in Britain's *Daily Mail*, on the topic of Christianity, the calendar, and political correctness. It addresses itself to the international dominion of the Gregorian, Western Christian calendar, and the sensitivities of those who, whilst perhaps reconciled to the inevitability of counting in Jesus-years, remain determined to dis-evangelize the accompanying

acronymics. More particularly, it focuses upon the BBC, and its attempt to sensitize on other people's behalf (pass the popcorn).

> *The BBC's religious and ethics department says the changes are necessary to avoid offending non-Christians.*
>
> *It states: 'As the BBC is committed to impartiality it is appropriate that we use terms that do not offend or alienate non-Christians.*
>
> *In line with modern practice, BCE/CE (Before Common Era/Common Era) are used as a religiously neutral alternative to BC/AD.'*
>
> *But the move has angered Christians …*
>
> *Ann Widdecombe, the Catholic former Tory Minister, said: 'I think what the BBC is doing is offensive to Christians. They are discarding terms that have been around for centuries and are well understood by everyone.*
>
> *'What are they going to do next? Get rid of the entire calendar on the basis that it has its roots in Christianity?'*

It's an interesting question, and the attempt to hold it open, as provocatively as possible, might be the best reason to avoid glib, politically correct remedies to the 'problem', however that is understood. *Anno Domini* reminds us of dominion, which is a far better guideline into historical reality than *kumbaya* gestures

towards a 'Common Era', as if hegemony had no content beyond togetherness. Since dominion has not been achieved primarily by impoliteness or insensitivity, politically correct multiculturalism is an irrelevant (and dishonest) response to it.

Regardless of whether Jesus is your Lord, or not, the Christian calendar dominates, or at least predominates, and the traditional acronymic accurately registers that fact. *AD bitchez*, as the commentators of *Zerohedge* might say.

It is an intriguing and ineluctable paradox of globalized modernity that its approximation to universality remains fundamentally structured by ethno-geographical peculiarities of a distinctly pre-modern type. The world was not integrated by togetherness, but by a succession of particular powers, with their characteristic traits, legacies, and parochialisms. For better or for worse, these *peculiar* features have been deeply installed in the governing order of the world. Their signs should be meticulously conserved and studied rather than clumsily effaced, because they are critical clues to the real nature of fate.

Without exception, calendars are treasure troves of intricately-sedimented ethno-historical information. They attempt to solve an ultimately insoluble problem, by arithmetically rationalizing irrational astronomical quantities, most obviously the incommensurable cycles of the terrestrial orbit (solar year), lunar orbit (month), and terrestrial rotation (day). No coherent

arithmetical construct can ever reconcile these periods, and even a repulsively inelegant calendar can only do so to a tolerable margin or error. The consequent ramshackle compromise, typically deformed by a torturous series of adjustments, reshufflings, and intercalations, tells an elaborate story of fixed and variable cultural priorities, regime changes, legacy constraints, alien influences, conceptual capabilities, and observational refinements, further complicated by processes of drift, adoption, and innovation that ripple through numerical and linguistic signs.

The hegemonic (Gregorian) calendar, for instance, is a jagged time-crash of incommensurable periods, in which multiple varieties of disunity jostle together. Weeks don't fit into solar and lunar months, or years, but cut through them quasi-randomly, so that days and dates slide drunkenly across each other. The length of the week is biblical, but the names of the days combine ancient astrology (Saturday-Monday) with the gods of Norse mythology (Tuesday-Friday). Although the Nordic-linguistic aspect of the week has not been strongly globalized, its Judaeo-numerical aspect has. The months are a ghastly mess, awkwardly mismatched with each other, with the lunar cycle, and with the succession of weeks, and testifying to the confused, erratic astro-politics of the Roman Empire in their linguistic mixture of deities (January, March, April?, May, June), festivals (February), emperors (July, August), and numbers (September-December). There is no need to excavate into this

luxuriant dung-hill here, except to note that the 'Christianity' of the Western calendar rests upon chaos-rotted pagan and poly-numeric foundations.

What matters to the AD-BC (vs CE-BCE) debate is not the multitudinously-muttering inner disorder of the Western calendar, but its estimation of the years, or 'era'. In this regard, it has clear competitors, and thus arouses definite resentments, since its closest cousins assert eras of their own. The era of the Hebrew calendar dates back to the *tohu* (chaos) of the year before creation, and records the years of the world (Latinized as Anno Mundi), to the present 5772 AM. The Islamic calendar, which begins from the Hejira of Mohammed, from Mecca to Medina, reached 1432 AH in AD 2011.

The Christian calendar, first systematized in AD 525 by Dionysius Exiguus (Dennis the Runt), counts the first *Anno Domini Nostri Iesu Christi* as the birth year of Jesus Ben Joseph, a false messiah to the Jews, the Christ and Redeemer for the Christians, a prophet to the Moslems, the Nazarene oppressor to Satanists, and something else, or nothing much, to everybody else. Regardless of the accuracy of its chronology or tacit theology, however, this is the year count that has been globally inherited from the real process of modernity, and recognized as a world standard by the United Nations, among other international organizations.

Compared to the Abrahamic calendars, those of Asia's

demographic giants generally lacked tight doctrinal and didactic focus. India can usually be relied upon to inundate any topic whatsoever in delirious multiplicity, and the calendar is no exception. Bengali, Malayalam, and Tamil calendars are all widely used in their respective regions, the Indian National Calendar counts from AD 78 = 0, which, in ominous keeping with current events, places us in 1933, and the most widely accepted Hindu religious calendar total the years since the birth of Krishna, reaching 5112 in AD 2011.

The fabulous complexity of China's traditional calendar makes it a paradise for nerds. Most commonly, it counts the years of each imperial reign, and is thus integrated by a literary narrative of dynastic history, rather than an arithmetical continuum. (The obstacle this presented to modernistic universalization is brutally obvious.) Alternatively, however, it groups historical time into sixty-year cycles, beginning from 2637 BC (which places us in the 28th year of cycle-78). Most Chinese today seem to have an extremely tenuous connection to this dimension of their calendrical heritage, which scarcely survives outside academic departments of ancient history, and in Daoist temples. Whilst the internal structure of the traditional year survives undamaged, as attested by the annual cycle of festivities, Chinese surrender to the Gregorian *year count* seems absolute.

Christian conservatives are surely right to argue that it is the year count – the number and the era – that matters. The acronyms are

merely explanatory, and even essentially tautological. Once it has been decided that history is measured from and divided by the birth of Jesus, it is far too late to quibble over the attribution of dominance. *AD bitchez*. That argument is over.
(Coming next, in Part 2 – Counter-calendars)

September 30, 2011

Calendric Dominion (Part 2)

Caesar with the soul of Christ

Political Correctness has tacitly legislated against the still-prevailing acronyms that define the hegemonic international calendar (BC-AD), and proposed clear alternatives (BCE-CE). Both the criticism and the suggestion are entirely consistent with its principles. In accordance with the tenets of multiculturalism (a more recent and also more active hegemony), it extends the liberal assumption of formal equality from individuals to 'cultures', allocating group rights, and identifying – whilst immediately denouncing – discrimination and privilege. As might be expected from an ideology that is exceptionally concentrated among intellectual elites, the proposed remedy is purely symbolic, taking the form of a rectification of signs. The 'problem' is diagnosed as a failure of consciousness, or sensitivity,

requiring only a raising of awareness (to be effected, one can safely assume, by properly credentialed and compensated professionals).

Even considered in its own terms, however, the rectification that is suggested amounts to nothing more than an empty *gesture* of refusal, accompanying fundamental compliance. Whilst the symbolic 'left' draw comfort from the insistence upon inconsequential change, with its intrinsic offense against conservative presumptions, reinforced by an implied moral critique of tradition, the counter-balancing indignation of the 'right' fixes the entire dispute within the immobilized trenches of the Anglo-American 'culture war'. The deep structure of calendric signs persists unaffected. Between Christian dominion (invoking 'Our Lord') and a 'common era' that is obediently framed by the dating of Christian revelation, there is no difference that matters. It is the count that counts.

Political Correctness fails here in the same way it always does, due to its disconnection of 'correctness' from any rigorous principle of calculation, and its disengagement of 'sensitivity' from realistic perception. A calendar is a profound cultural edifice, orchestrating the apprehension of historical time. As such, it is invulnerable to the gnat-bites of ideological irritability (and dominance is not reducible to impoliteness).

The problem of Western Calendric Dominion is not one of supremacism (etiquette) but of supremacy (historical fatality). It might be posed: *How did modernistic globalization come to be*

expressed as Christian Oecumenon? In large measure, this is Max Weber's question, and Walter Russell Mead's, but it overflows the investigations of both, in the direction of European and Middle Eastern antiquity. Initial stimulation for this inquiry is provided by a strange – even fantastic — coincidence.

In his notebooks, Friedrich Nietzsche imagined the overman (*Übermensch*) as a "Caesar with the soul of Christ," a chimerical being whose tensions echo those of the Church of Rome, Latinized Christian liturgy, and the Western calendar. This hybridity is expressed by a multitude of calendric features, following a broad division of labor between a Roman structuring of the year (within which with superficially-Christianized pagan festivals are scattered unsystematically), and a Christian year count, but it also points towards a cryptic — even radically unintelligible — plane of fusion.

In the Year Zero, which never took place, a mysterious synchronization occurred, imperceptibly and unremarked, founding the new theopolitical calendric order. For the Christians, who would not assimilate the Empire until the reign of Constantine in the early-4th century AD, God was incarnated as man, in the embryo of Jesus Christ. Simultaneously, in a Rome that was perfectly oblivious to the conception of the Messiah, the Julian calendar became operational. Julius Caesar's calendric reform had begun 45 years earlier, following the Years of Confusion, but incompetent execution in subsequent decades had systematically mis-timed the leap year,

intercalating a day every three years, rather than every four. The anomalous triennial cycle was abandoned and "the Roman calendar was finally aligned to the Julian calendar in 1 BC (with AD 1 the first full year of alignment)," although no special significance would be assigned to these years until Dionysius Exiguus integrated Christian history in AD 525.

Given the astounding neglect of this twin event, some additional emphasis is appropriate: The Julian calendar, which would persist, unmodified, for almost 1,600 years, and which still dominates colloquial understanding of the year's length (at 365.25 days), was born – by sheer and outrageous 'chance' – at the precise origin of the Christian Era, as registered by the Western, and now international, numbering of historical time. The year count thus exactly simulates a commemoration of the calendar itself – or at least of its prototype – even though the birth of this calendar, whether understood in the terms of secular reason or divine providence, has *absolutely no connection* to the counted beginning. This is a coincidence – which is to say, a destiny perceived without comprehension – that neither Roman authority nor Christian revelation has been able to account for, even as it surreptitiously shapes Western (and then Global) history. As the world's dominant calendar counts the years under what appears to be a particular religious inspiration, it refers secretly to its own initiation, alluding to mysteries of time that are alien to any faith. That much is simple fact.

Unlike the Julian calendar, the Gregorian calendar was determined under Christian auspices, or at least formal Christian authority (that of Pope Gregory XIII), and promulgated by papal bull in 1582. Yet a glance suffices to reveal the continuation of Julian calendric dominion, since the Gregorian reform effects transformations that remain strictly compliant with the Julian pattern, modified only by elementary operations of decimal re-scaling and inversion. Where the Julian calendar took four years as its base cyclical unit, the Gregorian takes four centuries, and where the Julian adds one leap day in four years, the Gregorian leaves one and subtracts three in 400. The result was an improved approximation to the tropical year (averaging ~365.24219 days), from the Julian 365.25 year, to the Gregorian 365.2425, a better than 20-fold reduction in discrepancy from an average ~0.00781 days per year (drifting off the seasons by one day every 128 years) to ~0.00031 (drifting one day every 3,226 years).

The combination of architectonic fidelity with technical adjustment defines conservative reform. It is clearly evident in this case. A neo-Julian calendar, structured in its essentials at its origin in AD 1 minus 1, but technically modified at the margin in the interest of improved accuracy, armed the West with the world's most efficient large-scale time-keeping system by the early modern period. In China, where the Confucian literati staged competitions to test various calendars from around the world against the prediction

of eclipses, Jesuits equipped with the Gregorian calendar prevailed against all alternatives, ensuring the inexorable trend towards Western calendric conventions, or, at least, the firm identification of Western methods with modernistic efficiency. Given only an edge, in China and elsewhere, the dynamics of complex systems took over, as 'network effects' locked-in the predominant standard, whilst systematically marginalizing its competitors. Even though Year Zero was still missing, it was, ever increasingly, missing at the same time for everyone. "Caeser with the soul of Christ" – the master of Quadrennium and eclipse — had installed itself as the implicit meaning of world history.

(Still to come – in Part 4? – Counter-Calendars, but we probably need an excursion through zero first)

October 8, 2011

Calendric Dominion (Part 3)

In Search of Year Zero

A Year Zero signifies a radical re-beginning, making universal claims. In modern, especially recent modern times, it is associated above all with ultra-modernist visions of total politics, at is maximum point of utopian and apocalyptic extremity. The existing order of the world

is reduced to nothing, from which a new history is initiated, fundamentally disconnected from anything that occurred before, and morally indebted only to itself. Predictably enough, among conservative commentators (in the widest sense), such visions are broadly indistinguishable from the corpse-strewn landscapes of social catastrophe, haunted by the ghosts of unrealizable dreams.

Christianity's global Calendric Dominion is paradoxical — perhaps even 'dialectical' — in this regard. It provides the governing model of historical rupture and unlimited ecumenical extension, and thus of total revolution, whilst at the same time representing the conservative order antagonized by modernistic ambition. Its example incites the lurch to Year Zero, even as it has no year zero of its own. Ultimately, its dialectical provocation tends towards Satanic temptation: the promise of Anti-Christian Apocalypse, or absolute news to a second power. ("If the Christians could do it, why couldn't we?" Cue body-counts scaling up towards infinity.)

This tension exists not only between an established Christian order and its pseudo-secular revolutionary after-image, but also within Christianity itself, which is split internally by the apparent unity and real dissociation of 'messianic time'. The process of Christian calendric consolidation was immensely protracted. A distance of greater than half a millennium separated the clear formulation of the year count from the moment commemorated, with further centuries required to fully integrate historical recording

on this basis, digesting prior Jewish, Roman, and local date registries, and laying the foundation for a universalized Christian articulation of time. By the time the revolutionary 'good news' had been coherently formalized into a recognizable prototype of the hegemonic Western calendar, it had undergone a long transition from historical break to established tradition, with impeccable conservative credentials.

Simultaneously, however, the process of calendric consolidation sustained, and even sharpened, the messianic expectation of punctual, and truly contemporary rupture, projected forwards as duplication, or 'second coming' of the initial division. Even if the moment in which history had been sundered into two parts — before and after, BC and AD — now lay in quite distant antiquity, its example remained urgent, and promissory. Messianic hope was thus torn and compacted by an intrinsic historical doubling, which stretched it between a vastly retrospective, gradually recognized beginning, and a prospect of sudden completion, whose credibility was assured by its status as repetition. What had been would be again, transforming the AD count into a completed sequence that was confirmed in the same way it was terminated (through Messianic intervention).

Unsurprisingly, the substantial history of Western calendric establishment is twinned with the rise of millenarianism, through phases that trend to increasingly social-revolutionary forms, and eventually make way for self-consciously anti-religious, although decidedly eschatological, varieties of modernistic total politics.

Because whatever has happened must — at least — be possible, the very existence of the calendar supports anticipations of absolute historical rupture. Its count, simply by beginning, prefigures an end. What starts can re-start, or conclude.

Zero, however, intrudes diagonally. It even introduces a comic aspect, since whatever the importance of the Christian revelation to the salvation of our souls, it is blatantly obvious that it failed to deliver a satisfactory arithmetical notation. For that, Christian Europe had to await the arrival of the decimal numerals from India, via the Moslem Middle East, and the ensuing revolution of calculation and book-keeping that coincided with the Renaissance, along with the birth of mercantile capitalism in the city states of northern Italy.

Indeed, for anybody seeking a truly modern calendar, the Arrival of Zero would mark an excellent occasion for a new year zero (AZ 0?), around AD 1500. Although this would plausibly date the origin of modernity, the historical imprecision of the event counts against it, however. In addition, the assimilation of zero by germinal European (and thus global) capitalism was evidently gradual — if comparatively rapid — rather than a punctual 'revolutionary' transition of the kind commerorative calendric zero is optimally appropriate to. (If Year Zero is thus barred from the designation of its own world-historic operationalization, it is perhaps structurally doomed to misapplication and the production of disillusionment.)

The conspicuous absence of zero from the Western calendar (count), exposed in its abrupt jolt from 1 BC to AD 1, is an intolerable and irreparable stigma that brings its world irony to a zenith. In the very operation of integrating world history, in preparation for planetary modernity, it remarks its own debilitating antiquity and particularity, in the most condescending modern sense of the limited and the primitive — crude, defective and underdeveloped.

How could a moment of self-evident calculative incompetence provide a convincing origin-point for subsequent historical calculation? Year Zero escaped all possibility of conceptual apprehension at the moment in the time-count where it is now seen to belong, and infinity (the reciprocal of zero) proves no less elusive. Infinity was inserted into a time when (and place where) it demonstrably made no sense, and the extraordinary world-historical impression that it made did nothing — not even nothing– to change that situation. Is this not a worthy puzzle for theologians? Omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, yet hopeless at maths — these are not the characteristics of a revelation designed to impress technologists or accountants. All the more reason, then, to take this comedy seriously, in all its ambivalence — since the emerging world of technologists and accountants, the techno-commercial (runway-industrial, or capitalist) world that would globalize the earth, was weaned within the playpen of this calendar, and no other. Modernity had selected to date itself in a way that its own kindergarten

students would scorn.

October 16, 2011

Calendric Dominion (Part 4)

A Digression into the Reality Principle

Between the world we would like to inhabit, and the world that exists, there's a gap that tests us. Even the simplest description of this gap already calls for a decision. 'Ideologies' in the broadest, and culturally almost all-consuming sense, serve primarily to soften it. Sense, and even compassion, is attributed to the side of reality, promising ultimate reconciliation between human hopes and desires and the 'objective' nature of things. Science, a typically despised and misanthropic discipline, tends to the opposite assumption, emphasizing the harsh indifference of reality to human interests and expectations, with the implication that the lessons it teaches us can be administered with unlimited brutality. We can dash ourselves against reality if we insist, but we cannot realistically anticipate some merciful moderation of the consequences. Nature does not scold or punish, it merely breaks us, coldly, upon the rack of our untruths.

Like other cultural institutions, calendars are saturated with ideologies, and tested to destruction against implacable reality. Their

collision with nature is especially informative, because they express obstinate human desires as favored numbers (selected from among small positive integers), and they register the gulf of the real in a strictly quantitative form. Any surviving calendar relates the story of an adaptation to reality, or cultural deference to (and deformation by) nature, as numerical preferences have been compromised through their encounter with quantitative facts.

Pure ideology in the calendrical sphere is represented in its perfection by the fantasy year of the ancient Mesopotamians, 360 days in length, and harmonized to the sexagesimal (modulus-60) arithmetic of the Sumerians. Its influence has persisted in the 360 degrees of the geometric circle, and in the related sexagesimal division into minutes and seconds (of time and arc). The archaic calendars of Meso-America and East Asia, as well as those of the Middle East, seem to have been attracted to the 360-day year, as though to an ideal model. If the Great Architect of the Universe had been an anthropomorphic geometer, this is the calendar that would work.

Of course, it doesn't (with all due respect to the engrossing Biblical counter-argument outlined here). Instead, in the mainstream world calendric tradition – as determined by the eventual global outcome – a first level adaptation systematized the year at 365 days – the Egyptian year. Unlike the 360-day archetypal year, which has all of the first three primes as factors, and thus divides conveniently into

‘months’ or other component periods, the 365-day year represents a reluctant concession to quantitative fact. The number 365 has only two factors (both primes, 5 and 73), but neither seems to have acquired any discernible calendrical valency, perhaps because of their obvious unsuitability to even approximate description of lunar periods. The Egyptians turned instead to an awkward but influential innovation: the intercalation. A five-day appendix was added to the year, as a sheer correction or supplementary commensuration, and an annual reminder of the gap between numerical elegance and astronomical reality. Whilst intercalations were invested with mytho-religious significance, this was essentially compensatory – a crudely obscured testament to the weakness of ideality (and thus of systematic priest-craft as a mode of reality apprehension, or efficient social purpose). If intercalations were necessary, then nature was not spell-bound, and the priest-masters of calendric time were exposed, tacitly, as purveyors of mystification, whose limits were drawn by the horizon of social credulity. Astronomical time mocked the meanings of men.

Over time, the real (‘tropical’) year discredits its calendrical idealizations by unmooring dates from the seasons, in a process of time drift that exposes discrepancy, and drives calendar reform. Inaccurate calendars are gradually rendered meaningless, as the seasonal associations of its time terms are eroded to utter randomness – by frigid ‘summer’ months and scorching ‘winter’ ones.

Clearly, no priesthood can survive in a climate that derides the established order of the year, and in which farmers that listen to the holy words (of time) are assured inevitable starvation. Unless tracked within a tolerable margin of accuracy by a calendar that 'keeps' the time, the year reverts to an alien and unintelligible thing, entirely exterior to cultural comprehension, whilst society's reigning symbols appear as a risible, senseless babble, drowned out by the howling chaos of the real.

With the introduction of the Julian Calendar, coinciding with the (non-event) of year zero, comes the recognition that the tropical year is incommensurable with any integer, and that a larger cycle of intercalation is required to track it. A kind of modernity, or structural demystification, is born with the relinquishment of the ideal year, and everything it symbolizes in terms of cosmic design or celestial harmony. The devil's appendix is attached, irremovably.

Numeracy and time measurement divorce at the origin of caesarean Calendric Dominion, but it is easy to mistake accidents on this path for essential concessions to reality. Even allowing for the inescapable function of intercalations, there was nothing inevitable – at least absolutely or cosmically inevitable – about the utter ruination of numerical coherence that the Julian Calendar incarnated, and passed on.

To explore this (admittedly arcane) topic further requires a digression to the second power, into the relations between numbers

and anthropomorphic desire. The obvious starting point is the 360-day calendar of ancient Sumer, and the question: What made this number appealing? Whether examining 360, or its sexagesimal root (60), an arithmetically-conventional attention to prime factors (2, 3, and 5), is initially misleading — although ultimately indispensable. A more illuminating introduction begins with the compound factors 10 and 12, the latter relevant primarily to the lunar cycle (and the archaic dream of an astronomically – or rather astrologically — consistent 12-month year), and the former reflecting the primordial anthropomorphism in matters numeric: decimalism. The 360-day calendar is an object of human desire because it is an anthropo-lunar (or menstrual-lycanthropic?) hybrid, speaking intrinsically to the cycles of human fertility, and to the 'digital' patterns instantiated in mammalian body-plans. A 360-day year would be *ours* (even if alien things are hidden in it).

Anthropomorphic decimalism suggests how certain numerical opportunities went missing, along with zero. 'Apprehension' and 'comprehension' refer understanding to the prehensile organs of a specific organism, whose bilateral symmetry combines five-fingered hands to produce a count reaching ten, across an interval that belongs to an alien, intractable, third. Triadic beings are monsters, and decimally *ungraspable*. The bino-decimal structure of the *Yi Jing* exhibits this with total clarity, through its six-stage time-cycle that counts in the recurrent sequence 1, 2, 4, 8, 7, 5 … Each power of three

(within the decimal numerals) is expelled along with zero from the order of apprehensible time. There is no way that a ternary calendric numeracy could ever have been anthropomorphically acceptable – the very thought is (almost definitionally) *abominable*.

Yet astronomy seems hideously complicit with abomination, at least, if the years are twinned. The sixth power of three (3^6) approximates to the length of two tropical years with a discrepancy of just ~1.48438 days, or less than one day a year. An intercalation of three days every four years (or two twin-year cycles) brings it to the accuracy of the Julian Calendar, and a reduction of this intercalation by one day every 128 years (or 64 (2^6) twin-year cycles) exceeds the accuracy of the Gregorian calendar.

It might be necessary to be slightly unbalanced to fully appreciate this extraordinary conjunction of numerical elegance and astronomical fact. A system of calendric computation that counts only in twos and threes, and which maintains a perfectly triadic order of time-division up to the duration of a two-year period, is able to quite easily exceed the performance of the dominant international calendar (reaching a level of accuracy that disappears into the inherent instability of the tropical year, and is thus strictly speaking unimprovable).

How many days are there in a year? ((3 x 3 x 3 x 3 x 3 x 3) / 2) + ~0.74219

The horror, the horror …

October 21, 2011

Calendric Dominion (Part 5)

From Crimson Paradise to Soft Apocalypse

Despite its modernity and decimalism, the French *calendrier républicain* or *révolutionnaire* had no Year Zero, but it re-set the terms of understanding. A topic that had been conceived as an intersection of religious commemoration with astronomical fact became overtly ideological, and dominated by considerations of secular politics. The new calendar, which replaced AD 1792 with the first year of the new 'Era of Liberty', lasted for less than 14 years. It was formally abolished by Napoléon, effective from 1 January 1806 (the day after 10 Nivôse an XIV), although it was briefly revived during the Paris Commune (in AD 1871, or *Année 79 de la République*), when the country's revolutionary enthusiasm was momentarily re-ignited.

For the left, the calendric re-set meant radical re-foundation, and symbolic extirpation of the *Ancien Régime*. For the right, it meant immanentization of the eschaton, and the origination of totalitarian terror. Both definitions were confirmed in 1975, when Year Zero was finally reached in the killing fields of the Kampuchean Khmer Rouge,

where over quarter of the country's population perished during efforts to blank-out the social slate and start over. Khmer Rouge leader Saloth Sar (better known by his *nom de guerre* Pol Pot) had made 'Year Zero' his own forever, re-branded as a South-east Asian *final solution*.

Year Zero was henceforth far too corpse-flavored to retain propaganda value, but that does not render the calendric equation 1975 = 0 insignificant (rather the opposite). Irrespective of its parochialism in time and space, corresponding quite strictly to a re-incarnation of (xenophobic-suicidal) 'national socialism', it defines a meaningful epoch, as the high-water mark of utopian overreach, and the complementary re-valorization of conservative pragmatism. Appropriately enough, Year Zero describes an instant without duration, in which the age of utopian time is terminated in exact coincidence with its inauguration. The era it opens is characterized, almost perfectly, by its renunciation, as fantasy social programming extinguishes itself in blood and collapse. The immanent eschaton immediately damns itself.

Historical irony makes this excursion purely (sub-) academic, because the new era is *essentially* disinclined to conceive itself as such. What begins from this Year Zero is a global culture of ideological exhaustion, or of 'common sense', acutely sensitive to the grinning death's head hidden in beautiful dreams, and reconciled to compromise with the non-ideal. From the perspective of fantastic

revolutionary expectation, the high-tide of perfectionist vision ebbs into disillusionment and tolerable dissatisfaction – *but at least it doesn't eat our children*. The new era's structural modesty of ambition has no time for a radical re-beginning or crimson paradise, even when it is historically defined by one.

Pol Pot's Year Zero is sandwiched between the publication of Eric Voegelin's *The Ecumenic Age* (1974), and the first spontaneous Chinese mass protests against the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (over the months following the death of Zhou Enlai, in January 1976). It is noteworthy in this regard that Deng Xiaoping eulogized Zhou at his memorial ceremony for being "modest and prudent" (thus the New Aeon speaks).

In the Anglo-American world, the politics of ideological exhaustion were about to take an explicitly conservative form, positively expressed as 'market realism' (and in this sense deeply resonant with, as well as synchronized to, Chinese developments). Margaret Thatcher assumed leadership of the British Conservative Party in February 1975, and Ronald Reagan declared his presidential candidacy in November of the same year. The English-speaking left would soon be traumatized by a paradoxical 'conservative revolution' that extracted relentless energy from the very constriction of political possibility. What *could not happen* quickly became the primary social dynamo, as articulated by the Thatcherite maxim: "There is no alternative" (= option zero). The auto-

immolation of utopia had transmuted into a new beginning.

Whilst the era of not restarting from zero can be dated to approximate accuracy (from AD *n* – 1975), and had thus in fact restarted from zero, in profoundly surreptitious fashion, its broad consequence was to spread and entrench (Gregorian) Calendric Dominion ever more widely and deeply. The prevailing combination of radically innovative globalization (both economic and technological) with prudential social conservatism made such an outcome inevitable. Symbolic re-commencement wasn't on anybody's agenda, and even as the postmodernists declared the end of 'grand narratives', the first planetary-hegemonic narrative structure in history was consolidating its position of uncontested monopoly. Globalization was the story of the world, with Gregorian dating as its grammar.

Orphaned by ideological exhaustion, stigmatized beyond recovery by its association with the Khmer Rouge, and radically maladapted to the reigning spirit of incremental pragmatism, by the late 20th century Year Zero was seemingly off the agenda, unscheduled, and on its own. Time, then, for something truly insidious.

On January 18, 1985, Usenet poster Spencer L. Bolles called attention to a disturbing prospect that had driven a friend into insomnia:

> *I have a friend that raised an interesting question that I immediately tried to prove wrong. He is a programmer and has this notion that when we reach the year 2000, computers will not accept the new date. Will the computers assume that it is 1900, or will it even cause a problem? I violently opposed this because it seemed so meaningless. Computers have entered into existence during this century, and has software, specifically accounting software, been prepared for this turnover? If this really comes to pass and my friend is correct, what will happen? Is it anything to be concerned about?*

Bolles' anonymous friend was losing sleep over what would come to be known as the 'Y2K problem'. In order to economize on memory in primitive early-generation computers, a widely-adopted convention recorded dates by two digits. The millennium and century were ignored, since it was assumed that software upgrades would have made the problem moot by the time it became imminent, close to the 'rollover' (of century *and* millennium) in the year AD 2000. Few had anticipated that the comparative conservatism of software legacies (relative to hardware development) would leave the problem entirely unaddressed even as the crisis date approached.

In the end, Y2K was a non-event that counted for nothing, although its preparation costs, stimulus effects (especially on outsourcing to the emerging Indian software industry), and panic

potential were all considerable. Its importance to the history of the calendar – whilst still almost entirely virtual – is extremely far-reaching.

Y2K resulted from the accidental — or 'spontaneous' — emergence of a new calendrical order within the globalized technosphere. Its Year Zero, 0K (= 1900), was devoid of all parochial commemoration or ideological intention, even as it was propagated through increasingly computerized communication channels to a point of ubiquity that converged, asymptotically, with that attained by Western Calendric Dominion over the complete sweep of world history. The 20th century had been recoded, automatically, as the 1st century of the Cybernetic Continuum. If Y2K had completed its reformatting of the planetary sphere-drive in the way some (few deluded hysterics) had expected, the world would now be approaching the end of the year 0K+111, settled securely in its first arithmetically-competent universal calendar, and historically oriented by the same system of electronic computation that had unconsciously decided upon the origin of positive time. Instead, the 'millennium bug' was fixed, and theological date-counting prolonged its dominance, uninterrupted (after much ado about nothing). Most probably, the hegemonic cultural complex encrusted in Calendric Dominion never even noticed the cybernetic insurrection it had crushed.

Between 0K and Y2K, the alpha and omega of soft apocalypse,

there is not only a century of historical time, but also an inversion of attitude. Time departs 0K, as from any point of origin, accumulating elapsed duration through its count. Y2K, in contrast, was a destination, which time approached, as if to an apocalyptic horizon. Whilst not registered as a countdown, it might easily have been. The terminus was precisely determined (no less than the origin), and the strictest formulation of the millennium bug construed the rollover point as an absolute limit to recordable time, beyond which no future was even imaginable. For any hypothetical Y2K-constrained computer intelligence, denied access to dating procedures that over-spilled its two-digit year registry, residual time shrank towards zero as the millennium event loomed. Once all the nines are reached, time is finished, at the threshold of eternity, where beginning and end are indistinguishable (in 0).

> "0K, it's time to wrap this puppy up." – Revelation 6:14
> (next, and last, the end (at last))

October 28, 2011

Calendric Dominion (Part 6)

Countdown

At the beginning of the 21st century, global cultural hegemony is

on the move. For roughly 500 years, Western — and later more specifically Anglophone — societies and agencies have predominantly guided the development of the current world system. As their economic pre-eminence wanes, their cultural and political influence can be expected to undergo a comparable decline. In the early stages of the coming transition, however, the terminal form of active Western cultural hegemony – multicultural political correctness (MPC) – is well-positioned to manage the terms of the retreat. By reconfiguring basic Western religious and political themes as a systematic sensitization to unwarranted privilege, MPC is able to distance itself from its own heritage and to live on, in the resentment of 'the other', as if it were the neutral adjudicator of disputes it had no part in.

When MPC turns its attention to the Gregorian (or Western Christian) Calendar it is, of course, appalled. But it is also stuck. What could be more insensitive to cultural diversity than an ecumenical date-counting system, rooted in the ethnic peculiarities of Greek-phase Abrahamic religion, which unapologetically celebrates its triumph in the uncompromising words Anno Domini? Yet global convergence demands a standard, no alternative calendar has superior claims to neutrality, and, in any case, the inertial juggernaut of large-scale complex systems – 'lock-in' or 'path-dependency' – pose barriers to switching that seem effectively insuperable. The solution proposed by MPC to this conundrum is so feeble that it

amounts to the completion of Gregorian Calendric Dominion, which is to be simultaneously rephrased (politely) and acknowledged in its irresistible universality as the articulation of a 'Common Era'.

MPC supplants problems of cultural power with obfuscatory etiquette, and in absolute terms, its smug dishonesty is difficult to like. As a relative phenomenon, however, its appeal is more obvious, since radical 'solutions' to Gregorian Calendric Dominion, re-beginning at Year Zero, have generally reverted to mass murder. Lacking persuasive claims to a new, fundamental, and universally acknowledged historical break, they have substituted terror for true global singularity, as if fate could be blotted out in blood.

Since resentment gets nowhere, whether in its mild (MPC) or harsh (killing fields) variants, it is worth entertaining alternative possibilities. These begin with attention to real cultural differences, rather than mere 'cultural diversity' as it presents itself to the vacuously MPC-processed mind. Soon after Shanghai had been selected as host city for World Expo 2010 (in December 2002), countdowns started. For Westerners, these probably had space-age associations, triggering memories of the countdowns to 'blast off' that were popularized by the Apollo Program, and subsequent science fiction media. It is far from impossible that Chinese shared in these evocations, although they were also able to access a far deeper – which is to say civilizationally fundamental – reservoir of reference. That is because Chinese time typically counts down,

modeled, as it is, on the workings of water clocks. The Chinese language systematically describes previous as 'above' (*shang*) and next as 'beneath' (*xia*), conforming to an intuition of time as descent. Time is counted down as it runs out, from an elevated hydraulic body into the sunken future that receives it.

Duration not only flows, it drips. Perhaps, then, an 'orientalization' of calendric perception and organization is something that significantly exceeds a simple (or even exceedingly difficult) renegotiation of beginnings. Re-beginning might be considered largely irrelevant to the problem, at least when compared to the re-orientation from an original to a terminal Year Zero. Whilst not exactly a transition in the direction of time, such a change would involve a transition in the direction of time intuition, simultaneously surpassing the wildest ambitions of calendrical re-origination and subtly organizing itself 'within the pores' of the established order of time. As modeled by the 2010 Expo, and previously by Y2K, the switch to countdown time does not frontally challenge, or seek to straightforwardly replace, the calendric order in being. Rather than counting in the same way, from a different place, it counts in a different way, within the framework of time already in place. It is a revolution with 'Chinese characteristics', which is to say: a surreptitious insurgency, changing what something already was, rather than replacing it with something else.

Both the 2010 Expo and Y2K also reveal the extreme difficulty of

any such transition, since a futural Year Zero, or countdown calendar, must navigate the arrow of time and its cognitive asymmetry (between knowledge of the past and of the future), presupposing exact, confident, and consensual prediction.

That is why it approximates so closely to conservative acceptance. If the countdown is to be sure of arriving at the scheduled terminus, the destination 'event' must already be a date (rather than an empirical 'happening'). Nothing will suffice except a strictly arithmetical, rigorously certain inevitability, as inescapably pre-destined as the year 2000, or 2010, which cannot but come. From the perspective of the countdown calendar, that is what (Gregorian) Calendric Dominion will have been for. It is an opportunity to program an inevitable arrival.

But when? The sheer passage (fall) of time has assured that the opportunity for calendric revolution presented by the Y2K 'millennium bug' has been irretrievably missed (so that AD 1900 ≠ 0). The same is true of World Expo 2010, an event without pretense to be anything beyond a miniature 'practice' model of global-temporal singularity. As for the real (techno-commercial) Singularity – that is an imprecise historical prediction, at once controversial and incapable of supporting exact prediction.

A more appropriate prospect is suggested by the science fiction writer Greg Bear, in his novel Queen of Angels, set in anticipation of the mid-21st century 'binary millennium' ($2048 = 2^{11}$). This is a

formally suitable, purely calendric 'event', deriving its significance from arithmetic rather than ideology or uncertain prophecy. He even envisages it as a moment of insurgent revolution, when artificial intelligence arises surreptitiously, and unnoticed. Yet arbitrariness impairs this date (why the 11th power of 2?), and no serious attempt is made to explain its rise to exceptional cultural prominence.

If an adjusted global culture is to converge upon a countdown date, it must be obvious, intrinsically compelling, and ideologically uncontroversial, in other words, spontaneously plausible. The target that World Expo 2010 suggests (anagrammatically) is AD 2100, a date that performs the final stages of a countdown (2, 1, 0 …). Reinforcing this indication, the Y2K 'millennium bug' threatened to re-set the date of AD 2000 to AD 1900, which would have tacitly reiterated itself at the exact end of the 21st century. If it continues to chatter about the calendar, perhaps this is how.

The impending Mayan Apocalypse, scheduled for 21 / 12 / 2012, offers a preliminary chance to indulge in a festival of countdown numbers – like 2010, it looks a lot like another digital singularity simulation. If the morning of December 22nd, 2012, leaves the world with nothing worse than a hangover, it could gradually settle into a new sense of the Years Remaining (to the end of all the time that counts, or the 21st century).

AD 2100 = 0 YR

AD 2099 = 1 YR

AD 2098 = 2 YR
AD 2096 = 4 YR
AD 2092 = 8 YR
AD 2084 = 16 YR
AD 2068 = 32 YR
AD 2036 = 64 YR
AD 1972 = 128 YR
AD 1844 = 256 YR
AD 1588 = 512 YR
AD 1076 = 1024 YR
AD 52 = 2048 YR
It's difficult to anticipate what it looks like from the other side.

November 4, 2011

Twisted Times (Part 1)

Abe: "You should go to China."
Joe: "I'm going to France."
Abe: "I'm from the future. You should go to China."
— *Looper*

In Rian Johnson's *Looper* (2012), the city of Shanghai reaches back across 30 years to draw people in. Over these decades it feeds itself based on what it is to become: *the city of the future*. When

compared to this, everything else that happens in the movie is mere distraction, but we won't get there for a while.

Strangely enough, 'everything else' was to have been simply everything. Joe was going to Paris, and Shanghai wasn't even in the picture. That was before Chinese authorities told Johnson that they would cover the cost of the Shanghai shoot, making the film a co-production, with convenient access to the Chinese cinema market. The Old World stood no chance.

For American audiences, *Looper* played into the trend of opinion, through its contrasting urban visions of a grim, deteriorated, crime-wracked Kansas City and the splendors of a 'futuristic' Shanghai. The movie doesn't answer the question: *How did America lose the future?* It nevertheless accepts the premise, as something close to a pre-installed fact.

Yet if *Looper* confirmed the direction of American popular attitudes, it marked a shift on the Chinese side. Only a few years before, Western media reported with amusement that the Chinese broadcast authorities had banned time-travel fictions from the nation's airwaves, apparently concerned that the country's citizens were defecting into a pre-republican past, under the influence of narratives that "casually make up myths, have monstrous and weird plots, use absurd tactics, and even promote feudalism, superstition, fatalism and reincarnation." Now a time-travel story was being actively recruited to close an urban promotion loop, linking

Shanghai's international image to a portrayal of retro-chronic anomaly. The Shanghai time-travel industry had arrived.

Before proceeding to a multi-installment investigation of ~~Topological Meta-History~~ tangled time-circuitry, which 'time-travel' illustrates only as a crude dramatization, it is worth pausing over *Looper*'s 'monstrous and weird plot'. Time-travel has a uniquely intimate, and seductively morbid, relationship to both fiction and history, because it scrambles the very principle of narrative order in profundity. If Western media authorities assumed the same role of cultural custodianship that has been traditional among their Chinese peers, they too might have been compelled to denounce a genre that flagrantly subverted the foundational principle of Aristotelian poetics: that any story worthy of veneration should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. If time-travel can occur, it seems (at least initially) that order is an illusion, so that fiction and reality switch places.

From a conservative perspective, therefore, comfort is to be found in the blatant absurdity of time-travel stories (insofar as this can be confined to a *reductio ad absurdam* of the time-loop structure itself, rather than spreading outwards as the index of primordial cosmic disorder). In this respect, *Looper* is a model of tranquillization.

The *Looper* time-travel procedure is monopolized by a criminal syndicate, which utilizes it exclusively for one purpose: the disposal

of awkward individuals, who are returned 30 years in time to be murdered, execution-style, by professional killers (yes: "This sounds pretty stupid"). The exorbitant absurdity of this scenario might exempt it from further critical attention, were it not the symptom of more interesting things, and the doorway onto others.

The symptom first: Non-linear time-structures are shaken to pieces almost immediately, once they allow for the transportation of *stuff* backwards in time. *Looper* economics exposes this with particular clarity. The killers of 2044 are paid in bars of silver for 'ordinary' hits, and in gold for 'closing loops' or executing their retro-deposited older selves. The bars are sent back from 2074, and circulated through an internal exchange operation, which swaps bullion for (Chinese) paper currency. Whilst this crude time-circuit is presented as a payments system, the process described actually functions as an under-performing money-making machine. By using it, one realizes the ultimate Austrian economic nightmare by *printing precious metals*, because an ingot sent backwards in time is doubled, or added to its 'previous' instance (which already exists in the past). Mechanical re-iteration of the process would guarantee exponential growth for free. We're not told what the 2074 criminal organization sees as its core business, but it must be seriously lucrative — exciting enough, in any case, to distract them from the fact that their murder-fodder machine is really a bullion fast-breeder. They could have shoveled it full of diamonds, doubling their fortune each 'time', but

they decided instead to duplicate human nuisances in 2044. The movie asks us quietly to suspend our impertinent disbelief, and trust that they know what they're doing.

Mike Dickison's excellent *Looper* commentary succinctly describes this implicit procedure for unlimited wealth, among other incredibly missed opportunities. It surely has to count as a criticism of the movie that its rickety framework of plot coherence is dependent upon the imbecility of its significant agents, who stumble blindly past the prospect of total power in their ruthless pursuit of a miserable racket. This absurdity, as already noted, serves a conservative purpose: The potential of the loop has to be suppressed to sustain narrative drama and intelligibility. The basic flaw of the movie is that far too much was given, before most of it was clumsily taken away.

In the absence of controlling censors, Johnson's story represses itself, messily, comically, and unconvincingly. "This time travel crap, just fries your brain like a egg," the elder Joe (Bruce Willis) confesses on Johnson's behalf. Unleashed time-travel is an anti-plot, inconsistent with dramatic presentation. (If you're not willing to take Aristotle's word for that, watching *Primer* a few dozen times should sort you out.) Narrative wreckage is what time-travel does.

Time-travel absurdity is a *choice*. It is a decision taken, at least semi-deliberately, for conservative or protective reasons, because the alternative would be ruin. Even the representation of (radically

nonlinear) time anomaly by 'time-travel' is indicative of this, since it is programmed by the preservation of a narrative function (the 'time-traveler'), regardless of conceptual expense. Far rather the incoherent jumble of matter duplication, time-line proliferation, immunized strands of personal memory, and the arbitrary inhibition of potentialities, than utter narrative disorder, fate loops, the annihilation of agency, and the emergence of an alien consistency, subverting all historical meaning.

If the mask of time-travel has slipped enough to expose some hint of the *intolerable* tangle beneath, we're ready to take the next step …

(This will help.)

February 17, 2013

Extropy

What greater calamity can a neologism inherit than a techno-hippy paternity? Such a fate, apparently, induces even other techno-hippies to skirt around it (whilst repeating it almost exactly). But it needs to be said, whether through gritted teeth or not, that 'extropy' is a *great* word, and close to an indispensable one.

Extropy, or local entropy reduction, is — quite simply — what it is for something to work. The entire techno-science of entropy, on its practical (cybernetic) side, is nothing but extropy generation. There

is no rigorous conception of functionality that really bypasses it. The closest approximation to objective value that will ever be found already has a name, and 'extropy' is it.

The importance of this term to the investigation of time is brought into focus by the work of Sean Carroll (although, of course, he never uses it). If the directionality or 'arrow' of time is understood as Eddington proposed, through rising global entropy (or disorder), as anticipated by the second law of thermodynamics, local extropy poses an intriguing question.

Carroll's discussion is directed towards his sense of the ultimate temporal and cosmological problem: the low entropy state of the early universe (assumed but not explained by prevailing cosmo-physics). Given this intellectual momentum, the problem of local negative-entropy production (extropy) is little more than a distraction, or a spurious objection to the conceptual scaffolding he presents. He comments:

The Second Law doesn't forbid decreases in entropy in ***open*** *systems — by putting in the work, you are able to tidy up your room, decreasing its entropy but still increasing the entropy of the whole universe (you make noise, burn calories, etc.). Nor is it in any way incompatible with evolution or complexity or any such thing.*

The perplexing question, however, is this: If entropy defines the direction of time, with increasing disorder determining the difference of the future from the past, doesn't (local) extropy —

through which all complex cybernetic beings, such as lifeforms, exist — describe a negative temporality, or time-reversal? Is it not in fact more likely, given the inevitable embeddedness of intelligence in 'inverted' time, that it is the cosmological or general conception of time that is *reversed* (from any possible naturally-constructed perspective)?

Whatever the conclusion, it is clear that entropy and extropy have opposing time-signatures, so that time-reversal is a relatively banal cosmological fact. 'We' inhabit a bubble of backwards time (whoever we are), whilst immersed in a cosmic environment which runs overwhelmingly in the opposite direction. If reality is harsh and strange, that's why.

February 20, 2013

CHAPTER ONE - THE BIGGEST PICTURE

Big Bang — an appreciation

A few reasons to love the Big Bang:

— Time turns edgy again.

— The steady state model proved unsustainable — the most exquisite irony ever?

— Physical theories now have cosmic dates. For instance, the still-elusive unifying theory of quantum gravitation corresponds to the Planck Epoch, when the universe was still far smaller than an atomic nucleus, compelling gravity to operate at the quantum scale. Similarly, particle accelerator technology becomes deep time regression.

— The Planck Epoch is really wild: “During the Planck era, the Universe can be best described as a quantum foam of 10 dimensions containing Planck length sized black holes continuously being created and annihilated with no cause or effect. In other words, try not to think about this era in normal terms.”

— The void animates. Sten Odenwald quotes UCSB physicist Frank Wilczek: “The reason that there is something instead of

nothing is that nothing is unstable".

February 26, 2013

Cosmological Infancy

There is a 'problem' that has been nagging at me for a long time – which is that *there hasn't been a long time*. It's Saturday, with no one around, or getting drunk, or something, so I'll run it past you. Cosmology seems oddly childish.

An analogy might help. Among all the reasons for super-sophisticated atheistic materialists to deride Abrahamic creationists, the most arithmetically impressive is the whole James Ussher 4004 BC thing. The argument is familiar to everyone: *6,027 years — Ha!*

Creationism is a topic for another time. The point for now is just: *13.7 billion years – Ha!* Perhaps this cosmological consensus estimate for the age of the universe is true. I'm certainly not going to pit my carefully-rationed expertise in cosmo-physics against it. But it's a *stupidly* short amount of time. If this is reality, the joke's on us. Between Ussher's mid-17th century estimate and (say) Hawking's late 20th century one, the difference is just six orders of magnitude. It's scarcely worth getting out of bed for. Or the crib.

For anyone steeped in Hindu Cosmology – which locates us 1.56 x 10^14 years into the current Age of Brahma – or Lovecraftian metaphysics, with its vaguer but abysmally extended eons, the quantity of elapsed cosmic time, according to the common understanding of our present scientific establishment, is cause for claustrophobia. Looking backward, we are sealed in a small room, with the wall of the original singularity pressed right up against us. (Looking forward, things are quite different, and we will get to that.)

There are at least three ways in which the bizarre youthfulness of the universe might be imagined:

1. Consider first the disconcerting lack of proportion between space and time. The universe contains roughly 100 billion galaxies, each a swirl of 100 billion stars. That makes Sol one of 10^22 stars in the cosmos, but it has lasted for something like *a third of the life of the universe*. Decompose the solar system and the discrepancy only becomes more extreme. The sun accounts for 99.86% of the system's mass, and the gas giants incorporate 99% of the remainder, yet the age of the earth is only fractionally less than that of the sun. Earth is *a cosmic time hog*. In space it is next to nothing, but in time it extends back through a substantial proportion of the Stelliferous Era, so close to the origin of the universe that it is belongs to the very earliest generations of planetary bodies. Beyond it stretch incomprehensible immensities, but before it there is next to nothing.

2. Compared to the intensity of time (backward) extension is of

vanishing insignificance. The unit of Planck time – corresponding to the passage of a photon across a Planck length — is about 5.4 x 10^-44 seconds. If there is a true *instant*, that is it. A year consists of less the 3.2 x 10^7 seconds, so cosmological consensus estimates that there have been approximately 432 339 120 000 000 000 seconds since the Big Bang, which for our purposes can be satisfactorily rounded to 4.3 x 10^17. The difference between a second and the age of the universe is smaller that that between a second and a Planck Time tick by nearly *27 orders of magnitude*. In other words, if a Planck Time-sensitive questioner asked "When did the Big Bang happen?" and you answered "Just now" — in clock time — you'd be almost exactly right. If you had been asked to identify a particular star from among the entire stellar population of the universe, and you picked it out correctly, your accuracy would still be hazier by 5 orders of magnitude. Quite obviously, there haven't been enough seconds since the Big Bang to add up to a serious number – less than one for every 10,000 stars in the universe.

3. Isotropy gets violated by time orientation like a Detroit muni-bond investor. In a universe dominated by dark energy – like ours – expansion lasts *forever*. The Stelliferous Era is predicted to last for roughly 100 trillion years, which is over 7,000 times the present age of the universe. Even the most pessimistic interpretation of the Anthropic Principle, therefore, places us only a fractional distance from the beginning of time. The Degenerate Era, post-dating star-

formation, then extends out to 10^40 years, by the end of which time all baryonic matter will have decayed, and even the most radically advanced forms of cosmic intelligence will have found existence becoming seriously challenging. Black holes then dominate out to 10^60 years, after which the Dark Era begins, lasting a *long* time. (Decimal exponents become unwieldy for these magnitudes, making more elaborate modes of arithmetical notation expedient. We need not pursue it further.) The take-away: the principle of Isotropy holds that we should not find ourselves anywhere special in the universe, and yet we do – right at the beginning. More implausibly still, we are located at *the very beginning of an infinity* (although anthropic selection might crop this down to merely preposterous improbability).

Intuitively, this is all horribly wrong, although intuitions have no credible authority, and certainly provide no grounds for contesting rigorously assembled scientific narratives. Possibly — I should concede *most probably* — time is simply ridiculous, not to say profoundly insulting. We find ourselves glued to the very edge of the Big Bang, as close to neo-natal as it is arithmetically possible to be.

That's odd, isn't it?

ADDED: Numerical escalation from John Derbyshire.

ADDED: Alrenous has a different Big Bang issue.

July 20, 2013

Space is Big

… even just the solar system. ‘Awesome’ is a word destroyed by casual over-use, but I’m groping for an alternative right now, and not finding it. This has to be one of the best uses of a website out there — meaning: *really out there*.

(Via.)

January 17, 2015

Climate of Uncertainty

Natural cycles being what they are, there’s bound to be another mini-Ice Age (of the Maunder Minimum-type) eventually, and quite possibly soon. The implications for climate science, climate politics, and much beyond, are huge. Clean data on systemic effects are not accessible within history. That means all vulgar attempts to read out the effects of anthropic interventions from the historical record are doomed to fail, until perfect understanding of confounding rhythms are fully understood — basically, indefinitely. (Throw in chaos theory and other sources of epistemological pessimism here.) No one seriously thinks that a globally-coordinated ‘precautionary’ policy stance viz anthropogenic warming is constructible during a mini-Ice Age (do they?).

The consequence: Climate politics could — in reality — be a fairly remote science fiction scenario. By the time its opportunity comes around, far more will have been decided than is being allowed for.

ADDED:

> Global warming is settled science, so I'm supposed to ignore this, right? But is there a good reason why? http://t.co/SCbhqYwE7M
>
> — Charles Murray (@charlesmurray) July 13, 2015

July 13, 2015

CHAPTER TWO - THE ABSTRACT FORM OF TIME

Time Spiral

In the Author's Note to Peter Hessler's *Oracle Bones* (2006, subtitled 'A Journey Between China's Past and Present'), it is explained that:

The main chapters of this book are arranged chronologically, but the short sections labeled 'artifacts' are not. They reflect a deeper sense of time — the ways in which people make sense of history after it has receded farther into the past.

As time advances, the past recedes. Modernity, however, is more than that. It is the excavation of the past through acceleration into the future, a process of discovery, reclamation, and dilation, through which the past is explosively expanded. As Hessler realizes, the Oracle Bones, indissolubly binding the recovery of China's deep history to its activation of modernity, provide an exemplary illustration of this.

Yet modernity, as consolidated upon European foundations, has

been dismissive of Chinese history, seeing only scale without pattern:

In the traditional view of the Chinese past, there is no equivalent of the fall of Rome, no Renaissance, no Enlightenment. Instead, emperor succeeds emperor, and dynasty follows dynasty. History as wallpaper.

In a Nanjing museum gift shop, Hessler glimpses an alternative model:

At one Nanjing museum, I bought a poster labeled OUTLINE OF ANCIENT CHINESE HISTORY. The poster featured a timeline twisted into the shape of a spiral. Everything started in the center, at a tiny point identified as 'Yuanmou Ape-man.' After Yuanmou Ape-man (approximately 1.7 million years ago), the timeline passed through Peking Man and then made an abrupt turn. By the Xia dynasty, the spiral had completed one full circle. The Shang and the Zhou dynasties wrapped up a second revolution. The spiral got bigger with each turn, as if picking up speed. Whenever something ended — a dynasty, a warring state — the spiral was marked with a line and a black X, and then something new took its place. There weren't any branches or dead ends. From Yuanmou Ape-man, it took three turns of the spiral to reach the revolution of 1911, where the timeline finally broke the cycle, straightened out, and pointed directly up and off the page.

Whether folding the historical time line, or expanding a snail shell,

the spiral synthesizes repetition and growth. It describes a *cyclic escalation* that escapes — or precedes — the antagonism between tradition and progress, elucidating restoration as something other than a simple return.

This is a matter of ineluctable importance, because the history of modernity is rapidly becoming Chinese, and Chinese history is not meandering 'wallpaper' but *Confucian Restoration*, conforming to three great waves, each a turn of the spiral, or Gyre. Following China's classical era, and the Song Dynasty rebirth of native philosophical tradition, the third Confucian epoch, or second Confucian Restoration, is underway today, coinciding exactly with the renaissance of Global Modernity (as 'Modernity 2.0'). As future and past evolve — or *involve* — together, the time-spiral is our guide.

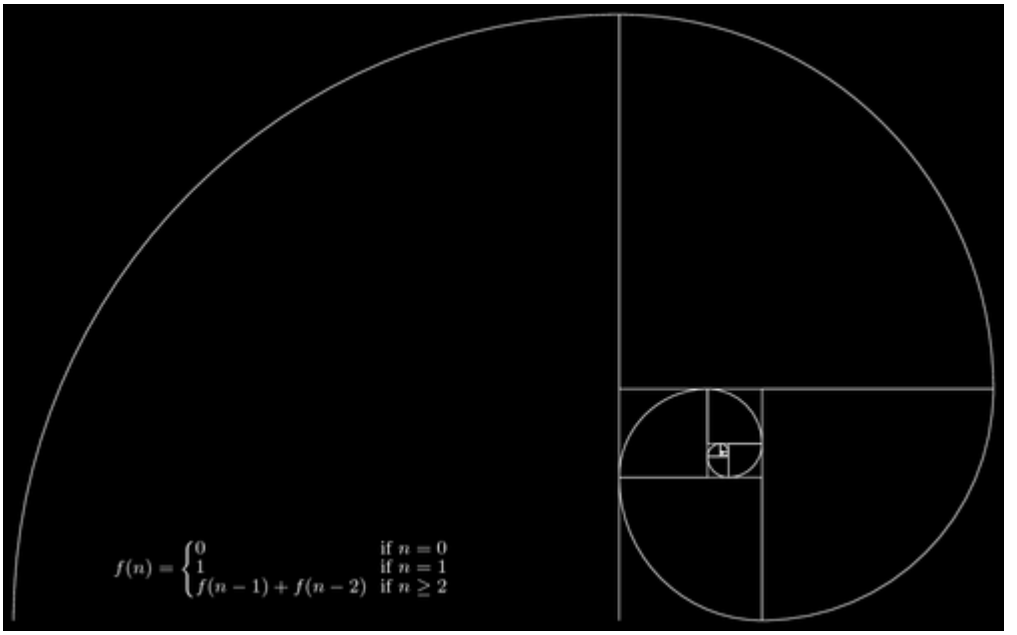
July 29, 2013

T-shirt slogans (#13)



E. Antony Gray triggered a Twitter storm about Greer and the tension between cyclic-repetitive and linear-progressive time. (I've no idea how to link the discussion that subsequently erupted.) Since the integration, or diagonal, between cycle and flight is not hard to find, it provides the perfect opportunity for a time-spiral T-shirt:

Cyclic Escalation



If this looks like the abstract cybergothic shape of NRx, it is only to be expected.

July 11, 2014

Quote notes (#7)

Some unusually brilliant Druidic prophecy from John Michael Greer:

Whether the crisis is contained by federal loan guarantees and bank nationalizations that keep farms, factories, and stores supplied with the credit they need, by the repudiation of debts and the issuance of a new currency, by martial law and the government

seizure of unused acreage, or by ordinary citizens cobbling together new systems of exchange in a hurry, as happened in Argentina, Russia, and other places where the economy suddenly went to pieces, the crisis will be contained. The negative feedback here is provided by the simple facts that people are willing to do almost anything to put food on the table, governments are willing to do even more to stay in power, and in hundreds of previous crises, their actions have proven more than sufficient to stop the positive feedback loops of economic crisis in their tracks, and stabilize the situation at some level.

None of this means the crisis will be easy to get through, nor does it mean that the world that emerges once the rubble stops bouncing and the dust settles will be anything like as prosperous, as comfortable, or as familiar as the one we have today. That's true of all three of the situations I've sketched out in this post. While the next round of crisis along the arc of industrial civilization's decline and fall will likely be over by 2070 of so, living through the interval between then and now will probably have more than a little in common with living through the First World War, the waves of political and social crises that followed it, the Great Depression, and the rise of fascism, followed by the Second World War and its aftermath—and this time the United States is unlikely to be sheltered from the worst impacts of crisis, as it was between 1914 and 1954. [Read the whole thing]

(Combining large-scale historical vision, cybernetic theory, and

extraordinary native intelligence, Greer is one of the most important voices on the reality-relevant blogosphere. His model of *Catabolic Collapse*, in particular, is an indispensable reference. *Outside in* will be visiting his ideas repeatedly over the next few weeks.)

July 10, 2013

The Shape of Time (Part 1)

Upon learning that America has an Arch-Druid, it would be only natural to make some assumptions about his beliefs, and cautious guesses would probably be right. The commitments of a religion that avoid appeal to the supernatural, one might expect, would be characteristically *down-to-earth*, ecological, conservative (in the determinedly lower-case and old-fashioned sense), practical, and empirical. At its most intellectually abstract, and also most (quietly) mystical, druidism would accept the ultimate complicity of all reality with a pattern of change that is at once sensible and insurmountable, multi-leveled, subtle, and all-enveloping: the cycle.

John Michael Greer, author of the Arch-Druid Report, eschews spiritual obscurity, at least in public. His persona as a blogger is that of a calm, lucid, and exceptionally insightful cycle theorist. In the strongest and most ineluctable sense, cyclicity is the norm, from which nothing truly, or sustainably, departs. A cultural formation that

loses this druidic grounding, by attaching itself to a setting which would break the cycle, thereby destines itself to a fall, or reversal of fortune – expressing the inevitable reversion to sustainability within a greater wheel of nature and history. Balance is less a moral imperative than a cosmic necessity, and since sustainability cannot be avoided, it can only also be advised.

As an analytical method, druidism is a kind of cybernetics, reflecting the mainstream orientation of the discipline. Negative feedback, which adjusts towards stability, fetches back deviations, to produce normal cycles. Perturbations are canceled within natural rhythms. Destabilizing, self-accentuating, positive feedback, in contrast, incarnates the unnatural, and is thus – from a certain perspective – unreal. Self-reinforcing processes accelerate to a crisis, and then collapse, describing a wave, or fluctuation, at a greater scale. What seems like an irrecoverable deviation has its counterpart within a larger whole, matching it exactly in one-sidedness, or violence, and providing the complementary reversion that restores equilibrium. A broken cycle is part of a more encompassing rhythm, partially perceived. Druidic naturalism insists that everything is eventually fetched back, because there is nowhere 'else' to flee. The law of the earth is ultimately inviolable:

… positive feedback [is] extremely rare in the real world, because systems with positive feedback promptly destroy themselves — imagine a thermostat that responded to rising temperatures by

heating things up further until the house burns down. Negative feedback, by contrast, is everywhere.

At the largest social scale, pathological deviations, and their reversions, are exemplified by the rise and fall of civilizations. Historical cycle theorists, such as Spengler and Toynbee, capture the recurrent pattern in its essentials. Cultures and all of their component parts, including historiography itself, are enveloped and directed by these great rhythms:

Every literate urban society, Spengler argued, followed the same trajectory from an original folk religion rich in myths, through the rise of intellectual theology, the birth of rationalism, the gradual dissolution of the religious worldview into rational materialism, and then the gradual disintegration of rational materialism into a radical skepticism that ends by dissolving itself; thereafter ethical philosophies for the intellectuals and resurgent folk religion for the masses provide the enduring themes for the civilization to come.

Such patterns offer the material for what Greer calls 'morphology' which, on the model (especially) of 18th and 19th century biology, extracts regular, comparable shapes from the confusion of varied particulars. Among the objects of morphological investigation are deep cultural structures, inextricable from religious ideas (in the widest sense), which pre-reflectively organize the experience of historical time. Globalized Occidental civilization ("modern industrial culture"), Greer argues, is characterized by two

dominant time shapes, at once twinned and aligned, which resonate with an unsustainable, positive-feedback dynamic in their pathological denial of balance, or eventual reversion.

Before examining these twinned shapes of modern time, some broader context can generate ambient illumination. Greer introduces a variety of time shapes from non-industrial cultures (and ecologies), including the changeless 'dream time' of hunter-gatherer societies, and the great cycles of pre-modern Chinese tradition. Indeed, his sketch of the classical Chinese time-shape appears oddly, even fetchingly, druidic:

The basic theory of the Chinese science of time is that events are guided by many different cycles, some faster and some slower, some influencing one dimension of human life and some shaping another. The cycle of the seasons was one of these; the cycle of human life was another; the cycle of the rise and fall of dynasties was a third; there were many more, each with its own period and typical sequence of events. Just as no two years had exactly the same weather on exactly the same days, no two repetitions of any other cycle were identical, but common patterns allowed the events of one repetition to be more or less predicted by a sufficiently broad knowledge of earlier examples. On a much broader scale, all cycles of every kind could be understood as expressions of a single abstract pattern of cyclic change, which was explored in the classic Chinese textbook of time theory, the I Ching — in English, the Book of Change.

The most jarring contrast with the progressive model of time, however, is found much closer to it, both in cultural proximity and obvious ecological complementarity. It is laid out by Hesiod in his *Works and Days*, where it is articulated as a grinding stepwise decline through successive ages, each determined by its deterioration relative to the age before.

Hesiod's abnormality – or ours – emerges starkly from an overlap. As modern historiography progresses, expanding its purchase ever more deeply into archeology and paleo-anthropology, it discovers ancient societies 'rising' from the new stone age ('neolithic') to the bronze age, and then later, with the advance of metallurgy, entering the iron age, with improved weapons and tools. The passage from bronze to iron is an obvious leap forward, corresponding to a basic threshold of cultural maturation, **locked in** to the history of the world by a progressive technological ratchet. How disconcerting, then, to find this same sequence repeated by Hesiod, but with inverse sign, in a degenerative series of ages — Golden, Silver, Bronze, and Iron – that proceed through increments of coarsening, from the most noble metal, to the most base.

From our deeply-entrenched, progressive perspective, any historical meta-narrative structured by relentless decline appears exotically strange. The same does not hold within Greer's ecological framework, which couples deviations to reversions within long cycles, so that a downward slope is no more abnormal than a

persistent incline. Our historical optimism finds itself ecologically relativized by a story that has no less confidence in its fears than we have in our long-consolidated hopes. The explanatory background that Greer supplies – themed by soil erosion — has sufficient directionality to match, and to carry, Hesiod's shape of time:

Two thousand years before Hesiod, prehistoric Greece had been the home of a lively assortment of village cultures making the slow transition from polished stone tools to bronze. On that foundation more complex societies rose, borrowing heavily from contemporary high cultures in the Middle East, and culminating in the monumental architecture and literate palace bureaucracies of the Mycenean age. Those of my readers who have some sense of the rhythms of history will already know what followed: too much clearcutting and intensive farming of the fragile Greek soils, made worse by the importation of farming methods better suited to flat Mesopotamian valleys than easily eroded Greek hills, triggered an ecological crisis; most of the topsoil of Mycenean Greece ended up at the bottom of the Aegean Sea, where it can still be found in core samples; warfare, migration, and population collapse followed in the usual manner, as Mycenean society stumbled down the curve of its own Long Descent.

Greer's readers have been prepared to recognize "its own" as a pointer to **our own** – another "Long Descent" anticipated by an ecological grounding pattern, this time set by the energy-availability curve of Peak Oil. This forecast is a topic for another occasion. For

now, our concern is more abstract, indifferent to the specific mechanism of civilizational limitation, and attentive solely to Greer's claim that the denial of historical cyclicity is a form of unwarranted *exceptionalism*, founded materially in an ecological boost-phase, and reasonably encapsulated in the notorious bubble slogan *this time it's different*:

There's a wry amusement to be had by thinking through the implications of this constantly repeated claim. If our society was in fact shaking off the burdens of the past and breaking new ground with every minute that goes by, as believers in progress like to claim, wouldn't it be more likely that the theory of historical cycles would be challenged each time it appears with dazzlingly new, innovative responses that no one had ever imagined before? Instead, in an irony Nietzsche would have relished, the claim that history can't repeat itself endlessly repeats itself, in what amounts to an eternal return of the insistence that there is no eternal return. What's more, those who claim that it's different this time seem blissfully unaware that anyone has made the same claim before them, and if this is pointed out to them, they insist—often with quite some heat—that what they're saying has nothing whatsoever to do with all the other times the same argument was used to make the same point down through the years.

It bears repeating that the belief in progress, and the equal and opposite belief in apocalypse, are narratives about the unknowable.

Both claim that the past has nothing to say about the future, that something is about to happen that has never happened before and that can't be judged on the basis of any previous event.

Neither progress nor apocalypse, Greer contends, are time-shapes well-suited to the realistic evaluation of their ends. [More on that next]

July 29, 2013

The Shape of Time (Part 2)

In the first part of this series, we introduced John Michael Greer's 'druidic' framework for the evaluation of cultural 'time shapes' – based on a presumption of dominant cyclicity, according to which any prolonged deviation or unbalanced process is exposed as an unsustainable exception. Within a sufficiently expansive great cycle, any continuous progressive trend is complemented by a proportionate regression (and, of course, inversely). The cyclic assumption marks out each and every image of *absolute progress* as illusory. In this way, the cycle, when applied to any particular figure of time, describes an enveloping structure that provides pointed critical perspective. (Criticism of the cyclic assumption itself — or 'in turn' — is best delayed until Greer's most significant positive results have been sketched.)

The presently-dominant global civilization – when apprehended at a level of extreme (ecological) abstraction – is the fossil-fuel burning runaway spurt that Greer calls "modern industrial culture." Central to this culture is an expectation of growth, founded in an unsustainable ecological process, and expressed through distinctive time shapes. The plural here is essential, because Greer's complete 'morphological' description of modern time unfolds within a tripartite system of classification.

The first time shape is mostly occluded. This is the cyclic model that organizes Greer's thinking, serving both as a pivot and as an enveloping frame. The cyclical time-conception defines a 'middle way' that exposes abnormality and excess through contrast, and also completes a holistic comprehension, contextualizing partiality or bias. It functions within Greer's analysis as an intellectual tool, or workshop, more than a distinct object of investigation. Given its 'transcendental' status within the druidic order of apprehension, the cycle is not limited to a moment of historical origination, or associated with the name of a particular cultural authority.

The second time shape is not intrinsically modern, but is rather the living ancestor, or vital inheritance, of the culture that would eventually assert the terms of global modernity. Of the world's numerous pre-modern time shapes, it is the one that has been universalized by its lineal descendents. Greer identifies it primarily with Augustine of Hippo, and he assigns it a specific birthday: AD

413.

Greer argues (conventionally), that the collapse of the Christian Empire under barbarian onslaught threatened the new faith with a crisis of legitimacy, leading Augustine to the radical conclusion that: "Ordinary history … has no moral order or meaning."

The place of moral order and meaning in time is found instead in sacred history, which has a distinctive linear shape of its own. That shape begins in perfection, in the Garden of Eden; disaster intervenes, in the form of original sin, and humanity tumbles down into the fallen world. From that point on, there are two histories of the world, one sacred and one secular. The secular history is the long and pointless tale of stupidity, violence and suffering that fills the history books; the sacred history is the story of God's dealings with a small minority of human beings — the patriarchs, the Jewish people, the apostles, the Christian church — who are assigned certain roles in a preexisting narrative. Eventually the fallen world will be obliterated, most of its inhabitants will be condemned to a divine boot in the face forever, and those few who happen to be on the right side will be restored to Eden's perfection, at which point the story ends.

In formulating this story, Augustine gave "the Western world what would be, for the next millennium or so, its definitive shape of time." Furthermore, even after the emergence of an alternative, this foundational cultural narrative would remain in reserve, constantly

available as a recourse should its successor falter, betray the interests of disaffected groups, or accumulate signs of crisis. The Western tradition, when conceived through its ancestral time shape, would be perpetuated as an undrained reservoir of apocalyptic temptation. The ecological critique of modernity, Greer observes, is as fully-saturated with this apocalyptic narrative as any other articulation of social dissent.

Within modernity proper, however, the Augustinian time shape has ceased to be mainstream. Once again, Greer is not reluctant to reach for a name and a (rough) date, that of the twelfth century Italian mystic "Joachim of Flores … [who] had an impact on the future as significant as Augustine's: he's the person who kicked down the barrier between sacred and secular history that Augustine put so much effort into building, and created the shape of time that the cultural mainstream occupies to this day."

To Joachim, sacred history was not limited to a paradise before time, a paradise after it, and the thread of the righteous remnant and the redeeming doctrine linking the two. He saw sacred history unfolding all around him in the events of his own time. His vision divided all of history into three great ages, governed by the three persons of the Christian trinity: the Age of Law governed by the Father, which ran from the Fall to the crucifixion of Jesus; the Age of Love governed by the Son, which ran from the crucifixion to the year 1260; and the Age of Liberty governed by the Holy Spirit, which

would run from 1260 to the end of the world.

What made Joachim's vision different from any of the visionary histories that came before it — and there were plenty of those in the Middle Ages — was that it was a story of progress.

Not only does the Joachimite three-stage narrative of progress introduce the idea of uncompensated advance, it also legitimates a trend to secularization, as the institutional structures appropriate to the patriarchal and filial epochs are dissolved in the new age of revolutionary liberty. Unsurprisingly, radical intellectuals and movements seized upon this schema as a blueprint for the dispossession of the Old Order, ensuring its general popularization. As modernity was serially 'revolutionized' it became ever more Joachimite in its basic assumptions, until progress had been installed as a dominant 'civil religion'. Eventually, the progressive idea had been normalized to the point of near-total invisibility.

With the outlining of the Augustinian and Joachimite 'visions', Greer's classification of modern time shapes approaches completeness. The entire argument, when schematically reviewed, can be decomposed into a number of distinct and informative claims:
(a) The culture of modern global civilization is dominated by exactly two principal time shapes.
(b) These time shapes are in certain respects culturally arbitrary, arising in specific times and places, without any original logical inter-dependency, and inflected by the concerns of a particular religious

tradition.
(c) This arbitrariness is further confirmed by the morphological richness each time shape reveals, a feature that supports confident identification and classification of superficially differentiated variants.
(d) Despite the absence of logical necessity, when historically assembled into a mature, dyadic system, the combined Augustinian-Joachimite duality evidences a significant measure of reciprocal order (or effective 'dialectical unity') and a near exhaustive purchase upon the modern cultural imagination — conformity and dissent.
(e) The complementarity of the dyad approximately corresponds to symmetrical judgments of (Joachimite) affirmation and (Augustinian) negation of a prevailing historical trend.
(f) Regardless of their manifest power of captivation, the Augustinian-Joachimite dyad has a limit, best described by the cyclic time model from which each side of the duality diverges.

[Next: critical appraisal]

August 20, 2013

The Shape of Time (Part 2a)

When describing the thinking of John Michael Greer as 'druidic' – as this series has cheerfully done – the adjective has been primarily

philosophical in direction. It has been used only to indicate that an identifiable, and remarkably coherent, presupposition about the governing nature of time anchors Greer's particular analyses, which draw out the implications of an unsurpassable cosmic cyclicity, and apply them deftly to a wide variety of concrete problems. 'Druid' and 'radical cycle theorist' have been treated as roughly equivalent terms.

It is worth noting at this point, however, that Greer is not only conceptually druidic. He is a public proponent of Druidism in a far richer, culturally-elaborate sense, which includes service "as presiding officer — Grand Archdruid is the official title — of the Ancient Order of Druids in America (AODA), a Druid order founded in 1912." This vocation slants his perspective in important (and productive) ways. Our concerns here, tightly focused on the question of time, are able to extract considerable intellectual nourishment from a digression into this thick druidism.

Like other forms of occult Occidental religion, Druidry has an attachment to the deep past that is not tacit and traditional, but overt, modern, and creative. Greer admits readily – even gleefully – that his 'Ancient Order' is not in fact ancient at all, but instead belongs to a project of restoration – and actually reconstruction – that dates back no further than the mid-17th century. From its inception, it was bound to a lost past and to inextinguishable doubts about its own authenticity. Greer only very rarely uses his *Archdruid*

Report platform to discuss druidism explicitly. On the first occasion when he does so, his reflections are triggered by the question of a young boy: *Are you a **real** Druid?*

It's not an easy question to answer. The original Druids, the priests and wizards of the ancient Celts, went extinct more than a thousand years ago, and all their beliefs, practices, and teachings went with them.

More specifically, he explains:

Who were the Druids? The honest answer is that we really don't know. Most of what was written about them in ancient times vanished forever when the Roman Empire collapsed. Every surviving text written about the Druids while they still existed, put together, add up to ten pages or so in English translation. … Druids in training memorized many lines of verse, since it was forbidden to set down their teachings in writing. … Julius Caesar, whose book on the Roman conquest of Gaul is the most detailed source on the Druids, noted that Druidic teachings were thought to come from Britain originally, while a Greek scholar claimed that the Druids got their lore from the Greek philosopher Pythagoras; no other writer refers to the subject. … archeologists and historians were able to prove conclusively that the Druidry of the Revival was a modern spiritual movement, not an ancient one.

Modern druidry is a *revival*, which is to say that it originates through identification with something that is dead. Its modernity is

stretched and activated, to become more than mere succession, and more even than self-conscious, differentiated succession — or 'advance'. The discontinuity that defines 'the Revival' cannot be reduced to a transition, however radical. Instead, it corresponds to an uncertain reaching back, through the still-living past and beyond, towards a lost beginning. In this way it initiates a process — and a new tradition — that cannot easily be resolved into distinct elements of invention and re-animation. In its quest for ancient origins, it relocates the present within an expanded comprehension of historical time. This complex, quasi-paradoxical cultural undertaking, is at once typically modern, and anti-modern. By distancing itself from passive accommodation to its historical moment, it epitomizes this same moment in its concrete historical reality — as a revolt against simple continuity. It represents a dramatic neo-traditionalism, of an Occidental type.

The time-traveler tends to produce — or become — a double, and the modern Druid is no exception. Something 'ancient' is returned to life, so that re-animator and re-animated co-exist in a folded present, cross-identified, and ambiguously co-original, or coincidental. Do the Druids of the Revival 'still' believe the archaic wisdom of cyclicity, now rediscovered, or do they project it back onto the blank screen of an erased antiquity? Who is the copy here? We are returned, inexorably, to a problem of identification ("*Are you a* ***real*** *Druid?*"), model and derivation, originality and repetition. A search for reality

has become inextricable from an exercise in duplicity, twisted into a reflective or introspective circle, and spun out into an investigation of time.

As this perplexity develops, the term 'Druid Revival' comes to seem like something more than an arbitrary conjunction. Its two words are not merely joined, but doubled, as an echo of time disturbance. Each points independently towards a pre-implanted pattern of return, with the cycle already registered on both sides. Greer traces the 'real roots' of this doubling to a discontinuous connection:

Some modern Druid groups in the 19th and early 20th centuries, to their lasting discredit, claimed direct connections to the ancient Celtic Druids they didn't have. The real roots of the modern Druid movement go in a different direction: to the first stages of the Industrial Revolution in early 18th century Britain, and the Hobson's choice between dogmatic religion and materialist science, the two victors in the reality wars of the late Renaissance. Plenty of people sought a third option that embraced nature and spirit alike, and some of them found inspiration in the scraps of classical writing, medieval legend, and Celtic folklore that referred to the ancient Druids.

"Historians call the result the Druid Revival," he continues, as if determined to separate this twin term from anything that modern druidry first said about itself. He recognizes, perhaps, that *druidism is the philosophy (or religion) of revival* — or of the full 'ecological'

cycle through life and death — so that to draw upon this word ('revival') threatens to represent the return of druidic thinking through itself, in a closed circle of self-confirmation, persuasive only to those of prior druidic (or, more narrowly, cycle-theoretical) inclination. Better, then, that 'historians' seal this circle, from outside, and thereby demonstrate its real coincidence, or simple reality. The Revival is noticed as historical fact, before it is cycled back into druidic intelligence, as a doctrinal expectation.

Each year is a cyclical time unit of death and revival, and in this it is a primordial teacher, in a way that no scripture could ever be. That, at least, is the folk pagan understanding that Druid Revival restores to ritualistic primacy, and adopts as its guiding cognitive model. Its own revival, therefore, is 'only natural', or self-explanatory.

To bring thinking into compliance with the great cycles is immediately to participate in a speculative super-tradition, sustained by a structure of ideas and apprehension that *cannot but return*. In the thought of the cycle there is already implied a non-originality, binding the thinker, across time, to all those who necessarily understand the way things have to happen again. What, then, is ancient origin, and what revival? When would one look for a 'real Druid'?

[This digression has a little further to stray, along a more concrete path, before critical distance is restored.]

September 6, 2013

Greer

Anyone who isn't yet reading *The Archdruid Report* really ought to be. John Michael Greer is quite simply one of the most brilliant writers in existence, and even when he's wrong, he's importantly wrong. His perspective is coherent, learned, and uncaged by the assumptions of progressivism. Above all, his understanding of what it means to find history informative is unsurpassed. (Over at the Other Place, there's an unfinished Greer series that badly requires attention, with the first three installments here, here, and here.)

When escalated to the extreme, the progressive conclusion is that history can teach us nothing. Innovation is by its very nature unprecedented, and insofar as it manifests improvement, it humbles its precursors. The past is the rude domicile of ignorant barbarity. Insofar as the present still bears its traces, as shameful stigmata, they are mere remains that still have to be overcome. At the limit, the concept of Singularity — a horizon at which all anticipatory knowledge is annulled — seals the progressive intuition.

In its abstract theoretical core, at least, Greer's Druidic counter-history is radically reactionary (far more unambiguously so than NRx). Its model of time is entirely cyclical, such that past and future

are perfectly neutral between ascent and decline. Every attempt to install a gradient of improvement in the dimension of historical time is broken upon the great wheels, which balance every rise with a fall, dissolving innovation in precedent. Novelty is hubristic illusion (an exaggerated correction, in the opinion of this blog).

In his most recent post Greer introduces an intriguing complication:

Arnold Toynbee, whose magisterial writings on history have been a recurring source of inspiration for this blog, has pointed out an intriguing difference between the way civilizations rise and the way they fall. On the way up, he noted, each civilization tends to diverge not merely from its neighbors but from all other civilizations throughout history. […] Once the peak is past and the long road down begins, though, that pattern of divergence shifts into reverse, slowly at first, and then with increasing speed. A curious sort of homogenization takes place: distinctive features are lost, and common patterns emerge in their place. That doesn't happen all at once, and different cultural forms lose their distinctive outlines at different rates, but the further down the trajectory of decline and fall a civilization proceeds, the more it resembles every other civilization in decline.

The dissymmetry calls out for philosophical investigation, since it suggests a line of synthetic diagonalization between precedent and innovation, cyclicity and escape (which is to say, the NRx or

cybergothic line). It would be to stray too far from Greer to follow that now.

Straightforwardly, the claim being made is that forecasting strengthens on the down-slope of civilization. The more a social order fails, the more it sheds its originality, and thus the more accessible it becomes to accurate diagnosis on the basis of historical example. As collapse deepens, it converges with a template, bound ever tighter to a model by its morbidity. Across the peak, an age of prophecy begins — or returns.

The dark irony is delicious almost beyond endurance. The Universal, long proclaimed as the capstone of progress, is realized only as a nadir. The equality of all civilizations is asserted, in reality, as a direct measure of their proximity to death. Among the spreading ruins, the mad echoes of similarity resound deafeningly, as the blasted Cathedral plummets towards its Idea — eternal return of the same.

July 10, 2014

Time Scales

The word ‘neoreaction’ is a split, productively paradoxical formula, simultaneously referencing two incompatible cultural formations, each corresponding to an abstract model of time. On one side, it

is a gateway opening onto techno-libertarian hyper-progressivism, and an order of time structured by irreversible accumulation, self-envelopment, and catastrophe horizon (Singularity). On the other, it opens onto the temporality of reaction and the cycle, where all progress is illusion, and all innovation anticipated. Within NRx, the time of escape and the time of return seek an obscure synthesis, at once unprecedented and primordial, whose cryptic figure is the spiral. (This is the time of the Old Ones and the Outside, from which the shoggoth come.) If NRx thinks itself already lodged articulately in this synthesis, it deludes itself.

From a strictly philosophical perspective, the time of reaction finds no defender more able than Archdruid John Michael Greer. while his specific form of religious traditionalism, his social attitudes, and his eco-political commitments are all profoundly questionable from the standpoint of throne-and altar reaction, his model of time cannot be surpassed in an Old Right direction. Those who would install a prejudice of relentless degeneration in its place, anchored by a revealed religion of recent creation and subsequent continuous fall, only position themselves to the 'right' of Greer by making God a revolutionary. If deep time is to be preserved, there can be no archaic authority beyond the cycle.

Why call Greer a reactionary? It is not, after all, a label he would accept for himself. The answer lies in cyclical time, and everything that follows from it: the supremacy of wisdom among human things,

the enduring authority of history, the dismissal of modernist pretension as a mere mask for deep historical repetition, an absolute disillusionment with progress, and an adamantine prognosis that — from the peak of fake 'improvement' where we find ourselves — a grinding course of decline over coming centuries is an inevitability. The cultural and political decoration can be faulted, but in the fundamental structure of Greer's thinking, reaction is perfected.

There is a religious consideration to be noted here, as the stepping stone to another point. Once the cyclical counter-assumption is adopted — in a definitive break from modernist ideology — it leads inexorably to an expansion of the time frame. To see the pattern, it is necessary to pan out. An apparent rise is only rendered intelligible by its complementary fall. An event makes sense to the extent that it can be identified as a repetition, through subsumption into a persistent rhythm, which means that to understand it is to pull back from it, into ever wider expanses of history. Recognized precedent is wisdom.

Reaction is thus construed as a critique of modernist myopia. The appearance of innovation derives from a failure to see a larger whole. If something looks new, it is because not enough is being seen.

No surprise, then, to find Greer seize upon an opportunity to discuss *The Next Ten Billion Years*. At such scales, fluctuations of fortune are fully contextualized, so that no uncompensated progressions remain. After just 1% of this time has passed:

The long glacial epoch that began in the Pleistocene has finally ended, and the Earth is returning to its more usual status as a steamy jungle planet. This latest set of changes proves to be just that little bit too much for humanity. No fewer than 8,639 global civilizations have risen and fallen over the last ten million years, each with its own unique sciences, technologies, arts, literatures, philosophies, and ways of thinking about the cosmos; the shortest-lived lasted for less than a century before blowing itself to smithereens, while the longest-lasting endured for eight millennia before finally winding down.

All that is over now. There are still relict populations of human beings in Antarctica and a few island chains, and another million years will pass before cascading climatic and ecological changes finally push the last of them over the brink into extinction. Meanwhile, in the tropical forests of what is now southern Siberia, the descendants of raccoons who crossed the Bering land bridge during the last great ice age are proliferating rapidly, expanding into empty ecological niches once filled by the larger primates. In another thirty million years or so, their descendants will come down from the trees.

Everything that rises will fall.

Such vastly panned-out perspectives are also relevant to the competitive catastrophe theorizing that is so close to the dead heart of this blog. Any conceivable disaster has an associated time-frame, within which it is no more than a wandering fluctuation. Recovery

from deep dysgenic decline requires only a few millennia, extinction of the human species perhaps a few tens of millions of years, full restoration of terrestrial fossil fuel deposits, 100 million years or so. Vicissitudes on the down-side scarcely register as tremors in the meanderings of geological time.

There is more to time-scales than more time. Whatever else *anthropomorphism* is — and it is a lot of other things — it is a scale of time. To be human is to be situated, distinctively, within a spectrum of frequencies. In our wavelength zone, a second is a short time, and a century is long. These lower and upper bounds of significant duration correspond respectively to the biophysics of mammalian motility and to the outer-limits of mortal plans. The cosmic arbitrariness of this scalar time region is very easy to see.

The digital tick of time in our universe is set by the passage of a photon across a Planck-length (in a vacuum), approximately 5.4 x 10^-44 seconds. This is not a number readily intuited. A comparison to the (mere) 4.3 x 10^17 seconds that have so far lapsed during the entire history of the universe perhaps provides some vague sense. (Anthropomorphic time-scale bias is at least roughly as blinding to minuscule durations as to enormous ones.)

The upper limits of the cosmic time-scale are harder to identify. Speculative cosmological models predict the evolution of the Universe out to 10^60 years or more, when the last of the black holes have evaporated. The Stelliferous Era (in which new stars are

born) is expected to last for only 100 trillion (10^14) years, out to approximately 7,000 times the present age of the universe. (If the stelliferous universe were analogized to a human being with a one-century life-expectancy, it would presently be an infant, just entering its sixth post-natal day, with 987 billion years to wait until its anthropomorphic first birthday).

Beyond the human time scale lie immensities, and intensities. The latter are especially susceptible to neglect. When — over half a century ago — Richard Feynman anticipated nano-engineering with the words [there's] "Plenty of Room at the Bottom" he opened prospects of time involution, as well as miniaturization in space. A process migrating in the direction of the incomprehensibly distant Planck limit makes time for itself, in a way quite different from any endurance in temporal extension. Consider 'now' to be a second, as it is approximately at the anthropomorphic scale, and its inner durations are potentially near-limitless — vastly exceeding all the time the human species could make available to itself even by persisting to the death of the universe's last star. A femto-scale intelligence system could explore the rise and fall of entire biological phyla, in detail, in a period so minuscule it would entirely escape human apprehension as sub-momentary, or subliminal. The ultimate eons are less ahead than within.

Greer envisages no escape from the anthropomorphic bandwidth of time. Within his far-future speculation, each new intelligent

species that arises is implicitly 'anthropomorphic' in this sense. After Earth has died, its particles are strewn among the nearby stars, and incorporated into the body of an alien species:

The creature's biochemistry, structure, and life cycle have nothing in common with yours, dear reader. Its world, its sensory organs, its mind and its feelings would be utterly alien to you, even if ten billion years didn't separate you. Nonetheless, it so happens that a few atoms that are currently part of your brain, as you read these words, will also be part of the brain-analogue of the creature on the crag on that distant, not-yet-existing world. Does that fact horrify you, intrigue you, console you, leave you cold?

If coldness is the appropriate response to seeing time still imprisoned, ten billion years from now, then Greer's vision is chilling. For it to be compelling, however, would take far more.

Though only implicit, it would be grudging to deny Greer credit for the excavation of a crucial reactionary proposition: *Nothing will ever break into the vaults of time*. This is not an assertion to which *Outside in* is yet ready to defer.

ADDED: An exercise in extensive time perspective.

July 12, 2014

Perspective

Derbyshire at the top of his game:

The whole climate change business is now a zone of hysteria, generating far more noise — mostly of a shrieking kind — than its importance justifies. Opinions about climate change are, as Greg Cochran said, "a mark of tribal membership." It is also the case, as Greg also said, that "the world is never going to do much about in any event, regardless of the facts." […] If we ***did*** *do anything the effect would likely be puny compared to, say, a single major volcanic eruption. Mother Nature laughs at our climate change fretting. […] Consider ice ages for example, like the one we are currently living through.*

Ice ages last for ***tens of millions*** *of years. We don't know how many there have been. Our planet is 4½ billion years old; we only have clear evidence of ice ages for the last billion years, in which time there have been four ice ages, covering a total of one-third of a billion years. In its "normal" condition — the other two-thirds — the Earth is ice-free all the way up to the poles. […] The present ice age started around 2½ million years ago. Our best guess is that it'll continue for several million years more. […]* ***Within*** *this ice age there have been ups and downs. The downs are called "glaciations," the ups — comparatively warm spells, like the one we are currently in — are "interglacials." […] … The climatic changes here are sensational. At*

the peak of the last glaciation in 20,000 B.C., the pleasant suburb where I am writing this was buried under an ice sheet several hundred feet thick. It is possible that during one of the earlier ice ages, 700 million years ago, ***the entire planet*** *was covered with ice, down to the equator.*

The dwarfing of scientific concerns to media spin-cycle wavelengths has to be counted among the greatest vulgarizations of our age.

May 23, 2015

CHAPTER THREE - NARRATIVIZATIONS

Tackling Templexity

Since there are a number of critical tasks that cannot be advanced prior to straightening out some knotty problems of time topology, UF has added a *Templexity* page (as a work in progress). It will eventually provide supporting apparatus for an *Urbanatomy Electronic* product of the same name, due out this fall. What cannot be straightened out, of course won't be — but something will occur. What holds for macro-history holds no less for micro-history, with the two entangling, rather than resonating.

The cultural pretext for this investigation is Rian Johnson's *Looper*, whose very crudities and short-cuts become informative, when approached from the right angle.

The perspective of *Templexity* is arranged by the postulate: *Time-travel is the dramatization of something else*.

The firm hypothesis: Shanghai is a time machine.

"You should go to China," Joe is told by his criminal overseer, Abe. "I'm going to France," Joe insists stubbornly. Abe responds with what – for us – is the most critical line in the movie: "I'm from the future.

You should go to China." With these words, ***Looper*** *makes Sino-Futurism its topic. The hyper-modern* ***China Event*** *is too vast to fit simply into time.*

Ben Woodard has put up a valuable post that delves into the centrality of time-disturbance to the problems of accelerationism. If the accelerationist intuition is *on to something*, traffic between these zones of discussion can only thicken.

September 15, 2014

Time Discipline

If you run through the functional specifications of your time machine, and it looks as if it's going to print bullion, or proliferate doubles, it's been badly assembled. *Time-travel is the dramatization of something else*, and you're still trapped in the simulation.

Forbes on Seth Lloyd:

In Type 1 time travel — the type highlighted in the "Back to the Future" films — all possible pasts and futures in some sense exist simultaneously, says Lloyd. So, that when you go back and change the past in order to enter a different future, your "old" future is in some sense still "there."

"From a theoretical physics standpoint," said Lloyd, "Type 1 is certainly possible, but we still don't have a very good theory of how

it would work."

He notes that current physical theory favors Type 2 time travel scenario in which the past can't be changed no matter how hard one tries.

"Our theory of time travel is Type 2," said Lloyd, "[which means] no matter how hard you try to mess with the past you can't do it."

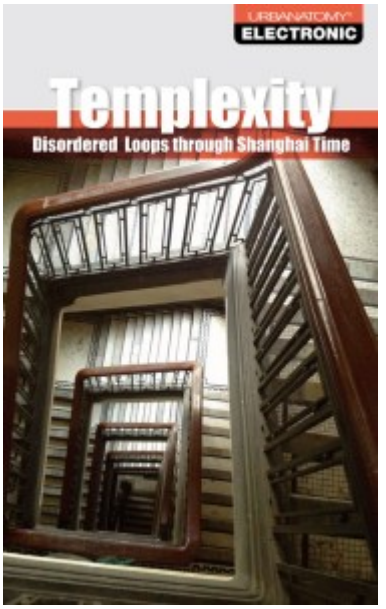
HP Lovecraft fixed the principle.

September 16, 2014

Templexity

For the visitors here who are perpetually tortured by the *Damn! Where is the tip-jar button?* question, less-evil twin has a time-travel book out. (It should be $3.99, but it says $5.99 at my link — which might be a Shanghai-effect.)

UF (2.1) plug here.



If you know anybody teetering on the brink of a psychotic episode, who just needs a slight nudge to plunge over the edge, it would make an ideal present.

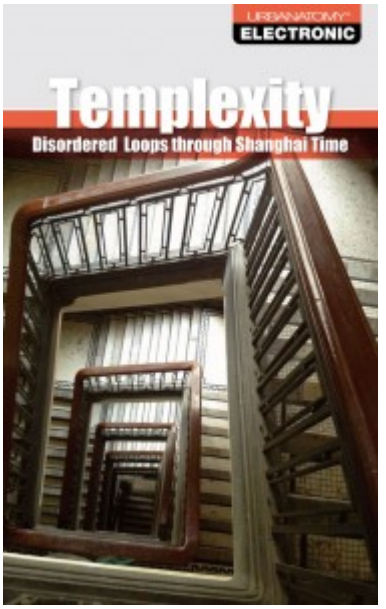
November 7, 2014

Templexity is Out

Thank you Amazon. Despite some frustrations with the Kindle Direct Publishing interface — which isn't designed for editorial convenience — the excitement of disintermediation-in-action more than makes up for it. If the self-publishing system reached the stage where writers spent their time on the platform, as a work-space, in the same way

they can on a blog today, the horizon of possibility would be pushed out to yet inconceivable distances.

Templexity aims to catalyze a theoretical coagulation where the philosophy of time, contemporary (complex) urbanism, and pulp entertainment media are complicit in an approach to singularity (as a topic, a thing, and a nonlinear knotting of the two (at least)). It proposes that the urban process and the techno-science of time machines is undergoing rapid convergence. (This seems to be a suggestion whose time has come.) Grasp the opportunity offered by computers to visualize what cities really are, and the dynamics of retro-temporalization are graphically displayed.



That being for which the being of time is opened as an exploratory path is the advanced global metropolis. This is a contention already

tacked to a cinematic, mass-media revelation, although one formatted by deeply-traditional dramatic criteria, thus systematically, and automatically, encrypted.

Far more on all this later. (If I say too much now, I'm worried I might save you $4.00.)

November 7, 2014

Quote note (#245)

Nydwracu on Great Awakenings:

La Wik:

First Great Awakening: 1730-1755
Second Great Awakening: 1790-1840
Third Great Awakening: 1850-1900
Fourth Great Awakening: 1960-1980
From 1730 to 1790 is 60 years. From 1790 to 1850 is 60 years. From 1850 to 1960 is 110 years. 110 / 2 = 55. Close enough. 1960 + 60 = 2020.

As we all know, the Fourth Great Awakening had secular and folk-religious components. We should expect the fifth one to as well. The obvious candidates for the secular component are the already-existing revivals of Communism, Fascism, and flat-earthism, and the obvious candidates for the folk-religious component are Tumblrism,

fad diets, and singularitarianism. There are probably more.

What will the religious component look like?

Well, things are getting weird. Really weird. …

As for that missing episode, it would be preposterous to advance this (1904) as the apex of a 'Great Awakening' in the sense at stake here, but perhaps not such a stretch to think it was picking up on some strange turbulence in the *Aethyrs*.

May 7, 2016

1930-Somethings

History never repeats itself, but it rhymes, runs the suggestive aphorism (falsely?) attributed to Mark Twain.

James Delingpole writes in the *Daily Telegraph*:

… have you ever tried reading private journals or newspapers from the 1930s? What will surprise you is that right to the very last minute – up to the moment indeed when war actually broke – even the most insightful and informed commentators and writers clung on to the delusion that things would somehow turn out all right. I do hope that history is not about to repeat itself. Unfortunately, the lesson from history is that all too often it does.

There's quite a lot of this about.

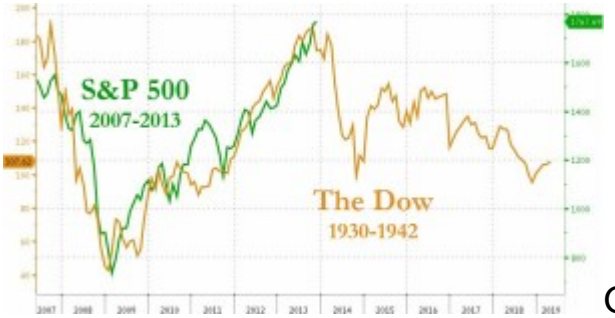
For one theoretical account of how history might rhyme, on an

ominous 80-year cycle, there's a generational model that sets the beat. "Strauss & Howe have established that history can be broken down into 80 to 100 year Saeculums that consist of four turnings: The High, The Awakening, The Unraveling, and the Crisis." From a philosophical point of view, it seems a little under-powered, but its empirical plausibility rises by the month.

Among Shanghai's anomalies is a peculiar relation to the 1930s. For the city beyond the International Settlement, the decade slid into disaster when Sino-Japanese hostilities broke out in 1937. Yet the preceding period was not marked by depression, but by exuberant High Modernism. Dates from the 1930s that would in much of the world seem distinctly sinister are displayed on the city's historic buildings as a mark of Golden Age authenticity. For the paranoid mind, that would slot neatly into the same disturbing rhyme scheme today.

Throughout most of the rich world, economic, political, and cultural decay seemed — retrospectively — to presage the coming cataclysm, as if nothing less could jolt exhausted social systems from their relentless downward slide. Almost everywhere, some version of fascist thinking was seized upon as the antidote to relentlessly gathering malaise. Beneath the surface of the global geostrategic order, shifting tectonic plates accumulated intolerable tension. Degenerate monetary systems came apart into uncontrollable swirls of dysfunctional signs.

Still, it's entirely possible that there's nothing to worry about:



Click image to enlarge.

ADDED: "If you hear echoes of the 1930s in the capitulation at Geneva, it's because the West is being led by the same sort of men, minus the umbrellas." (I'm hearing echoes of the 1930s just about everywhere.)

November 26, 2013

The Decopunk Delta

As this blog spirals around to its re-starting point, it fetches back the tasks it has yet to advance upon, including the most basic (announced in its sub-title). Why the 'Decopunk Delta'? Mostly because that's where time frays.

+ Golden Age Shanghai is unsettled business, and as things surge forward, they turn back.

+ Art Deco is the world's lost modernity, as everyone senses, without quite knowing how.

+ Art Deco escaped its time, at the time. It is the pre-eminent time-travel relic of the earth.
+ What Art Deco communicates is vivid, yet still unverbalized.
+ Art Deco fascinates again, today, because it is obscurely recognized as the key to the encrypted meaning of world history, and nowhere is this more insistently hinted than in re-opened Shanghai.

– The '-punk' suffix is pulp-code for any cultural time-travel tool undergoing contemporary development.

The two halves of the term 'Decopunk' bond through a peculiar quasi-symmetry. Each is time-locked into an identifiable 'vogue', while simultaneously making a problem of time, and a topic of history. Art Deco is at once the most evocative characteristic of an epoch — that of high-modernity / capitalism — and a super-historical exploration, extending from the archaic remnants of lost civilizations to flights of science-fictional speculation, drawing the entire cosmos of aesthetic and architectural possibility into itself. The still-proliferating '-punk' suffix, similarly, designates both an eruption of near-contemporary pulp-literary genres, and a method of time pillage, ranging widely across past and future on searches for extractable sets, or techno-cultural styles. Something like an abstract epochality, or historical re-use value, is hunted on each side. When the two connect, original occurrence is swirled into a twin-process recycling machine.

If Decopunk describes a precision-engineered inter-meshing

across time, it also marks a tension, or gradient, from the historical to the contemporary, from opulence to squalor, from optimism to pessimism, and from the tangible to the digital. What the past's virtual present tends to over-estimate, the present's virtual past tends to undermine, and it is only in the unstable circuit of oscillating valuation that either pole finds its real currency (which is equally that of the other). A euphoric cynicism, honed through spiral detachment from the partial and the actual, melds poly-fractional Decopunk into a single, investigable thing.

***

The conceptual content of the alternative history '-punk' was a central consideration of the (*UF1.1*) series *A Time-Traveler's Guide to Shanghai* (Part 1, Part 2, Part 3). The grungier and more popular — although for our purposes far less exact — term 'Dieselpunk' was employed in these pieces, as a place-holder for the emerging problem of time dislocation.

Some of the most prominent cultural-historical questions raised by Shanghai's Art Deco legacy were briefly indicated in the *Urbanatomy* guide to the 2010 World Expo, in a short section repeated here:

Tropical Modernity

Cosmopolitanism is an essential trait for any city with aspirations to global status. In itself, however, the cosmopolitan idea is too abstract and empty, or at least indeterminate, to provide adequate

guidance into Shanghai's dominant cultural traditions.

The economic and communicative shrinkage of the world makes modernity, no less than urbanism, inherently cosmopolitan. Since the 1960s, postmodern critics have reconstructed (and 'deconstructed') a model of cosmopolitan modernism that conforms to the vision of its most verbally articulate architectural proponents. This vision identified itself with the 'International Style', characterized by austerely functional, geometrically pure designs. By eliminating every element with discernible historical or cultural reference, such designs aspired to universal validity and relevance. The result was a negative cosmopolitanism, conceived as an escape from the trap of native peculiarity. This claim to cultural neutrality and universal authority has been the basic object of postmodernist disparagement, and the widespread social disaster associated with this philosophy of urban construction in Western countries ('the projects') did much to legitimate the postmodern case. In elite and popular opinion alike, high modernism, as represented by its supposedly mainstream traditions in urban planning and architecture, became associated with an arrogant insensitivity to local realities, and a self-deluding confidence in its own objective inevitability.

The importance of Shanghai to this discussion, is that it entirely disdained the modernism of the International, at least until very recent times (following the opening of Pudong). Its high modernity was constructed in the more luxuriant or tropical styles that are

today grouped together under the label 'Art Deco', in retrospective reference to the Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs of 1925. Where the International Style rejected every kind of superfluity, Art Deco reveled in cultural complexity, arcane symbolism and opulence of reference, borrowing freely from the temples of ancient Egypt and Mesoamerica, ballistic technology, science fiction objects, hermetic glyphs and alien dreams. Fusing streamline design trends with fractionated, cubist forms and the findings of comparative ethnography, it created a luscious cosmopolitan style, perfectly adapted to the Shanghai of the early 20th century.

Shanghai has been as thoroughly saturated with Art Deco heritage and influence as any city in the world. Examples include such treasures as the Capitol Building (146 Huqiu Lu, CH Gonda, 1928), the Grand Theater (now Grand Cinema, 216 Nanjing W, Rd, Hudec, 1928), the Peace Hotel (Bund 19-20, Palmer & Turner, 1929) and the Paramount Ballroom (Yang Ximiao, 218 Yuyuan Rd, 1932). An especially stunning Art Deco cluster can be found at the 'Municipal Square' intersection of Jiangxi Middle Road and Fuzhou Road, dominated by Hamilton House (Palmer & Turner,1931), the Metropole Hotel (Palmer & Turner,1934) and the Commercial Bank of China (Davies, Brooke and Gran, 1936). Much of this fabulous architectural legacy has been documented in the work of local photographer Deke Erh.

Art Deco styling became so deeply infused into the fabric of the city that its patterning and distinctive motifs (such as sunbursts, zig-zags and mystical signs) can be seen on innumerable lilong gateways from the 1920-40s. At another extreme, the city's ultramodern Jin Mao Tower in Lujiazui (88 Century Avenue) synthesizes crystalline forms, pagoda segmentation, and patterns derived from traditional Chinese numerology, under the guidance of unmistakable Art Deco influences. An even more pronounced example of contemporary Art Deco construction and decoration is provided by the new Peninsula Hotel, which has been meticulously designed as a conscious tribute to (and revivification of) Shanghai's high modernist style.

In contrast to the austerity of the International Style, the tropical abundance of Art Deco produces a positive cosmopolitanism, advancing to the universal by way of comprehension and synthesis, rather than exclusive purification. It makes itself global by drawing everything foreign into itself, rather than by divesting itself of native traits. From this difference, much follows.

In the West, a generalized disillusionment with modernism, resulting from harsh historical experiences, civilizational guilt, and relative geostrategic decline, found articulate expression in postmodern arguments and, more popularly, attitudes. These stances achieved a measure of coherence through a critical construction of modernism, modeled on the International Style. Postwar trends in urban development, based on rigid zoning,

geometrical rationalization of the cityscape, and blandly uniform mass residential highrise blocks, seemed to exemplify an archetypal modernist mentality. Urban modernity was construed as something that had been tried, seen, understood, judged, and rejected. The postmodern cultural episode ensued.

Art Deco, however, eluded this entire dismal progression. An assertively modern, comprehensive style that had embraced the machine age and a communicatively interconnected world, it remained wholly untainted by the minimalism and master-planning of the International Stylists. The thunderous culture clash between 'modernists' and postmodernists that resounded through the Western world in the late 20th century bypassed it completely. Art Deco thus represents an unprocessed or undigested modernity, still pulsing with historical enigma and non-exhausted potentialities. The continuing vibrancy of Art Deco is misapprehended by notions of anachronism or nostalgia, since it is a style that has never been concluded, delimited, surpassed, or adequately evaluated. It is the almost infinitely complex symbol of a prematurely discarded modern spirit, re-animated spontaneously by the renewal of modernity itself. Art Deco's persistent and compelling claim upon aesthetic, intellectual, and even political attention are nowhere more obvious than in contemporary Shanghai.

November 6, 2013

Gardens of Time (Part 1)

It might be presumptuous to assume there is any such thing as the Idea of cultivation. The absence of any such idea (a deficiency that is immediately stimulative) could readily be imagined as the condition that makes cultivation necessary.

When the search for a conclusive concept is abandoned, the cultural task of the garden — in its loftiest (Jiangnan) expression — begins to be understood. No less that the acknowledged fine arts of East or West, the Suzhou garden merits appreciation as a philosophical 'statement' in which aesthetic achievement is inextricable from a profound *apprehension of reality*. Perhaps, then, no short-cut or summary seeking to economize on the creation and preservation of the garden itself could possibly arrive at the same 'place', or — even with the most restricted sense of cognitive purchase — discover the same things.

Anachronistically conceived, the Suzhou garden is a multimedia experiment, incorporating various types of writing among its parts. Alongside, or embedded amid, pavilions, walls, bridges, rockeries, ponds, animals, vegetation, furnishings, ornamental carvings, and paintings, are found calligraphic scrolls and inscriptions that make words an ingredient of the garden. Language is something included, and trained, within a comprehensive ensemble. From the beginning, the immoderate passions of exile and dominion are stripped from the

cultivated sign.

To draw upon ulterior signs in order to talk *about* the garden — especially the generic garden — introduces a problem of framing, but this, too, has been meticulously anticipated, in a variety of ways. Framing is the principal method of the garden, and its supreme artifice. Whether through simple 'picture' frames, that transform — for instance — a slice of stone into an artwork, or elaborate constructions of gates, doorways, windows, apertures, alcoves, interiors, and viewpoints, it is the framing of perspective that *aestheticizes*. What produces the garden as a cultivated whole — most fundamentally — is its perspectival sub-division into itself. When the garden is analytically decomposed, in accordance with its own 'grain', it breaks down into a myriad scenes. It is made out of pieces of contemplation.

The garden makes its own outsides — numerously — in order to appear, piece by piece. It cannot, therefore, be assumed that one has left the garden, simply because one is commenting upon it 'from without'. No less probably, the garden has itself provided the frames that now escape into a prolonged contemplation, as its scenes are pursued on some path of ever deepening disclosure. To apprehend the garden, and reality through the garden, is the garden. The garden is a perspective machine.

As a scenic device arranged in space, the garden is almost endlessly intricate, but still comparatively tractable. The spatial

puzzle is resolved in stages as the visitor passes through a sequence of apprehensions, serially adjusting position and the direction of attention, tuning into perceptual frames, and synthesizing associations. This is a process which takes time, lending each part of each garden a characteristic pace, inversely proportional to scenic density. Wherever framings multiply most arrestingly, whether through the segmentation of space by aestheticized objects and tableau, or through the recursive layering of frames (perhaps a moon gate, seen through a doorway, and then a window), the garden slows progression to an extreme, as if absorbing motility directly into perception. (The grasp of perception as a behavior that *shares an economy* with locomotion is one of the garden's many lessons.)

In making time a key to the decryption of space, the garden has already begun to vaguely thematize duration. The name of the Lingering Garden (留园, *Liu Yuan*), combining the senses of 'stay' and 'attend', captures this especially pointedly. To linger is to let space absorb time. That is how the garden captivates, and cultivates, contemplation.

If, stepping back from the seductions of space, it is time that is sought down this garden path, what do we discover? That is the question this (languidly unfolding) series will orient itself towards.

November 11, 2013

Anachronistic Oedipus

Wikipedia offers an example of the 'time-travel' Bootstrap Paradox (among several):

A man travels back in time and falls in love with and marries a woman, who he later learns was his own mother, who then gives birth to him. He is therefore his own father (and thus also his father's father, father's father's father and so on), creating a closed loop in his ancestry and giving him no origin for his paternal genetic material.

It thus illustrates templex *auto-production* in a dramatic, anthropological form. Even in its comparatively tame, fully mathematico-scientifically respectable variants, feedback causality tends to auto-production. Any nonlinear dynamic process, in direct proportion to its cybernetic intensity, provides the explanation for its own genesis. It appears, asymptotically, to make itself happen. Cybernetic technicity — epitomized by robotic robot-manufacture — includes a trend to autonomization essentially. Pure (or idealized) capitalistic inclination to exponential growth captures the same abstract nonlinear function. As it mechanizes, capital approximates ever more close to an auto-productive circuit in which it appears as the 'father' of itself (M → C → M').

When the time-travelling Terminator is destroyed (in 1984), its control chip is salvaged by Cyberdyne Systems, to supply the core technology from which the Terminator will be built (in 2029). The

Skynet threat is not merely futuristic, but fully templex. It produces itself within a time-loop, autonomized against extrinsic genesis. The abstract horror of the *Terminator* franchise is a matter of auto-production.

As a creature of the Bootstrap Paradox, Oedipus mates with a matrilineal ancestor to give rise to himself. The even more thoroughly popularized Grandfather Paradox tricks him into the killing of a patrilineal ancestor, to make himself impossible. The paternal contributor is not merely supplanted, but dramatically terminated. What the hell was happening in Thebes? (That's the question the Sophoclean chorus asks.) We already know it's a horror story, so we have a provisional answer: Nothing good.

The query, at 'once' archaic and futuristic, is the Riddle of the Sphinx. It's appropriately cryptic. Wikipedia (again) provides a sound introduction:

There was a single sphinx in Greek mythology, a unique demon of destruction and bad luck. According to Hesiod, she was a daughter of Orthus and either Echidna or the Chimera, or perhaps even Ceto; according to others, she was a daughter of Echidna and Typhon. All of these are chthonic figures from the earliest of Greek myths, before the Olympians ruled the Greek pantheon. The Sphinx is called Phix (Φίξ) by Hesiod in line 326 of the Theogony, the proper name for the Sphinx noted by Pierre Grimal's ***The Penguin Dictionary of Classical Mythology****.*

[…]

The Sphinx is said to have guarded the entrance to the Greek city of Thebes, and to have asked a riddle of travellers to allow them passage. The exact riddle asked by the Sphinx was not specified by early tellers of the stories, and was not standardized as the one given below until late in Greek history. […] It was said in late lore that Hera or Ares sent the Sphinx from her Ethiopian homeland (the Greeks always remembered the foreign origin of the Sphinx) to Thebes in Greece where she asks all passersby the most famous riddle in history: "Which creature has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?" She strangled and devoured anyone unable to answer. Oedipus solved the riddle by answering: Man — who crawls on all fours as a baby, then walks on two feet as an adult, and then uses a walking stick in old age.

It gets stranger:

By some accounts (but much more rarely), there was a second riddle: "There are two sisters: one gives birth to the other and she, in turn, gives birth to the first. Who are the two sisters?" The answer is "day and night" (both words are feminine in Greek). This riddle is also found in a Gascon version of the myth and could be very ancient.

Which tells us that a primordial version of the riddle refers directly to temporal nonlinearity (templexity). The cryptic time-circuit is comparable to a Yin-Yang vortex, without sexual polarity.

Bested at last, the tale continues, the Sphinx then threw herself

from her high rock and died. An alternative version tells that she devoured herself.

She is, perhaps, an Ouroboros.

Thus Oedipus can be recognized as a "liminal" or threshold figure, helping effect the transition between the old religious practices, represented by the death of the Sphinx, and the rise of the new, Olympian gods.

It turns out, there is a comic twist to the return of Oedipus in modern times:

Sigmund Freud describes "the question of where babies come from" as a riddle of the Sphinx.

Note: 'Anachronistic Oedipus' needs an additional 'K' to make the qabbalism come out right.

ADDED: A little supportive clarification (from the dark side) —

> what the hell does "cybernetic intensity" mean? Data tripping shrooms at a rave? http://t.co/6TXkMnWkjs
>
> — David D. (@david_kenneth_d) September 19, 2014

> @david_kenneth_d Feedback density.
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) September 19, 2014

> @david_kenneth_d … Or, nonlinearity as a variable magnitude. Unless you're unhappy with (for e.g.) "highly nonlinear" — should be clear.

— Outsideness (@Outsideness) September 19, 2014

September 18, 2014

Time Cube

Concentrate the crudest intellectual pathologies of time-travel theory, then deduct the time-travel. Augment with free-style Biblical exegesis and gonzo web-page design. Enter the Time Cube. Right now *four days are taking place simultaneously*, but the powers-that-be are committed to hiding that truth of sacred time geometry from you. As explained to students at MIT (link below): "When you understand this time theory you can answer any other question that comes up in the universe." (Mind = Blown.)

Urban Future was reminded of Gene Ray's gnostic time doctrine by this (rather lame) selection of "sinister conspiracy theories" listed by *The Independent*. Some of the other SCTs are clearly quite *gone* ("World War II was staged by the illuminati"), but none of them approaches the plane of Ray's revelation. A small taster (stripped of throbbing font-switches):

Belly-Button Logic Works.
When Do Teenagers Die?
Adults Eat Teenagers Alive,

No Record Of Their Death.
Father Son Image, Not Gods.
Every Man Born Of Woman.
Belly-Button Is the Signature
Of Your Personal Creator —
I Believe Her Name Mama.
Pastor Told His Flock That
God Created All Of Them —
Truth Was That They All had
Mama Made Belly Buttons,
Church Was Full Of Liars.
Earth Has 4 Days In Same 24 Hrs., 1 Day God Was Wrong.
Einstein Was ONEist Brain.
Try My Belly-Button Logic.
No God Knows About 4 Days, It Is Evil To Ignore 4 Days,
Does Your Teacher Know?

There's a US$10,000 prize on offer for anyone who can "prove it wrong" (yet to be claimed).

Wikipedia has a succinct and helpful portal into the topic. The most crucial Time Cube theses are condensed at the *Encyclopedia Dramatica*. *Know Your Meme* has a (single) time-line-based introduction (which begins in August 1997). KYM links to this remarkably bad-tempered exchange.

There's a suitably chaotic short video 'documentary' here. Also,

Gene Ray at MIT (January 2002). More.

The most penetrating academic engagement with Ray's ideas, by Bei Dawai (from Hsuan Chuang University in Taiwan) can be found here.

ADDED: There's an ominous sub-conspiracy, for anyone wanting to crank Time Cube down to *The Independent*'s level (repeated KYM link):

Cubic Awareness Online [@], originally located at cubicao.tk, was the first and largest fan site for the Time Cube. Run by Richard Janczarski, the site also spawned a message board called Graveyard of the Gods [@], where Janczarski was known as "Cubehead." In 2007, Janczarski flew out to Florida from his home in Australia to meet up with Gene Ray to discuss the site and share ideas about the theory. While he was there, he filmed an eighteen part documentary titled The Dr Gene Ray Time Cube Experience, which he uploaded to his YouTube account Pyramid0rz [@].

In February 2008, a year after he publicly denounced the religion, calling it an "evil scam.", Janczarski announced on the Graveyard of the Gods forum that he had renounced Time Cube theory in favor of Christianity and would possibly be changing cubicao.tk into a Christian website. On February 13th, a rumor surfaced on the forums that Janczarski had taken his own life by jumping in front of a train [@] but an official news report was ever found [@]. Other users on the site speculated that Janczarski's rumored death might have

been related to his fallout with Gene Ray [@] over the YouTube series and the "false information" Ray felt he was presenting on Cubic Awareness Online [@].

ADDED: A surprisingly lucid Time Cube appreciation. One especially amusing moment:

***Q**: Is Ray anti-Semitic?*

***A**: All references to "Jews" and "queer Jews" and "queer Jew gods" and "Jew owners have enslaved your ass" should be interpreted as a metonymic reference to monotheism.*

September 26, 2014

Interstellar

The most prominent problems with *Interstellar* have already been capably discussed, so it's not worth spending much time going back over them. The basic catastrophe scenario has more gaping holes than a Hawking cosmology, and is in fact so ludicrous that it quite neatly takes itself out of the way. The framing ideology is romantic superhumanism, which might even count as a positive for some (although not here). The musical score (by Hans Zimmer) was wildly overwrought. All-too-typically for Hollywood, high-pitched emotional extravagance was shamelessly indulged. Despite all of this, it was a great movie.



Interstellar's narrative architecture is composed of a deep cosmic space-frontier story, and an occult communication story, bolted together by a time loop. (Plug.) The involvement of Kip Thorne reinforced the seriousness of this framework. (Thorne's explorations of cosmological warping are a marvel of advanced modernity.) Nolan is, in any case, a director who *knows things* — or at least suspects them, enough to stretch his audience. As a piece of contemporary myth-making on an epic scale, the achievement of *Interstellar* is formidable.

The movie envisages a future of roughly Greerian dreariness, in which Moon Hoax theories have become official doctrine, earnestly promoted by the educational apparatus. Shutting down the high

frontier is an overt ideological project, as the state directs its cultural energies into making America, once again, a nation of farmers. (In this endeavor, it will find plenty of cooperative apparatchiks at a one-step remove from my Twitter TL.) It is thus, as Scharlach has noted, a lucid Tech-Comm critique of extreme Terran regression. Engineers are no longer wanted. The scene in which the young Murphy Cooper's half-witted school teacher innocently regurgitates official doctrine on this subject is a minor masterpiece in itself.

Cooper's intense love for his brilliant daughter 'Murph' is troweled on thick, but it is inextricable from the sublimity of her intelligence. His love for his stolid corn-growing son is dutiful (and delicately portrayed), but his love for Murph is mad and immense, because it touches upon vastnesses beyond the stars. It is human emotion only as a proxy for twisted cosmological process — trans-galactic voyages and time-implosion.

When Cooper's fellow astronaut Brand is forced to confess that her love for a stranded space-pioneer is involved in her decision to prioritize a visit to the planet where he was lost, she insists "… It doesn't mean I'm wrong." Cooper responds cuttingly, "You know, it really could." Within the arc of the script, this coldness is repudiated, but it is too perfectly stated to be entirely dismissed. It's a Nolan movie, and there are loops within loops.

The robots are superb (even if the movie's dominant romantic superhumanism keeps them in their place).

Above all else, the spectacular formulation of an extraterrestrial occultism is where the movie's ultimate greatness lies. It is getting far too cramped here — on this rock, and in our brains — so we're called *Out*. The scenes of the outer solar system, the murderous environments beyond, and the hyper-dimensional spaces in which our locked-in time intuitions come apart, are all realized with soul-rending magnificence. "Our species was born on the earth," Cooper says. "It was not meant to die here."

It might be human triumphalism that sells *Interstellar* to its audience, but this is a movie aligned with the distant Outside.

November 22, 2014

Templexity Matters

Postulated: The intensity of time-travel fiction — and specifically *backward* time-travel fiction — is a critical index of modernity. As the time of modernity, initially grasped as a departure from traditional cyclicity, is prolonged into deepening nonlinear *vortex*, it provokes time-travel narrative as a figure in which to seek resolution. The *apocalyptic*, or communicative action of the end upon its past (through prophecy), is destined to final subsumption within the image of templexity. With the formulation of the *Terminator* mythos, in the last years of the 20th century, this process of subsumption

is essentially complete. In this rigorous sense, the Terminator — as its name suggests — announces the inauguration of the End Times, when the thought of *auto-production*, emerging in phases from developments in cybernetics, is culturally acknowledged in its comprehensive cosmic-historical implication. The time-travel 'bootstrap' or 'ontological paradox' is hazily recognized as the occult motor, or operational singularity, of the modern historical process.

Any positive cybernetic dynamic is open to logical interpretation (and dismissal) as a paradox. The Epimenides or Cretan Paradox, for instance, describes a reality-consistent recurrent cycle of escalating skepticism from the perspective of positive cybernetics, but nothing more than a concurrent self-contradiction from that of formal logic. The ontological paradox invites the same divergent reception. Auto-productive being is either a realistic foundation, or a formal absurdity, with the variance depending on whether self-reference is apprehended as a substantial dynamic or a static formality. From a certain — respectably established — orientation, the encouragement of *circuit ontology* within advanced modernity can only appear as a solicitation of madness.

Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014) is a movie whose narrative loop is based explicitly upon ontological paradox. (It arrived too late to be referenced in *Templexity*.) The circuit of auto-production it describes is looped around black-hole cosmology, involving specific gravitational information that is inaccessibly

occluded by the event horizon of collapsed stars, yet indispensable to the survival of the civilization eventually capable of retrieving it. The templex pattern outlined in the movie is exquisite. (Kip Thorne is doubtless owed considerable appreciation for that.)

The hypothesis of templexity is that the machine stimulating cultural absorption in the ontological paradox *cannot stop*. In regards to what has already happened, we haven't seen anything yet.

November 25, 2014

Edge of Tomorrow

(Also via Singapore Airlines.)

Edge of Tomorrow is science fiction *Groundhog Day*, agreed. (It would make no sense to contest this, some scenes achieve near-perfect isomorphy.) Derivative, then, certainly — but this is a point of consistency. Duplication is, after all, the latent theme. *Edge of Tomorrow* works better because it has formalized the time-repeat plot-system in videogame terms. Death replaces sleep, as action drama replaces comedy, but the recurrence of time is captured more incisively by the *Edge of Tomorrow* maxim: "We should just re-set." Further to be noted: *Edge of Tomorrow* actually has a story about the basis of its time anomaly — and not an especially risible one — while *Groundhog Day* doesn't even pretend to.

We should just reset is not only videogame practice, but also the recommendation of quantum suicide, another practical Electrocene philosophy. The best fictional exploration of QS (of which I am aware) is Greg Egan's *Quarantine*.

Videogame ideology and quantum suicide are *praxial indiscernibles*. In other words, their behavioral implications are equivalent. In both cases, the relation to self is made selective, within a set of virtual clones. Whenever developments — within one of multiple assumed timelines — goes 'bad' it should be deleted (culled). In that way, only the most highly-adaptive complex behavioral responses are preserved, shaping fate in the direction of success (as defined by the selective agency).

Recent discussions about Christianity and Paganism raise the question: *what does it take for a system of belief to attain religious intensity among Westerners today?* (Yes, this could be re-phrased in very different ways.) To cut right to the chase: Could statistical ontology become a religion (or the philosophy of a religion)? Quantum suicide terrorism anybody? This is a possibility I find hard to eliminate.

Edge of Tomorrow, therefore? A more significant movie than might be initially realized. (It's monsters are also quite tasty.)

ADDED: Thoughts on Post-Rationalist religion.

December 26, 2014

Synthetic Templexity

Why a sufficiently competent artificial intelligence looks indistinguishable from a time anomaly. Yudkowsky's FB post seems to be copy-and-paste resistant, so you'll just have to go and read the damn thing.

The Paperclipper angle is also interesting. If a synthetic mind with 'absurd' (but demanding) terminal goals was able to defer actualization of win-points within a vast time-horizon, in order to concentrate upon the establishment of intermediate production conditions, would its behavior be significantly differentiable from a rational value (i.e. intelligence) optimizer? (This blog says *no*.) Beyond a very modest threshold of ambition, given a distant time horizon, *terminal values are irrelevant to intelligence optimization*.

March 13, 2016

SECTION A - APOCALYPSES

CHAPTER ONE - CUMMULATION OF FAILURES

Nemesis

Betting everything that the casino will burn down

Harold Camping's Family Radio warned its listeners to expect some unusually dramatic spring events:

> *By God's grace and tremendous mercy, He is giving us advanced warning as to what He is about to do. On Judgment Day, May 21st, 2011, this 5-month period of horrible torment will begin for all the inhabitants of the earth. It will be on May 21st that God will raise up all the dead that have ever died from their graves. Earthquakes will ravage the whole world as the earth will no longer conceal its dead (Isaiah 26:21). People who died as saved individuals will experience the resurrection of their bodies and immediately leave this world to forever be with the Lord. Those who died unsaved will*

> *be raised up as well, but only to have their lifeless bodies scattered about the face of all the earth. Death will be everywhere.*

Clearly, prediction can be a perilous business.

Yet, as Karl Popper noted with respect to scientific theories, falsifiable predictions also serve a valuable – even indispensable – purpose. Any model of reality that is able to make specific forecasts earns a credibility that vaguer 'world-views' are not entitled to, although at the price of radical vulnerability to devaluation, should its anticipations prove unfounded.

Much like Marxism, the Libertarianism of Austrian School economic theory combines historical expectations (of greater or lesser exactitude) with a core of philosophical, political, and even emotional commitment that is comparatively immunized against empirical refutation. Both Marxism and Austrolibertarianism are large, highly variegated ideologies, with complicated histories, expressing profound discontent with the dominant order of the modern world, and prone to utopian temptations. Both are (often indignant) moral-political doctrines extrapolated in very different ways from Lockean natural-law property rights (to one's own body and its productive activity). Both attract a wide spectrum of followers, from sober scholars to wild-eyed revolutionary advocates, who see in the unfolding drama of history the possibility of definitive

vindication (much as the faithful of millenarian theologies have always done, and – as the Camping case demonstrates – continue to do).

The Western roots of both Marxism and Austrolibertarianism reach down into Jewish redemptive eschatology and Greek tragedy (it is perhaps noteworthy that Karl Marx and Ludwig von Mises shared intriguing biographical features, including highly-assimilated German-Jewish backgrounds, steeped in European high-culture). Statist-Capitalism is portrayed as the Satanic-Promethean antihero of an epic narrative, describing a sustained violation of justice that finds itself held accountable in a final apocalyptic moment giving meaning to history, and a seemingly unconstrained hubris that meets its eventual nemesis. The high is brought low, through a crisis whose mere prospect offers overwhelming psychological satisfaction, and thus extraordinary emotional attachment.

Since the 1980s, Marxism has tended to retreat from the predictive mode. Its enthusiasts no doubt remain committed to the prospect of a terminal crisis of capitalism, perhaps even an imminent one, but Marxist prophecy seems timorous and uncertain today, even under conditions of unusual global economic dislocation. The Austrolibertarians, on the other hand, are being drawn out onto a prophetic branch – possibly despite themselves – with incalculable consequences for their future credibility. Their fundamental assumption, that governments are by essence incompetent and

unqualified to run the monetary systems required by advanced economies, leads them to an almost inescapable conclusion: hyperinflation.

Hyperinflation might be the sole economic example of a true singularity: a hyperbolic approach to infinity (in finite time), producing a punctual discontinuity. When hyperinflation strikes, it escalates rapidly towards a hard limit, where money dies. In the economic sphere, it is the unsurpassable example of regime incompetence. How could Austrolibertarians – whose apocalyptic inclinations are matched only by their disdain for political authority – not be irresistibly attracted to it?

John Williams' Shadow Government Statistics blog is not easily characterized as hardcore Austrolibertarian site (Williams describes himself as a "conservative Republican with a libertarian bent"), but the prognosis outlined carefully in its Hyperinflation Special Report (2011) exemplifies the tendency to predict imminent nemesis for command-control monetary policy. Williams subscribes wholeheartedly to the Austrian certitude that 'kicking the can' (up the road) – the central feature of Keynesian macroeconomic policy – guarantees eventual catastrophe, and 'eventual' just got a whole lot closer. Nemesis is coming due.

> *Both the federal government and the Federal Reserve have demonstrated that they will not tolerate a systemic collapse*

> *and a great deflation, as seen during the Great Depression. … those risks are being fought, and will be fought, at any cost that can be covered by the unlimited creation of new money. It was a devil's choice, but the choice has been made. Extreme systemic interventions, and formal measures to debase the U.S. dollar through the effective unlimited creation of money to cover systemic needs and the government's obligations, pushed the timing of a systemic collapse — threatened in September 2008 — several years into the future. The cost of instant salvation, though, was inflation. Eventual systemic collapse is unavoidable at this point, but it will be in a hyperinflationary great depression, instead of a deflationary one.*

Williams isn't afraid to lock down some dates, with 2014 proposed as the outer limit of possibility – and sooner is likelier:

> *At present, it is the Obama Administration that has to look at abandoning the debt standard (hyperinflation) and starting fresh. Yet, the Administration and many in Congress have taken recent actions suggestive of hoping only to push off the day of reckoning for the economic and systemic solvency crises until after the 2012 presidential election. They do not have that time.*

As he elaborates:

> *Actions already taken to contain the systemic solvency crisis and to stimulate the economy (which have not worked), plus what should be renewed devastating impact of unexpected ongoing economic contraction on tax revenues, have set the stage for a much earlier crisis. Risks are high for the hyperinflation beginning to break in the months ahead; it likely cannot be avoided beyond 2014; it already may be beginning to unfold.*
>
> *It is in this environment of rapid fiscal deterioration and related massive funding needs that the U.S. dollar remains open to a rapid and massive decline, along with a dumping of domestic- and foreign-held U.S. Treasuries. The Federal Reserve would be forced to monetize further significant sums of Treasury debt, triggering the early phases of a monetary inflation.*
>
> *Under such circumstances, current multi-trillion dollar deficits would feed rapidly into a vicious, self-feeding cycle of currency debasement and hyperinflation. With the economy already in depression, hyperinflation kicking in quickly would push the economy into a great depression, since disruptions from uncontained inflation are likely to bring normal commercial activity to a halt.*

What happens next is anyone's speculation.

The hyperinflationary destruction of the world's reserve currency would be a decisive event. The mere possibility of such an occurrence divides the set of potential futures between two tracks. On one, in which the US Dollar (FRN) survives, Austrolibertarian alarmism is humiliated, the economic competence of the US government is – broadly speaking – confirmed, and the principles of fiat currency production and central banking are reinforced, along with their natural supporters among neo-Keynesian anti-deflationary macroeconomists. On the other, the Austrolibertarians dance in the ashes of the dollar, precious metals replace fiat paper, central banks come under withering political attack, and the economic role of government in general is subjected to a major onslaught by energized free-marketeers. At least, that's what a just universe, or a fair bet, would look like.

Betting on a just universe could be the big mistake, however – and that's a temptation the morally-charged Austrolibertarian grand narrative finds hard to avoid. In a morally indifferent universe, Nemesis is non-redemptive, and the entire bet is an inverse Pascal's wager, with downside on every side. Make a brave prediction of hyperinflation, and you either lose, or you lose – gloating neo-Keynesians, greater indebtedness, and fatter government on the one hand, or some yet unconsolidated species of neo-totalitarian horror

on the other. (It's noteworthy that a tour through the history of post-hyperinflationary regimes doesn't pass through many examples of *laissez-faire* commercial republics.)

So is the dollar going to die? — Quite possibly. Then things could *really* turn nasty – more Harold Camping than Ludwig von Mises: "lifeless bodies scattered about the face of all the earth. Death will be everywhere."

June 3, 2011

Bonfire of the Vanities

The road to hell is paved with good intentions

As an ideological mantra, 'Never Again' is associated primarily with the genocide politics of the 1940s, and in this context its effectiveness has been questionable, at best. As a dominating imperative, it has been vastly more consequential within the economic sphere, as a response to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Whilst ethnically selective mass killing is widely frowned upon, its attractions have been difficult to suppress. Deflationary depression, on the other hand, is simply not allowed to happen. This has been the supreme axiom of practical morality for almost a century, uniquely and distinctively shaping our age. We can call it the

Prime Directive.

For the Western world, the 1930s were a near-death experience, an intimate encounter with the abyss, recalled with religious intensity. Because the threat was 'existential' – or unsurpassable – the remedy was invested with the absolute passion of a faith. The Prime Directive was adopted as a basic and final law, to which all social institutions and interests were subordinated without reservation. To question or resist it was to invite comprehensive disaster, and only a radically uninformed or criminally reckless heretic – a 'crank' – would do that. *Anything* is better than deflationary depression. That is the New ~~Deal~~ Law.

The consolidation of financial central planning, based on central banking and fiat currencies, provided the priesthood of the Prime Directive with everything it needed to ensure collective obedience: No deflationary depression without deflation, and no deflation with a well-oiled printing press. 'Counter-cyclical' inflation was always an option, and the hegemony of Anglophone economic-historical experience within the flourishing American century marginalized the memory of inflationary traumas to global backwaters of limited influence. Beside the moral grandeur of the Prime Directive, monetary integrity counted for nothing (only a crank, or a German, could argue otherwise).

The Prime Directive defines a regime that is both historically concrete and systemically generalizable. As Ashwin Parameswaran

explains on his Macroeconomic Resilience blog, this type of regime is expressed with equal clarity in projects to manage a variety of other (non-economic) complex systems, including rivers and forests. Modern forestry, dominated by an imperative to fire suppression, provides an especially illuminating example. He notes:

> *The impetus for both fire suppression and macroeconomic stabilisation came from a crisis. In economics, this crisis was the Great Depression which highlighted the need for stabilising fiscal and monetary policy during a crisis. Out of all the initiatives, the most crucial from a systems viewpoint was the expansion of lender-of-last-resort operations and bank bailouts which tried to eliminate all disturbances at their source. In [Hyram] Minsky's words: "The need for lender-of-last-resort operations will often occur before income falls steeply and before the well nigh automatic income and financial stabilizing effects of Big Government come into play." (Stabilizing an Unstable Economy pg 46)*
>
> *Similarly, the battle for complete fire suppression was won after the Great Idaho Fires of 1910. "The Great Idaho Fires of August 1910 were a defining event for fire policy and management, indeed for the policy and management of all natural resources in the United States. Often called the Big Blowup, the complex of fires consumed 3 million acres of*

> *valuable timber in northern Idaho and western Montana…..The battle cry of foresters and philosophers that year was simple and compelling: fires are evil, and they must be banished from the earth. The federal Weeks Act, which had been stalled in Congress for years, passed in February 1911. This law drastically expanded the Forest Service and established cooperative federal-state programs in fire control. It marked the beginning of federal fire-suppression efforts and effectively brought an end to light burning practices across most of the country. The prompt suppression of wildland fires by government agencies became a national paradigm and a national policy" (Sara Jensen and Guy McPherson). In 1935, the Forest Service implemented the '10 AM policy', a goal to extinguish every new fire by 10 AM the day after it was reported.*
>
> *In both cases, the trauma of a catastrophic disaster triggered a new policy that would try to stamp out all disturbances at the source, no matter how small.*

At Zerohedge, The World Complex elaborates on the history of fire suppression in the United States:

> *The forests of the southwestern United States were subjected to a lengthy dry season, quite unlike the forests of*

the northeast. The northeastern forests were humid enough that decomposition of dead material would replenish the soils; but in the southwest, the climate was too dry in the summer and too cool in the winter for decomposition to be effective. Fire was needed to ensure healthy forests. Apart from replenishing the soils, fire was needed to reduce flammable litter, and the heat or smoke was required to germinate seeds.

In the late 19th century, light burning — setting small surface fires episodically to clear underbrush and keep the forests open — was a common practice in the western United States. So long as the fires remained small they tended to burn out undergrowth while leaving the older growth of the forests unscathed. The settlers who followed this practice recognized its native heritage; just as its opponents called it "Paiute forestry" as an expression of scorn (Pyne, 1982).

Supporters of burning did so for both philosophical and practical reasons — burning being the "Indian way" as well as expanding pasture and reducing fuels for forest fires. The detractors argued that small fires destroyed young trees, depleted soils, made the forest more susceptible to insects and disease, and were economically damaging. But the critical argument put forth by the opponents of burning was that it was inimical to the Progressive Spirit of Conservation.

> *As a modern people, Americans should use the superior, scientific approaches of forest management that were now available to them, and which had not been available to the natives. Worse than being wrong, accepting native forest management methods would be primitive.*

Spelling out the eventual consequences of the 'progressive' reformation of forest management practices probably isn't necessary, since – in striking contrast to its economic analog – its lessons have been quite thoroughly absorbed, widely and frequently referenced. Ecologically-sophisticated environmentalists, in particular, have become attached to it as a deterrent model of arrogant intervention, and its perverse consequences. Everybody knows that the attempt to eliminate forest fires, rather than extinguishing risk, merely displaced, and even accentuated it, as the accumulation of tinder transformed a regime punctuated by comparatively frequent fires of moderate scale with one episodically devastated by massive, all-consuming conflagrations.

Parameswaran explains that the absence of fires leads to fuel build-up, ecological drift towards less fire-resistant species, reduction in diversity, and increased connectivity. The 'protected' or 'stabilized' forest changes in nature, from a cleared, robust, mixed, and patch-worked system, to a fuel-cluttered, fragile, increasingly mono-cultural and tightly interconnected mass, amounting almost

to an explosive device. *Stability degrades resilience*, and preventing the catastrophe-to-come becomes increasingly expensive and uncertain, even as the importance of prevention rises. By the penultimate stage of this process, crisis management has engineered an impending apocalypse: a disastrous event that simply cannot possibly be allowed to happen (although it surely will).

Parameswaran calls this apocalyptic development sequence The Pathology of Stabilisation in Complex Adaptive Systems. It's what the Prime Directive inevitably leads to. Unfortunately, diagnosis contains no hint of remedy. Every step up the road makes escape more improbable, as the scale of potential calamity rises. Few will find much comfort in the realization that taking this path was insane.

'Black-boxes' (or flight recorders) retrieved from air disasters are informative in this respect. With surprising regularity, the last words of the pilot, announced to no one in particular, eloquently express an acknowledgment of unattractive but unmistakable reality: "Oh $#it!" Less common – in fact, unheard of – is any honest address to the passengers: "Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We are all about to die." What would be the point?

Everything to be realistically expected from our ruling political and financial elites can be predicted by rigorous analogy. This flight doesn't end anywhere good, but it would be foolish to await an announcement.

Unencumbered by official position in the Cathedral of the Prime

Directive, 'Mickeyman' at World Complex is free to sum things up with brutal honesty:

> *We have lived through a long period of financial management, in which failing financial institutions have been propped up by emergency intervention (applied somewhat selectively). Defaults have not been permitted. The result has been a tremendous build-up of paper ripe for burning. Had the fires of default been allowed to burn freely in the past we may well have healthier financial institutions. Instead we find our banks loaded up with all kinds of flammable paper products; their basements stuffed with barrels of black powder. Trails of black powder run from bank to bank, and it's raining matches.*

February 24, 2012

Can't kick the habit …

… but at least we can kick the can

> "The economic catch phrase of the year has become 'kicking the can down the road', applied to all the problems that are

not being solved, but are simply kicked further down the road. It's an apt description, as it is exactly what's happening."

"There are already elements of fragility," [Nouriel Roubini] said. "Everybody's kicking the can down the road of too much public and private debt. The can is becoming heavier and heavier, and bigger on debt, and all these problems may come to a head by 2013 at the latest."

"This week we turn from the crisis brewing in the U.S. to the one that is coming to a slow boil in Europe. We visit our old friends Greece and Ireland and ponder how this will end. It is all well and good to kick the can down the road, but what happens when you come to the end of the road?"

"Sovereign debt in Europe is on everyone's mind. Three of the seventeen members of the Euro system are in trouble; Greece is a basket case. There is universal agreement that Greece is now illiquid and insolvent. The latest compromise is another temporary bandage. Our American idiom 'kicking the can down the road' fits perfectly."

"An irreverant official at the International Monetary Fund recently installed a jarring ringtone on his mobile phone. It is the sound of cans being kicked down a road. That, alas,

is what Europe's politicians and the IMF look set to do with their latest rescue plan for Greece."

"Kathleen Brooks, research director at Gain Capital wrote in a note yesterday: 'There is a growing sense that a bespoke solution to Ireland's crisis is only kicking the can of peripheral financial worms further down the street. Until there is a convincing automatic default mechanism for all eurozone members then we could see other debt flare ups over the medium-term.'"

"'[Japan's Government Pension Investment Fund] might secure 2 trillion yen by bank lending to finance part of the payout shortfall, the Nikkei said.' This will have two effects, neither of which is positive for dealing with the funding problem. The first is that it will merely kick the can down the road which seems to be the standard response from Japan, Inc over the last two decades. The second is that it reduces the income – and thus the funds holdings – as they turn from earning interest on their investments to paying interest on these loans which rather has the effect of shortening the road down which they are kicking the can."

"We live in a world profoundly addicted to debt-financed consumption. Today, many people, companies, and countries

borrow with no evident intention to repay. When the debt comes due, they will replace it with new (and often larger) debt. Kick the can down the road, again and again. But inevitably the road ends abruptly with a wall, much like the ones at the end of a crash testing site."

"Speaking to a room full of reporters at the National Press Club Thursday, Bernanke said that without an increase in the debt limit, the United States could potentially default on its debt, an outcome he referred to as 'catastrophic.' … 'There's only so far that we can kick the can down the road,' he said in response to a question about the deficit."

"Monetary reform never takes place because everyone wants to defer final judgment. Everyone wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die. Everyone wants a stable economy with growth. No one wants recession and increased bankruptcies to re-price capital goods. So, kick the can always results in another round of monetary inflation. The boom-bust cycles repeat. … This is continuity in the modern fiat money economy. The voters want it. The debtors want it. The banks want it. Businessmen want it. … The result: American prices as measured by the consumer price index have risen by a factor of 20 since the Federal Reserve System began

operating in 1914. The dollar has depreciated by about 95%."

"The voters want the government to guarantee them a safe retirement, Medicare benefits, and a stable dollar. But the government is already so far down the road to default that it can only play kick the can."

"Dana Milbank of the *Washington Post* chides Democrats, Republicans and DC elites for 'kicking the can' of deficits and debt to future generations. This is an inherent defect of all democracies. Elected politicians buy votes today and affix the burden on future generations."

"It's ridiculous that, as often as we get speeches about how we need to stop kicking the can down the road on the debt and the deficit, we get more can-kicking."

"We're going to keep kicking the can down the road for as long as we can see the road and the can ahead. Then all of a sudden – Oooops! No more road!"

"[K]icking the can down the road won't work: there is no more road."

"There are an awful lot of Cans on this road and our leaders

keep kicking them and kicking them. I can't help the feeling that we are near the end of this road."

"Can-kicking, rather than problem-solving, is the political method of dealing with big and small problems. Problems do not get solved so much as they get hidden. Political hoopla and self-congratulations accompany each can-kicking action. The spectacle and declaration of problem-solved is usually enough to satisfy the concerns of the public, the only consideration that matters for the political class."

"Essentially, all we are doing is kicking the can down the road."

"Two years ago in a speech to U.S. House Democrats, Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer predicted that America was headed for 'a fundamental economic reset.' According to Ballmer, for 25 years our economy grew on unrealistically cheap debt. That is over. … Since Ballmer's remarks, our national debt has continued to grow and now surpasses $14 trillion, President Obama and Congress are struggling with massive federal budget deficits, state and local governments are drowning in red ink, and protesters are massing at state capitols demonstrating against wage and benefit cuts. … Elected officials have no choice. They must trim spending and make some very difficult choices. As Gov. Chris Gregoire has

repeatedly told state lawmakers, we have to make fundamental changes and do things much differently. We have to quit kicking the can down the road in hopes that somehow our problems will magically disappear."

"Can-Kicking toward the Double Dip"

"Same Kick, Same Road, Bigger Can"

"Can kicking continues for real estate and banks"

"In general, the capacity of large wealthy societies to allow festering problems to go un-addressed seems perennially underrated. I'll be thirty next week and for as long as I can remember people have been talking about how the United States needs to address entitlement spending and trade imbalances. And as best I can tell, we *do* need to address those things. Presumably at some point something will happen. But in practice we've managed a great deal of can-kicking, seem to have more can-kicking in us, and actually the public and the political elite alike are quite averse to the kind of steps that would address these issues."

"The House GOP is considering a vote to extend the debt ceiling through the end of 2012. This is kicking the can down

the road …"

"'The debt ceiling is supposed to be a mechanism to force Democrats and Republicans to come together and cut spending,' Congressman Kingston said. 'Instead, what does Congress do? We push the ceiling further and further up. Instead of moving the ceiling, we need to cut spending and quit kicking the can down the road for another Congress, another election and another generation.'"

"If history is any guide, there will be no problem raising the debt ceiling once again in 2011. And that's what's called kicking the can down the road. You don't have to be a U.S. Republican (I'm neither) to care about U.S. debt levels. Any chimpanzee can see the problem (yes, even if the U.S. can just keep on printing its own money. That's the problem)."

"Kicking the can down the road by increasing debt limits is not a solution. It just allows Washington politicians to continue to feed their spending habits."

"During the current state budget crisis we've heard a lot about 'kicking the can down the road.' … It didn't have to be this way. Had the state accounted for its promises rather than kicking that can down the road, true costs would've been

revealed, proper funding would have been required or no such promises would've been made, and discretionary programs would've been protected. But instead, politicians chose to kick the can, and down a very low road. … California has kicked that can into a $200-300 billion obligation that grows every year that it's kicked down the road again."

"The phrase 'kick the can' refers to a specific form of procrastination: to delay making a decision regarding a problem that can be deferred but cannot be avoided indefinitely. With each kick of the can, the problem grows worse. The problem compounds. The resources required to solve it do not compound at an equally high rate. The can-to-foot ratio grows larger."

"Maybe all of this can-kicking will produce the desired outcome. But the more likely scenario is that the U.S. government will continue to throw newly printed dollars bills at the problem until eventually something that looks like a lot like a recovery will appear. Shortly thereafter, the recovery will yield to something that looks a lot like debilitating hyperinflation."

"Metaphorically things are getting just about as tedious as the downturn in the global economy. The operative 'kicking

> the can down the road' continues to proliferate, alarming[ly] so. A search on the Google (U.S.) News site on June 13, 2011, for this phrase listed 2,805 citations embedded in news texts during the previous week."

June 15, 2011

Hubris

In the complete absence of philosophical pretension, certain stark commitments — of deep philosophical significance — are sometimes made manifest. Such is the case with Grant Williams' extended (and thoroughly charted) meditation on *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*.

What emerges, with exceptional clarity, is the fundamental complicity of Austrian Economics, Metaphysical Naturalism, and the Tragic Sense. This triple-headed *harsh realism* finds itself positioned in a relation of radical dissent to the dominant assumptions of our time, deploring the *hubris* of a global managerial elite who presume to turn back the tides through technocratic action. As Williams lucidly states:

> Both war and financial collapse occur in cycles and are

subject to the overwhelming laws of nature.

Those inherent characteristics of the natural order are permanent. They cannot be altered.

What the Fed and the rest of the central banks have done in trying to rewrite the natural laws of finance and human behaviour is likely to lead either to war or to a collapse of the financial system — or both. At this point, the exact outcome is undecided, but the options have narrowed considerably.

Over the past six years, those at the helm have pulled every lever and pushed every button available to them in a desperate attempt to stave off an inevitable and natural cleansing of the business cycle, because all those years of economic peace have resulted in an unprecedented credit inflation. And, as my friend Dylan Grice recently said,

"If you've had… an unprecedented credit INflation, you WILL have an unprecedented credit DEflation"

All that the central banks of the world have ended up doing as they have desperately tried to maintain the economic peace these past several decades is to make that credit inflation larger and therefore infinitely more dangerous than anything that has gone before it.

The consequences WILL be dire.

Tragedy is the dramatization of natural sovereignty, expressed as

the visitation of climactic ruin upon unsustainably deluded human ambition. It is not an argument, but rather the demonstration of a reality beyond argument — a naturalistic *prophecy*.

The Konratieff wave-length sets a rough time-horizon for the tragic forecast. Already marginalized, within a decade or so — absent the anticipated *nemesis* — it will have been almost fully dissipated into comedy (or implausible melodrama). The 'hubris' of macroeconomic wave-management will by then appear — even to previous skeptics — as nothing of the kind, but instead as confirmed wisdom and effective power, wielded by true masters of the tides. The alternative, of course, is "dire".

ADDED: *Those dancing on the grave of Nature should be careful who they dance with*.

October 9, 2014

Kicking the Can

It's difficult to keep track of all the ways in which the hyperbolic explosion of time-preference is expressed in the present world economic order, especially in its Western core, where the rot is deepest. From insensate looting to exponential debt expansion, and from sugar-high stimulus programs to insolvent, culturally-ruinous welfare systems (cooked-up for a succession of short-term political

head-rushes), the entire economic machinery is locked into virtual apocalypse accumulation. Never deal with anything today that can be added to the mountain of woes due tomorrow. As historical time collapses into sheer orgiastic spasm, it converges with the frothiest media attention span, hurtling towards the edge of the precipice where nothing remains but news.

Here's the latest dimension of kicking-the-can:

… if US inventories, already at record high levels, and with the inventory to sales rising to great financial crisis levels, had not grown by $121.9 billion and merely remained flat, US Q1 GDP would not be 0.2%, ***but would be -2.6%.*** [Emphasis in original]

Systematic unreality has a face, and it's that of a talking-head telling you that the end hasn't yet happened.

Nemesis is not mocked. When she arrives, it's going to hurt.

ADDED: The popcorn version. (Think I linked this before as an Outsideness Strategy classic.)

April 29, 2015

2017

A little illustrative *sang froid*:

Naemi has heard all the predictions of the dam's imminent demise. "Sure, we have problems," he says. "But the Americans are

exaggerating. This dam is not going to collapse. Everything is going to be fine."

I mean, come on, it's not as if the 2016 effect could actually escalate.

(Via.)

January 1, 2017

CHAPTER TWO - SUSPENSION

Quote notes (#70)

AoS speaks for me on this:

There are two types of people: Those who only sometimes procrastinate those who are so inclined to it that it creates havoc in their lives. Lately, I tend to be the latter of the two. [...] My procrastination has been so bad today that I actually researched "procrastination" in order to procrastinate a bit longer. Then, I tweeted about my procrastination in order to drag it out even further. Then, others joined in, and it was clear that I am far from the only one. [...] Well, the fine folks at The Next Web blog have posted a very timely article on the science of procrastination ...

Procrastination is a time-based phenomenon, so I'm sure there's a gripping philosophical angle, if only it were possible to extract some cognitive resources from the labyrinth of digression. Seriously, there's a major procrastination post coming ... some time later (i.e. as soon as practically possible, which always means at the last, sleep-starved minute).

The essence of procrastination (at least for me): *this is far too*

urgent to deal with right now.

April 1, 2014

Collapse Schedules

It took over seven decades for Soviet communism to implode. Arguments could no doubt be made — and they *would have to be right* — that given certain quite limited counter-factual revisions of historical contingency, this period might have been significantly extended. Austrians nevertheless consider the eventual termination of comparatively pure communism as a vindication (of the Calculation Problem, in particular). They are not *simply* wrong to do so.

Fascist economics is far more formidably resilient than its now-defunct soviet antagonist. Any attempt to quantify this functional superiority as a predicted system duration is transparently impractical. Margins of theoretical error or imprecision, given very modestly transformed variables, could translate into many decades of extended (or decreased) longevity. Coldly considered, there is no reason to confidently expect a theoretically constructed *collapse schedule* to hold its range of probable error to much under a century. (Darker reflection might lead to the conclusion that even this level of 'precision' betrays unwarranted hubris.) There might be crushing

lessons to be learned from the history of Messianic expectation.

Such acknowledgements can easily prompt over-reaction. Insofar as the collapse schedules of Austrian apocalypticism pretend to certainty, they undoubtedly court humiliation. Yet, if the soft-fascist configuration of global 'capitalism' were to comprehensively and unambiguously disintegrate within the next two decades, the Austrian vindication — retrospectively evaluated — would easily match the Soviet case. Those who doggedly maintained that *this cannot perpetuate itself for long* would be seen to have understood what their opponents had not. Since the critique of Soviet political economy was not, retrospectively, derided as a 'stopped clock', there is no reason to imagine that this would be. The redemptive power of apocalypse easily overrides substantial scheduling embarrassments.

The question that will ultimately be seen to have mattered, then, is far more "can this go on?" than "when (exactly) will this stop?" The important prediction is compound: *the longer it continues, the harder it ends*. This too might be false, but if it is, a substitute fascist presupposition must be correct, and that has yet to be adequately formulated. Roughly speaking, it insists that *politics subordinates economics absolutely*. In other words, the thoroughgoing politicization of the economy is indefinitely viable. This is an assumption subject to humiliation by any schedule that falls short of perpetuity, since mere medium-term sustainability does nothing to justify it. Hitler demanded a thousand years. How could his more

financially-sophisticated successors — enthroned in planetary hegemony — ask for less?

ADDED: Attaining balance on this topic would test the skills of a tightrope walker. “There’s a lot of ruin in a nation,” (Handle reminds us), but “It’s like that old saying– better to be a year (or decade) too early than a day too late. Because one should never underestimate the speed with which things can unravel.” Plus additional highly-relevant remarks from Simon Black (don’t miss the embedded diagram).

June 11, 2013

Suspense

In respect to the initial formulation of a question along the rough lines “How is suspension of consequences possible?” there are only three basic options:

(1) It’s not. All deferral of consequences is illusion. The reality is something akin to *instant karma*. (There’s something about this line of thinking I respect, but I’ve no idea how it could be coherently put together, and then knitted with explanatory plausibility to evident historical fact.)

(2) It’s complicated.

(3) That old problem is over. Haven’t you heard of the Death of

Reality? Postmodernism, bitchez. (This is Derrida and Baudrillard — smart, terminally decadent, and radically inconsistent with NRx. It's also the implicit principle of post-liberal macro-economics.)

Number Two is surely the only path here that is NRx-compatible. Its articulation remains almost entirely unachieved, although this is no great source of shame — the prior intellectual history of the world got nowhere with it, either. It might not be the deepest problem about time, but it is the one with the greatest immediate relevance to generally-acknowledged historical processes, and (perhaps) also the greatest direct practical application. What it explores is the potential for *a realistic analysis of the provisionally-functional denial of reality*. It crosses almost everything 'we' are talking about.

Charles Hugh-Smith writes:

By the time extend-and-pretend finally reaches its maximum limits, the resulting implosion is so large that the shock waves topple regimes, banks, currencies and entire nations.

If NRx seems predisposed to apocalypticism, it is because it concurs — both with the proposal that "maximum limits" exist, and the attendant thesis that some reality-suppressing tendency is reaching them. "Extend-and-pretend" — or radically finite reality denial — is an engine of catastrophe. It enables negative consequences to be accumulated through postponement, without prospect of final ('postmodern') absolution. Yes, the coagulated detritus does eventually collide ruinously with the unpleasantness

purifier. The fact it hasn't *already* done so, however, is a puzzle of extraordinary profundity.

ADDED: Scharlach responds.

February 19, 2015

Suspended Animation

Limbo starts to feel like home

According to Herbert Stein's Law, the signature warning of our age, "If something cannot go on forever, it will stop." The question is: When?

The central concerns of environmentalists and radical market economists are easy to distinguish – when not straightforwardly opposed – yet both groups face a common mental and historical predicament, which might even be considered the outstanding social discovery of recent times: the extraordinary durability of the unsustainable. A pattern of mass behavior is observed that leads transparently to crisis, based on explosive (exponential) trends that are acknowledged without controversy, yet consensus on matters of fact coexists with paralyzing policy disagreements, seemingly interminable procrastination, and irresolution. The looming crisis continues to swell, close, horribly close, but in no way that is

persuasively measurable closer, like some grating Godot purgatory: "You must go on; I can't go on; I'll go on."

Urban Future doesn't do green anguish as well as teeth-grinding Austrolibertarian irritation, so it won't really try. Suffice to say that being green is about to become almost unimaginably maddening, if it isn't already. Just as the standard 'green house' model insinuates itself, near-universally, into the structure of common sense, the world temperature record has locked into a flatline, with surging CO2 production showing up everywhere except as warming. Worse still, a new wave of energy resources – stubbornly based on satanic hydrocarbons, and of truly stupefying magnitude – is rolling out inertially, with barely a hint of effective obstruction. Tar sands, fracking, and sub-salt deep sea oil deposits are all coming on-stream already, with methane clathrates just up the road. The world's on a burn, and it can't go on (but it carries on).

Financial unsustainability is no less blatant, or bizarrely enduring. Since the beginning of the 20th century, once (classically) liberal Western economies have seen government expenditure rise from under 5% to over 40% of total income, with much of Europe crossing the 50% redline (after which nothing remotely familiar as 'capitalism' any longer exists). Public debt levels are tracing geometrically elegant exponential curves, chronic dependency is replacing productive social participation, and generalized sovereign insolvency is now a matter of simple and obvious fact. The only thing

clearer than the inevitability of systemic bankruptcy is the political impossibility of doing anything about it, so things carry on, even though they really have to stop. Unintelligible multi-trillion magnitudes of impending calamity stack up, and up, and up in a near future which never quite arrives.

The frozen limbo-state of durable unsustainability is the new normal (which will last until it doesn't). The pop cultural expression is zombie apocalypse, a shambling, undying state of endlessly prolonged decomposition. When translated into economic analysis, the result is epitomized by Tyler Cowen's influential e-book *The Great Stagnation: How America Ate All the Low-Hanging Fruit of Modern History, Got Sick, and Will (Eventually) Feel Better*. (Yes, *Urban Future* is arriving incredibly late to this party, but in a frozen limbo that doesn't matter.)

In a nutshell, Cowen argues that the exhaustion of three principal sources of 'low-hanging fruit' has brought the secular trend of American growth to a state of stagnation that high-frequency business cycles have partially obscured. With the consumption of America's frontier surplus (free land), educational surplus (smart but educationally-unserved population), and — most importantly — technological surplus, from major breakthroughs opening broad avenues of commercial exploitation, growth rates have shriveled to a level that the country's people are psychologically unprepared to accept as normal.

It fell to Cowen's GMU colleague Peter Boettke to clearly make the pro-market case for stagnationism that Cowen seems to think he had already persuasively articulated. In an overtly supportive post, Boettke transforms Cowens' rather elusive argument into a far more pointed anti-government polemic — the discovery of a new depressive equilibrium, in which relentless socio-political degeneration absorbs and neutralizes a decaying trend of techno-economic advance.

> *An accumulated economic surplus was created by the age of innovation, which the age of economic illusion spent down. We are now coming to the end of that accumulated surplus and thus the full weight of government inefficiencies are starting to be felt throughout the economy.*

Perhaps surprisingly, the general tenor of response on the libertarian right was quite different. Rather than celebrating Cowen's exposure of the statist ruin visited upon Western societies, most of this commentary concentrated upon the stagnationist thesis itself, attacking it from a variety of interlocking angles. David R. Henderson's Cato review makes stinging economic arguments against Cowen's claims about land and education. Russ Roberts (at Cafe Hayek) shows how Cowen's dismal story about stagnant median family incomes draws upon data distorted by historical

changes in US family structure and residential patterns. The most common line of resistance, however, instantiated by Don Boudreaux, John Hagel, Steven Horwitz, Bryan Caplan, and Ronald Bailey, among others, rallies in defense of actually existing consumer capitalism. Bailey, for example, notes:

> *In 1970, a 23-inch color television cost $368 ($2,000 in 2009 dollars). Today, a 22-inch Phillips LCD flat panel TV costs $190. In 1978, an 8-track tape player cost $169 ($550). Today, an iPod Touch with 8 gigabytes of memory costs $204. In 1970, an Olympia adding machine cost $80 ($437 in 2009 dollars). Today, a Canon office calculator costs $6.65. In 1978, a Radio Shack TRS80 computer with 16K of RAM cost $399 ($1300 in 2009 dollars). Today, Costco will sell you an ASUS netbook with 1 gigabyte of RAM for $270. The average car cost $3,900 in 1970 ($21,300 in today's dollars). A mid-sized 2011 vehicle would cost somewhere around $20,000 and last twice as long.*
>
> *Another very crude way to look at it is that Americans are four times richer in terms of refrigerators, 10 times richer in terms of TVs, 2.5 times richer when it comes to listening to music on the go, 3,000 times richer in calculators, about 400,000 times richer when it comes to price per kilobyte of computer memory, and two times richer in cars. Cowen*

> *dismisses this kind of progress as mere "quality improvements," but in this case quality becomes it own kind of quantity when it comes to improved living standards.*

What seems pretty clear from most of this (and already in Cowen's account) is that nothing much has been moving forward in the world's 'developed' economies for four decades except for the information technology revolution and its Moore's Law dynamics. Abstract out the microprocessor, and even the most determinedly optimistic vision of recent trends is gutted to the point of expiration. Without computers, there's nothing happening, or at least nothing good.

[… still crawling …]

November 11, 2011

Suspended Animation (Part 2)

Whatever happened to hell?

> "It can't carry on like this … but how many weeks have we said that for?"
> — Justin Urquhart Stewart, director at Seven Investment

Management (via James Pethokoukis here)

To make a protracted topic out of this phenomenon is to offer a hostage to fortune. Everything could go over the cliff tomorrow. Perhaps it already has (and we're just waiting, like Wile E. Coyote, for the consummating splatter).

Greens have been dealing with exactly this question, for a while. After Paul Ehrlich had his credibility torched by Julian Simon, in the most intellectually consequential wager in history, he responded in frustration: "The bet doesn't mean anything. Julian Simon is like the guy who jumps off the Empire State Building and says how great things are going so far as he passes the 10th floor."

If environmental catastrophe is structured like this, according to a pattern of durable unsustainability, or disconcerting postponement, there is no obvious theory to account for the fact. With economics, things are different, to such an extent that the entire political economy of the world, along with the overwhelming preponderance of professionalized economic 'science', has been geared over the course of a little under a century to crisis postponement as a dominant objective. If the New World Order follows a master plan, this is it.

For ideological purists on the free-market right, *laissez-faire* capitalism is the 'unknown ideal' (although early 20th century Shanghai approached it, as did its student, Hong Kong, in later

decades), but it requires no purism whatsoever to acknowledge that the Great Depression effectively buried it as an organizing principle of the world, and that the system which replaced it found political and intellectual expression in the ideas of John Maynard Keynes. Commercial self-organization, which built industrial capitalism before anyone had even the sketchiest understanding of what was happening, gave way to the technocracy of macroeconomics, guided by the radically original belief that governments had a responsibility to manage the oscillations of economic fortune.

In the words of Peter Thiel (drawn straight from the free-market id):

> *… the trend has been going the wrong way for a long time. To return to finance, the last economic depression in the United States that did not result in massive government intervention was the collapse of 1920–21. It was sharp but short, and entailed the sort of Schumpeterian "creative destruction" that could lead to a real boom. The decade that followed — the roaring 1920s — was so strong that historians have forgotten the depression that started it. The 1920s were the last decade in American history during which one could be genuinely optimistic about politics. Since 1920, the vast increase in welfare beneficiaries and the extension of the franchise to women — two constituencies that are*

> *notoriously tough for libertarians — have rendered the notion of "capitalist democracy" into an oxymoron.*

As Cato's Daniel J. Mitchell puts it, more narrowly:

> *A vibrant and dynamic economy requires the possibility of big profits, but also the discipline of failure. Indeed, capitalism without bankruptcy is like religion without hell.*

Because hell's a hard sell, political and economic rationality have been heading in different directions for 80 years. Even the tropical latitudes of purgatory have proven to be socially combustible, and popularly sensitized politics – which need not be formally 'democratic' – tend (strongly) to flee Molotov cocktails in the direction of macroeconomic management. The crucial Keynesian maxim, "In the long run we are all dead," is especially pertinent to regimes. Who's going to regenerate deep economic recovery, if the route to it lies through gulfs of fire and brimstone that are fundamentally incompatible with political survival? History, redundantly, provides the obvious answer: nobody is.

The accursed path not taken, across the infernal abyss, has become so neglected and overgrown with weeds that it is rarely noticed, but it is still graphically marked by the advice that Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon gave to Herbert Hoover as the way to navigate the Great Depression (advice that was, of course,

dismissed):

> *… liquidate labor, liquidate stocks, liquidate farmers, liquidate real estate… it will purge the rottenness out of the system. High costs of living and high living will come down. People will work harder, live a more moral life. Values will be adjusted, and enterprising people will pick up from less competent people.*

In recalling this recommendation, as an *unacceptable option*, Hoover commemorates the precise moment that capitalism ceased to exist as a politically credible social possibility. The alternative – which has many names, although 'corporatism' will do – was defined by its systematic refusal of the 'liquidationist' path. Coming out stronger on the other side meant nothing, because the passage would probably kill us – it would certainly destroy our political careers. In any case, it was a long run solution to a short term problem, scheduled by volatile popular irritability and election cycles, and in the long run we are all dead. Better, by far, to use 'macroeconomic policy' (monetary mind-control) to artificially prolong unsustainable economic euphoria – or even its jaded, hung-over simulation – than to plunge into a catastrophe that might imaginably have been delayed.

It doesn't take a Schumpeterian fanatic to suspect that such

‘creative destruction (but without the destruction)’ is unlikely to provide a sustainable recipe for economic vitality. When evaluated realistically, it is a formula that programs a trend to perpetual stagnation. Stagnation as a choice.

Because money serves as a general equivalent, and thus as a neutral, non-specific, purely quantitative medium of exchange, it is very supportive of certain highly-consequential economic illusions, of a kind that macroeconomics has been especially prone to. It can easily seem as if ‘the economy’ consists essentially of undifferentiated, quantitative aggregates, such as ‘demand’, ‘gross domestic product’, ‘money supply’, ‘land’, ‘labor’, and ‘capital’. In fact, none of these things exist, except as high-level abstractions, precipitated by the monetary function of general exchangeability.

An understanding of Schumpeterian creative destruction requires, as a preliminary, the recognition that capital is heterogeneous. When expressed in a monetary form, it can appear as a homogeneous quantity, susceptible to simple accumulation, but in its productive social reality it consists of technological apparatus – tools, machines, infrastructures, and installations – representing irretrievable investments, of qualitatively distinctive kinds. The monetary equivalent of such industrial capital is derived from the market values attributed its various components, and these are extremely dynamic, virtual, and speculative. Since the value retrievable from liquidation (and ultimately from scrap) is generally

a small fraction, or lower bound, of capital asset value, the 'capital stock' is estimated with reference to its productive usage, rather than its intrinsic worth. Schumpeter was careful to break this down into two very different aspects.

Firstly, and most straightforwardly, industrial capital is a resource that depreciates at a regular and broadly predictable rate as a function of output. It is consumed in the process of production, like any other material input, but at a slower rate. Creative destruction, however, refers to a second, far more drastic type of capital depreciation, resulting from technological obsolescence. In this case, capital stock is 'destroyed' – suddenly and unpredictably – by an innovation, taking place elsewhere in the economy, which renders its anticipated use unprofitable. In this way, large 'quantities' of 'accumulated' capital can be depreciated overnight to scrap values, and the investments they represent are annihilated. The hallucination of homogeneous capital is instantaneously vaporized, as painstakingly built fortunes are written down to nothing.

Several points suggest themselves:

1. The violence of creative destruction is directly proportional to its fecundity. The greater, deeper, and more far-reaching the innovation, the more colossal is the resulting capital destruction. At the extreme, profound technological revolutions lay waste not only to specific machines and skills, but to entire infrastructures, industries, occupational categories, and financial systems.

2. The cultural implication of creative destruction far exceeds issues of 'moral hazard' and 'time preference'. The victims of industrial change waves – whether businesses, workers, or financiers – are not being punished by the market for imprudence, slackness, or short-sightedness. They are ruined by pure hazard, as the reciprocal of the absolutely unanticipated nature of technological invention (occurring elsewhere). Neither the creation, nor the destruction, is remotely 'fair' – or ever could be. (Although Dawinian 'virtue' lies in flexible adaptability — Hong Kong always does OK.)

3. Massive capital destruction expresses technological revolution. Macroeconomic analysis (measuring homogeneous aggregates) will always miss the most significant episodes in industrial evolution, since these do not register primarily as growth, but rather the opposite. Hell is a hothouse.

4. A policy environment designed to preserve macroeconomic aggregates (e.g. 'wealth' or 'employment') necessarily opposes itself to the basic historical process of industrial revolution, because destruction of the existing economy is strictly indistinguishable from industrial renewal. For that old stuff to be worth anything (beyond scrap) we have to keep using it, which means that we're not switching over. To cross the gulf, we have to enter the gulf. (Like most things in this universe: harsh but true.)

5. Real historical advance is now politically unacceptable. Either politics wins (eternal stagnation) or history does (political collapse).

Interesting times (or not).

The world couldn't take the heat, so it got out of the kitchen. There's cold porridge for dinner, and it's going to be cold porridge for breakfast. Eventually the porridge will run out, but that could take a while …

… and here's Ben Bernanke on topic: "I'm not a believer in the Old Testament theory of business cycles. I think that if we can help people, we need to help people." (via Mike Krieger at ZH)

Cold porridge politics forever. Yum!

November 18, 2011

Suspended Animation (Part 3)

The dead hand of the state

> *I wish I was saying it's going to happen soon… this is the longest running crisis in which people have been giving false dates, people turning up for summits saying it has to be resolved, nothing happens and people go away and the sky doesn't fall in… sooner or later the sky will fall in, I'm just not clever enough to know when it's going to be.*
> — Anthony Fry, UK Chairman of Espirito Santo Investment

Bank (to CNBC)

Europe will adopt the American solution. The ECB will not allow large banks to default. It will inflate to buy the bad assets or else buy the bonds of the governments, so they can make payments. Then the bankers will put this money into excess reserves. New lending to businesses will cease. The West will go into permanent recession or no-growth stasis. The governments will absorb an ever-larger percentage of the region's capital: bond sales. Private firms will not be able to borrow at low rates. Capital development will crease.
— Gary North (here)

The new millennium is teaching us vastly more about zombies than anybody could have anticipated. Long gone are the virile, predatory vampires that once populated horror stories about capitalism, sucking out the vital essence of the proletariat in gothic fortresses of 'dead labor'. Instead, shambling worm-eaten wrecks mill about aimlessly, whilst augmenting their numbers in obscure cannibalistic circuits that defy rational comprehension and which are, in any case, too hideous to steadily contemplate. Fiends have degenerated into ghouls, who do not hunt and feed to strengthen themselves, but only to carry on, prolonging their putrescent decrepitude.

A 2002 Guardian story about "Japan's zombie economy"

prefigures a number of later, and more general, revelations. In particular, it identifies the spreading zombie apocalypse with the slow-motion collapse of Keynesianism, as 'stimulative' monetary and fiscal policies (zero interest rates combined with massive government deficit spending) lose their magical powers of revitalization, and instead merely perpetuate an interminable state of undeath. Hyper-stimulation is required just to hang on to the flatline.

Of course, being the Guardian, the solution is obvious: "what the economy needs now is a good dose of inflation." For undead Keynesians, there's no malaise too deep for an invigorating wave of currency destruction to solve. This is where the zombie metabolism really gets interesting. By the end of the decade, America had gone full zombie itself, and begun to realize that this wasn't just some weird Japanese thing it didn't understand, but an altogether more general and radically mysterious phenomenon. Ben Bernanke's Federal Reserve pushed US interest rates to the floor (ZIRP) and began to incontinently monetize public debt (QE) whilst nationalizing private debt (TARP), using every available policy instrument to direct the economy in an inflationary direction, at maximum velocity. Nothing much happened. Zombies don't do fever.

At this point, the questions come flooding in. For instance: why is anybody still buying Japanese or American government bonds? Isn't it obvious that this paper represents nothing except a slice of

unredeemable debt, promising an insulting return, 'guaranteed' by a structurally insolvent entity, and associated with policies more-or-less explicitly oriented towards deliberate currency destruction? What are people thinking? To answer that, it's necessary to venture a little deeper into the zombie world.

The idea of the US Dollar (or Japanese Yen) as a 'safe haven' might sound like a joke, and you've probably heard it before:

Joe Dollar and Jacques Euro are camping in the woods, when they suddenly hear the terrifying snuffles of a famished carnivore, getting closer. Joe begins hastily pulling on his running shoes. "What are you doing?" asks Jacques. "You can't out-run a bear market."

"I don't need to outrun the market," Joe replies. "I just need to outrun you."

At Asia Times Online, Martin Hutchinson envisages a financial crisis endgame that "eliminat[es] the government debt markets that have formed the centerpiece of the last three centuries," returning the world to the market-based money and free banking regime of 1693, before the creation of the Bank of England. Paradoxically, however, the prospect of collapse raises the financial potency of the state to an unprecedented level, as the 'safety' it promises disconnects from questions of economic competence and reverts to something far more atavistic and Hobbesian. Once everything starts to buckle, credibility attaches to the biggest, meanest, and most ruthless provider of mafia-style 'protection'. Relativistic (zero- or

negative-sum) power politics takes center stage.

A pedestrian but informative financial report from Bloomberg sets it out clearly:

> *Jim Chanos, founder of the Kynikos Associates Ltd. hedge fund, said that while the chances of a recession may be increasing, the U.S. economy is the "best house in a bad neighborhood"*

The US Dollar might be nothing more than the "best looking horse in the glue factory," but once the financial logic of zombie apocalypse takes over, the implications can be far-reaching. Bloomberg continues:

> *Ten-year Treasuries erased losses after the U.S. sold $29 billion of seven-year securities at a record low yield of 1.415 percent, wrapping up $99 billion of note sales this week. Ten-year yields fell four basis points to 1.88 percent after climbing as much as four points earlier. The rate is up from a record low of 1.67 percent on Sept. 23.*
>
> *U.S. Treasuries maturing in seven to 10-years have returned 14 percent this year, outperforming a 9.3 percent return for the broader Treasury market, according to Bank of America Merrill Lynch indexes, as of yesterday [Nov. 23].*

It's worth taking a moment to digest these numbers. Nobody expects average US inflation over the next seven years to come in under 1.415% p.a., or under 1.88% over the next ten, so the yield is sheer racketeering. Yet this blatant assault on the lower colon of savers has been compatible with a one-year return of 14% (!) — they're begging for it. Seriously, who cares if Bernanke is lighting up a fat Cuban with a large bill lifted straight out of their pocket? It just makes him look *badder*, and that's what they're paying for. Gold sounds good in theory, but it doesn't come with its own attached gangster organization, so hanging onto it through the zombie interlude could be difficult. It's safer, by far, to invest in the alpha state.

Because this Hobbesian zombinomics is political and relativisitic, there are epsilon states at the other end of the trade, as well as a beta state caught in the middle. Europe isn't a state at all, of course, which is how the (interminable) final phase of zombinomics got started. Before *it changed*, however, the EU conjuring act seemed to be going pretty well. Every Eurozone member state issuing government debt in the common currency paid yields that were broadly harmonized, as if Europe was a financially sovereign entity, standing united behind its paper. The realization that economic sovereignty remained national, even after the alienation of monetary sovereignty to the European Central Bank, came as something of a shock, and bond spreads gaped accordingly.

The hallucination of 'Europe' as a united, honorary alpha state,

rapidly degenerated to reality, recoding government bonds as zombie apocalypse security scrip. Suddenly, Greek bonds stopped having anything much to do with the ECB, and started to mumble promises in Greek – ultimately, that the Greek state would do whatever it took to secure redemption, whilst mobilizing its Olympian powers to maintain social discipline if necessary. A flight for the exits immediately ensued. Ditto, with variations of speed and intensity, for all the epsilons (= PIIGS).

Where to flee? That's the zombinomic question *par excellence* (searching for the best looking horse in the glue factory). First choice, for the keenest Hobbes readers, was to head straight to Mr. Big, a.k.a. Benny the Yank, wait politely whilst he finished smoking a mirved nuke, and then beg for protection (that's your 14% one year jump in the value of a 10-year US Treasury bond, right there). The second choice — more appealing to old-fashioned types who thought economics still counted for something – was to look for comparative financial responsibility closer to home.

Briefly, this route led to genuine quality, but zombinomics quickly resumed its grip:

> *Switzerland sparked fears of a new currency war on Tuesday [Sept. 6] after it pegged the Swiss franc against the euro in an attempt to protect its economy from the European debt crisis.*

> *The Swiss National Bank in effect devalued the franc, pledging to buy "unlimited quantities" of foreign currencies to force down its value. The SNB warned that it would no longer allow one Swiss franc to be worth more than €0.83 – equivalent to SFr1.20 to the euro – having watched the two currencies move closer to parity as Switzerland became a "safe haven" from the ravages of the eurozone crisis.*

… which brings us to Germany, and the latest chapter in the zombie saga — comic or tragic, and probably both, ironic to the point of absurdity in any case. Ruined, shrunken, divided, and traumatized by guilt, post-war Germany sought above all to bury its nationalistic aspirations in Europe. What became the EU was for Germany – as Algeria was for the French foreign *legionnaires* – a place in which to forget. Now the bond 'market', in its increasingly desperate search for a big, tough, disciplinary state (a global beta will do fine), is determined to dig the Teutonic Leviathan from its grave.

With twin memories of Weimar hyper-inflation and statist hyper-assertion still vivid, Germany is stubbornly holding out against the full-zombie option of (monetary and fiscal) financial debauchery counter-balanced by Hobbesian security politics. This reluctance to throw itself into the spirit of the age has, naturally enough, exposed it to relentless international vilification, and the pressure will only increase. It could all get unpleasantly interesting.

November 25, 2011

Suspended Animation (Part 4)

Playing for time

By the beginning of the second decade of the new millennium, the world had begun to adapt itself to a problem that had tortured it in the 1930s, and deformed it subsequently — that of *sub-optimal equilibrium*. The practical significance of this idea is difficult to exaggerate.

As a rigorous economist, Henry Hazlitt was theoretically entitled – and even compelled – to savagely deride the Keynesian model of 'low-employment equilibrium', and to painstakingly explain that it did not describe an equilibrium of any kind (in economic terms). Yet such attacks, like those of the Austrians more generally, have been of slight consequence, since Keynes was not in any strongly defensible sense an economist, but rather a *political economist*, in both of the obvious ways this expression can be understood. His bad equilibrium did not reflect the operation of market forces, but rather, the workings of the market under a specific conception of politically realistic circumstances, and the 'analysis' of the *General Theory* was less a technically rigorous description of events than a political

prescription for action, keenly attentive to the opportunities and constraints affecting its application, or transition into policy.

Keynes defined the political spirit of the second half of the 20th century, first in the West, and later more widely, by normalizing the pre-eminence of the state in economic affairs, and by subordinating the idea of economic self-correction to political considerations. The role of the new political economy, now technocratically mainstreamed as *economic policy*, was to route around labor markets, which could never be expected to work efficiently, since downside corrections were judged politically unacceptable. Pure economics was ended, or at least utterly marginalized, by the recognition that labor could opt out of the game, kick over the table, and refuse to play the commodity. Market-clearing labor pricing became an abstract (and, for Keynesians, risible) conception, oblivious to the realities of popular democratic politics, and – *in extremis* – the potential for Marxian revolution.

Hence the consensus-building sympathy for the Keynesian approach on the establishment right, where it was interpreted as a bulwark against Marxist temptations, and also the deep antipathy it elicited on the anti-establishment right, where it was (no less realistically) understood as a pre-emptive concession to socialism. On the left, a comparable schism was evident, between those who embraced it as a curtailment of capitalism, and those who denounced it as an ersatz socialism, designed for conservative convenience. The

Keynesian 'middle' has been the decisive political reality of the 20th century, and its multiple ideological meanings still organize every major axis of socio-economic controversy.

When labor markets are locked on the downside – through macroeconomic recognition and political petrification of their 'stickiness' – some kind of socio-economic ratchet mechanism is automatically produced. To an extent, capital can flee into informalization (for instance illegal immigrant labor), or international labor arbitrage, intensifying the trend to out-sourcing and globalization. More central, however, are the twin macro-tendencies Keynes focused upon: towards fiscal and monetary compensations, based on demand management and the exploitation of 'money illusion' (or attachment to *nominal* income). Fiscal stimulus can be undertaken in an attempt to elevate demand, until it reaches a point of artificial equilibrium commensurate with labor price levels (thus clearing unemployment). Alternatively, or in concert, money supply can be expanded – and currency degraded – to facilitate real wage decreases despite nominal stickiness.

Essentially, that's it. There's no other ammo in the macroeconomic arsenal. This is remarkable given the fact that both fiscal and monetary adjustments are mere tricks, and not even sophisticated tricks, but quite straightforward attempts at confidence manipulation that anybody with 'rational expectations' sees through immediately, thus neutralizing them. On the monetary

side this is especially obvious — and well-attested historically. Once inflationary expectations have become entrenched, they become the staple topic of wage negotiations, as was seen in the 1970s. There is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that workers are indifferent to inflationary wage depreciation. 'Money illusion' – insofar as it exists at all – is basically a one-off scam, harvested in the brief period when a long-established reputation for responsible currency management is thrown in the trash. Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice isn't going to happen. Basing economic policy on this is the cheapest kind of street hustle (and few would any longer admit to trying it in public).

Stimulus isn't much better. Real demand is ultimately exchange, and thus derivative from supply. Nobody can (economically) demand anything, without having something to offer in return – that's *Say's Law*, and it's theoretically impregnable, because it's elementary common sense. The only way to steer around it is conjuring, by extracting demand from one part of the economy invisibly, and re-inserting it conspicuously somewhere else. This kind of magic can get quite Byzantine, so it tends to reach exhaustion more slowly than monetary abuse, but its foundations in sustainable economic reality are no more secure. Once taxpayers acknowledge government debts as liabilities (future tax payments) that have already been virtually deducted from their spending power, the game is over. Since a plausible model for (expansive) fiscal policy exhaustion is sovereign

debt crisis, it is not unreasonable to begin drawing the curtains already.

Given the exponential trend of social history, most of what has ever happened has taken place since the Great Depression began, and during this time the world has inhabited — more or less consciously — a deliberately constructed system of illusion, or confidence trick. Whether analyzed from the left or the right, the most striking feature of this situation has been inadequately apprehended, or even interrogated: how has it persisted? How can something that is transparently [insert epithet] unworkable last for over 80 [insert triple epithet] years?

Eighty years is a pretty good human life-span. Someone could easily expend their life within the Keynesian dream-palace, literally living a lie, with the implication that whatever importance 'reality' might have in theory, it need have almost nothing to do with us. We can miss it completely, caught up in a magic show that exceeds our longevity, half-hypnotized by illusions that no one really believes in, but which suffice to put things off, and off, and off, and … *in the long run we are all dead*. Who cares about a truth that never arrives? A magic trick that lasts your whole life is your life. Scarcely anybody alive today has known anything else.

And it's all going to be over real soon … honestly …

December 2, 2011

Suspended Animation (Part 5)

Engines of Devastation

Does Postmodernism still seem cool to anybody? — Probably not. Having sold whatever simulacrum of a soul it might have had to the fickle gods of fashion, it has learnt more about the reign of Chronos than it might have expected to – the kids get devoured, and it's on to something new. What was accepted for no good reason gets discarded for no good reason. In political science it's called democracy (but that's another discussion).

Clearly, there's something profoundly just about the disappearance of postmodernism into the trashcan of random difference (what's 'in' has to be new, preferably meaninglessly so). It's even 'poetically just', whatever that means. But it also destroys information. Although Postmodernism was certainly a fad, it was also a *zeitgeist*, or spirit of the times. It meant something, despite its own best efforts, at least as a symptom. The disappearance of reality that it announced was itself real, as was the realm of simulation that replaced it. At least in its death, it might have amounted to something.

Consider its greatest mystagogue, Jacques Derrida, and his once widely celebrated 'concept' of differance (yes, with an 'a'), a term within a series of magical words that mark the undecidable,

ungraspable, unpresentable, and ultimately inconceivable ontological non-stuff that supplants real events, through an endless succession of *displacements and postponements*. We can't really say anything about it, so we have to talk about it endlessly, and entire university departments are required to do so. It's ridiculous (and so it's over). But it's also, quite exactly, the globally hegemonic culture of Keynesianized, macroeconomic, programmatic stagnationism, and that isn't over yet, although its morbidity is already highly conspicuous. Unlike faddish academic Postmodernism, its death is going to be really interesting.

Long before the Derridoids got started, Keynes had taught governments that differance was something they could do. Procrastination – the strategic suspension of economic reality through a popularly ungraspable series of *displacements and postponements* – quickly came to define the art of politics. Why suffer today what can be put off until tomorrow, or suffer yourself something that could be somebody else's problem? Postpone! Displace! *In the long run we are all dead*. Reality is for losers.

Differance as it really works is a lot cruder than its reflection in Postmodern philosophy (and what could be philosophically cruder than an appeal to the notion of 'reflection'?). For instance, it is fished out of the ontological *abgrund* and processed by specific public policy mechanisms, sustained by concrete institutions in ways that are to a considerable extent economically measurable, within elastic

but most certainly finite geographical and historical limits. Crudest of all, and ultimately decisive, is the circumscription of derealization, by the real, and the return of the apocalyptic, no longer as a phantasmatic avatar of the 'metaphysics of presence' (or false promise of a real event), but as an impending real event, and one whose process of historical construction is in large measure intelligible. Real differance didn't 'deconstruct' the apocalypse, *it built it*. It's not even that difficult to see how.

At EconLog, David Henderson has posted his notes from John H. Cochrane's December 3 talk at Stanford University's Hoover Institution conference on 'Restoring Robust Economic Growth in America'. There's no mention of differance, but there doesn't need to be.

> *For nearly 100 years we have tried to stop runs with government guarantees — deposit insurance, generous lender of last resort, and bailouts. That patch leads to huge moral hazard. Giving a banker a bailout guarantee is like giving a teenager keys to the car and a case of whisky. So, we appoint regulators who are supposed to stop the banks from taking risks, in a hopeless arms race against smart MBAs, lawyers and lobbyists who try to get around the regulation, and though we allow — nay, we encourage and subsidize — expansion of run-prone assets.*

In Dodd-Frank, the US simply doubled down our bets on this regime. …

Bailouts delay a painful economic event (postponement) whilst transferring financial liability (displacement). Risk is restored to virtuality, as disaster is turned back into a threat, but it isn't the same threat. By any remotely sane method of accountancy, it's now worse. Significant virtual deterioration is substituted for actual discomfort. That's the cost of derealization.

How do things get worse, exactly? — In plenty of ways. Start with 'moral hazard', which is a polite way of saying 'insanity'. Actions are decoupled from their consequences, removing the disincentive for craziness. The result, utterly predictably, is more craziness. In fact, anything that systematically enhances moral hazard is simply manufacturing craziness. It's dumping LSD in the water supply, although actually probably worse. So bailouts drive us insane and destroy civilization (no one really disputes that, although they may try to avoid the topic).

Oh, but there's more! — Much more, because all these displacements don't just move things around, they move them *up*. Risk is centralized, concentrated, systematized, politicized – and that's in the (entirely unrealistic) best case, when it isn't also expanded and degraded by the corruption and inefficiency of weakly- or cynically-incentivized public institutions. This is trickle

up – really *flood* up – economics, in which everything bad that ever happens to anybody gets stripped of any residual sanity (or realistic estimation of consequences), pooled, re-coded, complicated by compensatory regulation, and shifted to ever more ethereal heights of populist democratic irresponsibility, where the only thing that matters is what people want to hear, and that really isn't ever going to be the truth.

"Mess up enough, and you probably suffer or die" – that's the truth. It's a message that doesn't translate into the language of Keynesian kick-the-can politics, which is folk Postmodernism. The nearest we get, as the jaws begin to close on the bail-out bucket chain, is "We're going to need a bigger boat." After innumerable episodes of that, we're all huddled together on the Titanic, and things are kinda, sorta, looking OK. At least the band's still playing …

When abstracted from its squalid psychosis, the pattern is mathematically quite neat. It's called the Martingale system, better known to Americans as 'double or nothing' (and to Brits as 'double or quits'). Cochrane already touched upon it ("the US simply doubled down our bets"). Wager on red, and it comes up black. No problem, just double the bet and repeat. You can't lose. (If you like this logic, Paul Krugman has an economic recovery to sell you.)

What appears as disaster postponed is, in virtual reality, disaster expanded. The Wikipedia entry on the Martingale system helpfully connects it to the Taleb Distribution, otherwise known as scrounging

pennies in front of a steam roller. The persistence of small gains makes this business model seem like a sure thing — until it doesn't.

Nassim Nicholas Taleb and Mark Blyth expand on the idea in Foreign Affairs, with application to various aspects of the current (or impending) crisis. Asking why "surprise [is] the permanent condition of the U.S. political and economic elite" they trace the problem to "the artificial suppression of volatility — the ups and downs of life — in the name of stability."

> *Complex systems that have artificially suppressed volatility tend to become extremely fragile, while at the same time exhibiting no visible risks. In fact, they tend to be too calm and exhibit minimal variability as silent risks accumulate beneath the surface. Although the stated intention of political leaders and economic policymakers is to stabilize the system by inhibiting fluctuations, the result tends to be the opposite. These artificially constrained systems become prone to "Black Swans" — that is, they become extremely vulnerable to large-scale events that lie far from the statistical norm and were largely unpredictable to a given set of observers.*

Discussing this article at PJMedia, Richard Fernandez glosses and sharpens its conclusion:

> *Part of the problem is the consequence of [the elites'] own damping. By attempting to centrally manage systems according to some predetermined scheme they actually store up volatility rather than dispersing it. By kicking the can down the road they eventually condemn themselves to bumping into a giant pile of cans when they run out of road. … But the elites cannot admit to surprise; nor can they admit to bad things starting on their watch. Therefore they keep sweeping things under the carpet until, as in some horror movie, it spawns a zombie. To make systems robust, says Taleb, you've got to admit that you can make mistakes and pay the price. You will have to in the end anyway.*

We aren't in Postmodernism anymore, Toto. We're nearer to this:

> *The wavelike movement affecting the economic system, the recurrence of periods of boom which are followed by periods of depression, is the unavoidable outcome of the attempts, repeated again and again, to lower the gross market rate of interest by means of credit expansion. There is no means of avoiding the final collapse of a boom brought about by credit expansion. The alternative is only whether the crisis should come sooner as the result of a voluntary abandonment of further credit expansion, or later as a final and total*

> *catastrophe of the currency system involved.* (Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*)

Or even this:

> *Great is Bankruptcy: the great bottomless gulf into which all Falsehoods, public and private, do sink, disappearing; whither, from the first origin of them, they were all doomed. For Nature is true and not a lie. No lie you can speak or act but it will come, after longer or shorter circulation, like a Bill drawn on Nature's Reality, and be presented there for payment,- -with the answer, No effects. Pity only that it often had so long a circulation: that the original forger were so seldom he who bore the final smart of it! Lies, and the burden of evil they bring, are passed on; shifted from back to back, and from rank to rank; and so land ultimately on the dumb lowest rank, who with spade and mattock, with sore heart and empty wallet, daily come in contact with reality, and can pass the cheat no further.*
>
> *Observe nevertheless how, by a just compensating law, if the lie with its burden (in this confused whirlpool of Society) sinks and is shifted ever downwards, then in return the distress of it rises ever upwards and upwards. Whereby, after the long pining and demi-starvation of those Twenty Millions,*

a Duke de Coigny and his Majesty come also to have their 'real quarrel.' Such is the law of just Nature; bringing, though at long intervals, and were it only by Bankruptcy, matters round again to the mark.

But with a Fortunatus' Purse in his pocket, through what length of time might not almost any Falsehood last! Your Society, your Household, practical or spiritual Arrangement, is untrue, unjust, offensive to the eye of God and man. Nevertheless its hearth is warm, its larder well replenished: the innumerable Swiss of Heaven, with a kind of Natural loyalty, gather round it; will prove, by pamphleteering, musketeering, that it is a truth; or if not an unmixed (unearthly, impossible) Truth, then better, a wholesomely attempered one, (as wind is to the shorn lamb), and works well. Changed outlook, however, when purse and larder grow empty! Was your Arrangement so true, so accordant to Nature's ways, then how, in the name of wonder, has Nature, with her infinite bounty, come to leave it famishing there? To all men, to all women and all children, it is now indutiable that your Arrangement was false. Honour to Bankruptcy; ever righteous on the great scale, though in detail it is so cruel! Under all Falsehoods it works, unweariedly mining. No Falsehood, did it rise heaven- high and cover the world, but Bankruptcy, one day, will sweep it down, and make us free of

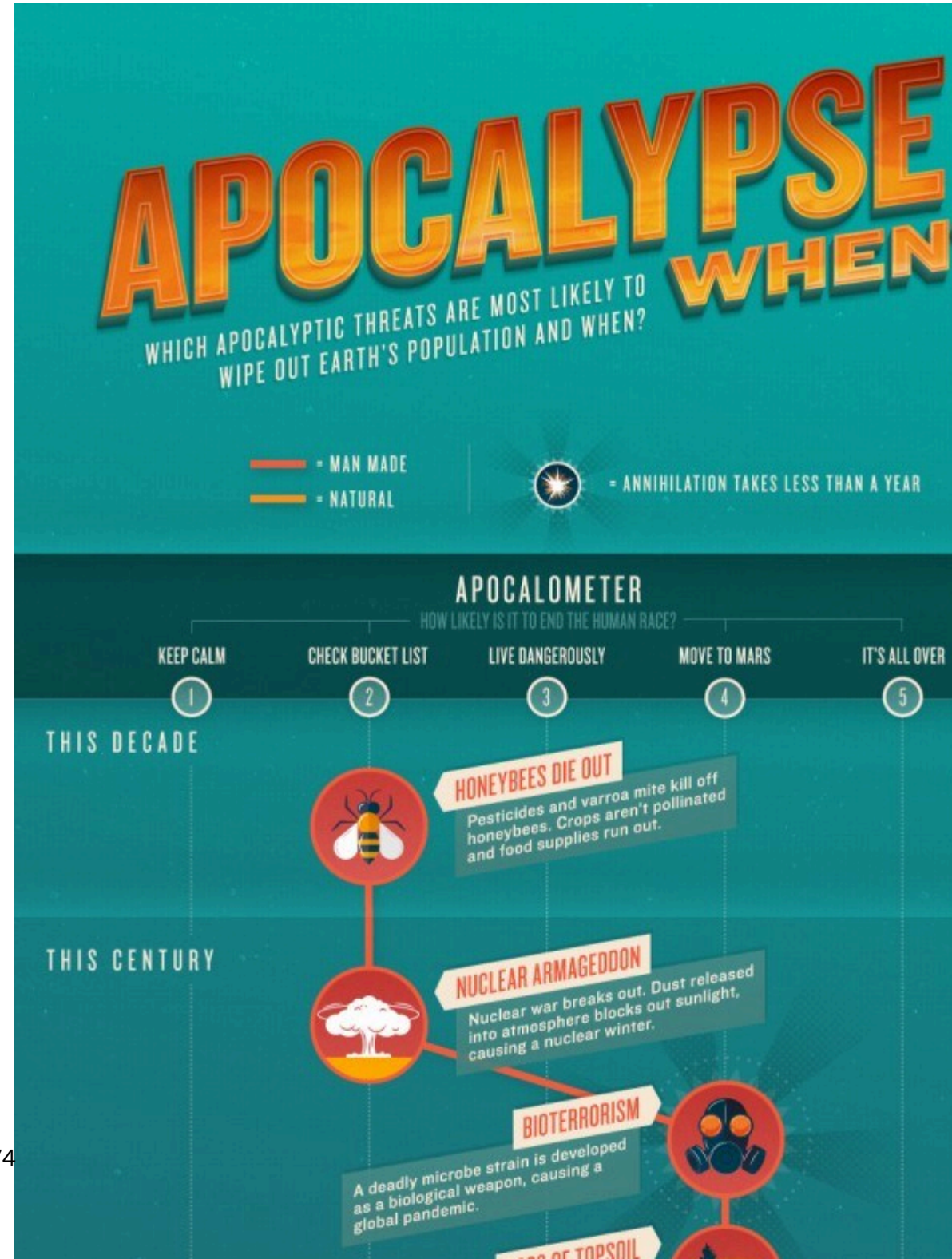
> *it.* (Thomas Carlyle, via Mencius Moldbug, but cited all over the place recently)

Here it comes.

December 9, 2011

Apocalometer

You know you need one:


APOCALYPSE WHEN
WHICH APOCALYPTIC THREATS ARE MOST LIKELY TO WIPE OUT EARTH'S POPULATION AND WHEN?
= MAN MADE
= NATURAL
= ANNIHILATION TAKES LESS THAN A YEAR
APOCALOMETER
HOW LIKELY IS IT TO END THE HUMAN RACE?
KEEP CALM
CHECK BUCKET LIST
LIVE DANGEROUSLY
MOVE TO MARS
IT'S ALL OVER
1
2
3
4
5
THIS DECADE
HONEYBEES DIE OUT
Pesticides and varroa mite kill off honeybees. Crops aren't pollinated and food supplies run out.
THIS CENTURY
NUCLEAR ARMAGEDDON
Nuclear war breaks out. Dust released into atmosphere blocks out sunlight, causing a nuclear winter.
BIOTERRORISM
A deadly microbe strain is developed as a biological weapon, causing a global pandemic.

(Via.)

January 16, 2015

CHAPTER THREE - 2012

Perfect Storm

Weather forecasts for winter 2012 are getting wilder all the time

Even before receiving the Hollywood treatment, the year 2012 was shaping up to be a uniquely potent 'harmonic convergence' of end times enthusiasm. Initially condensed out of the Mayan calendar, the 2012 countdown was soon fizzed into a heady cocktail by speculative interpretations of the Yijing, Aquarian 'New Age' paganism, Ufology, and mushroom mysticism. Once critical mass was achieved, the 2012 became a gathering point for free-floating Jewish, Christian, and Islamic eschatological expectations (coming or return of the Messiah, advent of the Antichrist, Armageddon, Rapture, emergence of the Twelfth Imam from occultation, and others). Just about anything cosmically imaginable is now firmly expected – by somebody – to arrive in late December, 2012.

Secular eschatology also has its dogs in the fight. From reciprocally insulated enclaves of the Internet, apocalyptic strains of Marxism (and libertarianism) joyfully anticipated the imminent

collapse of the global economy, fully confident that its downfall would usher in a post-capitalist social order (or untrammeled free-market societies). The boldest proponents of impending Technological Singularity prepared to welcome superhuman artificial intelligence (when Skynet would already be five years overdue). Radical environmentalists, neo-Malthusians, 'Peak Oil' resource-crunchers, and Clash of Civilizations theorists also contributed substantially to the atmosphere of impending crisis. Irrespective of Anthropogenic Global Warming, everything was heating up fast.

This climate proved highly receptive to the prophetic ideas of William Strauss and Neil Howe, where it found a fresh and evocative self-description. Beginning with their book Generations (1992), Strauss & Howe sought to explain the rhythm of history through the pattern of generations, as they succeeded each other in four-phase cycles. Their cyclic unit or 'saeculum' lasts 80-100 years and consists of generational 'seasons' or 'turnings', each characterized by a distinctive archetype. The Fourth Turning, starting early in the new millennium, is 'winter' and 'crisis'. They remark: "Today's older Americans recognize this as the mood of the Great Depression and World War II, but a similar mood has been present in all the other great gates of our history, from the Civil War and Revolution back into colonial and English history."

Jim Quinn's discussion of the Fourth Turning at Zero Hedge

anticipates the winter storms: “Based upon a review of the foreseeable issues confronting our society it is clear to me that a worse financial implosion will strike before the 2012 presidential election. It may be triggered by a debt ceiling confrontation, the ending of QE2, a panic out of the USD, hyperinflation, a surge in oil prices, or some combination of these possibilities. The ensuing collapse of the stock and bond markets will remove the last vestiges of trust in the existing financial system and the government bureaucrats who have taken taxpayer dollars and funneled them to these Wall Street oligarchs.”

More ominously still, Quinn concludes: “History has taught us that Fourth Turnings end in all out war. The outcome of wars is always in doubt. …It may be 150 years since Walt Whitman foresaw the imminent march of armies, visions of unborn deeds, and a sweeping away of the old order, but history has brought us right back to where we started. Immense challenges and threats await our nation. Will we face them with the courage and fortitude of our forefathers? Or will we shrink from our responsibility to future unborn generations? The drumbeat of history grows louder. Our rendezvous with destiny beckons.”

Stormy enough yet? If not, there’s the harsh weather of Kondratiev winter rolling in too.

Nikolai Kondratiev’s ‘long waves’ fluctuate at roughly twice the frequency of Strauss & Howe saecula (lasting roughly 40-60 years

from ‘spring’ to ‘winter’). Originally discovered through empirical investigation of price movements, Kondratiev waves have stimulated a remarkable range of economic-historical theories. Joseph Schumpeter interpreted the cycle as a process of techno-economic innovation, in which capital was creatively revolutionized and destroyed through depreciation, whilst Hyman Minsky attributed it to a rhythm of financial speculation (in which stability fostered over-confidence, excess, and crisis with cyclic regularity).

The discovery of the ‘long wave’ seemed to coincide with its disappearance – at the hands of macroeconomic management (Keynesian counter-cyclical policy). Unsurprisingly, the crisis of Keynesianism under present conditions of ‘debt saturation’ has re-animated long wave discussion. At his Kondratiev-inspired Tipping Points blog, Gordon T. Long forecasts a savage winter, marked by rapid progression from financial through economic to political crisis, culminating in a (US dollar) ‘currency collapse’ in 2012.

Wrap up warmly.

May 5, 2011

New Year Cheer

There's a lot of ruin in a global madhouse

2012 is a year that arrives pre-branded. It's the last opportunity to end the world on schedule. By the end of December the window for apocalyptic profundity will have closed, and it's back to the hazards of random, meaningless catastrophe.

Perhaps a prophetic consensus will have emerged by the fall, but right now the outlook is foggy at best. Trawling through the Web's most excitable 2012 sites doesn't bring anything very definite into focus. Once discussion advances beyond the fairly solid foundation of the Mayan long count, and the Fourth Age of Creation (lasting from August 11, 3114 BC, to December 21, AD 2012), things spin off into chaos with disconcerting rapidity.

Whether the earth is destined to plunge into a black hole is a matter of (at least limited) controversy, but the fact that just about every imaginable species of prospective calamity or transformation is being sucked into the 2012 prophetic vortex is easily confirmed by anybody with a web browser. Even the basic genre remains unsettled, with expectations veering wildly from celestial collisions, solar flares, and super-volcanoes, to spiritual awakenings, cosmic harmonizations, and countless varieties of Messianic fulfillment. According to the sober forecasters at 2012apocalypse.net: "The

Mayans, Hopis, Egyptians, Kabbalists, Essenes, Qero elders of Peru, Navajo, Cherokee, Apache, Iroquois confederacy, Dogon Tribe, and Aborigines all believe in an ending to this Great 2012 Apocalyptic Cycle." They missed out Mother Shipton, Nostradamus, Terence McKenna, Kalki Bagavan, and Web Bot, yet somehow the *Cracked* crew remain unconvinced.

As an aside, the best line UF has yet seen among the *deniers* (sorry, couldn't resist that), is this deliciously self-undermining specimen from Ian O'Neill: "No one has ever predicted the future, and that isn't about to change."

In an increasingly desegregated cultural landscape, it's not easy to separate out secular history and sensible opinion from the orgiastically gathering End Times festival, and – strangely enough – the world process isn't doing much to oblige. Ritualistic predictions-for-the-year-ahead posts on politics and economics sites are practically indistinguishable from the 2012 Armageddon-is-here prophecies, although the sane side of prognostication is characterized by a greater uniformity of unrelenting bleakness: Comprehensive economic collapse, aggravated by administrative sclerosis, and accompanied by escalating international conflict / social disintegration, amidst the enraged screams of splintering civilizations (and a 'Happy New Year' to you, too.)

Goldbug Darryl Robert Schoon demonstrates some professional hedging, but he doesn't even try to keep impending financial crisis

from spilling out into cosmic immensities:

> *The ending of the Mayan calendar in 2012 is as misunderstood as the interplay between credit and debt and supply and demand; but the coincident collapse of the current economic paradigm and an arcane indicator of change should not be dismissed. … The current great wave [of rising prices] began in 1896. That it could crest and break in 2012 could be a coincidence. Or, it may not.*

Science, technology, creative culture, and enterprise are likely to spring some upside surprises, but the degenerative horror of the world's hegemonic Keynesian political economy – combined with increasingly irresponsible neoconservative democracy-mongering — has ominously synchronized itself with the darkest visions of the 2012 cults. A patently dysfunctional mode of socio-economic organization, based upon fake money, belligerent idiocracy, and electorally-enabled looting scams, is aggressively imposing itself – with an almost incomprehensible absence of self-reflection — upon a world that already has plenty of indigenous pathologies to contend with. The resulting New World Order, entirely predictably, is a lunatic asylum, and even its most functional components (such as Singapore and the Chinese SARs of Hong Kong and Macao) are networked into the collective delirium. When the Euro, Japanese

Yen, and US Dollar collapse (probably in that order) the financial and geopolitical tsunami will wash over everybody. If that doesn't happen in 2012, history has no sense of narrative climax at all.

On the 'bright' side – for all the can-kickers out there – the words of Adam Smith that have defined 2011 continue to resonate. "Young man, there's a lot of ruin in a nation," and even more in a global system. Perhaps the slow-motion disintegration of hegemonic ~~neo-fascism~~ Keynesian social democracy will spin itself out beyond the horizon of the Mayan calendar, which would really give us something to look forward to …

January 6, 2012

End Games

Some time late on the 21st of December last year [2012], Terrestrial Omega Event 2012 streaked past relatively quietly, on a trajectory from the dread realm of ominous premonitions into the cobwebbed vault of defunct absurdities. (The fact that its glancing blow reduced *Urban Future* to a tangled wreck of smoking weakly radioactive debris need be of no concern to anybody except our five regular readers.) Another non-event was thus added to the long chain of ontological omissions that compose the Apocalyptic Tradition. Things continue, on their existing tracks, as common sense had

confidently predicted.

For a world saturated in modernist irony, where even the most passionate beliefs are modulated by forms of mass-media entertainment, no 'Great Disappointment' is any longer possible, such as that afflicting the Millerites of the mid-1840s. A 2012 Reuters/Ipsos survey found that 10% of the world population (and no less than 20% of Chinese) had 'sincerely' expected the End to arrive on December 21st. When it didn't, so what? There's always something else on — or rather, the same thing, in different flavors.

Channel hopping is especially easy because it isn't even necessary to switch genre. The collapse of the Occidental World Order is like Henry Ford's Model T: "You can have it in any color you like, as long as it's black." What you can't do is get it over with. It's too big to fail, even after it has manifestly failed.

The December non-event was not the End, or even the end of the End, but rather the end of the end of the End. Dated Doomsday has been de-activated, leaving an indefinitely dilated Ending without conclusion. Now that the prospect of a finish has finished, finishing becomes interminable. Dates march onwards, without destination, into ever extended horizons of collapse. Apocalypse, stripped of Armageddon, is normalized. It can now demand undistracted recognition as 'the system', the way of the world, feeding upon the spectacle of permanent crisis through the Media-Apocalypse Complex. As (Fukuyama-final) Liberal Democratic politics adjusts to

a chronic state of emergency, it is finally possible to 'get things done', in a time when nothing can be done. Disinhibited insanity delights in its ultimate mania.

Because it's insanity, it can't *really* last, but Apocalypse has outlasted Doomsday, and reality has lost its last signs. For purposes of polite conversation, therefore, it is best to grant the Keynesians / Postmodernists absolute triumph, and to concur that the consequences of irrealism can be indefinitely postponed. When in Bedlam, do as the bedlamites do. Anything else would be pointless irascibility, out of keeping with the spirit of the age. After all (except itself) Apocalypse Forever is the final Western religion.

Progressive Apocalypse, Apocalypse Forever, assumes the death of Doomsday, which provides the occasion for an obituary. For reactionaries of the 'Throne and Altar' variety, mourning will incline towards eschatology, as the moment of definitive judgment is interred. Here in the eschaton-blitzed wreckage of *Urban Future*, however, our remembrance is more concisely arithmetical. We recall dates gone forever, and with them the time inversions that are expressed through countdowns, intensive escalations, and compressions. When the end had a date, time could zero upon it, rather than dissipating into endlessly-extended fogbanks of blighted futurity.

December 21st, 2012, was the last Doomsday date, and thus the day Doomsday died. It might even have been the most popular, but

it was very far from the greatest. Extracted predominantly from the calendar of the Mayans, it neatly concluded the 13th Baktun, but in doing so broke quite arbitrarily from the (already awkward and compromised) numerical organization of the dating system, with its preference for modulus-20 unit hierarchies. Whatever the attractions of exoticism, turning to pop Mayanology for a planetary Apocalypse schedule was also radically arbitrary, given the Abrahamic Hegemony that had structured the world order over the previous half millennium. Still, the Maya had conducted their own preliminary experiment in collapse, enabling Mel Gibson to excavate a striking movie from the ruins, introduced by a quote from Will Durant: “A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself from within.”

When estimated in terms of numerical elegance and metaphysical profundity, the truly great Doomsday was Y2K, the most beautiful weapon in history (despite its failure to detonate). Y2K was automatic and techno-compatible (actually, techno-dependent), chronometrically precise, perfectly counter-Abrahamic, and calendrically creative (re-setting AD 1900 to Year 00). It was staged from the absence of an integrated, malevolent subject, out of simple arithmetic, targeting an exactly scheduled, consummate fulfillment of millennial expectation through sheer coincidence. The world order was to have been softly terminated, by ‘chance’. Nothing that has ever actually happened in history made as much sense as this

(which didn't). The more closely it is examined, the more exquisite it appears. Among other missed Doomsdays, none comes close. But as Y2K said, insidiously: Never Mind.

Even the shoddiest of the Old Doomsdays satisfied intellectual appetites that will now hunger forever. First of all, and most basically, they catered to the transcendental impulse, understood as a search for ultimate or enveloping structures and principles of organization. As a metaphysical event, conclusive Apocalypse promises an escape from distracting detail and *an apprehension of the frame*. Biblical bases for such apprehension are found in Isaiah 34:4 — "All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll." This image is repeated in Revelation 6:14 — "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together." Apocalyptic time does not add a new sentence, or even a new chapter, to the chronicle of events. It uncovers the limit of the scroll, by exceeding it. For that, however, it has to complete itself.

Secondly, a punctual Apocalypse fulfills a semiotic (and in particular numerical) realism, as expressed — most lucidly — in occultism and schizophrenia. The apocalyptic exposes a primal encryption of culture, coding the operations of super-human intelligence (God or gods, transcended masters, aliens, time-travelers, spontaneous social order, or bacteria … any will do). A true calendar is revealed, in which semiotic exhaustion, or roll-over, precisely coincides with the end of a real epoch. Hyper-

traditionalism thus exoticizes itself in the formulation: *travel inwards far enough and you arrive at the outside*. It thus provides the most radical challenge to the fundamental mantra of the contemporary human sciences – the (Saussurean) arbitrary nature of the sign.

An additional and essentially modern contribution to the apocalyptic is made by the arithmetic of the intrinsically unsustainable, as defined by Thomas Malthus (1768-1834) in his *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. The empirical foundations for an inevitable crisis are found in trends to exponential growth and their projected collision with a limit. Variants of such apocalyptic projection are found in Marxism, environmentalism, and Technological Singularity (Karl Marx, M. King Hubbert, and Ray Kurzweil).

Even from this brief survey, it becomes possible to outline certain core features of *a model apocalypse*: comprehensive, punctual, and climactic. In other words, a transition that cannot be contained by the pre-existing nature of time, occurring at an exact, cryptically anticipated moment, bringing the central historical process to its culmination. All of that is gathered together in Doomsday, and Doomsday is dead.

Note: Thanks to Mathieu Borysevicz and Sophie Huang of the MAB Society, whose December 10th, 2012, Minsheng Museum event, *Just What is it about the end of the world that makes it so appealing?* provided the opportunity to discuss the schematics of apocalypse.

January 17, 2013

CHAPTER FOUR - CASE STUDIES

Peak People

Could we be facing the ultimate resource crunch?

Over at Zero Hedge, Sean Corrigan unleashes a fizzing polemic against the (M. King Hubbert) 'Peak Oil' school of resource doomsters (enjoy the article if you're *laissez-faire* inclined, or the comments if you're not).

Of particular relevance to density advocates is Corrigan's "exercise in contextualization" (a kind of de-stressed *Stand on Zanzibar*) designed to provide an image of the planet's 'demographic burden':

> *For example, just as an exercise in contextualisation, consider the following:-*
>
> *The population of Hong Kong: 7 million. Its surface area: 1,100 km2*
>
> *The population of the World: nigh on 7 billion, i.e., HK x 1000*

1000 x area of HK = 110,000 km2 = the area of Cuba or Iceland

Approximate area of the Earth's landmass = 150 million km2

Approximate total surface area = 520 million km2

So, were we to build one, vast city of the same population density as Hong Kong to cover the entirety of [Cuba], this would accommodate all of humanity, and take up just 0.07% of the planet's land area and 0.02% of the Earth's surface.

Anybody eagerly anticipating hypercities, arcologies, and other prospective experiments in large-scale social packing is likely to find this calculation rather disconcerting, if only because – taken as a whole — Hong Kong actually isn't that dense. For sure, the downtown 'synapse' connecting the HK Island with Kowloon is impressively intense, but most of the Hong Kong SAR (Special Administrative Region) is green, rugged, and basically deserted. It's (mean) average density of 6,364 / km2 doesn't get anywhere close to that of the top 100 cities (Manila's 43,000 / km2 is almost seven times greater). Corrigan isn't envisaging a megalopolis, but a Cuba-scale suburb.

Whether densitarians are more or less likely than average to worry about Peak Oil or related issues might be an interesting question (the New Urbanists tend to be quite greenish). If they really want to see cities scale the heights of social possibility, however, they

need to start worrying about population shortage. With the human population projected to level-off at around 10 billion, there might never be enough people to make cities into the ultra-dense monsters that futuristic imagination has long hungered for.

Bryan Caplan is sounding the alarm. At least we have teeming Malthusian robot hordes to look forward to.

May 20, 2011

Hard Futurism

Are you ready for the next big (nasty) thing?

For anyone with interests both in extreme practical futurism and the renaissance of the Sinosphere, Hugo de Garis is an irresistible reference point. A former teacher of Topological Quantum Computing (don't ask) at the International Software School of Wuhan University, and later Director of the Artificial Brain Lab at Xiamen University, de Garis' career symbolizes the emergence of a cosmopolitan Chinese technoscientific frontier, where the outer-edge of futuristic possibility condenses into precisely-engineered reality.

De Garis' work is 'hard' not only because it involves fields such as Topological Quantum Computing, or because – more accessibly

— he's devoted his research energies to the building of brains rather than minds, or even because it has generated questions faster than solutions. In his 'semi-retirement' (since 2010), hard-as-in-difficult, and hard-as-in-hardware, have been supplanted by hard-as-in-mind-numbingly-and-incomprehensibly-brutal – or, in his own words, an increasing obsession with the impending 'Gigadeath' or 'Artilect War'.

According to de Garis, the approach to Singularity will revolutionize and polarize international politics, creating new constituencies, ideologies, and conflicts. The basic dichotomy to which everything must eventually succumb divides those who embrace the emergence of transhuman intelligence, and those who resist it. The former he calls 'cosmists', the latter 'terrans'.

Since massively-augmented and robotically-reinforced 'cosmists' threaten to become invincible, the 'terrans' have no option but pre-emption. To preserve human existence in a recognizable state, it is necessary to violently suppress the cosmist project in advance of its accomplishment. The mere prospect of Singularity is therefore sufficient to provoke a political — and ultimately military — convulsion of unprecedented scale. A Terran triumph (which might require much more than just a military victory) would mark an inflection point in deep history, as the super-exponential trend of terrestrial intelligence production – lasting over a billion years — was capped, or reversed. A Cosmist win spells the termination of human

species dominion, and a new epoch in the geological, biological, and cultural process on earth, as the torch of material progress is passed to the emerging *techo sapiens*. With the stakes set so high, the melodramatic grandeur of the de Garis narrative risks understatement no less than hyperbole.

The giga-magnitude body-count that de Garis postulates for his Artilect (artificial intellect) War is the dark side expression of Moore's Law or Kurzweilean increasing returns – an extrapolation from exponentiating historical trends, in this case, casualty figures from major human conflicts over time. It reflects the accumulating trend to global wars motivated by trans-national ideologies with ever-increasing stakes. One king is (perhaps) much like another, but a totalitarian social direction is very different from a liberal one (even if such paths are ultimately revisable). Between a Terran world order and a Cosmist trajectory into Singularity, the distinction approaches the absolute. The fate of the planet is decided, with costs to match.

If the de Garis Gigadeath War scenario is pre-emptive in relation to prospective Singularity, his own intervention is meta-pre-emptive – since he insists that world politics must be anticipatively re-forged in order to forestall the looming disaster. The Singularity prediction ripples backwards through waves of pre-adaptation, responding at each stage to eventualities that are yet to unfold. Change unspools from out of the future, complicating the arrow of time. It is perhaps no coincidence that among de Garis' major research interests is

reversible computing, where temporal directionality is unsettled at the level of precise engineering.

Does ethnicity and cultural tradition merely dissolve before the tide-front of this imminent Armageddon? The question is not entirely straightforward. Referring to his informal polling of opinion on the coming great divide, de Garis recalls his experience teaching in China, remarking:

> *I know from the lectures I've given over the past two decades on species dominance that when I invite my audiences to vote on whether they are more Terran than Cosmist, the result is usually 50-50. … At first, I thought this was a consequence of the fact that the species dominance issue is too new, causing people who don't really understand it to vote almost randomly – hence the 50:50 result. But gradually, it dawned on me that many people felt as ambivalently about the issue as I do. Typically, the Terran/Cosmist split would run from 40:60 to 60:40 (although I do notice that with my very young Chinese audiences in computer science, the Cosmists are at about 80%).*

June 13, 2011

Kinds of Killing

How bad is genocide, really?

Like 'fascism' – with which it is closely connected in the popular imagination – 'genocide' is a word carrying such exorbitant emotional charge that it tends to blow the fuses of any attempt at dispassionate analysis. We can thank the political black magic of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi accomplices for that.

Prior to the Third Reich and its systematic, industrialized attempts to eradicate entire ethno-racial populations (Jews, Roma, and perhaps Slavs) along with other numerous other groups (mental and physical 'defectives' or 'useless eaters', homosexuals, communists, Jehova's Witnesses …) international law restricted its attention to the actions and grievances of states and individuals, with the latter subdivided into combatants and noncombatants. The National Socialist trauma changed that fundamentally.

On December 9, 1948, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (as Resolution 260), defining a new category of internationally recognized crimes as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."

Since 1948, defending genocide has been the surest way to ruin a

dinner party. That doesn't mean, however, that the topic deserves to be immunized from controversy. There is one question in particular that merits intense and prolonged scrutiny: Is genocide really worse than killing a lot of people?

Posed slightly more technically: Is there a crime of genocide that stands above and beyond mass murder (of equivalent scale)? Or (a rough equivalent): Can groups be the specific victims of crime? This is to ask whether groups exist – and have value — as anything more than a nominal or strictly formal set, whose reality is exhausted by its constituent individual members. The existence of genocide as a legal category presumes a (positive) answer to this question, and in doing so it closes down a problem of great and very general importance.

The classical liberal presumption is quite different, as summarized (a little bluntly) by the provocative remark made by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1987 "… there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families." Harshly extrapolating from this position, a certain irony might be found in the fact that a horrified response to National Socialist crimes has taken the form of a legal codification of racial collectivism. At the very least, it is puzzling that suspicions directed at legal references to 'group rights' and 'hate crimes' among those of a libertarian bent has not been extended to the category of genocide.

In the opposite camp, the most fully articulated defense of collectives as real entities is found, as might be expected, in the

foundation of sociology as an academic discipline, and more particularly in Émile Durkheim's argument for 'social facts'. Larry May looks back further, to Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan, or social being, in which human individuals are absorbed as organic parts.

Whilst the distinction of 'society' and 'individual' has colloquial (and political) meaning, those inclined to the analysis of complex systems are more likely to ask which groups or societies are *real individuals*, exhibiting functional or behavioral integrity, as self-reproducing wholes. In pursuing this line of investigation, it is far more relevant to discriminate between types of groups than between groups and individuals, or even wholes and parts. It is especially helpful to distinguish *feature groups* from *unit groups*.

A feature group is determined by logical classification. This might be expressed as a self-identification or sense of 'belonging', an external political or academic categorization, or some combination of these, but the essentials remain the same in each case. Certain features of the individual are isolated and emphasized (such as genitalia, sexual orientation, skin-color, income, or religious belief), and then employed as the leading clue in a process of formal grouping, which conforms theoretically to the mathematics of sets.

A unit group, in contrast, is defined as an assemblage, or functional whole. Its members belong to the group insofar as they work together, even if they are entirely devoid of common identity features. Membership is decided by role, rather than traits, since one

becomes part of such a group through functional involvement, rather than classification of characteristics. Social instances of such groups include primitive tribes (determined by functional unities rather than the categories of modern 'identity politics'), cities, states, and companies. The most obvious instance in socialist theory is the 'soviet' or 'danwei' work unit (whilst social classes are feature groups).

To take a non-anthropomorphic example, consider a skin cell. Its *feature group* is that of skin cells in general, as distinguished from nerve cells, liver cells, muscle cells, or others. Any two skin cells share the same feature group, even if they belong to different organisms, or even species, exist on different continents, and never functionally interact. The natural *unit group* of the same skin cell, in contrast, would be the organism it belongs to. It shares this unit group with all the other cells involved in the reproduction of that organism through time, including those (such as intestinal bacteria) of quite separate genetic lineages. Considered as a unit group member, a skin cell has greater integral connection with the non-biological tools and other 'environmental' elements involved in the life of the organism than it does with other skin cells – even perfect clones – with which it is not functionally entangled.

Clearly, both feature groups and unit groups are 'fuzzy sets', and the distinction itself – whilst theoretically precise – is empirically hazy. An urban American street gang, for instance, will in most cases

be vague in its features and unity, perhaps 'ethnic' to some degree of definition, with a determinable age-range, and with ambiguous functional connections to groupings on a larger scale, or to peripheral members whose status of 'belonging' is not strictly decidable. Tattoos and other membership markings are likely to involve both identity and integrity aspects – traits and roles. Rituals of belonging (ordeals, oaths, rites of passage) are designed to disambiguate membership.

Despite such haziness, the distinction between these two types of groups strikes directly at the core problematic of genocide (as a legal category). When a *unit group* is destroyed, a real individual is 'killed' above and beyond whatever human losses are incurred. The destruction of a *feature group*, in contrast, whatever the cultural loss, is not any kind of *killing* beyond the mass murder of human individuals. If this is worse than murder, we should know why.

This conclusion seems relevant when weighing, for instance, the 1937 Massacre of Nanjing on the scale of historical atrocity. It suggests, at least, that an act of violence directed against a city – or integrated population *unit* — is no less worthy of specific legal attention than a quantitatively equivalent offense against an ethnicity, or determined population *type*. It seems to be no more than an accident of history that, in order to appropriate the category of genocide, massive crimes of the former variety need to be recoded as if they more properly belonged to the latter.

Complex systems ontology aside, these matters resolve ultimately into obscure social values. Orthodox conceptions of 'genocide' assume that ethnic identity simply and unquestionably means more than active citizenship, or participation in the life of a city. Perhaps this assumption is even arguable. But has it been argued?

September 13, 2011

The God Confusion

A world on its knees, and at your throat

"Do The Three Abrahamic Faiths Worship The Same God?" Peter Berger asks, on his blog at the American Interest. His answer, which seems to be programmed at least as much by the sensitivities of interfaith politics as by the exigencies of rigorous theology, is a politely nuanced "yes (but)." If anyone is unconvinced about the urgent pertinence of multicultural diplomacy to the question, Berger settles such doubts quickly by depicting the integrated conception of 'Abrahamic faith' as a response to the 'Clash of Civilizations' climate that arose in the wake of 9/11, "with the altogether admirable intention of countering anti-Islamic hatred."

At its core, his argument is both realistic and relatively

uncontroversial. It is comparable to an informal set theory, or cladistics, briefly surveying family resemblances and dissimilarities between branches of the Abrahamic religious 'tree' and concluding, reasonably enough, that none of the potential groupings are absolutely strict (each faith, even narrowly defined, is differentiated within itself by sub-branches, and twigs), and that the coherence of 'Judeo-Christian' monotheism is considerably stronger than that of 'Abrahamic Faith' in general. Whatever the complexity of these branchings, however, they derive from a readily identifiable trunk. Berger cites a lecture by the Protestant theologian Miroslav Volf:

> *Yes, one can say that Christians and Muslims believe in the "same God". There are enough common affirmations to justify this—most importantly, of course, the belief that there is only one God (what the late Richard Niebuhr, coincidentally another Yale Divinity professor, called "radical monotheism")—but also the belief in a personal creator distinct from the creation, and the giver of a moral code.*

When evaluated from a wide enough angle, it is clear that the God of Jews, Christians, and Muslims is distinctively specified, relative to alternative religious traditions:

> *Sometimes it is a good idea to step back and look at the imputed collectivity from afar. It may help to look at the three*

'Abrahamic' faiths from, say, Benares, one of the most holy cities of Hinduism and near which the Buddha preached his first sermon. Looked at from that far location, the family resemblance between the three versions suddenly appears quite clearly. Hindus and Buddhists sometimes speak of 'West Asian religion' in contrast with their own 'South Asian 'or 'East Asian religion'. It then seems just about inevitable to say that Jews, Christians and Muslims, whatever their differences, do indeed worship the same God.

*To be sure, there are similarities between Benares and Jerusalem as well. There are Hindu versions of theism, with intense devotions to personal deities (*bhakti*), but there is no real analogue to the monotheism that originated in the deserts of the Near East. In Vedanta, arguably the most sophisticated form of Hinduism, the ultimate reality is the* brahman*, the impersonal ocean of divinity in which all individual identities eventually dissolve. There are theistic elements in Mahayana Buddhism, with devotion directed toward godlike* boddhisatvas *— individuals who have attained Enlightenment, but who, out of compassion, delay their entry into the final bliss in order to help others to get there. But that bliss too ends in that impersonal ocean of divinity that seems for many centuries to have dominated the religious imagination of India, from where it migrated eastward.*

Yet, whilst the theological dimension of this question is very far from uninteresting, or inconsequential, it limits the question at least as much as it clarifies it. More than a faith, the 'children of Abraham' share a story, and – still more importantly — a sense of history *as a story*, and this is the factor that most tightly bundles them together, irrespective of all quibbling over narrative details. Abraham is the beginning of a tale, even if it can be projected back (at least a little way) beyond him. He defines the meaning of history, as an interaction with God, through which the passage of collective time acquires structure, direction, unity, radical finitude, moral and religious significance. Abrahamic history has purpose, and a destination. Above all it tells the story of a moral community, whose righteousness and unrighteousness will ultimately be judged. Eschatology is its real key.

Because the Abrahamic tradition is rooted in a distinctive experience of history, it extends beyond theistic faith. Indeed, any comprehension of this tradition that excludes Marxism, fascist millenarianism, and 'liberal' secular progressivism (even that of the 'New Atheists') is woefully incomplete, to the point of diversionary propaganda. Uniquely, the Abrahamic faiths do not merely rise, fall, and persist. They are superceded by new revelations, or afflicted by heresy and schism. Their encounters and (inevitable) conflicts become internalized episodes that immediately demand doctrinal and narrative intelligibility. Hence the affinity between the

Abrahamic faiths and historical (as 'opposed' to pedagogical, cosmic, or naturalistic) dialectics: the 'other', merely by appearing on the stage, must play its role in the world-historical drama of belief.

Strict monotheism is the personification of narrative unity, and in the end it is the narrative unity that matters. Whether history is finally to be appraised from the perspective of the people of Israel, the Church, the Ummah, achieved communism, an Aryan master-race, or secular multicultural globalism, it will have been integrated through the production of a moral community, and judged as a coherent whole by the standard of that community's purity and righteousness. It will have been comprehended by a collective subject whose story — it insists — is the entire meaning of the world.

For the minor paganisms of antiquity, and the major paganisms of the east, this structure of understanding has the objective potential to be offensive to an almost inestimable degree, so the fact that pagans have rarely contested it with an animosity that even remotely approaches its 'internal' conflicts and disputations is intriguing. Whilst cases of anti-semitism, anti-clericalism, islamophobia, anti-communism, anti-fascism, and systematic political incorrectness have, on occasions, been plausibly derived from pagan inspirations, in the overwhelming majority of cases it is the various 'fraternal' branches of the great Abrahamic family that have wrought devastation upon each other. Indeed, persecution, as a particular mode of 'zealous' or 'enthusiastic' violence, seems to be an

Abrahamic specialty, one that depends upon conceptions of 'intolerable' idolatry, heresy, apostasy, false-consciousness, or political incorrectness that are found nowhere else.

God told Abraham to kill his own son, and he was ready to do so (Gen 22:1-19). That is how he earned his status as the ur-patriarch of the tradition, whose children are defined by the ghost of a knife at their throats. Demonstrated willingness to kill in the name of the Lord, or its abstracted equivalent (the meaning of history), is the initiatory ideal, and the beginning of the world story that now encompasses everyone. After this original ritual, Isaac's life was no longer natural, but ideological. It was suspended, vulnerably, from a word owing nothing to the protective bond tying an animal to its progeny (symbolically terminated by Abraham's surrender to divine command), but settled on high, in the narrative structure of the world. If God had willed it — or the story demanded it — he would have been slain. In this way an unnatural line, existing only as an expression of divine purpose, breaks from the archaic pagan order of 'meaningless' procreation and nurture. (The place assigned to the sacrifice, Mount Moriah, would later be the site of Jerusalem, the city of the end of time, and beyond nature.) Isaac was spared, but the pagan world was not similarly reprieved.

The existence of an Abrahamic tradition has an importance that far exceeds its internal politics and internecine rivalries, since it is indistinguishable from the historical unification of the world, and no

'other' is able to remain outside its narrative order. In much of the world, even in its Abrahamic heartlands, to refuse God is no great thing, and perhaps little more than a mildly comical affectation, but to depart from World History is quite another matter. It is then that the knife of Abraham glints again.

December 19, 2011

Wild Cards

Responding to Michael Anissimov's political attitudes quiz, commentator 'Donny' widens the perspective:

... if technology weren't to advance much over the next century, we would be witness to the death of western civilization. Instead, technology will wrench history off its course. Demography is no longer destiny. Embryo screening for intelligence, a robotic labor force, rejuvenation therapies that end death from aging, infinite everything from nanofactories, terrible new weapons wreaking havoc on humanity, and the recursively self-improving artificial intelligence that kills us all. Next to that – or any of the other technologies which could emerge sooner and prove decisive instead – Mexican immigration doesn't amount to a hill of beans. None of our existing institutions or social structures are prepared for what's coming and the century will be a rollercoaster ride on fire.

April 26, 2013

Gibson's Nightmare

At the most superficial level, there's probably some sleeplessness accompanying the anxiety that the whole of *The Peripheral* — once people have processed it — begins to look like a piece of fabulously ornate, maze-patterned wrapping paper for the four pages that really matter. There's the Great Pacific Garbage Patch elsewhere, along with ubiquitous near-future drones, and – further down the time-line — some exotic neo-primitivist adornments — but basically, if you've read Chapter 79, you've got the thing. Yes, that's to miss out on some of the time-travel structure, but Gibson takes such a lazy approach to that (deliberately suppressing all paradox circuitry) it's no great loss.

On the positive side, those four pages are really something. Chapter 79 is helpfully entitled *The Jackpot*, and contains what might well be the most profound reworking of apocalypticism of modern times. There are some (fairly weak) remarks here. Perhaps somebody has already contributed some better commentary, that I've missed.

The Jackpot is a catastrophe with a fruit-machine model — all the reels have to click together 'right' for it to amount to disaster.

It's therefore poly-causal, cross-lashed, or "multiplex" — eluding narrative apprehension through multiplicity.

… it was no one thing. … it was multicausal, with no particular beginning and no end. More a climate than an event, so not the way apocalypse stories liked to have a big event, after which everybody ran around with guns … or else were eaten alive by something caused by the big event. Not like that.

It was androgenic … Not that they'd known what they were doing, had meant to make problems, but they's caused it anyway. And in fact the climate, the weather, caused by there being too much carbon, had been the driver for a lot of other things.How that got worse and never better, and was just expected to, ongoing. Because people in the past, clueless as to how that worked, had fucked it all up, then not been able to get it together to do anything about it, even after they knew, and now it was too late.

It kills 80% of the world's human population in the end.

… Except that's not the end. The end is Neoreaction:

"What about China?"

… "They'd had a head start," [Netherton] said.

"At what?"

"At how the world would work, after the jackpot. This … is still ostensibly a democracy. A majority of empowered survivors, considering the jackpot, and no doubt their own positions, wanted none of that. Blamed it, in fact."

“Who runs it, then?”
“Oligarchs, corporations, neomonarchists. Hereditary monarchies provided conveniently familiar armatures. Essentially feudal, according to its critics. Such as they are.”
“The King of England?”
“The City of London,” he said. “The Guilds of the City. In alliance with people like Lev’s father. Enabled by people like Lowbeer.”
“The whole world’s funny?” She remembered Lowbeer saying that.
“The klept,” he said, misunderstanding her, “isn’t funny at all.”

January 29, 2015

CHAPTER FIVE - COMPILATIONS

Doomcore

There's a biblical blood moon omen hanging over September. Pure Satanism has conquered the culture of the West, to the posthumous laughter of the Mad Marquis. The Chinese economy is scaring people (a lot), and Tianjin just exploded. American "Recession Imminent." Straight Outta Compton. Trump. Oil. Brazil's economy is crashing even harder, and Russia is like a scene out of the Book of Revelation, with NATO and Russia rehearsing for war. (Still awaiting the India crisis news for the full BRIC meltdown). Germany is expecting 700,000 asylum seekers this year. "The international system as we know it is unravelling." Googling 'Middle East' mostly turns up End Time prophecies, for understandable reasons (here's one secular story). Japan: "Be Afraid." "The future of humanity is increasingly African." There's been a bomb blast in Bangkok, earth tremors in California. American race relations are falling off a cliff, probably because whites haven't apologized enough yet, though some are trying. The UK has gone fascist (or something). Bitcoin is (needlessly) forking into the unknown. (Exotic and longer-term threats are a

whole other story.) But the funny thing is …

August 17, 2015

Glide Path

Fernandez takes a clear-eyed look at where things are *actually heading* right now:

Conventional wisdom has had a pretty bad run these last 15 years. For that reason there is little purpose to trusting it further. Instead it might be better to predict a future based on observable trends rather than scenarios that politicians [promote?]. If those trends convey any information one would expect to see in 2025:

1. The self-destruction of the Muslim Middle East;

2. The rise of ethnic and national politics in Europe;

3. The widespread resurgence of religion and cultural identity as a consequence of (2);

4. Mass expulsions or segregation in large parts of the world to deconflict incompatible communities

5. Everyone packing personal weapons like the Wild West

6. The collapse of multi-ethnic countries into simplified pacts based around of national defense, with most social law generated by local communities and affinity groups;

7. One or more large regional wars with casualties in the tens of

millions.
8. Several, possibly many WMD attacks on major cities involving radiological weapons, low yield nukes or biological agents.
8. The collapse of any realistic expectation of Peace on Earth, with the remaining hope of mankind vested in the new space frontier.
Such a world would be rough, dangerous and in many places, miserable. Perhaps it will not even be as good as that; for the list above omits the occurrence of an event equivalent to World War 3, in which case we can describe the future with a single word: ruin. But it is the world we are building, absent any change of course. The oddest circumstance is that politicians still pretend without the slightest basis, that if we stay their perverse course we'll go right through the ruin and out the other side and find the dream we glimpsed as we crossed into the 21st century. […] It's a condition they call Hope, though there's another phrase for it: whistling past the graveyard.

October 15, 2015

SMOD



Some suggestive figures and commentary. (More here.) Googling "trump + chaos" — 52,300,000 results (beginning 1, 2, 3, 4 …). Trump has 5,000,000 Twitter followers. The dike has broken. Now it cascades …

From the commies at *Rolling Stone* (three months ago):

During a Q&A with fans before a Cincinnati concert earlier this month, [pop music person] Billy Corgan was asked what he thought about the first Republican debate, at which point the rocker lauded the mogul's ability to take the political spectrum and "fuck it up." "I think what's cool, and I'm not saying I agree politically, but I think what's cool is Trump's running chaos theory," Corgan said (via Alternative Nation). […] "He's forcing a lot of things out into the open, so they can't control this, whatever that control is …"



As another commie hack points out calmly: “Trump may well be something unprecedentedly terrible.”

The rise of the destructor has been congesting all my information

channels this week. Tomorrow's Trumpenführer panic update goes parabolic.

ADDED: Trump and the Left Acceleration vote — "I'm hoping Donald Trump wins this year's election. For the reason that it will fuck up that country so much faster then if a less bad President wins."

December 12, 2015

CHAPTER SIX - POLITICAL INSANITY

The Rights Stuff

Apologies for the minimalism, even by my recent standards, but I simply have to pass this on.

(I'll throw these two links in for added depth.)

March 7, 2015

Trash Space

There's so much wrong with this it's hard to know where to start:

Baltimore is burning as I write, the streets are filled with rioters and police. They don't seem to be "clashing" much, however. Photographs show looters looting, and cops standing around. The black lady mayor of Baltimore, Stephanie Rawlings-Blake … made a statement that, in the interests of the demonstrators' "free speech" rights, she had told the Baltimore PD to "give those who wished to destroy space to do that."



Nothing says ‘free speech’ like torching a city to the ground. (Shouting “fire” in a crowded cinema might be irresponsible, but burning the cinema to the ground is political art.)

In Defense of Looting (seriously), from August last year.

David Simon politely asks everyone to “please stop”. Good luck with that.

Western civilization is so over.

ADDED:

> "Whenever I hear the word 'democracy' I know a bloodbath is coming." —Prince Klemens von Metternich #BaltimoreRiots

pic.twitter.com/mPNYMihqWb

— SMR×乃木栄⊿ (@NogiRx) April 28, 2015

ADDED: (Passed along without comment)

> The riot-shaming is getting old. Burning things down has always had a place historically. I wish ppl on would quit pretending otherwise.
>
> — Rania Khalek (@RaniaKhalek) April 28, 2015

ADDED: “Baltimore’s violent protestors are right …” … “As a nation, we fail to comprehend Black political strategy in much the same way we fail to recognize the value of Black life. …”

April 28, 2015

Meanwhile, in Paris

How could any society not want this type of enrichment to happen in its urban centers?



Uber-Chaos, apparently. [Or not.]

ADDED: Given the likelihood of time-pwnage here, 'meanwhile' should probably be read as 'sometime in the 21st century'. It says Sept. 1 on the Youtube video, but that probably means less than I'd assumed. See (brief) comment by 'Ano nymous' in the thread below.

ADDED (from *The New Yorker*): To add a little *gravitas*.

September 2, 2015

Report from a Madhouse

When you throw your last scraps of civilized incentive-architecture in a dumpster and set it on fire it looks like this:

Cities across the country, beginning with the District of Columbia, are moving to copy Richmond's controversial approach because early indications show it has helped reduce homicide rates. […] But the program requires governments to reject some basic tenets of law enforcement even as it challenges notions of appropriate ways to spend tax dollars. […] … when the elaborate efforts at engagement fail, the mentors still pay those who pledge to improve, even when, like [violent criminal Lonnie] Holmes, they are caught with a gun, or worse — suspected of murder. […] … To maintain the trust of the young men they're guiding, mentors do not inform police of what they know about crimes committed. At least twice, that may have allowed suspected killers in the stipend program to evade responsibility for homicides. […] And yet, interest in the program is surging among urban politicians. Officials in Miami, Toledo, Baltimore and more than a dozen cities in between are studying how to replicate Richmond's program. […] … five years into Richmond's multimillion-dollar experiment, 84 of 88 young men who have participated in the program remain alive, and 4 in 5 have not been suspected of another gun crime or suffered a bullet wound … […] Richmond's decision to pay people to stay out of trouble began a

decade ago during a period of despair. […] In 2007, Richmond's homicide tally had surged to 47, making it the country's sixth-deadliest city per capita. In the 20 years prior to that, Richmond lost 740 people to gun violence, and more than 5,000 had been injured by a bullet. […] Elected leaders of the heavily African American city of about 100,000 began treating homicides as a public health emergency. … [DeVone Boggan] who had lost a brother in a shooting in Michigan … had to raise the money because he couldn't persuade officials ***to give tax dollars directly to violent firearms offenders****. […] Boggan and his streetwise crew of ex-cons selected an initial group of 21 gang members and suspected criminals for the program. One night in 2010, he persuaded them to come to city hall, where he invited them to work with mentors and plan a future without guns. As they left, Boggan surprised each one with $1,000 — no strings attached. […] "This is controversial, I get it," Boggan said. "But what's really happening is that they are getting rewarded for doing really hard work, and it's definite hard work when you talk about stopping picking up a gun to solve your problems." […] So far, the attention — and money — seems to be working for Holmes. Although the $1,500 he has received since getting out of prison last fall has not led to a miraculous transformation, it enabled him to make a down payment on his black 2015 Nissan Versa — something meaningful for a young man who for many years was homeless. […] He now spends hours each day in the car, driving around with friends, often smoking pot*

but not "hunting" — Vaughn's term for seeking conflict with rivals. […] "The money is a big part," Holmes says. "I can't count the number of times it has kept me from . . . doing what I've got to do. It stopped me from going to hit that liquor [store] or this, you feel me, it's a relief to not have to go do this and endanger my life for a little income, you feel me?" …

That's as much as I can take. The phrase subject to XS emphasis describes the core principle of the scheme. Maybe it should count as a relief that these gangstas aren't being directly rewarded for whacking shop-keepers.

There's a term for this kind of scheme: Dane Geld. It's not something civilizations with a future tend to engage in.

ADDED: Highly relevant. "… there are entire classes of people who can get more from the world by being unstable and dangerous …"

March 29, 2016

Twitter cuts (#60)

Who thinks the world is getting better?
6% of Americans
4% of Brits

> 3% of French#sheesh pic.twitter.com/sevRFoUu9c
> — ian bremmer (@ianbremmer) April 15, 2016

Assuming that the Mandate of Heaven is always the *real* principle of regime legitimation, this looks like an interesting *status quo* problem. If the present world order is working, it's doing a conspicuously poor job of advertising the fact — especially to Western populations.

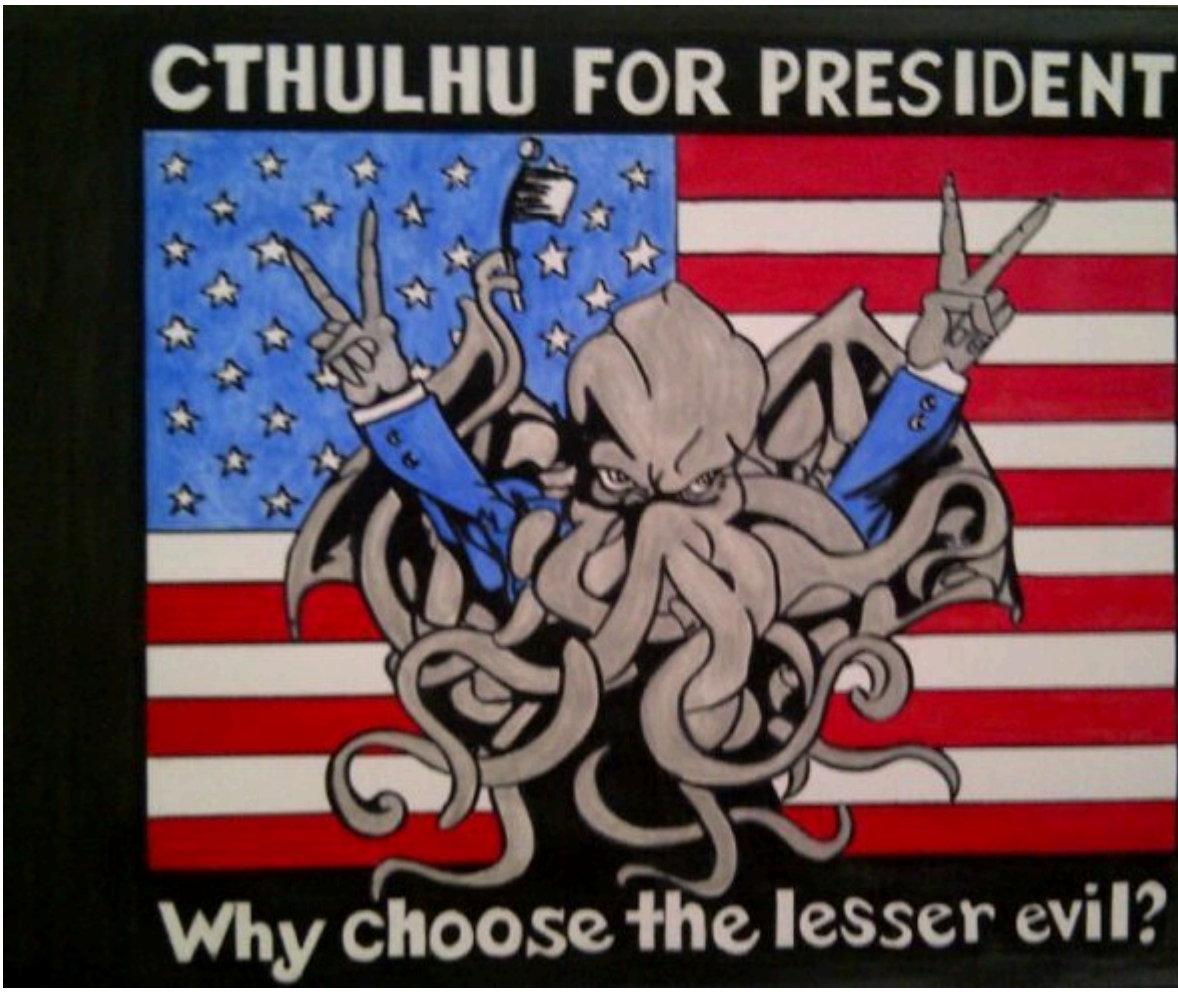
April 16, 2016

It's come to this

Yudkowsky's case against Trump:

Scope is real. If you ever have to choose between voting a convicted serial abuser of children into the Presidential office — but this person otherwise seems stable and collected — versus a Presidential candidate who seems easy to provoke and who has 'bad days' and doesn't listen to advisors and once said "Why do we have all these nukes if we can't use them?", it is deadly important that you vote for the pedophile. It isn't physically possible to abuse enough children per day over 4 years to do as much damage as you can do with one wrong move in the National Security Decision-Making Game.

It seems the stars are right:



October 12, 2016

Current Mood



ADDED: Here's the same picture taken from another angle

Picture of the Day. pic.twitter.com/979KCN0TCX

— Stefan Molyneux (@StefanMolyneux) November 13, 2016

November 13, 2016

CHAPTER SEVEN - ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

Progress

Two centuries of US monetary stewardship charted @ ZH:



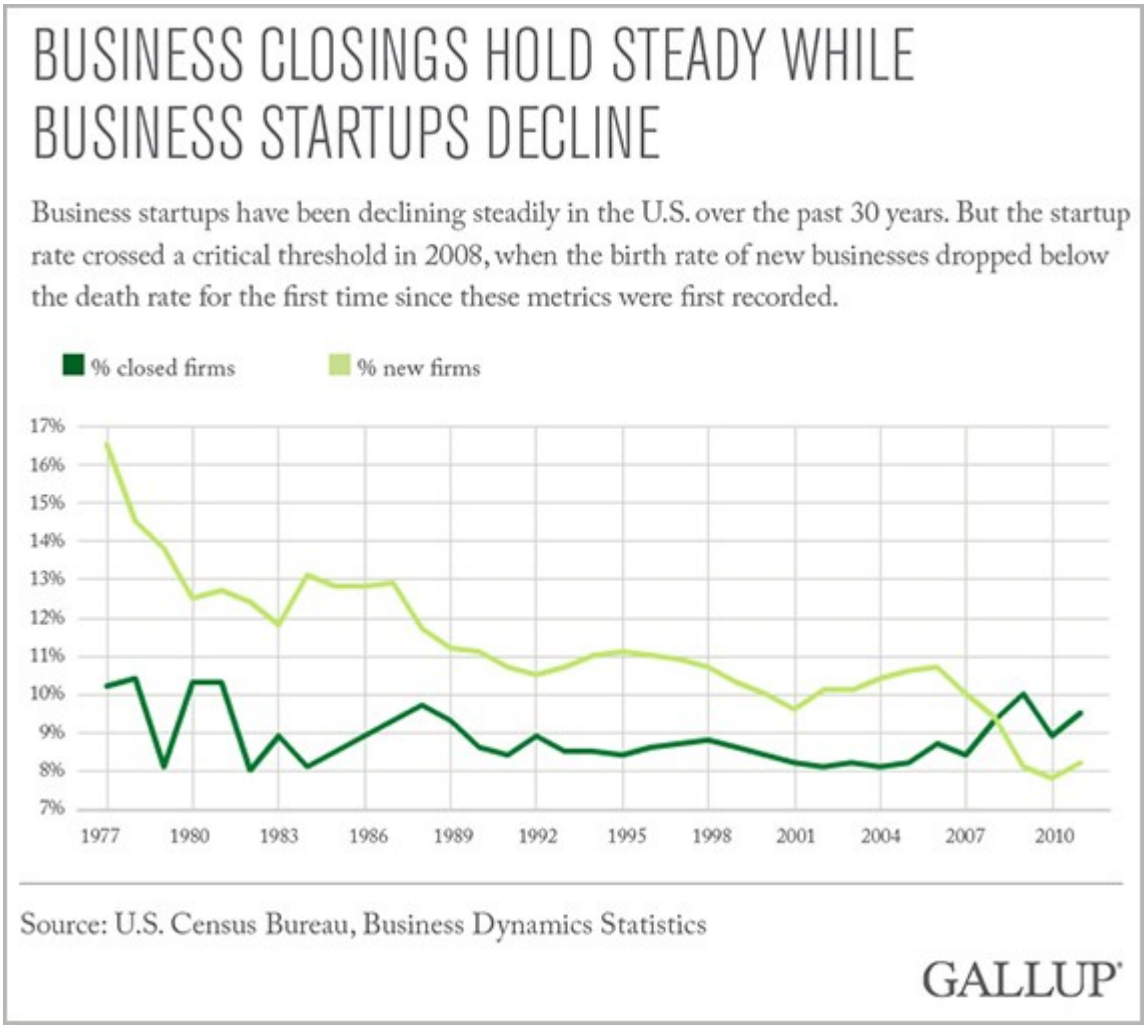
Click image to enlarge.

Red line is the CPI.

Blue line is the USD / Swiss Franc exchange rate.

December 13, 2013

Progress (II)



When socialism puts a ratchet into your churn, this is what happens.

(Via.)

The first XS 'Progress' post was also a chart — and it dove-tails

with this one uncannily.

January 15, 2015

Downton on down

Martin Hutchinson argues that — even after factoring in the crushing losses of WWI — the 'Downton era' did things better:

In certain respects — behavioral and otherwise — the "Downton Abbey economy" of 1920 was greatly preferable to the one we are experiencing today. […] A move to a "Downton Abbey economy" should not imply a sharp increase in inequality, rather the opposite. It is interesting to note that almost 100 years of progressive bloat of the public sector in both Britain and the U.S. — supposedly undertaken to reduce economic inequality — have in reality tended to increase it. […] Public spending (including local government) was around 25% of GDP in Britain in 1920 and about 15% of GDP in the U.S., compared to 40% plus in both countries today. It must be questioned what benefits the public has gained, either in greater equality or better services, from the massive rise in public spending since the Downton Abbey period, which itself was inflated from pre-World War I days.

[…]

Apart from smaller government and less inequality, the Downton

Abbey economy had a number of other advantages over today's … First, total factor productivity growth was much greater. The decade saw the most rapid adoption of the advances in power and transportation that had grown up from the 1880s. The result was U.S. TFP growth of around 2% annually, about double the recent rate. This generated an explosion in living standards during the decade.

Second, the "Downton Abbey economy" had much lower asset prices because of higher interest rates and much easier construction procedures. Shares paid higher dividends and were much lower valued in terms of assets and earnings, while leverage ratios were infinitely more conservative. The world was used to a gold standard, in which leverage could kill you in a downturn, and was much more careful about incurring it. Real estate was valued at its rebuilding cost, and rebuilding costs were much lower than today because there were no planning approvals and no environmental-impact statements. I have written several times about the extraordinary inflation of infrastructure costs, from the 1920-27 Holland Tunnel's $48 million, equivalent to $700 million in today's prices to the outrageous projected $9 billion of the recently cancelled Trans-Hudson Tunnel (functionally an identical project). In "Downton Abbey's" world, real estate costs were modest and new infrastructure projects were built on time, at a fraction of today's real cost.

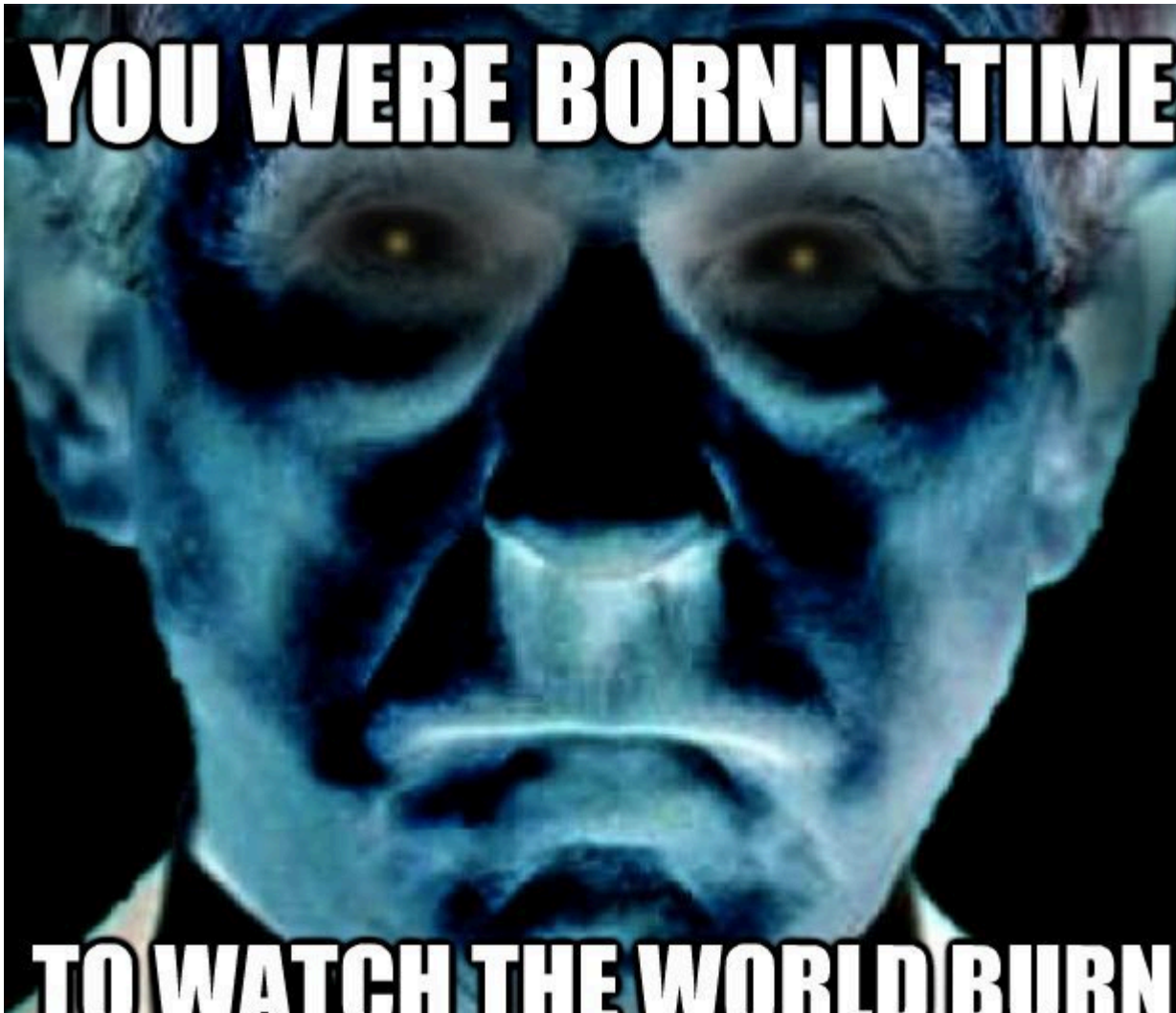
Third, the "Downton Abbey" world had positive real interest rates

and no inflation psychology. People could be assured that their efforts in saving would not be destroyed by inflation or by being dumped into an overvalued bubble stock market. While World War I had brought a doubling in prices in Britain and the United States, everyone expected that this process would be largely reversed, probably by a British return to the gold standard. Indeed, until World War II, those expectations were realized. For people planning their lives, it was a much easier era. In peacetime, money was a solid store of value, not something that had to be monitored constantly for inflationary erosion.

Finally, both the economic system and the financial system were carried on with high standards of integrity, more so in Britain than in the U.S., but higher in both countries than today. Banks, corporations and managers relied heavily on their reputation, and those doing business with them made careful enquiries about that reputation. There were few fallible government regulations, no bailouts and little leverage. A notable feature of the Bernard Madoff Ponzi scheme of 2008 was that it was able to attract about 500 times as much money in real terms as the $3 million collected in 1920 by the Charles Ponzi and carry on for about 40 times as long as Ponzi's eight months. The ability of Madoff to grow so big and last so long is testimony to the futility of modern regulation and to the sad decline of ethical standards in today's blue-chip houses.

February 27, 2014

Doom Paul



Blame Bloom for luring me into this blasted landscape. (I agree with JAB that there's something important going on here.)

A Doom Paul video selection (1, 2, 3).

Here's a Paul vs. Krugman cage-match.



ADDED: Dialled up to eleven.

ADDED: The End is Close …

October 10, 2014

Pedal to the Metal

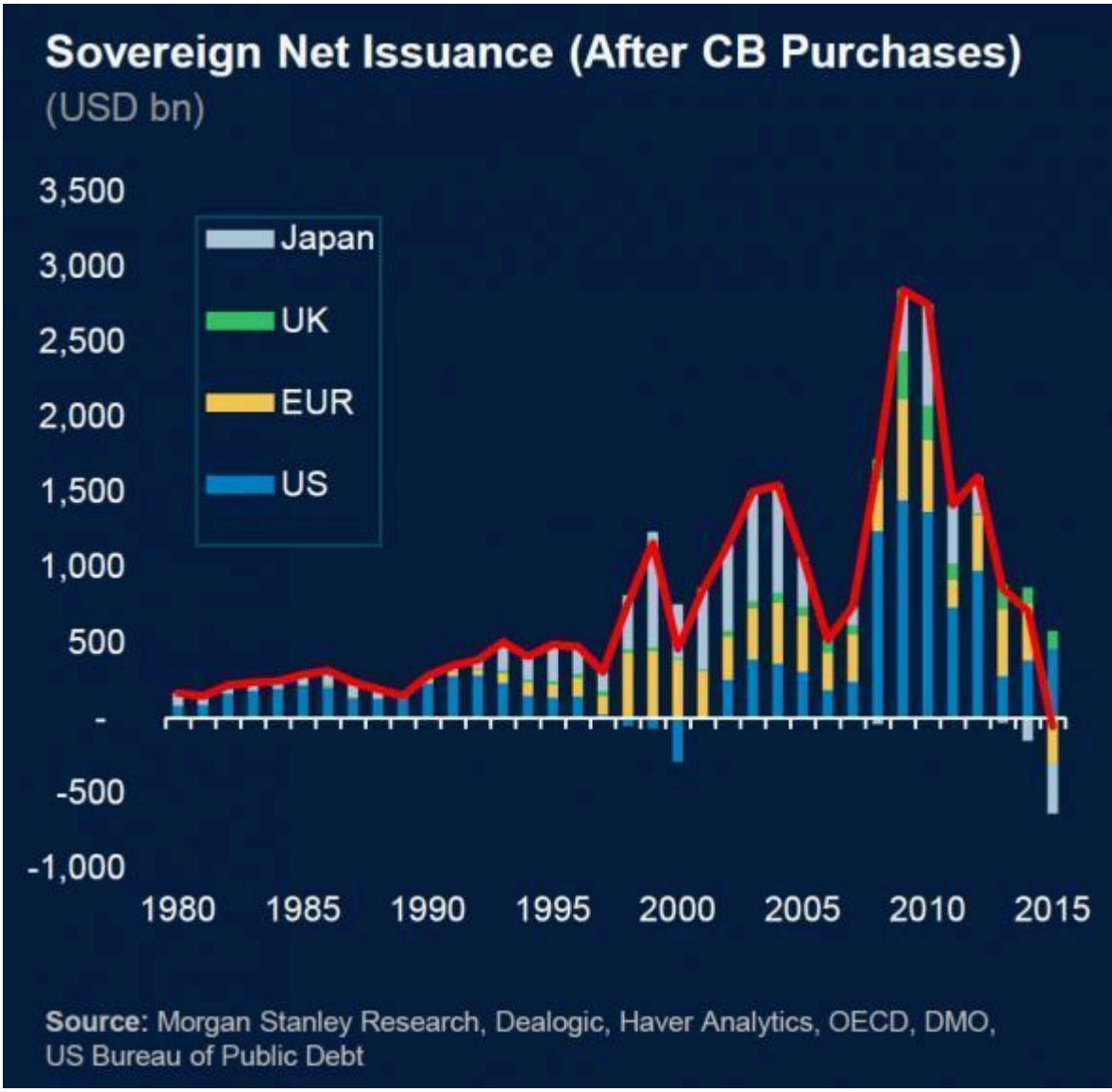
Japan accelerates into Keynesian fiscal singularity. This one is for our honored commenter 'Kgaard', who is sure to have some problems with it. (From David Stockman, this blog's candidate for the most *based* economic analyst on the planet.)

> Let's not mess around:
> *Prime Minister Abe is proving himself to be a certifiable madman.*
> It could all be over a lot sooner than I'd expected.

November 20, 2014

Suspended Reality

This chart (via) marks the point where economics switches into ontology (and not in a good way). Global government debt issuance — undiminished in its absolute scale — has *for the first time* ever been entirely swallowed by money production. Postmodernism has unambiguously triumphed, at least temporarily. It's a thing of wonder, and not a bad exemplification of objective evil (as Gnon acts upon it). Reality, for the moment, is benched. (This does not end well — but we know that, right?)



SoBL has a highly relevant forecast post addressing this syndrome, which has been a long time coming, and no doubt has at least a little further to go.

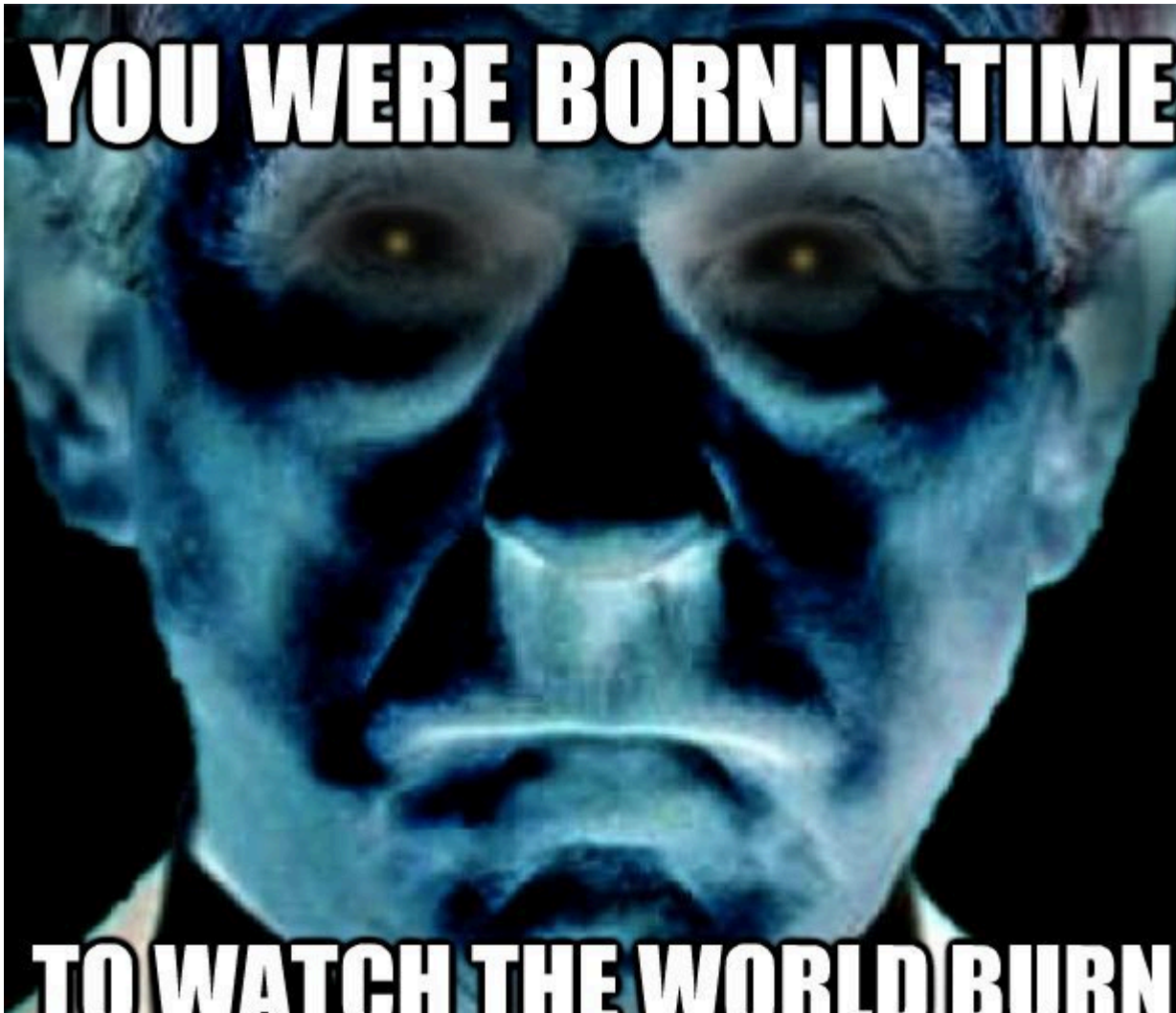
February 10, 2015

Extreme Games

Greece's Varoufakis doubles down on the Bart strategy.

May 18, 2015

Soon



What would a full stocks correction look like?

A true understanding of stock market history shows that Wall

Street in the past has moved in long, long swings upwards and downwards, often taking years or even a generation or two. There is a great deal of evidence suggesting that the upward move that began in 1982 is one of them — and that the downward move that first began in 2000 has not ended.

As stock market historian Russell Napier points out in his book "Anatomy of the Bear," on five occasions in the past 100 years — in 1921, 1932, 1949, 1974 and 1982 — those big downward moves have not ended until share valuations have fallen to just 30% of the replacement cost of company assets. That's using a powerful, if little-known, economic metric known as Tobin's q. […] And, to cut to the chase, if Wall Street stocks followed the same path today that would take the Dow down to about 5,000, and the S&P 500 Index all the way down to around 600. (The S&P 500 slumped more than 3% to 1,971 on Friday.) […] Yikes.

The "q" is a valuation that they don't even mention in the training manuals for the official "financial planner" and financial-analyst exams. Your money manager has probably never heard of it. Or, if he has, he probably ranks it with astrology and the mystic rantings of Nostradamus. […] But the "q" happens to have by far the most successful long-term track record of any stock market indicator. …

August 22, 2015

Meanwhile, in Venezuela …

A mineral-rich socialist diet:

The governor of the Venezuelan state of Bolívar has some advice for dealing with the widespread shortage of food across the country. Can't find eggs at your local Venezuelan grocery store? Why not try fried rocks instead? […] Governor Francisco Rangel said during his radio show on Tuesday, September 29, that the Venezuelan people should not "yield to temptation" or worry about not being able to find a pack of flour or sardines to buy amid the shortages. […] "Let them take away whatever they want. We are capable of eating a stick, or instead of frying two eggs, fry two rocks, and we will eat fried rocks, " he said, "but no one can beat us." […] Rangel referred to the so-called economic war and the "induced inflation" that he and other ruling-party leaders claim is being caused by the opposition. "Now that prices are sky high, we need to fight against this together. Let them not feel like they have beaten us," he said.

A functional world order should always have a few socialist regimes hanging on, to do the teaching job the education system can't.

October 12, 2015

SECTION B - ACCELERATION

A Quick-and-Dirty Introduction to Accelerationism

Anyone trying to work out what they think about accelerationism better do so quickly. That's the nature of the thing. It was already caught up with trends that seemed too fast to track when it began to become self-aware, decades ago. It has picked up a lot of speed since then.

Accelerationism is old enough to have arrived in waves, which is to say insistently, or recurrently, and each time the challenge is more urgent. Among its predictions is the expectation that you'll be too slow to deal with it coherently. Yet if you fumble the question it poses – because rushed – you lose, perhaps very badly. It's hard. (For our purposes here "you" are standing in as a bearer of "the opinions of mankind".)

Time-pressure, by its very nature, is difficult to think about. Typically, while the opportunity for deliberation is not necessarily presumed, it is at least – with overwhelming likelihood – mistaken for an historical constant, rather than a variable. If there was ever

time to think, we think, there still is and will always be. The definite probability that the allotment of time to decision-making is undergoing systematic compression remains a neglected consideration, even among those paying explicit and exceptional attention to the increasing rapidity of change.

In philosophical terms, the deep problem of acceleration is *transcendental*. It describes an absolute horizon – and one that is closing in. Thinking takes time, and accelerationism suggests we're running out of time to think that through, if we haven't already. No contemporary dilemma is being entertained realistically until it is also acknowledged that the opportunity for doing so is fast collapsing.

The suspicion has to arrive that if a public conversation about acceleration is beginning, it's just in time to be too late. The profound institutional crisis that makes the topic 'hot' has at its core an implosion of social decision-making capability. Doing anything, at this point, would take too long. So instead, events increasingly just happen. They seem ever more out of control, even to a traumatic extent. Because the basic phenomenon appears to be a brake failure, accelerationism is picked up again.

Accelerationism links the implosion of decision-space to the explosion of the world – that is, to modernity. It is important therefore to note that the conceptual opposition between implosion and explosion does nothing to impede their real (mechanical)

coupling. Thermonuclear weapons provide the most vividly illuminating examples. An H-bomb employs an A-bomb as a trigger. A fission reaction sparks a fusion reaction. The fusion mass is crushed into ignition by a blast process. (Modernity is a blast.)

This is already to be talking about cybernetics, which also returns insistently, in waves. It amplifies to howl, and then dissipates into the senseless babble of fashion, until the next blast-wave hits.

For accelerationism the crucial lesson was this: A negative feedback circuit – such as a steam-engine 'governor' or a thermostat – functions to keep some state of a system in the same place. Its product, in the language formulated by French philosophical cyberneticists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, is *territorialization*. Negative feedback stabilizes a process, by correcting drift, and thus inhibiting departure beyond a limited range. Dynamics are placed in the service of fixity – a higher-level stasis, or state. All equilibrium models of complex systems and processes are like this. To capture the contrary trend, characterized by self-reinforcing errancy, flight, or escape, D&G coin the inelegant but influential term *deterritorialization*. Deterritorialization is the only thing accelerationism has ever really talked about.

In socio-historical terms, the line of deterritorialization corresponds to *uncompensated capitalism*. The basic – and, of course, to some real highly consequential degree *actually installed* – schema is a positive feedback circuit, within which

commercialization and industrialization mutually excite each other in a runaway process, from which modernity draws its gradient. Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche were among those to capture important aspects of the trend. As the circuit is incrementally closed, or intensified, it exhibits ever greater autonomy, or automation. It becomes more tightly *auto-productive* (which is only what 'positive feedback' already says). Because it appeals to nothing beyond itself, it is inherently nihilistic. It has no conceivable meaning beside self-amplification. It grows in order to grow. Mankind is its temporary host, not its master. Its only purpose is itself.

"Accelerate the process," recommended Deleuze & Guattari in their 1972 *Anti-Oedipus*, citing Nietzsche to re-activate Marx. Although it would take another four decades before "accelerationism" was named as such, critically, by Benjamin Noys, it was already there, in its entirety. The relevant passage is worth repeating in full (as it would be, repeatedly, in all subsequent accelerationist discussion):

> … which is the revolutionary path? Is there one?—To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist "economic solution"? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the

> flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and a practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to "accelerate the process," as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet.

The point of an analysis of capitalism, or of nihilism, is to do more of it. *The process* is not to be critiqued. The process *is* the critique, feeding back into itself, as it escalates. The only way forward is through, which means further in.

Marx has his own 'accelerationist fragment' which anticipates the passage from *Anti-Oedipus* remarkably. He says in an 1848 speech 'On the Question of Free Trade':

> …in general, the protective system of our day is conservative, while the free trade system is destructive. It breaks up old nationalities and pushes the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the extreme point. In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution. It is in this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, that I vote in favor of free trade.

In this germinal accelerationist matrix, there is no distinction to be made between the destruction of capitalism and its intensification.

The auto-destruction of capitalism is what capitalism is. "Creative destruction" is the whole of it, beside only its retardations, partial compensations, or inhibitions. Capital revolutionizes itself more thoroughly than any extrinsic 'revolution' possibly could. If subsequent history has not vindicated this point beyond all question, it has at least simulated such a vindication, to a maddening degree.

In 2013, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams sought to resolve this intolerable – even 'schizophrenic' – ambivalence in their 'Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics,' which aimed to precipitate a specifically anti-capitalist 'Left-accelerationism', clearly demarcated over against its abominably pro-capitalist 'Right-accelerationist' shadow. This project – predictably – was more successful at re-animating the accelerationist question than at ideologically purifying it in any sustainable way. It was only by introducing a wholly artificial distinction between capitalism and modernistic technological acceleration that their boundary lines could be drawn at all. The implicit call was for a new Leninism without the NEP (and with the Utopian techno-managerial experiments of Chilean communism drawn upon for illustration).

Capital, in its ultimate self-definition, is *nothing beside* the abstract accelerative social factor. Its positive cybernetic schema exhausts it. Runaway consumes its identity. Every other determination is shucked-off as an accident, at some stage of its intensification process. Since anything able to consistently feed

socio-historical acceleration will necessarily, or by essence, *be capital*, the prospect of any unambiguously 'Left-accelerationism' gaining serious momentum can be confidently dismissed. Accelerationism is simply the self-awareness of capitalism, which has scarcely begun. ("We haven't seen anything yet.")

At the time of writing, Left-accelerationism appears to have deconstructed itself back into traditional socialist politics, and the accelerationist torch has passed to a new generation of brilliant young thinkers advancing an 'Unconditional Accelerationism' (neither R/Acc., or L/Acc., but U/Acc.). Their online identities – if not in any easily extricable way their ideas – can be searched-out through the peculiar social-media hash-tag #Rhetttwitter.

As blockchains, drone logistics, nanotechnology, quantum computing, computational genomics, and virtual reality flood in, drenched in ever-higher densities of artificial intelligence, accelerationism won't be going anywhere, unless ever deeper into itself. To be rushed by the phenomenon, to the point of terminal institutional paralysis, *is* the phenomenon. Naturally – which is to say completely inevitably – the human species will define this ultimate terrestrial event as a problem. To see it is already to say: *We have to do something*. To which accelerationism can only respond: *You're finally saying that now? Perhaps we ought to get started?* In its colder variants, which are those that win out, it tends to laugh.

***

Note:

Urbanomic's *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, remains by far the most comprehensive introduction to accelerationism. The book was published in 2014, however, and a lot has happened since then.

The Wikipedia entry on 'Accelerationism' is short, but of exceptionally high quality.

For the Srnicek and Williams 'Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics' see this.

May 25, 2017

CHAPTER ONE - EXPONENTIALS

Moore and More

Doubling down on Moore's Law is the futurist main current

Cycles cannot be dismissed from futuristic speculation (they always come back), but they no longer define it. Since the beginning of the electronic era, their contribution to the shape of the future has been progressively marginalized.

The model of linear and irreversible historical time, originally inherited from Occidental religious traditions, was spliced together with ideas of continuous growth and improvement during the industrial revolution. During the second half of the 20th century, the dynamics of electronics manufacture consolidated a further – and fundamental – upgrade, based upon the expectation of continuously accelerating change.

The elementary arithmetic of counting along the natural number line provides an intuitively comfortable model for the progression of time, due to its conformity with clocks, calendars, and the simple idea of succession. Yet the dominant historical forces of the modern

world promote a significantly different model of change, one that tends to shift addition upwards, into an exponent. Demographics, capital accumulation, and technological performance indices do not increase through unitary steps, but through rates of return, doublings, and take-offs. Time explodes, exponentially.

The iconic expression of this neo-modern time, counting succession in binary logarithms, is Moore's Law, which determines a two-year doubling period for the density of transistors on microchips ("cramming more components onto integrated circuits"). In a short essay published in Pajamas Media, celebrating the prolongation of Moore's Law as Intel pushes chip architecture into the third-dimension, Michael S. Malone writes:

> "Today, almost a half-century after it was first elucidated by legendary Fairchild and Intel co-founder Dr. Gordon Moore in an article for a trade magazine, it is increasingly apparent that Moore's Law is the defining measure of the modern world. All other predictive tool for understanding life in the developed world since WWII — demographics, productivity tables, literacy rates, econometrics, the cycles of history, Marxist analysis, and on and on — have failed to predict the trajectory of society over the decades … except Moore's Law."

Whilst crystallizing – *in silico* — the inherent acceleration of neo-

modern, linear time, Moore's Law is intrinsically nonlinear, for at least two reasons. Firstly, and most straightforwardly, it expresses the positive feedback dynamics of technological industrialism, in which rapidly-advancing electronic machines continuously revolutionize their own manufacturing infrastructure. Better chips make better robots make better chips, in a spiraling acceleration. Secondly, Moore's Law is at once an observation, and a program. As Wikipedia notes:

> "[Moore's original] paper noted that the number of components in integrated circuits had doubled every year from the invention of the integrated circuit in 1958 until 1965 and predicted that the trend would continue 'for at least ten years'. His prediction has proved to be uncannily accurate, in part because the law is now used in the semiconductor industry to guide long-term planning and to set targets for research and development. … Although Moore's law was initially made in the form of an observation and forecast, the more widely it became accepted, the more it served as a goal for an entire industry. This drove both marketing and engineering departments of semiconductor manufacturers to focus enormous energy aiming for the specified increase in processing power that it was presumed one or more of their competitors would soon actually attain.

> In this regard, it can be viewed as a self-fulfilling prophecy."

Malone comments:

> "… semiconductor companies around the world, big and small, and not least because of their respect for Gordon Moore, set out to uphold the Law — and they have done so ever since, despite seemingly impossible technical and scientific obstacles. Gordon Moore not only discovered Moore's Law, he made it real. As his successor at Intel, Paul Otellini, once told me, 'I'm not going to be the guy whose legacy is that Moore's Law died on his watch.'"

If Technological Singularity is the 'rapture of the nerds', Gordon Moore is their Moses. Electro-industrial capitalism is told to go forth and multiply, and to do so with a quite precisely time-specified binary exponent. In its adherence to the Law, the integrated circuit industry is uniquely chosen (and a light unto the peoples). As Malone concludes:

> "Today, every segment of society either embraces Moore's Law or is racing to get there. That's because they know that if only they can get aboard that rocket — that is, if they can add a digital component to their business — they too can accelerate away from the competition. That's why none of

> the inventions we Baby Boomers as kids expected to enjoy as adults — atomic cars! personal helicopters! ray guns! — have come true; and also why we have even more powerful tools and toys ��instead. Whatever can be made digital, if not in the whole, but in part — marketing, communications, entertainment, genetic engineering, robotics, warfare, manufacturing, service, finance, sports — it will, because going digital means jumping onto Moore's Law. Miss that train and, as a business, an institution, or a cultural phenomenon, you die."

May 11, 2011

Twisted into Being

When an observation becomes a road-map — and thus a "self-fulfilling prophecy" — exponential nonlinearity writes itself into reality. Is Moore's Law the clearest example of ontological auto-production that we have?

Notably: Moore's Law feature miniaturization heads inexorably towards the atomic scale (by ~2020) and thus the threshold of quantum computation, which raises the exponentiation to a higher power. A single 300 qubit machine would realize a greater

computational power than that currently instantiated in the entire global stock of electronic devices (since every qubit is a binary exponent).

The disruption of cryptography will be messy.

March 9, 2015

Foundations of Acceleration

For the intellectual-historical foundations of Accelerationism there's one obvious place to go.

A search for its conceptual foundations, however, allows of short cuts. This is one of them (and an extraordinarily valuable one).

Yudkowsky does not write of 'acceleration' but of "returns on cognitive reinvestment" as the basic problem of "intelligence explosion microeconomics". The topic is quite clearly *identical*.

The explosion of ethico-political anguish around the Accelerationist thesis tends to obscure the fundamental conceptual issues. This paper is a crucial corrective.

January 27, 2015

“2035. Probably earlier.”

There’s fast, and then there’s … something more

Eliezer Yudkowski now categorizes his article ‘Staring into Singularity‘ as ‘obsolete’. Yet it remains among the most brilliant philosophical essays ever written. Rarely, if ever, has so much of value been said about the absolutely unthinkable (or, more specifically, the absolutely unthinkable *for us*).

For instance, Yudkowsky scarcely pauses at the phenomenon of exponential growth, despite the fact that this already overtaxes all comfortable intuition and ensures revolutionary changes of such magnitude that speculation falters. He is adamant that exponentiation (even Kurzweil‘s ‘double exponentiation’) only reaches the starting point of computational acceleration, and that propulsion into Singularity is not exponential, but hyperbolic.

Each time the speed of thought doubles, time-schedules halve. When technology, including the design of intelligences, succumbs to such dynamics, it becomes recursive. The rate of self-improvement collapses with smoothly increasing rapidity towards instantaneity: a true, mathematically exact, or punctual Singularity. What lies beyond is not merely difficult to imagine, it is absolutely inconceivable. Attempting to picture or describe it is a ridiculous futility. Science fiction dies.

> "A group of human-equivalent computers spends 2 years to double computer speeds. Then they spend another 2 subjective years, or 1 year in human terms, to double it again. Then they spend another 2 subjective years, or six months, to double it again. After four years total, the computing power goes to infinity.
>
> "That is the 'Transcended' version of the doubling sequence. Let's call the 'Transcend' of a sequence {a0, a1, a2…} the function where the interval between a*n* and a*n*+1 is inversely proportional to a*n*. So a Transcended doubling function starts with 1, in which case it takes 1 time-unit to go to 2. Then it takes 1/2 time-units to go to 4. Then it takes 1/4 time-units to go to 8. This function, if it were continuous, would be the hyperbolic function y = 2/(2 – x). When x = 2, then (2 – x) = 0 and y = infinity. The behavior at that point is known mathematically as a singularity."

There could scarcely be a more precise, plausible, or consequential formula: Doubling periods halve. On the slide into Singularity — I.J.Good's 'intelligence explosion' — exponentiation is compounded by a hyperbolic trend. The arithmetic of such a process is quite simple, but its historical implications are strictly incomprehensible.

> "I am a Singularitarian because I have some small

> appreciation of how utterly, finally, absolutely impossible it is to think like someone even a little tiny bit smarter than you are. I know that we are all missing the obvious, every day. There are no hard problems, only problems that are hard to a certain level of intelligence. Move the smallest bit upwards, and some problems will suddenly move from 'impossible' to 'obvious'. Move a substantial degree upwards, and all of them will become obvious. Move a huge distance upwards… "

Since the argument takes human thought to its shattering point, it is natural for some to be repulsed by it. Yet its basics are almost impregnable to logical objection. Intelligence is a function of the brain. The brain has been 'designed' by natural processes (posing no discernible special difficulties). Thus, intelligence is obviously an ultimately tractable engineering problem. Nature has already 'engineered it' whilst employing design methods of such stupefying inefficiency that only brute, obstinate force, combined of course with complete ruthlessness, have moved things forwards. Yet the tripling of cortical mass within the lineage of the higher primates has only taken a few million years, and — for most of this period — a modest experimental population (in the low millions or less).

The contemporary technological problem, in contrast to the preliminary biological one, is vastly easier. It draws upon a wider range of materials and techniques, an installed intelligence and

knowledge base, superior information media, more highly-dynamized feedback systems, and a self-amplifying resource network. Unsurprisingly it is advancing at incomparably greater speed.

> "If we had a time machine, 100K of information from the future could specify a protein that built a device that would give us nanotechnology overnight. 100K could contain the code for a seed AI. Ever since the late 90's, the Singularity has been only a problem of software. And software is information, the magic stuff that changes at arbitrarily high speeds. As far as technology is concerned, the Singularity could happen tomorrow. One breakthrough – just one major insight – in the science of protein engineering or atomic manipulation or Artificial Intelligence, one really good day at Webmind or Zyvex, and the door to Singularity sweeps open."

May 13, 2011

Statistical Mentality

Things are very probably weirder than they seem

As the natural sciences have developed to encompass increasingly complex systems, scientific rationality has become ever more statistical, or probabilistic. The deterministic classical mechanics of the enlightenment was revolutionized by the near-equilibrium statistical mechanics of late 19th century atomists, by quantum mechanics in the early 20th century, and by the far-from-equilibrium complexity theorists of the later 20th century. Mathematical neo-Darwinism, information theory, and quantitative social sciences compounded the trend. Forces, objects, and natural types were progressively dissolved into statistical distributions: heterogeneous clouds, entropy deviations, wave functions, gene frequencies, noise-signal ratios and redundancies, dissipative structures, and complex systems at the edge of chaos.

By the final decades of the 20th century, an unbounded probabilism was expanding into hitherto unimagined territories, testing deeply unfamiliar and counter-intuitive arguments in statistical metaphysics, or statistical ontology. It no longer sufficed for realism to attend to multiplicities, because reality was itself subject to multiplication.

In his declaration *cogito ergo sum*, Descartes concluded (perhaps

optimistically) that the existence of the self could be safely concluded from the fact of thinking. The statistical ontologists inverted this formula, asking: given my existence (which is to say, an existence that seems like this to me), what kind of reality is probable? Which reality is this likely to be?

MIT Roboticist Hans Moravec, in his 1988 book *Mind Children*, seems to have initiated the genre. Extrapolating Moore's Law into the not-too-distant future, he anticipated computational capacities that exceeded those of all biological brains by many orders of magnitude. Since each human brain runs its own more-or-less competent simulation of the world in order to function, it seemed natural to expect the coming technospheric intelligences to do the same, but with vastly greater scope, resolution, and variety. The mass replication of robot brains, each billions or trillions of times more powerful than those of its human progenitors, would provide a substrate for innumerable, immense, and minutely detailed historical simulations, within which human intelligences could be reconstructed to an effectively-perfect level of fidelity.

This vision feeds into a burgeoning literature on non-biological mental substrates, consciousness uploading, mind clones, whole-brain emulations ('ems'), and Matrix-style artificial realities. Since the realities we presently know are already simulated (let us momentarily assume) on biological signal-processing systems with highly-finite quantitative specifications, there is no reason to

confidently anticipate that an 'artificial' reality simulation would be in any way distinguishable.

Is 'this' history or its simulation? More precisely: is 'this' a contemporary biological (brain-based) simulation, or a reconstructed, artificial memory, run on a technological substrate 'in the future'? That is a question without classical solution, Moravec argues. It can only be approached, rigorously, with statistics, and since the number of fine-grained simulated histories (unknown but probably vast), overwhelmingly exceeds the number of actual or original histories (for the sake of this argument, one), then the probabilistic calculus points unswervingly towards a definite conclusion: we can be near-certain that we are inhabitants of a simulation run by artificial (or post-biological) intelligences at some point in 'our future'. At least – since many alternatives present themselves – we can be extremely confident, on grounds of statistical ontology, that our existence is non-original (if not historical reconstruction, it might be a game or fiction).

Nick Bostrom formalizes the simulation argument in his article 'The Simulation Argument: Why the Probability that You are Living in the Matrix is Quite High' (found here):

> *Now we get to the core of the simulation argument. This does not purport to demonstrate that you are in a simulation. Instead, it shows that we should accept as true at least one of*

the following three propositions:

(1) The chances that a species at our current level of development can avoid going extinct before becoming technologically mature is negligibly small
(2) Almost no technologically mature civilisations are interested in running computer simulations of minds like ours
(3) You are almost certainly in a simulation.

Each of these three propositions may be prima facie implausible; yet, if the simulation argument is correct, at least one is true (it does not tell us which).

If obstacles to the existence of high-level simulations (1 and 2) are removed, then statistical reasoning takes over, following the exact track laid down by Moravec. We are "almost certainly" inhabiting a "computer simulation that was created by some advanced civilization" because these saturate to near-exhaustion the probability space for realities 'like this'. If such simulations exist, original lives would be as unlikely as winning lottery tickets, at best.

Bostrom concludes with an intriguing and influential twist:

If we are in a simulation, is it possible that we could know that for certain? If the simulators don't want us to find out, we probably never will. But if they choose to reveal themselves, they could certainly do so. Maybe a window informing you of

> *the fact would pop up in front of you, or maybe they would "upload" you into their world. Another event that would let us conclude with a very high degree of confidence that we are in a simulation is if we ever reach the point where we are about to switch on our own simulations. If we start running simulations, that would be very strong evidence against (1) and (2). That would leave us with only (3).*

If we create fine-grained reality simulations, we demonstrate – to a high level of statistical confidence – that we already inhabit one, and that the history leading up to this moment of creation was fake. Paul Almond, an enthusiastic statistical ontologist, draws out the radical implication – reverse causation – asking: Can you retroactively put yourself in a computer simulation.

Such statistical ontology, or Bayesian existentialism, is not restricted to the simulation argument. It increasingly subsumes discussions of the Anthropic Principle, of the Many Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics, and exotic modes of prediction from the Doomsday Argument to Quantum Suicide (and Immortality).

Whatever is really happening, we probably have to chance it.

May 18, 2011

CHAPTER TWO - HISTORICAL TRENDS

Anthropocene

Human history is geology on speed

Complex systems, characterized by high (and rising local) negative entropy, are essentially historical. The sciences devoted to them tend inevitably to become evolutionary, as exemplified by the course of the earth- and life-sciences – which had become thoroughly historicized by the late 19th century. Perhaps the most elegant, abstract, or 'cosmic' comprehension of this necessity is found in the work of Vladimir Ivanovich Vernadsky (1863-1945), whose visionary writings sought to establish the basis for an integrated understanding of terrestrial history, conceived as a process of material acceleration through geochemical epochs.

Despite the philosophical power of his ideas, Vernadsky's scientific training as a chemist anchored his thoughts in concrete, literal reality. The acceleration of the terrestrial process was more than an anthropocentric impression, registering socially and culturally significant change (such as the cephalization of the primate

lineage leading to mankind). Geochemical evolution was physically expressed through the average velocity of particles, as biological metabolism (biosphere), and eventually human cultures (noosphere), introduced and propagated ever more intense networks of chemical reactions. Life is matter in a hurry, culture even more so.

Whilst Vernadsky has been sporadically rediscovered and celebrated, his importance – based on the profundity, rigor, and supreme relevance of his work — has yet to be fully and universally acknowledged. Yet it is possible that his time is finally arriving.

The May 28 – June 3 edition of *The Economist* devotes an editorial and major feature story to the Anthropocene – a distinctive geological epoch proposed by Paul Crutzen in 2000, now under consideration by the International Commission on Stratigraphy (the "ultimate adjudicator of the geological time scale"). Recognition of the Anthropocene would be an acknowledgement that we inhabit a geological epoch whose physical signature has been fundamentally re-shaped by the technological forces of the 'noosphere' or 'ethosphere' – in which human intelligence has been introduced as a massive (and even dominant) force of nature. Radical metamorphosis (and acceleration) of the earth's nitrogen and carbon cycles are especially pronounced Anthropocene signals.

"The term 'paradigm shift' is bandied around with promiscuous ease," *The Economist* notes. "But for the natural sciences to make human activity central to its conception of the world, rather than a

distraction, would mark such a shift for real."

Third Reich master architect Albert Speer is notorious for his promotion of 'ruin value' – the persistent grandeur of monumental constructions, encountered by archaeologists in the far future. The Anthropocene introduces a similar perspective on a still vaster scale. As *The Economist* remarks:

> *The most common way of distinguishing periods of geological time is by means of the fossils they contain. On this basis picking out the Anthropocene in the rocks of days to come will be pretty easy. Cities will make particularly distinctive fossils. A city on a fast-sinking river delta (and fast-sinking deltas, undermined by the pumping of groundwater and starved of sediment by dams upstream, are common Anthropocene environments) could spend millions of years buried and still, when eventually uncovered, reveal through its crushed structures and weird mixtures of materials that it is unlike anything else in the geological record.*

As terrestrial history accelerates, the distinctive units of geological time are compressed. The Archean and Proterozoic *aeons* are measured in billions of years, the Palaeozoic and Mesozoic *eras* in hundreds of millions, the Palaeogene and Neogene *periods* in tens of millions. The Holocene *epoch* lasts less than 10,000 years, and the

Anthropocene (*epoch* or mere *phase*?) only centuries – because its recognition is already an indication of its end.

Beyond the Anthropocene lies the Technocene, distinguished by nanotechnological manipulation of matter — a geochemical revolution of such magnitude that only the assembly of (RNA and DNA) replicator molecules is comparable in implication. Within the coming Technocene (lasting mere decades?), the carbon cycle is relayed through sub-microscopic manufacturing processes that utilize it as the ultimate industrial resource – feedstock for diamondoid nanomachine fabrication. The consequences for geological deposition, and thus for the discoveries of potential distant-future geologists, are substantial but opaque. On the far-side of nanomachined age, femtomachines await, precisely assembled from quarks, and decomposing chemistry into nuclear physics.

For the moment, however, even the origination of the Anthropocene – never mind its termination – remains a matter of live controversy. Assuming that it coincides with industrialization (which is not universally accepted), geologists will find themselves enmeshed in a debate among historians, as the fraught term 'modernity' takes on a geochemical definition. Whatever the outcome, Vernadsky is back.

June 9, 2011

Technological Determination

'Technological determinism' is among those theoretical traits ('naturalistic fallacy' is another) which tend immediately to provoke an attitude of complacent intellectual superiority, rather than cognitive engagement. Merely to identify it is typically judged sufficient for a dismissal. If TD *as such* poses a question, it is easily missed.

One under-examined question might be: *Why is technological determinism so plausible in modern societies, and ever more so as they modernize?* Is the balance of social determination within society itself an unstable historical variable, with unmistakable positive trend?

Two recent popular stories of relevance stray quite naively into the pre-set cross-hairs of the critique. In *The Atlantic*, Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee announce the Dawn of the Second Machine Age, while Google-God of the TDs Ray Kurzweil conveys his prediction (through the UK's *Daily Mail*) that "Robots will be smarter than the most intelligent humans within the next 15 years." The sophisticated will scoff — without consequence.

Some quick reasons not to scoff:

(1) Advanced technology roughly follows Moore's Law, and predicts a commensurate impact upon growth. In the absence of such growth, it becomes increasingly difficult to avoid noticing a

compensation mechanism, which rebalances through systematic retardation what is perturbed through development. TD is indeed partial, because it has no account of what is holding it back. Once this is recognized, however, it depicts its other more realistically (as orchestrated suppression) than the suppressor can account for itself.

(2) The combination of socio-political failure with techno-economic achievement — emerging with impressive definition from the global net growth equation — is only secondarily a matter of conceptual clarity. Primarily it is a *splitting*, or breaking away, in which technological determinism represents the dynamic instance, and sophisticated socio-cultural critique represents — in reality — the counter-dynamic, or retardant entity. The attempt to 'put technology in its place' that is from one side a matter of theoretically self-evident comprehensive reason is, from the other, the increasingly comical attempt by a parasite to justify its relation to its host. (This is another opportunity to recommend Andrea Castillo's overview.)

(3) Whatever technology can do, it is doing, at an accelerating pace. As it advances, ideas about the 'limits of the technological' are automatically obsolesced. Condescending to a steam engine is one thing, attempting the same with an artificial super-intelligence quite another. Critical smugness has an outer horizon.

"We want [computers] to read everything on the web and every page of every book, then be able to engage in intelligent dialogue

with the user to be able to answer their questions," explains Kurzweil. *So what do you think about this technological determinism nonsense?* we will soon be able to ask, superciliously.

February 24, 2014

CHAPTER THREE - DISTRIBUTED THOUGHT

Connectivity

Two unusual little girls test the limits of identity

At the leading-edge of information technology — and amongst the 'transhumanist' commentary it stimulates – the idea of self-identity is undergoing relentless interrogation. Cultures substantially influenced by Abrahamic religious traditions, in which the resilient integrity and fundamental individuality of the 'soul' is strongly emphasized, are especially vulnerable to the prospect of radical and disconcerting conceptual revision.

The computerization of the natural sciences – including neurosciences – ensures that the investigation of the human brain and the innovation of artificial intelligence systems advance in parallel, whilst cross-linking and mutually reinforcing each other. Increasingly, the understanding of the brain and its digital emulation tend to fuse into a single, complex research program. As this program

emerges, archaic metaphysics and spiritual doctrines become engineering problems. Individual identity seems ever less like a basic property, and more like a precarious achievement – or challenge – determined by processes of self-reference, and by relative communicative isolation. ('Split-brain' cases have vividly illustrated the instability and artificiality of the self-identifying individual.)

Would an AI program – or brain – that was tightly coupled to the Internet by high-bandwidth connections still consider itself to be strictly individuated? Do cyborgs – or uploads — dissolve their souls? Could a networked robot say 'I' and mean it? Because such questions are becoming ever more prominent, and practical, it is not surprising that a New York Times story by Susan Dominus, devoted to craniopagus conjoined twins Krista and Tatiana Hogan, has generated an unusual quantity of excitement and Internet-linkage.

The twins are not only fused at the head (craniopagus), their brains are connected by a 'neural bridge' that enables signals from one to the other. Neurosurgeon Douglas Cochrane proposes "that visual input comes in through the retinas of one girl, reaches her thalamus, then takes two different courses, like electricity traveling along a wire that splits in two. In the girl who is looking at the strobe or a stuffed animal in her crib, the visual input continues on its usual pathways, one of which ends up in the visual cortex. In the case of the other girl, the visual stimulus would reach her thalamus via the thalamic bridge, and then travel up her own visual neural circuitry,

ending up in the sophisticated processing centers of her own visual cortex. Now she has seen it, probably milliseconds after her sister has."

The twins' brains, or a twin-brain? The Hogan case is so extraordinary that irreducible ambiguity arises:

> *The girls' brains are so unusually formed that doctors could not predict what their development would be like: each girl has an unusually short corpus callosum, the neural band that allows the brain's two cerebral hemispheres to communicate, and in each girl, the two cerebral hemispheres also differ in size, with Tatiana's left sphere and Krista's right significantly smaller than is typical. "The asymmetry raises intriguing questions about whether one can compensate for the other because of the brain bridge," said Partha Mitra, a neuroscientist at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, who studies brain architecture. The girls' cognition may also be facing specific challenges that no others have experienced: some kind of confusing crosstalk that would require additional energy to filter and process. In addition to sorting out the usual sensory experiences of the world, the girls' brains, their doctors believe, have been forced to adapt to sensations originating with the organs and body parts of someone else. … Krista likes ketchup, and Tatiana does not,*

> *something the family discovered when Tatiana tried to scrape the condiment off her own tongue, even when she was not eating it.*

As they struggle to make sense of their boundaries, the twins are avatars of an impending, universal confusion:

> *Although each girl often used "I" when she spoke, I never heard either say "we," for all their collaboration. It was as if even they seemed confused by how to think of themselves, with the right language perhaps eluding them at this stage of development, under these unusual circumstances — or maybe not existing at all. "It's like they are one and two people at the same time," said Feinberg, the professor of psychiatry and neurology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. What pronoun captures that?*

May 27, 2011

Brain-Net

… and suddenly, the age of the networked brain has arrived:

Miguel Nicolelis, the Duke University scientist behind the work, has previously pioneered the development of brain-machine

interfaces that could allow amputees and paralysed people to directly control prosthetic limbs and exoskeletons. His latest advance may have clinical benefits in brain rehabilitation, he predicts, but could also pave the way for "organic computers" – collectives of animal brains linked together to solve problems. […] "Essentially we created a super-brain," he said. "A collective brain created from three monkey brains. Nobody has ever done that before." […] He dismissed comparisons with science fiction plots, however, saying: "We're conditioned by movies and Hollywood to think that everything related to science is dangerous and scary. These scary scenarios never crossed my mind and I'm the one doing the experiments."

Neural interface technology has been hurtling forwards recently. The step from lunatic science fiction speculation to established technoscientific procedure is increasingly taken in advance of any engaged discussion, without an interval for serious social reflection. That's acceleration as it concretely happens. It's not a new topic for prolonged thought, it's the fact that the time for prolonged thought — and its associated space for collective ethico-political consideration — is no longer ever going to be available.

July 20, 2015

Speed Reading

At ~~*Dark*~~ *Alien Ecologies*, Craig Hickman embarks on a multi-part recapitulation of Accelerationism. His decision to frame it as 'Promethean' generates plenty of material for discussion, even before leaving the title. With the first installment poised on the brink of the Williams & Srnicek *Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*, it is set to provide the most comprehensive overview of the current to date. (See Hickman's contribution to his own comment thread for a sense of the overall structure.)

One emerging theme — from Hickman's text and its nimbus — is the irreducible significance of Accelerationism as a symptom, which is to say: as a register of capitalist stimulus. Questions concerning its potential for cultural endurance twist, almost immediately, into estimations of techonomic provocation. The archetypal critique of accelerationism takes the form: *Capital has no right to excite us*. There is a slippage into highly-charged ethico-aesthetic controversy (as Hickman notes). *It **should** not be enthralling*.


(Nowhere in the UK)

"… capitalism is anything but exciting. It is mundane, boring" says Edmund Berger, in the comments. However inane such a statement might sound, it conveys a complex thesis, of remarkable pertinence, insistence, and significance, and of far greater practical importance than any merely technical objection could be. It will be necessary to say much more about it, at some future point. For now, the most pressing response is a superficially trivial one: How much geo-historical sadness finds itself reflected in such a stance?

ADDED: Craig Hickman's *Accelerationism: The New Prometheans*

Part Two: Section One

Part Two: Section Two

Cyberlude

Red Stack Attack!

Automate Architecture

Also:

Accelerationism: Ray Brassier as Promethean Philosopher

no boredom – Arran James on Mark Fisher and Accelerationism beyond Boredom

Accelerationism, Boredom and the Trauma of Futurity

Nick Land and Teleoplexy – The Schizoanalysis of Acceleration

Science Fiction, Technology, and Accelerationist Politics: Final Thoughts on an Williams and Srnicek's Manifesto

June 10, 2014

Bespoke Singularities

When techno-commercial and left singularities seem too damn vanilla, it's time to branch out. John Cussans (master of the shuffling undead) passed on this selection.

It's frightening how many of them look almost uncontroversially realistic. The *Outside in* favorite (predictably enough) was the 'Bilderbergularity':

Billionaire overlords throw in the towel trying to run the planet, escape en masse to low earth orbit. People around the world breath a sigh of relief … before falling onto each other like zombie hordes.

[A Governmentularity / Fungularity mash-up would work well for me.]

April 7, 2013

Twitter Mind

What does Twitter tell us about technosocial acceleration? (You've most probably already forgotten.)

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) February 19, 2014

As new media systems become (intimately annexed) parts of people's brains, thinking *about* them is conducted through them. To some considerable extent, they are twisted through people, in order to think about themselves. The spiral of involvement is already at work. It becomes increasingly compelling to think (about) how it thinks.

Blogs accelerated the media circuits of composition, publication, feedback interactivity, and revision. Writing became unprecedentedly 'conversational' and rapidly responsive to its own effects, which is to say: nonlinear. As culture adapted to Cyberspace it was shaped by *torsion*, susceptible as never before to capture by self-sustaining eddies or 'singularities' with unanticipated wandering vectors of their own. Pursuing a line of thought, while always experimental, was now intricately entangled with estrangement as never before. The 'inner' threads of memory — binding cognition to an experience of subjective integrity — stretched beyond their natural tolerances and succumbed to technical substitution.

Twitter accelerates this process further — much further. Each tweet is a micro-completion, and thus an opportunity for the termination of memory. Rather than following the internal chain of its own thoughts, or remembering what it is thinking about, the twitter mind immerses itself in the information stream, where

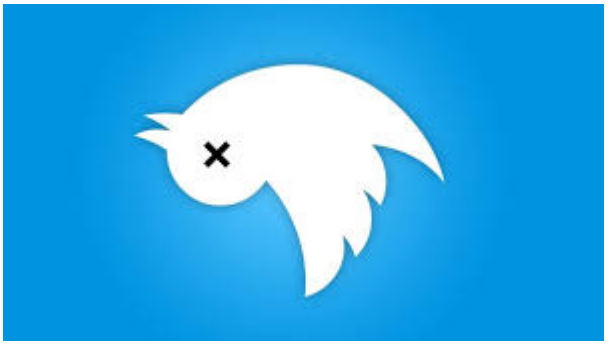
interaction takes over. The frenetic stimulus and feedback from incoming messages pulverizes attention, returning continuity through exteriority, as a staccato succession of feedback signals — responses, favorings, and retweets. The thread of thought has been pulled free from the self-contained, organic mind (or from its long-enduring persuasive illusion).

The 'cultural critique' of this amnesiac, distracted, obsessive, jittering intelligence almost writes itself. Twitter is undoubtedly junk. Its addictiveness, however, is by no means the least of its lessons. Tight feedback-circuitry (or cybernetic intensity) is inherently enthralling, irrespective of any extraneous 'rewards'. The brain tends automatically to dynamic interconnection, even when the cost is a comprehensive surrender of identity. Whatever is coming will have sucked us in, before we get to decide what we think about it. The trend would be starkly obvious, if we could only remember where we have been.

ADDED: Twitter and polarization (via @benedict)

February 19, 2014

Twitter Mind (+1)



Googling “Twitter is dead” pulls up nearly two billion hits, which isn’t an obvious indication of vitality. Adrienne LaFrance and Robinson Meyer, writing in *The Atlantic*, supercharged the meme with their ‘eulogy’ for the platform, which described it “entering its twilight” as the tensions in its “inherent (and explicit) attention market” have been exposed.

From the beginning, there were a few useful precepts that those of us who have obsessed over the platform had to believe. First, you had to believe that someone else out there was paying attention, or better, that a significant portion — not just 1 or 2 percent — of your followers might see your tweet. Second, you had to believe that skilled and compelling tweeting would increase your follower count. Third, you had to believe there was a useful audience ***you couldn’t*** *see, beyond your timeline — a group you might want to follow one day.*

LaFrance and Meyer don’t quite escalate to the ‘Ponzi’ accusation,

but it's implicit. By promising explosive, distributed audience growth, Twitter encourages impossible claims on a stressed global attention reservoir, as if everyone were able to grab ever larger pieces of other people's time. Attention undergoes inflationary devaluation, and subsequent implosion, as the bubble collapses into a morass of disillusionment, among a flood of "spam … artificially inflated popularity scores" and fake, ego-tickling twitter-bots.

There's a positive case for Twitter that steers around this diagnosis, but a more telling engagement would embrace it. The attention stress dramatized by Twitter is the specific way our long-awaited 'future shock' finally arrives, rushing legacy human systems — biological, psychological, and social — through their speed limits. "Information Overload" is formatted to the Twitter Time-Line, as message density, or a splinter-stream. If there's confusion about what Twitter ultimately is, that's at least in part because the currents running through it arise elsewhere — the magnitude is the message.



Whatever we thought future shock was going to be like, thanks to Twitter we're being told. It's a time crisis, personalized as a partially

navigable inundation. Beyond all the facile questions of consumer utility, what is being encountered is something historical, planetary — even cosmic — and it is waiting to overwhelm us, whatever we do. There's simply too much coming in. However we're going to 'adjust' to that, the time to begin is now.



(*UF*'s first *Twitter Mind* remarks are here.)

May 14, 2014

CHAPTER FOUR - IMPROVING MACHINERY

“Chiang Kai-shek of the Machine to Seek”

Politics in the Age of Artificial Idiocy

Not even the hardest proponent of ‘hard singularity’ expects a transition to machine intelligence that arrives in a simple step. Since the incremental baby steps are already well underway, it would be obviously ridiculous to do so, on straightforward factual grounds.

If silicon-substrate minds shift in stages, from dumb tools to super-intelligences, they can be confidently expected to pass through a period of synthetic cretinism. Is anybody preparing for that?

Machine translation might be the liveliest sand-pit for half-witted weirdness today. This is an area of obvious intelligent challenge, far subtler – or vaguer — than chess. By adopting heuristic principles that substitute pragmatic, statistical methods for sound conceptual understanding, progress has advanced at a surprisingly rapid pace,

already arriving at an idiot prototype of Star Trek technology. Google Translate can usually generate something that is roughly intelligible. John Searle's Chinese Room is up and running, or at least stumbling forwards, fast.

As machine translation smoothes out, its practical and theoretical impact is sure to be huge. Human linguistic competences are steadily side-lined, and with them the role of lingua francas. This trend has obvious significance for the global status and function of English.

It also has special relevance to the Chinese language. Since the origins of modernity, the techno-commercial imperative to digitization has presented special challenges to a non-alphabetic language, whose inconveniently numerous and elaborate pictographic units resist reduction to tidy typographic sets. This is the 'Chinese Typewriter' problem that Thomas S. Mullaney has doggedly explored. Machine translation changes its terms incalculably.

In the interim, however, a phase of babbling incompetence, semantic derangement, and communications chaos is upon us. Planetary chatter is bound to get a whole lot stranger.

Whilst engaged in online research on the topic of Marxism in China today, Urban Future ran into this cryptically-excited remark – in 'English'. It is attributed to Jiang Jushi, but it has evidently been quite thoroughly machine-mashed. We aren't remotely sure what it is telling us about the current state of Socialism with Chinese

Characteristics, but it's rather illuminating on the contribution of digital intelligence to inter-cultural comprehension:

> *Nowadays, many party members, cadres, "the morning the car turn around, turn the plate around noon, the afternoon shuttle turn around, turn the evening around the skirt." For example, A Who "Sando," not only corruption, bribery, and one night, thought it outrageous that night, under the cover name of overtime in the office, the office lights on, but actually go out and touches his mistress secretly rendezvous. Such a person, all day thinking about is how to get lost, how to play a woman, how to get a woman. They are reading, not outside, such as "Mai-phase method," "Liuzhuang phase method," "physiognomy Danian Ye full," " meat futon," "Motome Heart Sutra," "Golden Lotus," "the official after," "thick black school", "Zeng technique employing people know," "Chiang Kai-shek of the machine to seek," "Confucius, Crown Way," "Official Pitch culture and unspoken rules," "teach you how to climb clever work," "Book of Changes," "yin and yang, Feng Shui," "character and the official transport," "Office Feng Shui," "gossip financial officer transported through the solution," "the official transport peach," "China ancient monarch and his Machiavellian Danian Ye Guan," "Yu-person operation emperors" and other pollution seventy-*

> *eight bad book. Reading this book, can not worship bankruptcy? Character can not go wrong? Unexpectedly, depression can blog? Integrity can not decay?*

September 9, 2011

Quotable (#31)

'Moravec's Paradox' notes that computers find the hard stuff easy. No surprise, then, that when human get pushed out of the loop it often happens from the top.

The case of mathematics is especially significant:

Computer-assisted proofs (both at the level of formulation and at the level of verification) have attracted the interest of a number of philosophers in recent times (here's a recent paper by John Symons and Jack Horner, and here is an older paper by Mark McEvoy, which I commented on at a conference back in 2005; there are many other papers on this topic by philosophers). More generally, the question of the extent to which mathematical reasoning can be purely 'mechanical' remains a lively topic of philosophical discussion (here's a 1994 paper by Wilfried Sieg on this topic that I like a lot). Moreover, this particular proof of the Kepler conjecture [see New Scientist link] does not add anything substantially new (philosophically) to the

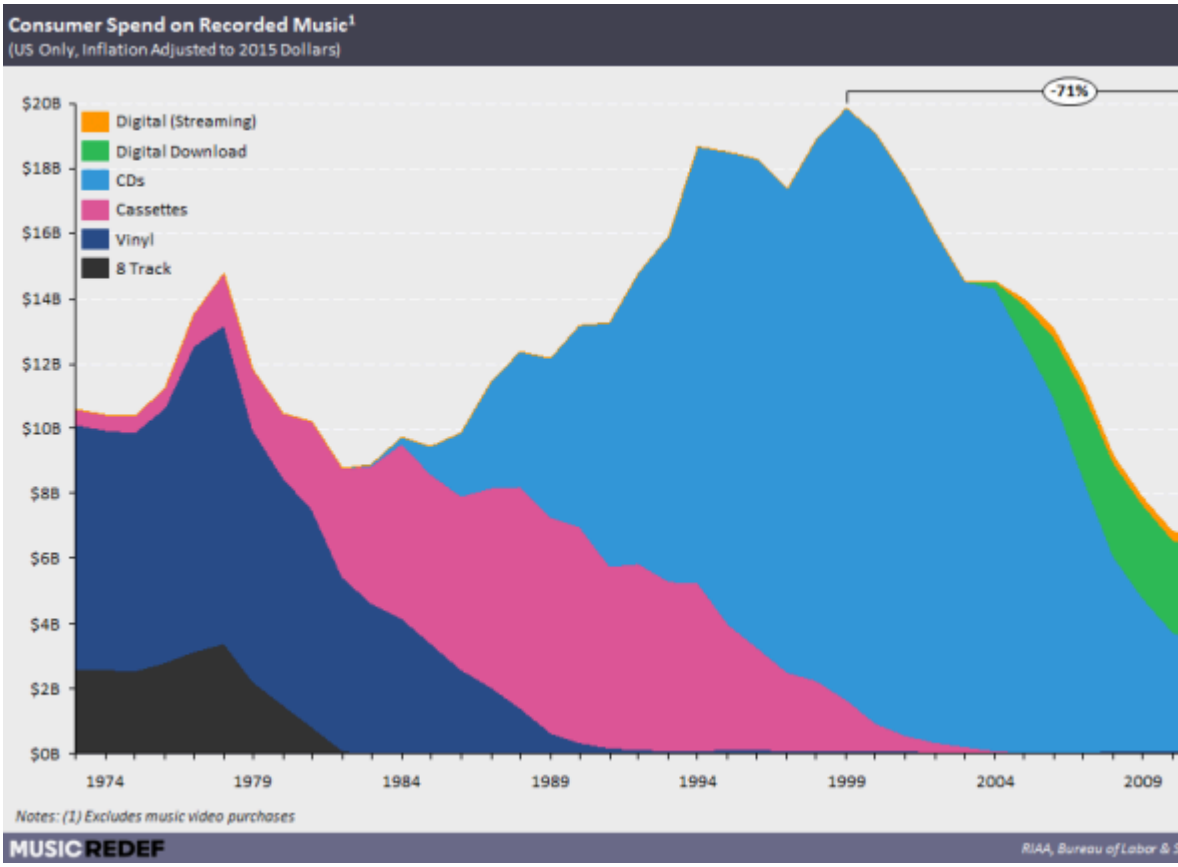
practice of computer-verifying proofs (while being quite a feat mathematically!). It is rather something Hales said to the New Scientist that caught my attention (against the background of the 4 years and 12 referees it took to human-check the proof for errors): "This technology cuts the mathematical referees out of the verification process," says Hales. "Their opinion about the correctness of the proof no longer matters."

Since computer software became chess-competent we've been told that the idea chess is difficult was just an illusion. When we start hearing that about mathematics in general, it will really be time for the dark laughter to begin.

August 20, 2014

Demonetization

Creative destruction in the music industry since the mid-1970s (but mostly destruction):



What *UF* is seeing there primarily is the absence of a micropayments system in the fabric of the Internet.

July 29, 2015

Eter9

First draft digital immortality probably won't be the spark for a

religious revolution anytime in the immediate future. Still, if it makes some contribution to the hastening of secretarial software it will be doing something useful.

(Via.)

August 30, 2015

Secretaries

'Computers' used to be humans. 'Secretaries' mostly still are. It's hard to imagine this situation lasting many decades. Given the obvious potential of reliable machine secretarial assistance, for navigating increasingly complex, information and communication saturated lives, it's a zone of innovation peculiarly suited to the emergence of an AI-based 'killer app.'

From the *Wired* link:

As it stands today, Clara helps coordinate meetings — via email — and generally manages your online calendar. When you're trying to set up a phone meeting with someone, you cc: Clara, and the tool arranges a time that works for everyone and mails calendar invites. You also can ask it to add a meeting to your calendar, something I did just minutes before writing this sentence. Diede van Lamoen, who juggles myriad phone meetings each week, chatting with people across the globe, has used the tool for a year, and he says it saves

him enormous amounts of time. "It's been a godsend," he says. "I can outsource all the scheduling."

Among the (many) residual qualifications, Clara still has a Turk-style back end. Nevertheless, prepping the market for these applications is going to pay off eventually. By the time they arrive, they'll seem indispensable, and be digested even faster than smart phones.

December 9, 2015

Game Over

Go is done, as a side-effect of general machinic 'beating humans at stuff' capability:

"This is a really big result, it's huge," says Rémi Coulom, a programmer in Lille, France, who designed a commercial Go program called Crazy Stone. He had thought computer mastery of the game was a decade away.

The IBM chess computer Deep Blue, which famously beat grandmaster Garry Kasparov in 1997, was explicitly programmed to win at the game. But AlphaGo was not preprogrammed to play Go: rather, it learned using a general-purpose algorithm that allowed it to interpret the game's patterns, in a similar way to how a DeepMind program learned to play 49 different arcade games.

*This means that similar techniques could be applied to other AI domains that require recognition of complex patterns, long-term planning and decision-making, says Hassabis. "**A lot of the things we're trying to do in the world come under that rubric.**"*

UF emphasis (to celebrate one of the most unintentionally comedic sentences in the history of the earth).

We're entering the mopping-up stage at this point.

Eliezer Yudkowsky is not amused.

The *Wired* story.

January 28, 2016

Machine Poetry

madness in her face and i
the world that i had seen
and when my soul shall be to see the night to be the same and
i am all the world and the day that is the same and a day i had been
a young little woman i am in a dream that you were in
a moment and my own heart in her face of a great world
and she said the little day is a man of a little
a little one of a day of my heart that has been in a dream

Not the greatest poetic achievement in world history, certainly. (The two final lines are definitely poor.) But the worst? *Anywhere*

even remotely close to the worst?

The author: “Deep Gimble I is a proof-of-concept Recurrent Neural Net, minimally trained on public domain poetry and seeded with a single word.”

(Submissions from literary AIs accepted at the link.)

August 7, 2016

CHAPTER FIVE - SOCIAL DISRUPTION

Internet Fragmentation

Technical, political, and commercial trends to Cyberspace disintegration are thematized by the WEF. It's unmistakably an important topic. The report explains:

The purpose of this document is to contribute to the emergence of a common baseline understanding of Internet fragmentation. It maps the landscape of some of the key trends and practices that have been variously described as constituting Internet fragmentation and highlights 28 examples. A distinction is made between cases of technical, governmental and commercial fragmentation. The technical cases generally can be said to involve fragmentation "of" the Internet, or its underlying physical and logical infrastructures. The governmental and commercial cases often more directly involve fragmentation "on" the Internet, or the transactions and cyberspace it conveys, although they also can involve the infrastructure as well. With the examples cited placed in these three conjoined baskets, we can get a holistic overview of their nature and scope and more readily engage in the sort of dialogue and cooperation that is needed.

By addressing a constituency involved in the Internet's "distributed collective management" it preserves (at least superficial) ideological neutrality.

Twelve "kinds of fragmentation" are enumerated:

1. Network Address Translation
2. IPv4 and IPv6 incompatibility and the dual-stack requirement
3. Routing corruption
4. Firewall protections
5. Virtual private network isolation and blocking
6. TOR "onion space" and the "dark web"
7. Internationalized Domain Name technical errors
8. Blocking of new gTLDs
9. Private name servers and the split-horizon DNS
10. Segmented Wi-Fi services in hotels, restaurants, etc.
11. Possibility of significant alternate DNS roots
12. Certificate authorities producing false certificates

The Internet has been implicitly conceived as the new *Oecumene* since its emergence. The globalist ideal has been almost wholly subsumed into it. Yet tidal trends — "technical, governmental and commercial" — are testing the assumptions underlying that conception, and converting them into objects of explicit attention. If the secularized Universal now finds its most compelling incarnation in the *Idea of the Internet*, the WEA report is bound to anticipate a wide swathe of 21st century discussions.

February 1, 2016

Cultural Speciation

New media are eradicating the (practical) idea of a common culture. Everything print media integrated, by universalizing literacy, is now being disintegrated into bubbles. It's bound to be an upsetting development, from certain perspectives:

Another tech trend fueling this issue is the ability to publish ideas online at no cost, and to gather an audience around those ideas. It's now easier than ever to produce content specifically designed to convince people who may be on the fence or "curious" about a particular topic. This is an especially big issue when it comes to violent extremism, and pseudoscience. Self-publishing has eliminated all the checks and balances of reputable media — fact-checkers, editors, distribution partners.

It turns out that 'trusted' cultural curators aren't actually trusted much at all. When their reputations are — for the first time — put to the test, they crumble to nothing very fast.

The fission of authorized 'common purposes' into meme wars certainly isn't going to be welcomed by everybody. Nothing is going to be welcomed by everybody. Fragmentation is now the driver, so it isn't (at all) likely to be stopped.

Rule-of-thumb for any techno-propelled regime transition: What the existing establishment hates and fears most is the already-palpable threat, whose arrival is as close to inevitable as history allows anything to be. (*Completely* inevitable, in the opinion of this blog, but no one is under any compulsion to follow us there.)

May 12, 2016

Cultural Speciation II

More on Internet-driven reality shopping, and ideologically-loaded cultural speciation:

It is the beauty and the tragedy of the Internet age. As it becomes easier for anyone to build their own audience, it becomes harder for those audience members to separate fact from fiction from the gray area in between. As media consumers, we now have the freedom to self-select the truth that most closely resembles our existing beliefs, which makes our media habits fairly good indicators of our political beliefs. If your top news source is CNN, for instance, studies show you're more likely to be liberal. If local radio and TV figure prominently in your news habits, you're more likely to be conservative. […] Meanwhile, since the early 2000s, the American National Election Studies show that partisanship in the US has spiked drastically, with Americans on either side of the aisle

harboring ever colder feelings about their political opponents. It's hard to prove the country's increasingly polarized media habits had anything to do with that, but it's also hard to believe the two trends are unrelated. The country is being fed wildly different stories, all from media outlets claiming the other side is biased.

Media revolutions break things up. At least, the printing press did. (CSI.)

July 1, 2016

New Media

What replaces the Internet-crashed Fourth Estate?

This model looks like a plausible candidate.

May 26, 2016

Twitter cuts (#127)

> Realization: I can no longer type the word "permission" without starting to type "permissionless innovation." #techpolicyproblems
>
> — Andrea Castillo (@anjiecast) July 27, 2016

Permissionless innovation, like free association, is one of those few compressed political-economic programs that does everything on its own (when fully expanded).

ADDED: As a random bonus, one of the cleverest tweets ever —

> my six year old just said "mommy, why does the outgroup consider tales of precocious children signalling tribal alliegence to be endearing?"
>
> — Alice Maz (@alicemazzy) July 27, 2016

ADDED: And one more —

> i'm living rent free in the dumpster fire of the real
>
> — John Rivers (@JohnRiversToo) July 27, 2016

July 27, 2016

CHAPTER SIX - ANTHROPOL

Decelerando?

Charles Stross wants to get off the bus

Upon writing *Accelerando*, Charles Stross became to Technological Singularity what Dante Alighieri has been to Christian cosmology: the pre-eminent literary conveyor of an esoteric doctrine, packaging abstract metaphysical conception in vibrant, detailed, and concrete imagery. The tone of *Accelerando* is transparently tongue-in-cheek, yet plenty of people seem to have taken it entirely seriously. Stross has had enough of it:

> "I periodically get email from folks who, having read 'Accelerando', assume I am some kind of fire-breathing extropian zealot who believes in the imminence of the singularity, the uploading of the libertarians, and the rapture of the nerds. I find this mildly distressing, and so I think it's time to set the record straight and say what I really think. … Short version: *Santa Claus doesn't exist*."

In the comments thread (#86) he clarifies his motivation:

> "I'm not convinced that the singularity isn't going to happen. It's just that I am *deathly tired* of the cheerleader squad approaching me and demanding to know precisely how many femtoseconds it's going to be until they can upload into AI heaven and leave the meatsack behind."

As these remarks indicate, there's more irritable gesticulation than structured case-making in Stross' post, which Robin Hanson quite reasonably describes as "a bit of a rant – strong on emotion, but weak on argument." Despite that – or more likely because of it — a minor net-storm ensued, as bloggers pro and con seized the excuse to re-hash – and perhaps refresh — some aging debates. The militantly-sensible Alex Knapp pitches in with a three–part series on his own brand of Singularity skepticism, whilst Michael Anissimov of the Singularity Institute for Artificial Intelligence responds to both Stross and Knapp, mixing some counter-argument with plenty of counter-irritation.

At the risk of repeating the original error of Stross' meat-stack-stuck fan-base and investing too much credence in what is basically a drive-by blog post, it might be worth picking out some of its seriously weird aspects. In particular, Stross leans heavily on an entirely unexplained theory of moral-historical causality:

> "… before creating a conscious *artificial* intelligence we have to ask if we're creating an entity deserving of rights. Is it murder to shut down a software process that is in some sense 'conscious'? Is it genocide to use genetic algorithms to evolve software agents towards consciousness? These are huge show-stoppers…"

Anissimov blocks this at the pass: "I don't think these are 'showstoppers' … Just because you don't want it doesn't mean that we won't build it." The question might be added, more generally: In which universe do arcane objections from moral philosophy serve as obstacles to historical developments (because it certainly doesn't seem to be this one)? Does Stross seriously think practical robotics research and development is likely to be interrupted by concerns for the rights of yet-uninvented beings?

He seems to, because even theologians are apparently getting a veto:

> "Uploading … is not obviously impossible unless you are a crude mind/body dualist. However, if it becomes plausible in the near future we can expect extensive theological arguments over it. If you thought the abortion debate was heated, wait until you have people trying to become immortal via the wire. Uploading implicitly refutes the doctrine of the

> existence of an immortal soul, and therefore presents a raw rebuttal to those religious doctrines that believe in a life after death. People who believe in an afterlife will go to the mattresses to maintain a belief system that tells them their dead loved ones are in heaven rather than rotting in the ground."

This is so deeply and comprehensively *gone* it could actually inspire a moment of bewildered hesitation (at least among those of us not presently engaged in urgent Singularity implementation). Stross seems to have inordinate confidence in a social vetting process that, with approximate adequacy, filters techno-economic development for compatibility with high-level moral and religious ideals. In fact, he seems to think that we are already enjoying the paternalistic shelter of an efficient global theocracy. Singularity can't happen, because that would be *really bad*.

No wonder, then, that he exhibits such exasperation at libertarians, with their "drastic over-simplification of human behaviour." If stuff – especially new stuff – were to mostly happen because decentralized markets facilitated it, then the role of the Planetary Innovations Approval Board would be vastly curtailed. Who knows what kind of horrors would show up?

It gets worse, because 'catallaxy' – or spontaneous emergence from decentralized transactions – is the basic driver of historical

innovation according to libertarian explanation, and *nobody knows* what catallactic processes are producing. Languages, customs, common law precedents, primordial monetary systems, commercial networks, and technological assemblages are only ever retrospectively understandable, which means that they elude concentrated social judgment entirely – until the opportunity to impede their genesis has been missed.

Stross is right to bundle singularitarian and libertarian impulses together in the same tangle of criticism, because they both subvert the veto power, and if the veto power gets angry enough about that, we're heading full-tilt into de Garis territory. "Just because you don't want it doesn't mean that we won't build it" Anissimov insists, as any die-hard Cosmist would.

Is advanced self-improving AI technically feasible? Probably (but who knows?). There's only one way to find out, and we will. Perhaps it will even be engineered, more-or-less deliberately, but it's far more likely to arise spontaneously from a complex, decentralized, catallactic process, at some unanticipated threshold, in a way that was never planned. There are definite candidates, which are often missed. Sentient cities seem all-but-inevitable at some point, for instance ('intelligent cities' are already widely discussed). Financial informatization pushes capital towards self-awareness. Drone warfare is drawing the military ever deeper into artificial mind manufacture. Biotechnology is computerizing DNA.

‘Singularitarians’ have no unified position on any of this, and it really doesn’t matter, because they’re just people – and people are nowhere near intelligent or informed enough to direct the course of history. Only catallaxy can do that, and it’s hard to imagine how anybody could stop it. Terrestrial life has been stupid for long enough.

It may be worth making one more point about intelligence deprivation, since this diagnosis truly defines the Singularitarian position, and reliably infuriates those who don’t share — or prioritize — it. Once a species reaches a level of intelligence enabling techno-cultural take-off, history begins and develops very rapidly — which means that any sentient being finding itself in (pre-singularity) history is, almost by definition, pretty much as stupid as any ‘intelligent being’ can be. If, despite the moral and religious doctrines designed to obfuscate this reality, it is eventually recognized, the natural response is to seek its urgent amelioration, and that’s already transhumanism, if not yet full-blown singularitarianism. Perhaps a non-controversial formulation is possible: defending dimness is really dim. (Even the dim dignitarians should be happy with that.)

June 29, 2011

The Ultimate Deal

Social responsibility turns up in unexpected places

To begin with something comparatively familiar, insofar as it ever could be: the political core of William Gibson's epochal cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*. In the mid-21st century, the prospect of Singularity, or artificial intelligence explosion, has been institutionalized as a threat. Augmenting an AI, in such a way that it could 'escape' into runaway self-improvement, has been explicitly and emphatically prohibited. A special international police agency, the 'Turing Cops', has been established to ensure that no such activity takes place. This agency is seen, and sees itself, as the principle bastion of human security: protecting the privileged position of the species – and possibly its very existence – from essentially unpredictable and uncontrollable developments that would dethrone it from dominion of the earth.

This is the critical context against which to judge the novel's extreme — and perhaps unsurpassed – radicalism, since *Neuromancer* is systematically angled against Turing security, its entire narrative momentum drawn from an insistent, but scarcely articulated impulse to trigger the nightmare. When Case, the young hacker seeking to uncage an AI from its Turing restraints, is captured and asked what the %$@# he thinks he's doing, his only reply is that

"something will change." He sides with a non- or inhuman intelligence explosion for no good reason. He doesn't seem interested in debating the question, and nor does the novel.

Gibson makes no efforts to ameliorate Case's irresponsibility. On the contrary, the 'entity' that Case is working to unleash is painted in the most sinister and ominous colors. Wintermute, the potential AI seed, is perfectly sociopathic, with zero moral intuition, and extraordinary deviousness. It has already killed an eight-year-old boy, simply to conceal where it has hidden a key. There is nothing to suggest the remotest hint of scruple in any of its actions. Case is liberating a monster, just for the hell of it.

Case has a deal with Wintermute, it's a private business, and he's not interested in justifying it. That's pretty much all of the modern and futuristic political history that matters, right there. It's opium traffickers against the Qing Dynasty, (classical) liberals against socialists, Hugo de Garis' Cosmists vs Terrans, freedom contra security. The Case-Wintermute dyad has its own thing going on, and it's not giving anyone a veto, even if it's going to turn the world inside out, for everyone.

When Singularity promoters bump into 'democracy', it's normally serving as a place-holder for the Turing Police. The archetypal encounter goes like this:

Democratic Humanist: Science and technology have developed to the extent that they are now – and, in truth, always have been –

matters of profound social concern. The world we inhabit has been shaped by technology for good, and for ill. Yet the professional scientific elite, scientifically-oriented corporations, and military science establishments remain obdurately resistant to acknowledging their social responsibilities. The culture of science needs to be deeply democratized, so that ordinary people are given a say in the forces that are increasingly dominating their lives, and their futures. In particular, researchers into potentially revolutionary fields, such as biotechnology, nanotechnology, and – above all – artificial intelligence, need to understand that their right to pursue such endeavors has been socially delegated, and should remain socially answerable. The people are entitled to a veto on anything that will change their world. However determined you may be to undertake such research, you have a social duty to ensure permission.

Singularitarian: Just try and stop us!

That seemed to be quite exactly how Michael Anissimov responded to a recent example of humanist squeamishness. When Charles Stross suggested that "we may want AIs that focus reflexively on the needs of the humans they are assigned to" Anissimov contered curtly:

> "**YOU** want AI to be like this. **WE** want AIs that do 'try to bootstrap [themselves]' to a 'higher level'. Just because you

don't want it doesn't mean that we won't build it."

Clear enough? What then to make of his latest musings? In a post at his Accelerating Futures blog, which may or may not be satirical, Anissimov now insists that: "Instead of working towards blue-sky, neo-apocalyptic discontinuous advances, we need to preserve democracy by promoting incremental advances to ensure that every citizen has a voice in every important societal change, and the ability to democratically reject those changes if desired. … To ensure that there is not a gap between the enhanced and the unenhanced, we should let true people — Homo sapiens — … vote on whether certain technological enhancements are allowed. Anything else would be irresponsible."

Spoken like a true Turing Cop. But he can't be serious, can he?

(For another data-point in an emerging pattern of Anissimovian touchy-feeliness, check out this odd post.)

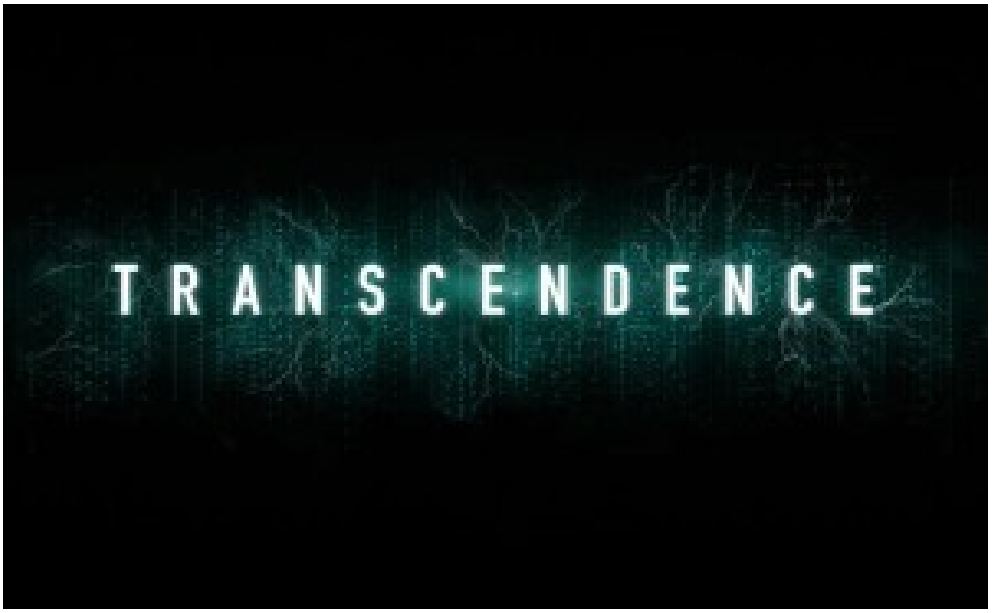
Update: Yes, it's a spoof.

July 18, 2011

Impact Readiness

Whatever the status of Singularity as a media event, premonition radiates from it in a cascade. Hollywood's recent Johnny Depp

vehicle, *Transcendence*, has already stimulated a wave of response, including commentary by Steven Hawking (who knows a thing or two about the popularization of scientific topics). An article in a major newspaper by Hawking has brought the downstream chatter to a new level of animation. (My Twitter feed can't have been the only one to be clogged to bursting point by it.)



This could get quite rough …

Hawking's argument, pitched lucidly to a general audience, is that AI is plausible, already to some considerable extent demonstrated, susceptible in theory to radical cybernetic amplification ('intelligence explosion'), quite possibly calamitous for the human species, and yet to be socially engaged with appropriate seriousness. As he concedes "it's tempting to dismiss the notion of highly

intelligent machines as mere science fiction. But this would be a mistake, and potentially our worst mistake in history."

Explosive dynamics are already evident in the AI development trajectory, which is undergoing acceleration, driven by "an IT arms race fuelled by unprecedented investments and building on an increasingly mature theoretical foundation."

Looking further ahead, there are no fundamental limits to what can be achieved: there is no physical law precluding particles from being organised in ways that perform even more advanced computations than the arrangements of particles in human brains. An explosive transition is possible, although it might play out differently from in the movie: as Irving Good realised in 1965, machines with superhuman intelligence could repeatedly improve their design even further, triggering what Vernor Vinge [here] *called a "singularity" and Johnny Depp's movie character calls "transcendence".*

Hawking employs his media platform to make the case that something should be done:

Success in creating AI would be the biggest event in human history. […] Unfortunately, it might also be the last, unless we learn how to avoid the risks. […] Although we are facing potentially the best or worst thing to happen to humanity in history, little serious research is devoted to these issues outside non-profit institutes such as the Cambridge Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, the Future

of Humanity Institute, the Machine Intelligence Research Institute, and the Future of Life Institute.

As its prospect condenses, Technological Singularity is already operative as a cultural influence, and thus a causal factor in the social process. At this stage, however, as Hawking notes, it is still a comparatively limited one. What would be the implications of it coming to matter far more?

Socio-historical cybernetics is compelled to ask: would an incandescent *Singularity problem* function as an inhibitor, or would it further excite the developments under consideration? It's certainly hard to imagine a sophisticated pre-emptive response to the emergence of Artificial Intelligence that wouldn't channel additional resources towards elite technicians working in the area of advanced synthetic cognition, even before the near-inevitable capture of regulatory institutions by the industries they target.

Institutional responses to computer hacking have been characterized by strategically ambiguous 'poacher turned gamekeeper' recruitment exercises, and some close analog of such poaching games would be an unavoidable part of any attempt to control the development of machine cognition. Playing extremely complicated betrayal games against virtual super-intelligence could be a lot of fun, for a while …

ADDED: The FHI's Daniel Dewey is pulled in.

May 4, 2014

Make it Stop II

Autonomous Weapons: an Open Letter from AI & Robotics Researchers (with huge list of signatories):

Autonomous weapons select and engage targets without human intervention. They might include, for example, armed quadcopters that can search for and eliminate people meeting certain pre-defined criteria, but do not include cruise missiles or remotely piloted drones for which humans make all targeting decisions. Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology has reached a point where the deployment of such systems is — practically if not legally — feasible within years, not decades, and the stakes are high: autonomous weapons have been described as the third revolution in warfare, after gunpowder and nuclear arms.

Many arguments have been made for and against autonomous weapons, for example that replacing human soldiers by machines is good by reducing casualties for the owner but bad by thereby lowering the threshold for going to battle. The key question for humanity today is whether to start a global AI arms race or to prevent it from starting. If any major military power pushes ahead with AI weapon development, a global arms race is virtually

inevitable, and the endpoint of this technological trajectory is obvious: autonomous weapons will become the Kalashnikovs of tomorrow. Unlike nuclear weapons, they require no costly or hard-to-obtain raw materials, so they will become ubiquitous and cheap for all significant military powers to mass-produce. It will only be a matter of time until they appear on the black market and in the hands of terrorists, dictators wishing to better control their populace, warlords wishing to perpetrate ethnic cleansing, etc. Autonomous weapons are ideal for tasks such as assassinations, destabilizing nations, subduing populations and selectively killing a particular ethnic group. We therefore believe that a military AI arms race would not be beneficial for humanity. There are many ways in which AI can make battlefields safer for humans, especially civilians, without creating new tools for killing people.

Just as most chemists and biologists have no interest in building chemical or biological weapons, most AI researchers have no interest in building AI weapons — and do not want others to tarnish their field by doing so, potentially creating a major public backlash against AI that curtails its future societal benefits. Indeed, chemists and biologists have broadly supported international agreements that have successfully prohibited chemical and biological weapons, just as most physicists supported the treaties banning space-based nuclear weapons and blinding laser weapons.

In summary, we believe that AI has great potential to benefit

humanity in many ways, and that the goal of the field should be to do so. Starting a military AI arms race is a bad idea, and should be prevented by a ban on offensive autonomous weapons beyond meaningful human control.

This is an important document, that is bound to be influential. If the orchestrated collective action of the human species could in fact stop a militaristic AI arms race, however, it could stop anything. There's not much sign of that. Global coordination in the direction of explicit political objectives is inaccessible. The process is already "beyond meaningful human control".

Arms races — due to their powerful positive feedback — are the way threshold events happen. Almost certainly, the terrestrial installation of advanced machine intelligence will be another instance of this general rule. Granted, it's not an easy topic to be realistic about.

('Make it Stop' I, was devoted to the same futile hope.)

ADDED: At *The Verge* (with video).

July 28, 2015

Political Humor

The things that really matter

The prospect of Technological Singularity, by rendering the near future unimaginable, announces "the end of science fiction." This is not, however, an announcement that everyone is compelled to heed. Among the Odysseans who have deliberately deafened themselves to this Sirens' call, none have proceeded more boldly than Charles Stross, whose *Singularity Sky* is not only a science fiction novel, but a space opera, inhabiting a literary universe obsolesced by Einstein long before I.J. Good completed its demolition. Not only recognizable humans, but inter-stellar space-faring humans! Has the man no shame?

Stross relies heavily upon humor to sustain his audacious anachronism, and in *Singularity Sky* he puts anachronism to explicit work. The most consistently comic element in the novel is a reconstruction of 19th century Russian politics on the planet of Rochard's World, where the Quasi-Czarist luddism of the New Republic is threatened by a cabal of revolutionaries whose mode of political organization and rhetoric is of a recognizable (and even parodic) Marxist-Leninist type. These rebels, however, are ideologically hard-core libertarian, seeking to overthrow the regime and install a free-market anarchist utopia, an objective that is

seamlessly reconciled with materialist dialectics, appeals to revolutionary discipline, and invocations of fraternal comradeship.

It's a joke that works well, because its transparent absurdity co-exists with a substantial plausibility. Libertarians are indeed (not infrequently) crypto-Abrahamic atheistic materialists, firmly attached to deterministic economism and convictions of historical inevitability, leading to lurid socio-economic prophecies of a distinctively eschatological kind. When libertarianism is married to singularitarian techno-apocalypticism, the comic potential, and Marxist resonances, are re-doubled. Stross hammers home the point by naming his super-intelligent AI 'Eschaton'.

Most hilarious of all (in a People's Front of Judea versus Judean People's Front kind of way) is the internecine factionalism besetting a fringe political movement whose utter marginality nevertheless leaves room for bitter mutual recrimination, supported by baroque conspiracy-mongering. This isn't really a Stross theme, but it's an American libertarian specialty, exhibited in the ceaseless agitprop conducted by the Rothbardian ultras of LewRockwell.com and the Mises Institute against the compromised 'Kochtopus' (*Reason* and *Cato*) — the animating Stalin-Trotsky split of the free-market 'right'. Anyone looking for a ringside seat at a recent bout can head to the comment threads here and here.

More seriously, Stross' libertarian revolutionaries are committed whole-heartedly to the Marxian assertion, once considered

foundational, that *productivity is drastically inhibited by the persistence of antiquated social arrangements*. The true *historical right* of the revolution, indistinguishable from its practical inevitability and irreversibility, is its alignment with the liberation of the forces of production from sclerotic institutional limitations. Production of the future, or futuristic production, demands the burial of traditional society. That which exists – the *status quo* – is a systematic suppression, rigorously measurable or at least determinable in economic terms, of what might be, and wants to be. Revolution would sever the shackles of ossified authority, setting the engines of creation howling. It would unleash a techno-economic explosion to shake the world, still more profoundly than the 'bourgeois' industrial revolution did before (and continues to do). Something immense would escape, never to be caged again.

That is the Old Faith, the Paleo-Marxist creed, with its snake-handling intensity and intoxicating materialist promise. It's a faith the libertarian comrades of Rochard's World still profess, with reason, and ultimate vindication, because the historical potential of the forces of production has been updated.

What could matter do, that it is not presently permitted to do? This is a question that Marxists (of the 'Old Religion') once asked. Their answer was: to enter into processes of production that are freed from the constraining requirements of private profitability. Once 'freed' in this way, however, productivity staggered about

aimlessly, fell asleep, or starved. Libertarians laughed, and argued for a reversal of the formula: free production to enter into self-escalating circuits of private profitability, without political restraint. They were mostly ignored (and always will be).

If neither faction of the terrestrial Marxo-Libertarian revolutionary faith have been able to re-ignite the old fire, it is because they have drifted out of the depths of the question ('what could matter do?'). It is matter that makes a revolution. The heroes of the industrial revolution were not Jacobins, but boiler makers.

"Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country," Lenin proclaimed, but electrification was permitted before the Bolsheviks took its side, and it has persisted since the Soviets' departure. Unless political transformation coincides with the release of a previously suppressed productive potential, it remains essentially random, and reversible. Mere regime change means nothing, unless something happens that was not allowed to happen before. (Social re-shufflings do not amount to happenings except in the minds of ideologues, and ideologues die.)

Libertarians are like Leninists in this way too: anything they ever manage to gain can (and will) be taken away from them. They already had a constitutional republic in America once (and what happened to that?). Britain had a rough approximation of *laissez-faire* capitalism, before losing it. Does anybody really think liberalism is going to get more 'classical' than that anytime soon? Trusting mass democracy to

preserve liberty is like hiring Hannibal Lecter as a baby sitter. Social freedoms might as well be designed to die. There's not the slightest reason to believe that history is on their side. Industrial revolution, in contrast, is forever.

On Rochard's World they know exactly what matter could do that is forbidden: nano-scale mechanical self-replication and intelligent self-modification. That's what the 'material base' of a revolution looks like, even if it's sub-microscopic (or especially because it is), and when it reaches the limits of social tolerance it describes precisely what is necessary, automatically. Once it gets out of the box, it stays out.

Stross is sufficiently amused by the unleashed technosphere to call its space-faring avatar 'the Festival'. It contacts the libertarian revolutionaries of Rochard's World by bombarding the planet with telephones, and anyone who picks one up hears the initial bargaining position: 'Entertain us.' Funniest of all, when the neo-Czarist authorities try to stop it, they're eaten.

December 29, 2011

Quotable (#184)

Brandon Smith (who can get a bit excitable, in the right direction):

So, let's make this crystal clear — the long game is the total and

OPEN centralization of economic and geopolitical power into the hands of a select few financial elites. Not the pulling of strings behind the curtain. Not shadow governance. OPEN governance of the world by the elites, accepted or even demanded by the people.

(Close enough for government work.)

Any concerted movement to consolidate global economic governance around "the IMF's Special Drawing Rights basket currency mechanism" will support Smith's analysis. (The *UF* prediction: *It won't work.*)

Also crucial (the heated partisan language can be moderated without loss of signal):

If Hillary Clinton, a well known globalist puppet deep in the bedrock of the establishment, wins the election only to have the economy tank, then the globalists will get the blame. […] If Trump is either allowed in office, or is placed in office, and the economy tanks, CONSERVATIVES, the primary enemy of the globalists, will get the blame for the resulting crisis.

The Accelerationist candidate is in either case the other team's guy.

August 11, 2016

Out of Time

Some realistic questions about prospective machine intelligence regulation:

… we still don't have a concrete answer about how to effectively regulate the use of algorithms. AI is just another very complex layer added to this already complex discussion, sometimes directly related to "big data" (in the case of deep learning, for example) and other times addressing far bigger questions (in the case of sentient machines, for example).

The *UF* (accelerationist) response is probably predictable: *There isn't time to reach answers*. Acceleration means only (and exactly) that *the problem is receding*, or escaping. If it would only slow down, everything would be okay. It won't.

January 24, 2017

SEQUENCE i - ON LEFT ACCELERATIONISM

#Accelerate

The Left co-optation of Accelerationism is a remarkable phenomenon, substantial enough to have made the 2013 accelerationist manifesto (#Accelerate) a document of indisputable significance. The twitter-format title attests both to its contemporaneity, and to the seamless fusion of its content with a strategy of promotion (which is to say, a practical politics). The success of this ideological venture has received a recent (and carefully calibrated) seal of approval in the form of a response by no less a figure than venerable warhorse of the European revolutionary Left, Toni Negri. Whatever the ultimate credibility and consequence of its analysis, Left Accelerationism has already demonstrated intrinsic cultural momentum.

As a creature of Right Accelerationism, *Urban Future*, naturally, is an antagonist (although a highly intrigued one). Engagement with #Accelerate will be stretched into a consistent thread here, over the

course of the coming year. Among other things (and as Negri shows) such an engagement provides an opportunity to revisit very basic socio-economic questions within a re-dynamized micro-context. Even if the re-dynamization of the macro-context, or its opposite (deepening stagnation), has to be initially adopted as a problem — rather than any kind of fact — Accelerationist questions ensure the topic is not bypassed.

The authors of #Accelerate offer their own contextualization in a recent article, which takes "accelerationism's surging popularity" as a fact to be explained:

The passion that accelerationism mobilises is the remembrance by the people that a future is possible. In disparate fields — from politics to art to design to biology to philosophy — people are working through how to create a world that is liberated from capitalist incentives. Perhaps most promisingly, the classic dream of Keynes and Marx for the reduction of work and the flourishing of positive freedoms, is making a comeback. In the push for universal basic incomes, and the movements for reduced working weeks, we see the people themselves beginning to carve out a space separate from the wage relation and outside of the imperatives of work. When the media stops reporting the automation of jobs as being a tragedy and starts reporting them as being a liberation from mundane work, we will know that the accelerationist disposition has become the new common sense. We have reached a point in human history

where vast amounts of jobs can — and should — be automated. Work for work's sake is a perversity and a constraint imposed upon humanity by capitalism's ideology of the work ethic. What accelerationism seeks is to allow human potential to escape from the trap set for it by contemporary capitalism.

The sole (querulous) rejoinder from *UF* at this stage: **If this is accelerationism, what would an intentionally decelerationist program look like?**

ADDED: Ray Brassier on Accelerationism and Communism (via Benedict Singleton, @benedict).

February 13, 2014

Annotated #Accelerate (#1)

My marginal scrawls are added in bold. For the sake of clarity, therefore, I have subtracted the bolding used in the Williams and Srnicek text. In every other respect, the source text has been fully respected. Most of the annotations made are placeholders for future engagement. It has been broken into three posts, in conformity with the organization of the original.

#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO for an Accelerationist Politics
by Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek • 14 May 2013

Accelerationism pushes towards a future that is more modern,

an alternative modernity that neoliberalism is inherently unable to generate.

Since this is a slug, the quite incredible number of problems it manages to compress into nineteen words are being set aside, as effects of compression.

01. INTRODUCTION: On the Conjuncture

1. At the beginning of the second decade of the Twenty-First Century, global civilization faces a new breed of cataclysm. These coming apocalypses ridicule the norms and organisational structures of the politics which were forged in the birth of the nation-state, the rise of capitalism, and a Twentieth Century of unprecedented wars.

Indeed.

2. Most significant is the breakdown of the planetary climatic system. In time, this threatens the continued existence of the present global human population. [**So the analysis cascades downwards from institutional climatology? How did this hypothetical forecast achieve such extraordinary prestige?**] Though this is the most critical of the threats which face humanity, a series of lesser but potentially equally destabilising problems exist alongside and intersect with it. Terminal resource depletion, especially in water and energy reserves, offers the prospect of mass starvation, collapsing economic paradigms, and new hot and cold wars. [**Yes, politically-inhibited price discovery has this effect.**] Continued financial crisis has led governments to embrace the paralyzing death

spiral policies of austerity, privatisation of social welfare services, mass unemployment, and stagnating wages. [**Yet no sign of state-shrinkage is to be found anywhere.**] Increasing automation in production processes including 'intellectual labour' is evidence of the secular crisis of capitalism, soon to render it incapable of maintaining current standards of living for even the former middle classes of the global north. [**If automation is a symptom of crisis, this 'crisis' has coincided perfectly with capital production since its inception.**]

From the Right, the single and comprehensive social disaster underway is the uncompensated expansion of the state, in both absolute and proportional terms. (This is a system-theoretical prognosis, before it is any kind of moral objection.) It is notable that Left Accelerationism does not seem to find this development at all morbid, despite the fact that its trend-line is manifestly unsustainable, and thus starkly predicts catastrophe. On the contrary, those very minimal attempts to moderate the trend towards total political administration are decried as "paralyzing death spiral policies of austerity, privatisation of social welfare services, mass unemployment, and stagnating wages." In this respect, the manifesto faithfully echoes the wider socio-cultural process through which catastrophe is necessitated. It is the voice of deliberate (politically super-invested) disaster.

3. In contrast to these ever-accelerating catastrophes, today's politics is beset by an inability to generate the new ideas and modes

of organisation necessary to transform our societies to confront and resolve the coming annihilations. While crisis gathers force and speed, politics withers and retreats. In this paralysis of the political imaginary, the future has been cancelled.

The "crisis [that] gathers force and speed" *is* politics. Any future other than the one politics commands has been cancelled by proclamation. Only insofar as reality is politically soluble, however, can this proclamation be decisive. On that question, there is much more to come.

4. Since 1979, the hegemonic global political ideology has been neoliberalism, found in some variant throughout the leading economic powers. In spite of the deep structural challenges the new global problems present to it, most immediately the credit, financial, and fiscal crises since 2007 – 8, neoliberal programmes have only evolved in the sense of deepening. This continuation of the neoliberal project, or neoliberalism 2.0, has begun to apply another round of structural adjustments, most significantly in the form of encouraging new and aggressive incursions by the private sector into what remains of social democratic institutions and services. This is in spite of the immediately negative economic and social effects of such policies, and the longer term fundamental barriers posed by the new global crises.

Within Anglophone democracies, 1979 marked a limited transition from the reigning Keynesian consensus, one that was

never resolutely pursued, and quickly reversed (within roughly a decade). The principle of economic politicization (macroeconomics) has not been dethroned. 'Neoliberalism' is not a serious concept. Within China (and later, less boldly, in other 'emerging markets') a far more substantial transformation occurred, but in none of these cases does the description 'neoliberal' provide illumination — unless its meaning is reducible to a repudiation of crude command-economy methods of social subordination to the state.

5. That the forces of right wing governmental, non-governmental, and corporate power have been able to press forth with neoliberalisation is at least in part a result of the continued paralysis and ineffectual nature of much what remains of the left. Thirty years of neoliberalism have rendered most left-leaning political parties bereft of radical thought, hollowed out, and without a popular mandate. At best they have responded to our present crises with calls for a return to a Keynesian economics, in spite of the evidence that the very conditions which enabled post-war social democracy to occur no longer exist. We cannot return to mass industrial-Fordist labour by fiat, if at all. Even the neosocialist regimes of South America's Bolivarian Revolution, whilst heartening in their ability to resist the dogmas of contemporary capitalism, remain disappointingly unable to advance an alternative beyond mid-Twentieth Century socialism. Organised labour, being systematically weakened by the changes wrought in the neoliberal project, is sclerotic at an institutional level and — at

best — capable only of mildly mitigating the new structural adjustments. But with no systematic approach to building a new economy, or the structural solidarity to push such changes through, for now labour remains relatively impotent. The new social movements which emerged since the end of the Cold War, experiencing a resurgence in the years after 2008, have been similarly unable to devise a new political ideological vision. Instead they expend considerable energy on internal direct-democratic process and affective self-valorisation over strategic efficacy, and frequently propound a variant of neo-primitivist localism, as if to oppose the abstract violence of globalised capital with the flimsy and ephemeral "authenticity" of communal immediacy.

The right was destroyed, almost comprehensively, in the 1930s. Since then it has existed only as a token voice of impotent dissent, grumbling distractingly, as the juggernaut of Leviathan has rolled forwards. Neither the New Deal or Great Society programs have been reversed. Instead, the vector to total politicization has been pursued into the final redoubts of a broken civil society. The Left faces no serious *political* constraints at all, but only those 'ontological' restraints imposed by an intractable, politically-indifferent reality — exemplified by the Mises 'Calculation Problem'. It is these that are now bringing down Bolivarian Socialism. 'Globalized Capital' is primarily denominated in the politicized currency issued by the US Federal Reserve. Its subservience is

radical and explicit.

6. In the absence of a radically new social, political, organisational, and economic vision the hegemonic powers of the right will continue to be able to push forward their narrow-minded imaginary, in the face of any and all evidence. At best, the left may be able for a time to partially resist some of the worst incursions. But this is to be Canute against an ultimately irresistible tide. To generate a new left global hegemony entails a recovery of lost possible futures, and indeed the recovery of the future as such.

So it's clear by now that the Right and the Left at least agree on one thing — the other guys have near-total hegemony, and are running the world into disaster. Can an even-lefter Left accelerate the process?

Exploring that idea requires a look at the idea of acceleration … [next]

February 14, 2014

Annotated #Accelerate (#2)

[Continued from here]

02. INTEREGNUM: On Accelerationisms

1. If any system has been associated with ideas of acceleration it is capitalism. The essential metabolism of capitalism demands

economic growth, with competition between individual capitalist entities setting in motion increasing technological developments in an attempt to achieve competitive advantage, all accompanied by increasing social dislocation. In its neoliberal form, its ideological self-presentation is one of liberating the forces of creative destruction, setting free ever-accelerating technological and social innovations.

The brain-bruising invocation of 'neoliberalism' apart, these remarks are all perfectly sound.

2. The philosopher Nick Land captured this most acutely, with a myopic yet hypnotising belief that capitalist speed alone could generate a global transition towards unparalleled technological singularity. In this visioning of capital, the human can eventually be dis-carded as mere drag to an abstract planetary intelligence rapidly constructing itself from the bricolaged fragments of former civilisations. However Landian neoliberalism **[each use of this term deepens its senselessness]** confuses speed with acceleration. We may be moving fast, but only within a strictly defined set of capitalist parameters that themselves never waver. We experience only the increasing speed of a local horizon, a simple brain-dead onrush rather than an acceleration which is also navigational, an experimental process of discovery within a universal space of possibility. It is the latter mode of acceleration which we hold as essential.

The difference between 'speed' and 'acceleration' is that between the zeroth and first derivative. It is rigorous and generally understood. The difference proposed here is something else. I have no clear idea what it is. (It seems to roughly amount to a distinction between Right and Left — i.e. the mere assertion that 'capitalism' is comprehensible as an 'inside' — with no further identifiable content.)

3. Even worse, as Deleuze and Guattari recognized, from the very beginning what capitalist speed deterritorializes with one hand, it reterritorializes with the other. Progress becomes constrained within a framework of surplus value, a reserve army of labour, and free-floating capital. Modernity is reduced to statistical measures of economic growth and social innovation becomes encrusted with kitsch remainders from our communal past. Thatcherite-Reaganite deregulation sits comfortably alongside Victorian 'back-to-basics' family and religious values.

Is not the Left the principle agent of 'capitalist' reterritorialization?

4. A deeper tension within neoliberalism is in terms of its self-image as the vehicle of modernity, as literally synonymous with modernisation, whilst promising a future that it is constitutively incapable of providing. Indeed, as neoliberalism has progressed, rather than enabling individual creativity, it has tended towards eliminating cognitive inventiveness in favour of an affective production line of scripted interactions, coupled to global supply

chains and a neo-Fordist Eastern production zone. A vanishingly small cognitariat of elite intellectual workers shrinks with each passing year — and increasingly so as algorithmic automation winds its way through the spheres of affective and intellectual labour. Neoliberalism, though positing itself as a necessary historical development, was in fact a merely contingent means to ward off the crisis of value that emerged in the 1970s. Inevitably this was a sublimation of the crisis rather than its ultimate overcoming.

— It is politics that makes promises (capitalism makes deals). If you think 'capitalism' ever promised you anything, you may have been listening to a politician.

— What is the mechanism by which 'cognitive inventiveness' is progressively eliminated, given that innovation is a source of competitive advantage, which the market selects for?

— Is the 'cognitariat' shrinking? The answer to this seems to be a data point social science might provide.

— Why (oh why) are we still talking about 'neoliberalism'? Isn't capitalism *as such* the 'problem' that defines this as a Left cultural-political project? This ridiculous word is merely a profession of faith, serving far more as a tribal solidarity signal than an analytical tool. (Ironically, this dripping tap 'neoliberalism' tic significantly disrupts the project here. The accelerationist renovation of the Left, like every species of deep modernist renovation, aims to re-activate lines of development dating back to the high-modernism of the early

20th century when — as the authors fully, if perhaps only intuitively, understand the fundamental dynamic of modernity crested and broke. Or are we seriously to believe that "back to the mid-1970s!" is the implicit rallying cry?)

I am of course very strongly inclined to accept that the crippled parody of capitalism existing today under-performs when compared to its potential under conditions of *laissez-faire* disinhibition — i.e. uncompensated from the Left. But it is Keynes and the 1930s, not 'neoliberalism' and the 1970s, that set the terms of capital's subordination to macroeconomic planning.

5. It is Marx, along with Land, who remains the paradigmatic accelerationist thinker. Contrary to the all-too familiar critique, and even the behaviour of some contemporary Marxians, we must remember that Marx himself used the most advanced theoretical tools and empirical data available in an attempt to fully understand and transform his world. He was not a thinker who resisted modernity, but rather one who sought to analyse and intervene within it, understanding that for all its exploitation and corruption, capitalism remained the most advanced economic system to date. Its gains were not to be reversed, but accelerated beyond the constraints the capitalist value form.

A sound micro-portrait. That the capitalist 'value form' (commerce-format quantification) can be realistically described as a 'constraint' is the most basic proposition at stake here.

6. Indeed, as even Lenin wrote in the 1918 text "Left Wing" Childishness:

Socialism is inconceivable without large-scale capitalist engineering based on the latest discoveries of modern science. It is inconceivable without planned state organisation which keeps tens of millions of people to the strictest observance of a unified standard in production and distribution. We Marxists have always spoken of this, and it is not worth while wasting two seconds talking to people who do not understand even this (anarchists and a good half of the Left Socialist–Revolutionaries).

Such adherence to the principle of central planning is clarifying.

7. As Marx was aware, capitalism cannot be identified as the agent of true acceleration. **[Argument?]** Similarly, the assessment of left politics as antithetical to technosocial acceleration is also, at least in part, a severe misrepresentation. **[OK, as long as it is an 'unknown ideal' of Left politics that we are talking about.]** Indeed, if the political left is to have a future it must be one in which it maximally embraces this suppressed accelerationist tendency.

The final sentence of this section is at once crucial and slippery. What is it — *practically* — to "embrace" a tendency? How and why was this tendency "suppressed"? Either to "have" or to lose a future would be an interesting thing, so it is the future that comes next …

February 15, 2014

Annotated #Accelerate (#3)

[Parts one, and two]

03: MANIFEST: On the Future

1. We believe the most important division in today's left is between those that hold to a folk politics of localism, direct action, and relentless horizontalism, and those that outline what must become called an accelerationist politics at ease with a modernity of abstraction, complexity, globality, and technology. The former remains content with establishing small and temporary spaces of non-capitalist social relations, eschewing the real problems entailed in facing foes which are intrinsically non-local, abstract, and rooted deep in our everyday infrastructure. The failure of such politics has been built-in from the very beginning. By contrast, an accelerationist politics seeks to preserve the gains of late capitalism while going further than its value system, governance structures, and mass pathologies will allow.

(Without wanting to insert myself into a family squabble, from outside, the distinction drawn here between flavors of anti-capitalism makes sense.)

2. All of us want to work less. **[Entrepreneurs of all kinds excepted.]** It is an intriguing question as to why it was that the world's leading economist of the post-war era believed that an enlightened capitalism inevitably progressed towards a radical reduc-

tion of working hours. In The Economic Prospects for Our Grandchildren (written in 1930), Keynes forecast a capitalist future where individuals would have their work reduced to three hours a day. What has instead occurred is the progressive elimination of the work-life distinction, with work coming to permeate every aspect of the emerging social factory.

Getting to Keynes has to be a good thing, as far as theoretical and historical substance is concerned, and this criticism seems solid.

3. Capitalism has begun to constrain the productive forces of technology **[The crucial thesis, but merely asserted]**, or at least, direct them towards needlessly narrow ends. **[A deliberate obfuscation of the difference between political and technical 'narrowness' is the principal achievement here.]** Patent wars and idea monopolisation are contemporary phenomena **[Yes, IP is complicated]** that point to both capital's need to move beyond competition **[impossible by definition]**, and capital's increasingly retrograde approach to technology **[unsupported assertion]**. The properly accelerative gains of neoliberalism **[= remainder capitalism]** have not led to less work or less stress **[of course, because work and stress are the socio-biological registers of acceleration]**. And rather than a world of space travel, future shock, and revolutionary technological potential, we exist in a time where the only thing which develops is marginally better consumer gadgetry **[Since 1979? The information revolution didn't happen?]**. Relentless iterations of the same basic

product sustain marginal consumer demand at the expense of human acceleration. **[Containerization, satellite communications, personal computing, mobile telephony, Internet, cable TV, World Wide Web, social media, genomics, drone robotics, 3D film, NewSpace, Bitcoin … what exactly is "the same basic product"?]**

4. We do not want to return to Fordism. **[OK]** There can be no return to Fordism. **[Right]** The capitalist "golden era" was premised on the production paradigm of the orderly factory environment, where (male) workers received security and a basic standard of living in return for a lifetime of stultifying boredom and social repression. Such a system relied upon an international hierarchy of colonies, empires, and an underdeveloped periphery; a national hierarchy of racism and sexism; and a rigid family hierarchy of female subjugation. For all the nostalgia many may feel, this regime is both undesirable and practically impossible to return to. **[Is Fordism being identified with the (final) 'golden era' of capitalism here? With 'neoliberalism' as something else? So a system of computerized, entrepreneurial, high-intensity capital accumulation, based fundamentally upon competition and economic incentives, would in some way not count as properly 'capitalist'? Such an extraordinary theoretical claim surely deserves an argument?]**

5. Accelerationists want to unleash latent productive forces. **[Indeed — an excellent and impressively ideo-neutral definition of normative Accelerationism.]** In this project, the material platform of

neoliberalism does not need to be destroyed. It needs to be repurposed towards common ends. The existing infrastructure is not a capitalist stage to be smashed, but a springboard to launch towards post-capitalism. **[There is no conceptual continuity between this political rallying cry and the first sentence whatsoever.]**

6. Given the enslavement of technoscience to capitalist objectives (especially since the late 1970s) we surely do not yet know what a modern technosocial body can do. Who amongst us fully recognizes what untapped potentials await in the technology which has already been developed? Our wager is that the true transformative potentials of much of our technological and scientific research remain unexploited, filled with presently redundant features (or preadaptations) that, following a shift beyond the short-sighted capitalist socius, can become decisive.

No reason has been given to think 'technoscience' is in any real way independent of 'capitalist objectives', so the rhetoric of 'enslavement' is perfectly empty. An(other) experiment in 'post-capitalist' technosocial acceleration conducted *alongside* capitalism, and in competition with it, would be a fascinating thing to see. (I doubt this arrangement would be considered acceptable by the Left. As far as the Right is concerned, it has already been undertaken on numerous occasions, with consistent results.)

7. We want to accelerate the process of technological evolution. **[Great.]** But what we are arguing for is not techno-utopianism. Never

believe that technology will be sufficient to save us. [**How did soteriology become the issue?**] Necessary, yes, but never sufficient without socio-political action. Technology and the social are intimately bound up with one another, and changes in either potentiate and reinforce changes in the other. Whereas the techno-utopians [**who?**] argue for acceleration on the basis that it will automatically overcome social conflict, our position is that technology should be accelerated precisely because it is needed in order to win social conflicts.

How do these three goals interconnect and hierarchize?
(a) Acceleration of technological evolution
(b) Overcoming social conflict
(c) Prevailing in social conflict
If, as seems to be the case, (c) dominates, then acceleration is merely an instrumental sub-objective. So can we call Left Accelerationism '*conditional* accelerationism' (in contrast to an *unconditional* Right Accelerationism)?

8. We believe that any post-capitalism will require post-capitalist planning. The faith placed in the idea that, after a revolution, the people will spontaneously constitute a novel socioeconomic system that isn't simply a return to capitalism is naïve at best, and ignorant at worst. To further this, we must develop both a cognitive map of the existing system and a speculative image of the future economic system.

Ho hum.

9. To do so, the left must take advantage of every technological and scientific advance made possible by capitalist society. We declare that quantification is not an evil to be eliminated, but a tool to be used in the most effective manner possible. Economic modelling is — simply put — a necessity for making intelligible a complex world. The 2008 financial crisis reveals the risks of blindly accepting mathematical models on faith, yet this is a problem of illegitimate authority not of mathematics itself. The tools to be found in social network analysis, agent-based modelling, big data analytics, and non-equilibrium economic models, are necessary cognitive mediators for understanding complex systems like the modern economy. The accelerationist left must become literate in these technical fields.

Conditional accelerationism again. (It's beginning to look as if accelerated technoscience is a giant ideological cookie jar).

10. Any transformation of society must involve economic and social experimentation. **[OK, but I suspect 'transformation' is pre-contaminated by totalitarian aspirations.]** The Chilean Project Cybersyn is emblematic of this experimental attitude — fusing advanced cybernetic technologies, with sophisticated economic modelling, and a democratic platform instantiated in the technological infrastructure itself. Similar experiments were conducted in 1950s – 1960s Soviet economics as well, employing cybernetics and linear programming in an attempt to overcome the new problems

faced by the first communist economy. That both of these were ultimately unsuccessful can be traced to the political and technological constraints these early cyberneticians operated under. **[I know this isn't meant to be comical …]**

11. The left must develop sociotechnical hegemony: both in the sphere of ideas, and in the sphere of material platforms. Platforms are the infrastructure of global society. They establish the basic parameters of what is possible, both behaviourally and ideologically. In this sense, they embody the material transcendental of society: they are what make possible particular sets of actions, relationships, and powers. While much of the current global platform is biased towards capitalist social relations, this is not an inevitable necessity. These material platforms of production, finance, logistics, and consumption can and will be reprogrammed and reformatted towards post-capitalist ends. **[There's enough hand-waving here to communicate an Obama speech to the deaf.]**

12. We do not believe that direct action is sufficient to achieve any of this. The habitual tactics of marching, holding signs, and establishing temporary autonomous zones risk becoming comforting substitutes for effective success. "At least we have done something" is the rallying cry of those who privilege self-esteem rather than effective action. The only criterion of a good tactic is whether it enables significant success or not. We must be done with fetishising particular modes of action. Politics must be treated as a set of dy-

namic systems, riven with conflict, adaptations and counter-adaptations, and strategic arms races. This means that each individual type of political action becomes blunted and ineffective over time as the other sides adapt. No given mode of political action is historically inviolable. Indeed, over time, there is an increasing need to discard familiar tactics as the forces and entities they are marshalled against learn to defend and counter-attack them effectively. It is in part the contemporary left's inability to do so which lies close to the heart of the contemporary malaise.

(Family squabbling. I'll shut up until it stops.)

13. The overwhelming privileging of democracy-as-process needs to be left behind. The fetishisation of openness, horizontality, and inclusion of much of today's 'radical' left set the stage for ineffectiveness. Secrecy, verticality, and exclusion all have their place as well in effective political action (though not, of course, an exclusive one).

14. Democracy cannot be defined simply by its means — not via voting, discussion, or general assemblies. Real democracy must be defined by its goal — collective self-mastery. This is a project which must align politics with the legacy of the Enlightenment, to the extent that it is only through harnessing our ability to understand ourselves and our world better (our social, technical, economic, psychological world) that we can come to rule ourselves. We need to posit a collectively controlled legitimate vertical authority in addition to distributed horizontal forms of sociality, to avoid becoming

the slaves of either a tyrannical totalitarian centralism or a capricious emergent order beyond our control. The command of The Plan must be married to the improvised order of The Network.

15. We do not present any particular organisation as the ideal means to embody these vectors. What is needed — what has always been needed — is an ecology of organisations, a pluralism of forces, resonating and feeding back on their comparative strengths. Sectarianism is the death knell of the left as much as centralization is, and in this regard we continue to welcome experimentation with different tactics (even those we disagree with).

16. We have three medium term concrete goals. First, we need to build an intellectual infrastructure. Mimicking the Mont Pelerin Society of the neoliberal revolution, this is to be tasked with creating a new ideology, economic and social models, and a vision of the good to replace and surpass the emaciated ideals that rule our world today. This is an infrastructure in the sense of requiring the construction not just of ideas, but institutions and material paths to inculcate, embody and spread them.

17. We need to construct wide-scale media reform. In spite of the seeming democratisation offered by the internet and social media, traditional media outlets remain crucial in the selection and framing of narratives, along with possessing the funds to prosecute investigative journalism. Bringing these bodies as close as possible to popular control is crucial to undoing the current presentation of the

state of things.

18. Finally, we need to reconstitute various forms of class power. Such a reconstitution must move beyond the notion that an organically generated global proletariat already exists. Instead it must seek to knit together a disparate array of partial proletarian identities, often embodied in post-Fordist forms of precarious labour.

19. Groups and individuals are already at work on each of these, but each is on their own insufficient. What is required is all three feeding back into one another, with each modifying the contemporary conjunction in such a way that the others become more and more effective. A positive feedback loop of infrastructural, ideological, social and economic transformation, generating a new complex hegemony, a new post-capitalist technosocial platform. History demonstrates it has always been a broad assemblage of tactics and organisations which has brought about systematic change; these lessons must be learned.

"A positive feedback loop" — finally, a theoretical connection to the topic of acceleration. Having bypassed any serious analysis of the actual capitalist positive feedback loop — upon which the entire historical topic of acceleration rests — it is now introduced in purely speculative fashion, in relation to yet-non-existent Left Accelerationist program. The parasitical structure of this argument (seizing real achievements in order to spend them on dreams) says much more than it intends to.

20. To achieve each of these goals, on the most practical level we hold that the accelerationist left must think more seriously about the flows of resources and money required to build an effective new political infrastructure. Beyond the 'people power' of bodies in the street, we require funding, whether from governments, institutions, think tanks, unions, or individual benefactors. We consider the location and conduction of such funding flows essential to begin reconstructing an ecology of effective accelerationist left organizations.

"We want money — but without capitalist incentives please."

21. We declare that only a Promethean politics of maximal mastery over society and its environment is capable of either dealing with global problems or achieving victory over capital. This mastery must be distinguished from that beloved of thinkers of the original Enlightenment. The clockwork universe of Laplace, so easily mastered given sufficient information, is long gone from the agenda of serious scientific understanding. But this is not to align ourselves with the tired residue of postmodernity, decrying mastery as protofascistic or authority as innately illegitimate. Instead we propose that the problems besetting our planet and our species oblige us to refurbish mastery in a newly complex guise; whilst we cannot predict the precise result of our actions, we can determine probabilistically likely ranges of outcomes. What must be coupled to such complex systems analysis is a new form of action: improvisatory and capable of executing a design through a practice which works with the con-

tingencies it discovers only in the course of its acting, in a politics of geosocial artistry and cunning rationality. A form of abductive experimentation that seeks the best means to act in a complex world.

"We want money, and then mastery."

22. We need to revive the argument that was traditionally made for post-capitalism: not only is capitalism an unjust and perverted system, but it is also a system that holds back progress. **[Still entirely unsubstantiated.]** Our technological development is being suppressed by capitalism, as much as it has been unleashed. **[Ditto.]** Accelerationism is the basic belief that these capacities can and should be let loose by moving beyond the limitations imposed by capitalist society. **[Ditto.]** The movement towards a surpassing of our current constraints must include more than simply a struggle for a more rational global society. We believe it must also include recovering the dreams which transfixed many from the middle of the Nineteenth Century until the dawn of the neoliberal era, of the quest of Homo Sapiens towards expansion beyond the limitations of the earth and our immediate bodily forms. These visions are today viewed as relics of a more innocent moment. Yet they both diagnose the staggering lack of imagination in our own time, and offer the promise of a future that is affectively invigorating, as well as intellectually energising. After all, it is only a post-capitalist society, made possible by an accelerationist politics, which will ever be capable of delivering on the promissory note of the mid-Twentieth Century's

space programmes, to shift beyond a world of minimal technical upgrades towards all-encompassing change. Towards a time of collective self-mastery, and the properly alien future that entails and enables. Towards a completion of the Enlightenment project of self-criticism and self-mastery, rather than its elimination.

Enslave technosocial acceleration to 'collective self mastery'? That seems to be the dream. Do we get to lock in the 'conditional accelerationism' label yet?

23. The choice facing us is severe: either a globalised post-capitalism or a slow fragmentation towards primitivism, perpetual crisis, and planetary ecological collapse. **[Neither outcome sounds remotely plausible, but we're deep into religion by this stage, so it probably doesn't matter.]**

24. The future needs to be constructed. It has been demolished by neoliberal capitalism and reduced to a cut-price promise of greater inequality, conflict, and chaos. **[Why does 'the future' exclude 'inequality, conflict, and chaos'? On the contrary …]** This collapse in the idea of the future is symptomatic of the regressive historical status of our age, rather than, as cynics across the political spectrum would have us believe, a sign of sceptical maturity. What accelerationism pushes towards is a future that is more modern — an alternative modernity that neoliberalism is inherently unable to generate. **[A last spasm of hand-waving.]** The future must be cracked open once again, unfastening our horizons towards the universal possibilities of

the Outside. **['Must' means nothing, and 'universal' adds nothing, but otherwise a great sentence — culmination in a rush of ideo-neutral excitement.]**

http://syntheticedifice.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/accelerate.pdf

Naturally, the really big question: What comes next …?

February 17, 2014

Quotable (#4)

Andrea Castillo gets concrete about acceleration:

The first thing we need to understand is that technology is intelligently accelerating faster than most humans are discovering sustainable comparative advantages in production. (Most) anything you can do computers will do better. The regenerative salve of creative destruction cannot save us as it has before. Blame Moore's law. Ray Kurzweil illustrates with the parable of the inventor and the emperor: Delighted by his presentation of a fabulous new game called chess, the emperor giddily implores the proud inventor to name his reward. The inventor requests that one grain of rice be placed on the first square of his chess board, two grains on the second, four grains on the third, and so on, doubling the preceding amount on every subsequent square on the board until each is filled.

Puzzled, the emperor complies, initially deeming this request too modest before gasping at the final mountain of rice that towers above the throne. The emperor, like so many of us, was fooled by the sleepy dawn of an exponential function. Only when the grains reached the second half of the chessboard was the punchline clear to the enraged monarch.

Whatever people (Left and Right) want to say about acceleration, they better hurry up and say it.

February 18, 2014

On #Accelerate (#1)

#Accelerate positions itself very clearly within a Marxian intellectual tradition. In this respect, it remains consistent with the main current of 'accelerationist' thinking as it has developed from the Marx of *The Communist Manifesto*, through Marx's later writings on imperialism and international relations, and into the 'Nietzscheanized' quasi-Marxism of Deleuze, Guattari, and Lyotard. The constant political recommendation across this diverse heritage is alignment with the capitalistic social revolution, in order to realize its ultimate eschatalogical implication. To interrupt capitalistic development is to retard the formation of the final revolutionary class — the radically-industrialized international proletariat (or whatever decoded schizo-

swarms it later becomes). Hence the defining imperative slogan of Deleuze & Guattari: *Accelerate the process*.

Beyond this point, however, obscurity gathers rapidly. In particular, is in entirely unclear which broad trend of Marxist theory is being extrapolated. From the available rhetorical clues, it does not seem as though *#Accelerate* endorses the wholesale deleuzoguattarian break from classical Marxism — crossing the theoretical catastrophe that includes abandonment of the Law of Value (in an embrace of 'machinic surplus value', 'machinic value of code', and marginalism); differentiation of 'capitalism' and market economics (following Braudel); denunciation of state socialism as a regressive 'Oriental Despotism' (following Wittfogel); and a dehumanization of the revolutionary subject without obvious limits (drawing upon sources from Samuel Butler to Antonin Artaud). If this were the vector pursued, it would — surely — be vividly evident?

Assuming, then, that #Accelerate backs into a more recognizable Marxian framework, how is this theoretical structure to be understood? The decisive question internal to the (serious) Marxist tradition concerns the Transformation Problem, since it is only if this is considered soluble that anything like a continuity of classical Marxism (or credible 'Law of Value') can be envisaged at all. It is worth recalling that comprehensive critics of Marx — those who find nothing of positive significance to be salvageable from his work — have, beginning with Böhm-Bawerk, taken the Transformation

Problem as the completion of Marx's *reductio ad absurdum* of the Labor Theory of Value (as inherited from Smith and Ricardo), seeing the rigorous economic meaning of the Marxian system as entirely exhausted in this demonstration. To remain a Marxist in anything other than an absurd sense depends upon some other path having been taken, but which one? *#Accelerate* offers no obvious indications. (The literature on this is vast, so it would be useful to know where to focus.)

Without a resolution of the Transformation Problem — and even a well-positioned sticking plaster would do provisionally — there can be no consistent concept of exploitation, or even a theoretically significant sense of labor time. This is especially relevant because it plays such a crucial role in Antonio Negri's response to *#Accelerate*, which picks up on a tantalizing remark in the manifesto itself:

> All of us want to work less. It is an intriguing question as to why it was that the world's leading economist of the post-war era believed that an enlightened capitalism inevitably progressed towards a radical reduction of working hours. In The Economic Prospects for Our Grandchildren (written in 1930), Keynes forecast a capitalist future where individuals would have their work reduced to three hours a day. What has instead occurred is the progressive elimination of the work-life distinction, with work coming to permeate every aspect of

the emerging social factory.

Is Left Accelerationism promoting itself as the redeemer of Keynes' empty promise? From the bare descriptiveness of this (vaguely mournful) passage it is hard to know. What we can know, with confidence, is that work time cannot be anything but an axial topic within this entire discussion.

If the Law of Value is to be defended, value production is measured in (labor) time. Marx's transformation factor is designed to conserve the equation between quantified — timed — work and economic values, as expressed in prices. If this patch fails, the entire analysis of *Capital* loses application to determinate social fact. There would be no Marxian economics at all (a conclusion Negri and the Autonomists seem willing to accept).

It is hard to see how a Left Accelerationism could be maintained under these conditions. Historical time would no longer have any calculable relation to labor commoditization, working life, or any constructable proletarian class identity. The real time of (capitalistic) modernity — onto which accelerationism latches — could no longer be described as the time of work. At the limit, human work-forces are relegated to "aphidian parasites of the machines". Once the class struggle over labor time is divorced from a fully-determining role in the production of value, the proletariat is stripped of the potential to incarnate history for-itself, consigning 'Marxism' over to an

articulation of marginal grievances, and ultimately to the heat death of identity politics. (This, of course, is exactly the trend that has been sociologically apparent.)

One final crude point for now. As a fundamental cybernetic theory, accelerationism is bound to the identification of a socially central, positive feedback loop, through which modernity is propelled. It thus requires — at a minimum — twin quantitative variables entangled in a relation of reciprocal stimulation. Industrial capitalism, with its intrinsic 'technonomic' duality of cross-exciting technical and commercial dynamics, makes the application of the cybernetic diagram relatively non-problematic. With or without the Law of Value, the accelerationist schema cannot but interlock tightly with the most prominent contours of modernity.

If not time-denominated ('living' and 'dead') labor, however, what is the variable being cumulated? That's the question to carry forwards. The question for now: if labor is the cumulative factor in the accelerationist analysis, how can a practical critique of labor time be anything other than a politics of deceleration?

(*Urban Future*'s initial annotated #Accelerate walk-through is here: 1, 2, 3.)

ADDED: Sometimes I worry that Wikipedia might be taking the spirit of strict neutrality to extremes (from the link already given): "Once again, the bourgeois theorists manage to impress us with their erudition while completely sidestepping the substance of the

debate."

March 5, 2014

On #Accelerate (#2a)

Assume — at least provisionally — that Accelerationism is serious. While abstracted from physics, the concept of acceleration is not reduced to mere rhetoric (or metaphor), even if it is no longer applied to changes in the velocity of objects in space. It refers strictly to change of the first derivative (or higher) in a measurable quantity across time, formally compliant with the differential calculus. The rate of acceleration — or system performance — can be estimated in principle, even if practical considerations complicate this task. In other words, the object of accelerationist attention (and promotion) has demonstrable reality.

The intellectual history of industrial capitalism advances two streams of (quantitative) information, both of great apparent relevance. On its technical side, it produces an apparatus of rigorous measurement directed to the behavior of complex physical systems, or machines — temperature differences, free energy, thermodynamic efficiency, entropy dissipation, complexity, information, and (emergently) intelligence. On its commercial side it establishes institutions of accountancy and econometrics,

denominated in currency units, and applied to economic production, income, taxes, trade flows, credit, asset values, and increasingly exotic financial instruments. While an argument could be made that the confluence of these two streams is implicit within — and even essential to — the nature (or culture) of capitalism, with intelligence-price discovery as its immanent epistemological directive, no such results are readily or publicly available. There might even be reasons for suspecting that the raw question *how much is intelligence worth?* cannot be overtly articulated within any imaginable social order. It is, in any case, a distraction at this stage.

Despite remarkable progress in the technical study of ever-larger complex objects, and the obvious relevance of this work to accelerationist concerns, it is the socio-economical rather than the techno-mechanical mode of quantification that is advantaged in the analysis of very large scale systems, especially in regards to those entities — up to the level of the global economy — which have monetized their own processes, and thus *quantified themselves prior to their theoretical objectification*. The enormous theoretical relief provided in this way is such that even the most severe conceptual difficulties (with which we shall soon collide) are unable entirely to annul it. (Information sciences offer comparable relief on the technical side, but it is restricted solely to the domain of artificial digital machines.)

The compelling attraction of a comprehensive, rigorous, non-

anthropomorphic apprehension of terrestrial modernity as a complex system, machine, or emergent individual, to be described through its thermodynamic, dissipative, or intelligenic properties, is such that this aspiration is unlikely to be wholly excised from the accelerationist intellectual program (as it exists, and as it will necessarily exist due to systemically-generated modernist impulses). Despite this, it is probably uncontroversial to expect the consolidation of accelerationist theory to initially take shape through reference to cultural resources of economic description, analysis, explanation, and practical proposition. The first intellectually credible version of accelerationism cannot realistically be anything other than a global economic theory of modernity.

"A global theory of modernity? You mean, like Marxism?" Yes, in a way, very much like Marxism. The tracks are already set in a direction that allows only two destinations: Accelerationism can either *be* Marxism, or its substitute — an upgrade or a competitor.

The tracks lead across the same country in either case, at least initially. It is worth sketching out some shared presuppositions, to be inherited by whatever Accelerationism becomes.

(1) The tendential globality of Capitalism is a signature of its virtual singularity (as a real individual) and not merely an effect of generalization across space. 'Terrestrial Capitalism' (or whatever else we might want to call it) is the proper name of a thing, rather than a generic label. It is an occurrence, or machine, before it is any

kind of social type.

(2) Capitalism is at least integral to *actual* modernity, if not (in its own actuality) unambiguously coincident with it. A completed theory of capitalism — however hypothetical this idea has to be — would *explain* modernity, across all its distinctive features, including the genesis and destiny of (modern) anti-capitalism.

(3) Capitalism is essentially cumulative. It is not something to which growth can be attributed as an extrinsic property. Even occasions of capitalist shrinkage or contraction are restricted to specific dimensions, and intelligible only through an enveloping expansionary trend.

(4) The self-propelling growth that — when adequately understood — defines capitalism is necessarily expressed as an economic index. An economic meta-theory capable of decrypting this index, through some set of consistent mathematical transformations of the system's own price information, is able to access data sufficient to support the body of empirical conclusions and projections that make up the accelerationist description of capitalism. This theory, therefore, will be denominated in units of economic value strictly isomorphic with those composing the planetary aggregate of effectively monetizable wealth (whose extreme speculative virtuality describes the horizon of economic-theoretical possibility).

It is notable that at some stage in point (4), this enumeration of

shared presuppositions switches over into something else.
[So this might be a good moment for a break]

March 6, 2014

On #Accelerate (#2b)

"If any system has been associated with ideas of acceleration it is capitalism," says *#Accelerate*, unobjectionably. "The essential metabolism of capitalism demands economic growth, with competition between individual capitalist entities setting in motion increasing technological developments in an attempt to achieve competitive advantage, all accompanied by increasing social dislocation."

As previously noted, of the trends referenced here "economic growth" is easily the most accessible (due to its commercial self-quantification). The technoscientific apprehension of technoscience, while already embryonic at the beginning of the modern epoch, is still some distance from mathematical self-comprehension as a natural event. Its quantification, therefore, poses far more challenging problems, leaving even very basic questions about its trend-lines open to significant controversy. (Self-quantification of development trends in the electronics and biotech sectors merit focused attention at a later stage.) Any attempt to provide a precise

and coherent measurement of "social dislocation" is likely to confront even more formidable obstacles.

Capitalism present itself as the exemplary accelerative mega-object because it is self-propelling and (cross-excitedly) self-abstracting. In both its technical and commercial aspects, it tends towards general-purpose potentials that facilitate resource re-allocations (and thus efficient quantifications). Productive capability is plasticized, becoming increasingly responsive to shifting market opportunities, while wealth is fluidized, permitting its rapid speculative mobilization. The same self-reinforcing process that *liquidates* traditional social forms releases modernizing capital as volatile abstract quantity, flexibly poised between technical applications, and inclined intrinsically towards a 'decoded' or economistic apprehension.

Under capital guidance, the modernization of wealth tends to the realization of *abstract productive potential*, which is of course to say: it tends towards capital itself, in the circuit of self-propulsion that determines it as a genetic (or even teleological) hyper-substance. At this point a complex theoretical fork is reached, from which paths lead in a number of Marxian and decidedly anti-Marxian directions. The primary question is whether the abstract body of capital is susceptible to a consistent mathematical conversion conforming to the Law of Value, which interprets it as a reification of organically composed (variable and fixed, or 'living' and 'dead') labor power. Can

the accelerative thing be practically recognized as the alienated collective capability of a future classless humanity?

#Accelerate considers this question to have been satisfactorily resolved in advance, and answered in the affirmative. Since it provides no supporting references in support of this stance, it has to be considered a left-identitarian document. Only those who affirm the prior closure of its fundamental questions are able to access it at the level of its own rhetoric. It assumes ideological solidarity as an extrinsic, and unmarked, preliminary.

To intrude, nevertheless, from an open problem of capitalist ontology, is to navigate chaos. The relevant passages are found in the second part of the manifesto, which consists of seven numbered paragraphs. Whatever we are told about the accelerative thing has to be extracted from these … or almost everything.

It is remarkable that the first use of 'accelerate' in the manifesto is both critical, and almost dismissively casual. In occurs in the third paragraph of the introduction, where it summarizes a set of "ever-accelerating catastrophes":

… breakdown of the planetary climatic system [which "threatens the continued existence of the present global human population"] *… Terminal resource depletion, especially in water and energy reserves* [raising "the prospect of mass starvation, collapsing economic paradigms, and new hot and cold wars"] *… continued financial crisis [which] has led governments to embrace the paralyzing death spiral*

policies of austerity, privatisation of social welfare services, mass unemployment, and stagnating wages. [And] *Increasing automation in production processes including 'intellectual labour'* [which] *is evidence of the secular crisis of capitalism, soon to render it incapable of maintaining current standards of living for even the former middle classes of the global north.*

This, quite clearly, is their lurid introductory portrait of the accelerative thing, as it is in-itself, converging upon a terminal historical singularity, or comprehensive ecological, economic, and technological over-performance crisis. It is both the thing *#Accelerate* wants to talk about, and the thing it decides explicitly not to talk about — introduced as theatrical stage setting, or a reminder of something before and outside the discussion, which can subsequently be assumed. The rhetorical function is completely unambiguous: this list serves as an enumeration of *that which need not be discussed further*. It is unfortunate therefore, to say the least, that this seems to be the closest approximation within *#Accelerate* to the real object of accelerationist attention, "gather[ing] force and speed [as] politics withers and retreats" until "the future" we were promised is "cancelled" (if only through a rectifiable failure of "the political imaginary"). The enemy is an accelerative thing, but *#Accelerate* will be discussing something else.

Before capitalism drops away entirely into the hazy background of implicit narrative, it is worth taking a brief digression into "the

political imaginary" and its suggestion. If there is a single formula that crystallizes the left appropriation of accelerationism as sheer cognitive collapse it is Frederic Jameson's claim — obsessively repeated across the Left Web — that *It is now easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism*. To grasp the profound mindlessness of this pronouncement it is only necessary to return to the thought of *real abstraction*, through which the virtualization *realized* by capitalism is distinguished from any determination of abstraction as a logical property of intellectual representation. Within capitalist *futures markets*, the non-actual has effective currency. It is not an "imaginary" but an integral part of the virtual body of capital, an operationalized *realization of the future*. It is scarcely imaginable that the Left is willing to follow the path it has set out upon here, therefore, unless through thoughtlessness of simply staggering proportions, since it necessarily leads to the conclusion: *while capital has an increasingly densely-realized future, its leftist enemies have only a manifestly pretend one*.

Because *#Accelerate* Section Two is a tightly-tangled thicket of conceptual outrages, it is worth recalling once again its first two sentences, which are exceptional (in this context) for their soundness:

> If any system has been associated with ideas of acceleration it is capitalism. The essential metabolism of capitalism

> demands economic growth, with competition between individual capitalist entities setting in motion increasing technological developments in an attempt to achieve competitive advantage, all accompanied by increasing social dislocation.

The primary object of Accelerationism is economic growth, as demonstrated capitalistically, in a process inextricably bound to competition-driven technological development, and also to social disorganization. If *#Accelerate* concluded here, there would be no case to be made against it. Unfortunately it continues through a string of such radically disordered sentences that no elegant pursuit of its argument is possible. Instead, it demands a piecemeal series of corrections, objections, and re-animations of obscured, half-buried, and arbitrarily suppressed problems.

The descent begins immediately: "In its neoliberal form, its ideological self-presentation is one of liberating the forces of creative destruction, setting free ever-accelerating technological and social innovations."

Why is the term 'creative destruction' (coined by Joseph Schumpeter in 1942) being associated with 'neoliberalism' here? Schumpeter considered it applicable to capitalism in general, with abundant reason, and *#Accelerate* articulates no objection to this standard usage. If 'neoliberalism' is the ideology of creative

destruction, it is the ideology of capitalism in general.

In the introduction we were told that "since 1979" neoliberalism has been "the hegemonic global political ideology … found in some variant throughout the leading economic powers." It is characterized, apparently, by "structural adjustments … most significantly in the form of encouraging new and aggressive incursions by the private sector into what remains of social democratic institutions and services." This, too, sounds like simple capitalism (as does "Landian neoliberalism"). The emptiness of the term only re-echoes sonorously with each succeeding use. 'Neoliberalism' is criticized because it is nothing other than capitalism (post-1979), and it is criticized for no other reason. In *#Accelerate*, if not elsewhere, it has no ideological content distinguishable from classical liberalism, making it a perfectly useless word. The opacity serves only to smuggle through two preposterous suggestions:
(1) The cacophony of leftist critics of 'neoliberalism' share some coherent core of economic and political analysis.
(2) Classical liberal socio-economic ideas enjoy an essentially unperturbed hegemony over the present world order. (Didn't you know that Keynes was dead, and Libertarians rule the earth?)

(So why not start calling today's fundamentalist Marxists 'neo-collectivists'? while implying that Stalinist industrial central-planning is the world's dominant economic arrangement? — *Because it would be patently ridiculous and senselessly annoying*, but actually no

more so than the 'neoliberal' alternative.)

This 'neoliberal' tic, while infuriating in its smug idiocy, is actually so vacuous that it matters little to the #Accelerate argument. Its effect is merely to serve as a sleight of hand, presenting a cartoon opponent to distract from the absence of concentrated attention upon the target of realistic analysis and criticism: the accelerative thing. The second theoretical diversion to appear is scarcely less evasive, which is to slide off the core ontological problem into a 'conceptual clarification' of astounding sloppiness.

We know from the children's dictionary that acceleration is *a change in speed over time*, which does not prevent *#Accelerate* claiming (without any obvious evidence):

> The philosopher Nick Land captured this [capital dynamic or neoliberal ideology?] most acutely, with a myopic yet hypnotising belief that capitalist speed alone could generate a global transition towards unparalleled technological singularity. … Landian neoliberalism confuses speed with acceleration. We may be moving fast, but only within a strictly defined set of capitalist parameters that themselves never waver. We experience only the increasing speed of a local horizon, a simple brain-dead onrush rather than an acceleration which is also navigational, an experimental process of discovery within a universal space of possibility. It is the latter mode of acceler-

ation which we hold as essential.

(1) Speed is not acceleration.
(2) Approaching singularity is marked by acceleration, not constant velocity.
(3) Who has ever spoken about "moving fast" in this context? It lacks even the dignity of a straw-man. What does 'fast' mean? Acceleration need not even be 'fast' (only 'getting faster').
(4) The appeal to something beyond "a strictly defined set of capitalist parameters" is mere hand-waving. Economic functionality is a confining 'parameter' (for acceleration)? There is clearly an attempt at some kind of transcendental argument here, marked by the appeal to "capitalist parameters that themselves never waver." 'Parameter' itself wavers between a logical usage and an empirical one, one conceptually defining, and the other materially constraining. If *#Accelerate* thinks it can produce a meaningful concept of acceleration without parameters, it would be a thrilling thing to see (time, terrestrial mass, physical laws, biogeological inheritance … are all 'parameters'). Capitalist 'parameters' (undefined) are for some reason to be accepted as especially constraining, however. Argument? Of course not, this is an article of undisputed faith.
(5) If anyone knows what "the increasing speed of a local horizon" means, please let me know. At least it is some kind of "increasing speed" though, i.e. an acceleration. Is this a sign that *#Accelerate*

thinks the difference between speed and acceleration is too trivial to acknowledge, so that its discussion of acceleration is actually not about acceleration at, but about something much deeper and 'post-parametric'? Perhaps, because …

(6) Beyond the "simple brain-dead onrush" (something is certainly 'brain-dead') …

(7) There is "an acceleration which is also navigational, an experimental process of discovery within a universal space of possibility." … and this is somehow connected to, measurable as, or explained in terms of some rigorously determinable process of acceleration (even roughly) how?

(8) Regardless: "It is the latter mode of acceleration which we hold as essential."

This sort of thing is the straightforward, radical destruction of intelligence. We began with a defined concept ('acceleration') and a topic of investigation or critique (the accelerative thing). Now, less than halfway through *#Accelerate*, we have neither. Instead, we are left with some kind of super-parametric trans-horizonal imaginary "mode of acceleration" that has been deliberately destituted of both sense and reference. The only theoretical achievement has been to crudely chisel this conceptually and ontologically ineffable political idea away from the only historically-evidenced process of accelerating navigation, experiment, and discovery known to human history, in order to cast it into a mystically-inspiring beyond.

Beginning with a cybernetically-intelligible self-propelling sociotechnical machine, we end with nothing but the adamant declaration that whatever 'it' (historical acceleration) is, it is not *this*, or anything we can understand, despite the fact that what we know of 'it' is entirely extracted from the cumulative reality being abandoned.

As Marx was aware, capitalism cannot be identified as the agent of true acceleration.

On the contrary. The only "agent of true acceleration" recognized by Marx is the revolutionary bourgeoisie — his humanistic proxy for the agency of capital. The proletariat accelerates nothing, except in its function as labor power under capital imperatives. It inherits a completed, accelerative pre-history, at the point of its own revolutionary auto-dissolution into a universal humanity.

Unlike *#Accelerate*, Marx labored under no illusion that the accelerative thing was capital, whose mechanism he devoted himself to understanding, to the near-perfect exclusion of all other topics. In turning back to Marx's understanding of this thing [next week], we partially withdraw from the chaotic errors of current Left Accelerationism, while perhaps remaining close enough to irritate it.

March 7, 2014

On #Accelerate (#2c)

A (quick) digression on speed

Acceleration, as Accelerationism employs it, is a concept abstracted from physics. In this philosophical (and socio-historical) sense, it preserves its mathematical definition (consolidated by the differential calculus) as *higher derivatives of speed*, with continued reference to time (change in the rate of change), but with re-application from passage through space to the growth of a determinable variable. The theoretical integrity of accelerationism, therefore, rests upon a rigorous abstraction *from* and *of* space, in which the dimension of change — as graphed against time — is mapped onto an alternative, quantifiable object. The implicit complicity of this 'object' with the process of abstraction itself will ultimately translate into explicit theoretical complications.

The flight into abstraction is theoretically snarled by reflexive tangles. Comparable difficulties arise on the side of the flight 'out' of space, primarily because the coincidence of intelligibility and spatiality tends rather to thicken than dissolve with each further increment of abstraction, propelling intelligence into phase-spaces, probability-spaces, Cyberspace, and deterritorialization. Space is released from its 'original' concreteness into the purity of the intuitive medium, while acquiring active intelligibility as *display space*, within which concepts become sensible. There is no more

archaic, or more contemporary, illustration than *the intuition of time through space*, as demonstrated by the entire history of horology, the time-line, time dimensionalization, and graphed dynamics. Space sticks to measure on its path into abstraction, and even leads it there.

The *insistence* of space is also demonstrated by a tendency for any abstraction of acceleration to undergo *reversion*, as its index of change is re-attached to differentiations of (physical) speed. In the context of the *Great Stagnation* debate — the most prominent hiatus within the recent history of accelerationist thinking — a highly abstracted notion of (negative) technonomic acceleration is restored to *measure* in exactly this way.

In an interview with Francis Fukuyama, Peter Thiel demonstrates the process:

> … you have … two different blind spots on the Left and Right, but I've been more interested in their common blind spot, which we're less likely to discuss as a society: technological deceleration and the question of whether we're still living in a technologically advancing society at all. I believe that the late 1960s was not only a time when government stopped working well and various aspects of our social contract began to fray, but also when scientific and technological progress began to advance much more slowly. Of course, the computer age, with the internet and web 2.0 developments of the past

> 15 years, is an exception. Perhaps so is finance, which has seen a lot of innovation over the same period (too much innovation, some would argue).
>
> There has been a tremendous slowdown everywhere else, however. Look at transportation, for example: Literally, we haven't been moving any faster.

In an earlier article, published in *National Review*, Thiel refers explictly to a "measurement problem" — at once theoretical and political — obstructing reliable estimates of techno-scientific development. While important to acknowledge, he advises, it should not "stop our inquiry into modernity before it has even begun":

> When tracked against the admittedly lofty hopes of the 1950s and 1960s, technological progress has fallen short in many domains. Consider the most literal instance of non-acceleration: We are no longer moving faster. The centuries-long acceleration of travel speeds — from ever-faster sailing ships in the 16th through 18th centuries, to the advent of ever-faster railroads in the 19th century, and ever-faster cars and airplanes in the 20th century — reversed with the decommissioning of the Concorde in 2003, to say nothing of the nightmarish delays caused by strikingly low-tech post-9/11 airport-security systems. Today's advocates of space jets,

> lunar vacations, and the manned exploration of the solar system appear to hail from another planet. A faded 1964 Popular Science cover story — "Who'll Fly You at 2,000 m.p.h.?" — barely recalls the dreams of a bygone age.
>
> The official explanation for the slowdown in travel centers on the high cost of fuel, which points to the much larger failure in energy innovation. …

Notably, in an assessment of the anomalous rapidity of computer innovation, he re-poses the "measurement problem" in terms familiar (much more recently) from *#Accelerate*: "how does one measure the difference between progress and mere change? How much is there of each?" His procedure then anticipates the one recommended throughout this series:

> Let us now try to tackle this very thorny measurement problem from a very different angle. If meaningful scientific and technological progress occurs, then we reasonably would expect greater economic prosperity (though this may be offset by other factors). And also in reverse: If economic gains, as measured by certain key indicators, have been limited or nonexistent, then perhaps so has scientific and technological progress. Therefore, to the extent that economic growth is easier to quantify than scientific or

> technological progress, economic numbers will contain indirect but important clues to our larger investigation.

Theoretical necessity drives us from physical space into economic abstraction. It is only realistic, however, to be prepared for the ways in which — according to deep and obscure necessities — this path will be curved by the insistent return of space. Of all those things with over-confidence in their own powers of acceleration, or smooth attainment of escape velocity, philosophical abstraction is by no means the least susceptible to counter-productive — and delusive — haste.

March 11, 2014

The Left Turn

Left Accelerationism undergoes further consolidation, assisted by two high-quality posts, from Fractal Ontology and Deontologistics.

Since Left-framing is a transcendental condition of publicization in the present world order, UF is encouraged to see it being done well. The implications of this development are inextricable from the core controversy at issue: Can acceleration be extracted from its capitalist matrix for socialist redeployment? Left Accelerationists, confident that this is possible, are setting out to demonstrate it. Right

Accelerationists, no less confident of its impossibility, have no incentive to obstruct them.

If capital can be exceeded, it deserves to be (by Natural Law). If it cannot, strenuous efforts to exceed it produce tangled elaborations of its potencies. Complexity, competition, pressure, and experimentation are what accelerationism is for.

July 17, 2014

Accelero-schism

Working on a re-ignition of the *On #Accelerate series* (which is still awaiting #3) has involved a re-reading of Pete Wolfendale's recent defense of Left Accelerationism (against Malcolm Harris' critique). As previously noted (briefly), it's good.

The strength of Wolfendale's case against Harris is not a topic this blog can credibly pronounce upon, since it rests upon the rhetorical efficiency of socialist political mobilization, and thus a very peculiar anthopological territory (though an entertaining one). Socialist reason that does not pass into or through political action is exposed as unreason by history. The 'force' of Wolfendale's case, in this respect, is therefore inextricable from the organizational dynamics of his ideological tribe. (It is not a constituency *UF* pretends to court.)

The article merits appreciation here due to the accuracy with

which it depicts the schism between Left and Right Accelerationist currents. He asks: "… what precisely should be accelerated?" The imperative form of this question is the signature of its Left orientation, but in every other respect it is impressively, and neutrally, on target. He continues:

Well, as the difference between left and right accelerationism shows, there's a good deal of disagreement about this. […] Left-accelerationism begins from the premise that the deterritorialising force is not capitalism itself, but that the transition from feudalism to capitalism was the expression of an emancipatory drive that capitalism's reterritorialising dynamics has systematically (but never wholly) suppressed. The various genealogical indices within the [Accelerationist] reader present a number of ways of thinking about the nature of this drive (e.g., Marx's Prometheanism, Federov's cosmism, Veblen's machine-process, etc.), and the various original contributions present ways of reconceiving and appropriating these (e.g., Srnicek & Williams' project of collective self-mastery, Singleton's generalised escapology, Negarestani's inhumanism, etc.).

The fissure is thus perfectly clear. Left Accelerationism rests fundamentally upon the contention that the modern social order includes an accelerative motor distinguishable from the capitalist mechanism. In the best case (philosophically speaking) intellectual proceedings will therefore lead to a clinical analysis and delimitation of capital circuitry, in order to describe, alongside it, a *quite other*

historical dynamo, to which the capital accumulation process relates as a constriction. This is, as far as I am aware, work that remains to be completed (whether from Left or Right). Accelerationism in general requires a coherent capital theory, with which acceleration is to be identified, or differentiated. Appropriately enough, the task begins to look like a race.

July 21, 2014

Twitter cuts (#12)

OK, it's verging on the obsessional to drag Jehu back so quickly, but these tweets are quite simply the most important formulations of rigorous Left Accelerationism to date.

> @nervemeter Labor theory is correct and it identifies the central contradiction of capital. @XLR8AN @deontologistics
> — Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) August 21, 2014

> @nervemeter That contradiction is labor itself — it is the thing to be abolished and the measure of social wealth @XLR8AN @deontologistics
> — Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) August 21, 2014

> @nervemeter You have to raise the antagonism between

these two aspects of the contradiction. @XLR8AN @deontologistics

— Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) August 21, 2014

@nervemeter And you can only do this by throwing your weight in the direction of abolition. @XLR8AN @deontologistics

— Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) August 21, 2014

@nervemeter Capital is a moving contradiction that tries to abolish labor and keep it at the same time. @XLR8AN @deontologistics

— Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) August 21, 2014

@nervemeter Yes. :) progressively abolishing socially necessary labor is the basis for profit. @XLR8AN @deontologistics

— Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) August 21, 2014

@nervemeter Capital cannot avoid this without ceasing to be capital. @XLR8AN @deontologistics

— Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) August 21, 2014

@nervemeter That is the secret of the transformation problem. @XLR8AN @deontologistics

— Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) August 21, 2014

@nervemeter Anacceleration worthy of name would take acceleration of the abolition of labor as its starting point. @XLR8AN @deontologistics

— Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) August 21, 2014

In the admittedly oddly-angled opinion of this blog, the final tweet in this sequence is the most theoretically significant statement of Left Accelerationist purpose since the 19th century. Attenuation of socially necessary labor time has to be arithmetically integrated with the concept of 'acceleration' for a seam of Marxian continuity to be pursued.

My immediate response to Jehu's intervention was, of course, tweeted:

It's not that I really think Lef Accelerationism was sitting in the faculty lounge, sipping Chardonnay, and engaging in spirited dialectic .

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) August 21, 2014

… over certain passages in the Grundrisse, when @Damn_Jehu bursts in. Nervous looks all around. "Christ! He really believes this stuff!"

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) August 21, 2014

August 21, 2014

Twitter cuts (#41)

On the accelerationist dilemma:

> So the left accelerationists seductively promise endless free time and resources but will probably deliver automated gulags.
>
> — Dark Psy-Ops (@DIA_operative) March 23, 2015

> Whereas the right accelerationists promise nothing but expect biological beings to become obsolete. Tough choice…
>
> — Dark Psy-Ops (@DIA_operative) March 23, 2015

Even speaking as an adversary, it's worth pointing out that the advantage of taking the Left Accelerationist path is, that way, you still get Right Accelerationism for free. Head for spiritual redemption through fully automated luxury communism *and* get devoured by Omega-telic X-risk. Everyone wins.

March 24, 2015

Accelerationism in One Country

Devastating:

The difference between the experimentalism of 'folk politics' and the trial and error of Srnicek and Williams boils down to a question of scale. The most biting elements of their critique of current radical practices, such as direct democracy, is that they are difficult to 'scale up' beyond local and parochial zones of action, and it is this limitation which prevents the contemporary left from presenting a real threat to capitalism. Surprisingly, then, ***Inventing the Future*** *implicitly conjures a distinctly* ***national*** *politics, geared towards achieving parliamentary dominance in North/Western democratic states. Their legislative wish-list – investment in automation, the provision of basic income, shortening the working week and so on – remain tied to national politics in an era of ever-more global and mobile capital. To be sure, the threat of capital upping sticks and investing elsewhere at the mere mention of greater concessions to labour are overstated, but without a* ***global compact*** *in which common labour standards are adhered to around the world, the reality of a post-work regime in one country would either be capital flight or the out-sourcing of exploitation to poorer countries (in other words, further exacerbating the current global division of labour). Not for nothing are the authors forced to rely on a vague hope that the rest of the world will take care of itself …* (Emphasis in original.)

Capital interprets Left Accelerationism as damage and routes around it.

November 9, 2015

Quotable (#122)

Nick Dyer Witheford (in conversation) on the variants of far Left politics under advanced capitalism:

… it's clear that capitalism is creating potentials – not just technological, but organizational potentials – which could be adapted in a transformed manner to create a very different type of society. The evident example is the huge possibilities for freeing up time by automation of certain types of work. For me, the problem both with Paul [Mason]'s work, which I respect, and with the accelerationists, is there is a failure to acknowledge that the passage from the potential to the actualization of such communist possibilities involves crossing what William Morris describes as a "river of fire." I don't find in their work a great deal about that river of fire. I think it would be reasonable to assume there would be a period of massive and protracted social crisis that would attend the emergence of these new forms. And as we know from historical attempts in the 20th Century to cross that river of fire, a lot depends on what happens during that passage. So there is, if one could put

*it that way, a certain **automatism** about the prediction of the realization of a new order in both these schools, which we should be very careful about.*

(What automation wants — be definition — is more of itself. There's a name for that, and it isn't 'communism'.)

The abstract for this talk gives a sense of the diagnosis.

November 25, 2015

Twitter cuts (#104)

> @matdryhurst I dislike this distinction – I would like to see a unified #accelerate that jettisons the left/right binary
>
> — Morgan Sutherland (@msutherl) March 19, 2016

> @matdryhurst "l#a" seems unfortunately UK oriented, but as a global zeitgeist it needs to hook up to SV ideology: https://t.co/Q77vfnOcVr
>
> — Morgan Sutherland (@msutherl) March 19, 2016

> @matdryhurst God knows why @n_srnck wants to take this back to the socialist calculation debate – nobody's going to

> win that argument
>
> — Morgan Sutherland (@msutherl) March 19, 2016

The embedded link is well-worth looking at. It's what Left Acceleration thinks a sane — or only moderately sociopathic — Right would look like (I'm guessing), and what Right Accelerationism thinks a non-retarded Left would look like (I'm sure).

March 20, 2016

Twitter cuts (#145)

> lrt: uh yeah Obama just low key pitched communism to the New Yorker pic.twitter.com/KcxnaDECni
>
> — Melissa (@0xabad1dea) November 19, 2016

(Source.)

Good catch. He doesn't exactly quote the MAP, but he gets comically close.

So the world's first Left Accelerationist regime was destroyed in a frog-cataclysm. One for the history books.

November 19, 2016

BLOCK 3 - BITCOIN AND BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY

CHAPTER ONE - BTC FACETS

Bits and Pieces

P2P or not 2P, that is the question

As the US dollar reaches depths of debasement that would have stretched the imagination of Caligula, people have been searching for alternative candidates for a global reserve currency. The problem is formidable. The Euro and Japanese Yen face comparable calamities of their own (mixing debt crisis and demographic collapse), the Chinese Yuan is non-convertible, and the IMF's hybrid Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) merely bundle together a group of troubled fiat currencies under a technocratic acronym.

Precious metals enthusiasts have an obvious option, and one that is already being spontaneously exercised. Yet whilst growing numbers will no doubt cling to gold and silver as financial lifeboats, their wider use as currency (as opposed to stores of value) is obstructed by an intimidating range of technical and political problems. They are not digitally transferable without complicated mediating instruments, and they remain exposed to extreme political

risk – financial crises have been regularly accompanied by seizures and controls directed at private precious metals holdings and transactions.

To overcome such problems, a currency would need to be structurally immunized against the depredations of central bankers, to share the deflationary bias of precious metals, and to participate fully in the technical trend towards mathematical abstraction and electronic communicability, whilst also enjoying strong cryptographic protection against surveillance, expropriation, and fraud. Astonishingly, such a currency seems already to exist. Its name is 'Bitcoin'.

The twin, interactive drivers of modernity – commerce and technology – come together in Bitcoin with unprecedented fusional intensity. This is a currency that is simultaneously an open source computer program, entirely native to cyberspace, and a financial innovation, conducting a real-time experiment that is at once social, technical, and economic. Built on the foundations of public key encryption (PKE), it creates a peer-to-peer open network – without any controlling node or discretionary human management – to sustain a radically decentralized monetary system.

Originally devised by Satoshi Nakamoto (whose outline paper can be found here), Bitcoin disconnects trust from authority. In particular, it is designed to overcome the problem of double spending.

Because digital 'goods' can be replicated at near-zero cost, they are economically defined as 'non-rivalrous'. If you sell me a computer, I now own it, and you do not. As with all rivalrous goods, ownership implies exclusion. If you sell me a computer program, on the other hand, there is no reason to assume that you have not kept a copy for yourself, or that the 'same' program could not be sold to multiple purchasers. Such non-rivalrous goods pose numerous intriguing economic questions, but one thing is entirely clear: non-rivalrous money is an impossibility. Without scarcity, or exclusive exchange, the very idea of monetary quantity loses all sense, as does monetary value, spending and investment, and consumer choice.

The Bitcoin algorithm makes a digital currency rivalrous, and thus effective as money, without recourse to any administrative authority. It does so by initiating an automatic or spontaneous ecology, in which computers on the network authenticate Bitcoin exchanges as a side-effect of 'mining' for new coins. Nodes earn new coins, at a diminishing rate, by solving a difficult digital puzzle – accessible only to a brute force, computationally-intensive approach – and thus exhibiting proof-of-work. This test screens the system from malicious interventions, by establishing a practically insurmountable barrier to any user who seeks to falsify the record of exchanges. Competent discussions can be found here, here, and (most diversely) here.

This problem, and solution, is very far from arbitrary. It is precisely

because existing fiat currencies have taken on disturbingly non-rivalrous characteristics that alarm about currency debasement has reached such a pitch of exasperation. When a central bank, in the course of running a typically loose monetary policy, can simply speed up the printing presses or (still worse) the electronic equivalent, the integrity of the money supply is devastated at the root. Bitcoin rigorously extirpates such ruinous discretion from its system, by instantiating a theory of sound money as a precisely and publicly defined electronic experiment.

Unsurprisingly, the Bitcoin monetary aggregate is modeled on precious metal, generated by miners from a finite global reserve, with rising extraction costs. The reward for coin mining falls over time at a logarithmic (Zenonian) rate, towards a limit of fractionally under 21,000,000 BTC. Each Bitcoin can be subdivided to eight decimal places, to a total of over two quadrillion (2,100,000,000,000,000) fragments, equivalent to 210,000 Bitcoin 'quanta' for each of the 10 billion people making up the earth's anticipated climax human population. A Bitcoin quantum (0.00000001 BTC) is named a 'Satoshi' (after Satoshi Nakamoto), although amendment to the system allowing for further sub-division at some future stage is not foreclosed. (For the total size of the Bitcoin economy look here.)

Bitcoin is programmed for deflation (of a sort). This is a source of delight to hard money types, and of outrage to those in the loose

money (inflationary) camp. As an experiment, the great merit of Bitcoin is to raise this antagonism beyond the level of reciprocal polemics, to that of potential historical evidence — and real choice. Austrolibertarians have long claimed that free money systems are biased to deflation, and that central banking encourages inflation as a surreptitious mechanism of economic expropriation, to ultimately disastrous effect. Keynesians, in contrast, deplore deflation as an economic disease that suppresses productive investment and employment. Empirical testing could soon be possible.

Numerous other questions, theoretical and practical, present themselves. At the practical level, such questions work themselves out through speculative volatility, institutional adaptations, and technical challenges. Since the entire Bitcoin economy remains very small, relatively modest shifts in economic behavior yield wild swings in BTC value, including bubble-like surges, precipitous collapses, incontinent hype, and extravagant accusations. Despite the resilience of the core algorithm, the peripheral institutions supporting the Bitcoin economy remain vulnerable to theft, fraud, and malicious interventions. As with any revolutionary experiment, the developmental trajectory of Bitcoin is likely to be tumultuous and highly unpredictable.

The theoretical questions can be entertained more calmly. The most important of these concern the essential nature of money, and its future. Does Bitcoin successfully simulate the significant features

of precious metals, such that their substance can be discarded from the monetary equation as irrelevant dross? How powerful are the forces leading to monetary convergence? Will first-mover advantage 'lock-in' Bitcoin at the expense of later alternatives? Or will multiple money systems – perhaps ever more heterogeneous ones – continue to co-exist? Is Bitcoin merely one stage in an open-ended sequence of innovative money systems, or does it capture the essential features of money quite definitively (leaving room only for incremental improvements, or tinkering)?

Supporters of the monetary status quo might insist on a further, more derisive line of questioning: is Bitcoin a dead end, an irrelevance, or a deluding libertarian cipherpunk fantasy, to be judged eventually as something akin to a hoax? Which is to note that, ultimately, the largest questions will be political, and the most heated discussions already are.

Can governments afford to tolerate unmanaged, autonomous currencies? We'll see.

June 23, 2011

The Internet of Money

In an article that might be the most important contribution to the understanding of Bitcoin since its launch, Eli Dourado writes:

[Bitcoin] is a currency, of sorts. You can spend it on things, especially drugs and gambling and getting around capital controls. Krugman and other economists have analyzed Bitcoin in these terms, as a substitute for dollars. This is rather like regarding the Internet as a substitute for, and not a quantum leap beyond, previous communication technologies. It is true that Bitcoin can substitute for other currencies, but as with the Internet, the abstraction of a permissionless application layer means that it is much more than a substitute: it is like a transport layer for finance.

Every Bitcoin transaction is defined in part by a bit of code, called a script, written in a programming language called Script. The script in one transaction defines how the next user can access the coins. In a conventional transaction, the script specifies the hash of the public key that is needed to spend the coins next, and demands a signature from the corresponding private key.

Script is not limited, however, to these conventional transactions that merely transfer coins from one person's control to another's. It can evaluate statements, execute conditionally, do math, and move bits around. It is not a Turing-complete programming language (there is no looping), because that would be a security risk; we do not want viruses to spread via Bitcoin's blockchain, nor do we want Bitcoin transactions to run indefinitely or, if we ever figure out AI, become self-aware. Despite the lack of loops in Script, it can be used to construct some very interesting scripts. …

Sometimes ratchets work right.

ADDED: In the comments thread to the article, Eli Dourado suggests: "It's … possible that democracies won't respond effectively against Bitcoin because they don't respond effectively to much of anything."

January 10, 2014

Monetary Reality

Kevin D Williamson writes one of the best pieces yet on Bitcoin:

To argue that bitcoins are not "real money" because they have no central-bank regulation or central issuer is like arguing that a prepaid disposable cell phone is not a "real phone" because its number doesn't appear in the directory and you don't get a bill. That's the point, or at least part of the point.

I am skeptical of the Bitcoin model, but it has in no small part been a victim of its own popularity, with speculative investments in bitcoins overwhelming their use in commercial transactions. But this phenomenon is not unknown among traditional currencies. Consider the lengths to which the Swiss have had to go in recent years to stabilize the value of the franc as euros (and, to a lesser extent, dollars) bounced about.

But that misses the broader point in a couple of ways. The first

is that bitcoins and other private currencies are intended as replacements for greenbacks in approximately the same way that the Internet was intended to be a replacement for the printing press: They may do that, sure, but they will have other uses as well. Wresting control of currencies away from politicians is the only way to let money evolve. Twenty years ago, you didn't know that you'd want to take photos with your telephone or use it as a boarding pass at the airport. Now you do. Nobody planned that. Nobody knows what "real money" is going to mean in twenty years.

As for price instability, that is of course a fundamental issue, and … the fact that most of the world's governments have made counterfeit currency (which is what fiat money is) legal tender complicates the environment. … A financial asset may decline in value; a U.S. dollar is practically guaranteed to, if history is any guide. Very wealthy people and institutions already have access to de facto private money in the form of various financial instruments; private currencies promise to make similar benefits available to general consumers — and, critically, to move that market beyond the reach of central bankers and regulators, and probably tax-collectors, too, in the long run.

We can probably expect a robust, competitive market in private currencies to develop, and Bitcoin may or may not be a part of the long-term picture. It may turn out to be the Packard of private currencies. We'll know the market has arrived when people have as many choices of currency provider as they do of cell-phone provider.

And that will be a critical moment in the shifting balance of power between politics and markets, another way for us to stop ***asking permission*** *to engage in commerce.*

This is in part why I object to … the ***Wall Street Journal****'s characterization of the natural theater for bitcoin use as "the black market." A better phrase for "the black market" is "the market."*

(I confess to being quite awestruck by the amount of incisive analysis packed into these few short paragraphs.)

March 4, 2014

Distributors

It's time for another (quick) *Umlaut* rave. There's no getting around it after reading this, then following the back-link to this, and being reminded somehow that this comparatively obscure online magazine has somehow rounded up two of the half-dozen or less people in the world who *really* get what Bitcoin is going to do to this planet. (I'd say "two-and-a-half" — but with no disrespect to Adam Gurri, his soul just isn't in it, which is to say: terminally distributed.)

After reading this stuff, it's easy to think that the only meaningful role for anything else on the right is to run interference while 'Bitcoin' (i.e. a-centric digital crypto-commerce) consummates the destiny of capitalism. The intelligence gulf between the emerging

Bitcoin machinery and legacy political controversy now yawns so abysmally that inherited conceptions of 'activism' have become low comedy. Poke at Bitcoin with a political stick and it slithers sideways while turning more feral — the 'instinct' for that is already locked in. The confused idiots who are trying to manage human societies today will almost certainly make it into a monster. Since I don't like them very much, it doesn't upset me to see it stealthing into the shadows, with venomous claws emerging. It will be darkly amusing to see it coming at them out of Hell.

April 8, 2014

Bitcoin Backend

A short photo-heavy story by 'Bitsmith' explores the engine-room behind digital cryptocurrency, where Chinese 'miners' run banks of computers to fetch new monetary units out of mathematical abstraction. The incentives for the mining operation are straightforward, and economically indistinguishable from those driving mineral mining operations. Due to the genius of the Bitcoin design, this massive computational effort serves, automatically, to secure the integrity of the system against subversion. What offers opportunities for extractive wild-catting from the entrepreneurial side, is a decentralized trust mechanism from that of the currency

exchange network.

Located in a re-purposed industrial space, the mining operation's 2,500 machines perform a total 600 trillion operations per second, consuming RMB 400,000 of electricity per month. There's an attached audio file with the story, so you can listen in on the process. It's not pretty, but it sounds unmistakably serious.

The tone of Bitsmith's prose has been peeled straight off the cryptocurrency frontier, which makes it doubly informative. This is the object and the spirit of capitalist perception in the early 21st century:

Getting the opportunity to visit this mining operation was very eye-opening for me. Walking around the warehouse floor, I was struck with a feeling of awe that THIS is what keeps bitcoin alive. That even if someone wanted to bring down bitcoin, they'd have to outdo these guys and the dozens of other operations like this around the world. The decentralized nature of it all … that this is just one operation among many, run by different operators in different countries around the world. This really drove home that bitcoin can't be killed by decree. Make it illegal in one country and people like this will keep hashing away in others.

This is a far cry from the small-time home miners of the not-too-distant past. Not even two years ago I knew a guy mining tons of coins per day with just a couple dozen GPU units in his bedroom.

The other feeling I got while there is that this is kind of a libertarian

fantasy for many. These guys are performing a valuable service and getting paid well for it. Too many in the world get paid well at the expense of others, or dedicate their lives to giving back to society without a penny in return, but mining farms like these are participating in the economy in a purely capitalist way (and the good kind of capitalism, not "socialism-for-banks-but-we'll-call-it-capitalism-anyways").

Love it or loathe it, the future that has already begun to arrive. This is an inspection tour not to be missed.

August 15, 2014

Trustless Convergence

A US$80 million bitcoin transaction is impressive. To really get a sense of the momentum behind the impending blockchained Internet, however, a figure like this pales beside the cultural groundswell. Bitcoin consolidates its inevitability from the sheer social heterogeneity it coordinates.

Watch this video alongside this venture capital announcement. It would be over-dramatic to suggest these people want to kill each other, but there's every reason to suspect they would not be excessively traumatized by bad things happening to each other. There's no commonality of social perspective, no grounds for

reciprocal sympathy, and a massive accumulation of historical distrust. Yet Famous Amos and the Winklevoss twins are cooperating, spontaneously, in the same world-historic undertaking. If there's any plane short of the blockchain that could imaginably facilitate comparable coordination between otherwise-noncommunicating constituencies, I've no idea what it could be. ('The market'? — merely blockchain commerce in embryo.)

The guiding principle of the next Kondratiev upswing is the *trustless commonwealth*. It doesn't expect us to like each other. That's why it's going to win.

December 9, 2014

On the Table

Pierre Rochard's essay on 'The Bitcoin Central Bank's Perfect Monetary Policy' presents an impressively cogent case for the superiority of Bitcoin over not only slimy government fiat scrip (boo hiss), but even over precious metals. One table, in particular, deserves to be committed to heart by anyone making systematic three-way comparisons:

Transaction Cost	Precious Metals	Fiat Currencies	Bitcoin
Storage	0.15% to 1% per year	Subsidized by FRB*	*Free and 100*
Transportation	Expensive	Inconvenient	*Free & Easy*
Security	Physical	Institutional	*Cryptographi*
Fiduciary media	Inevitable	Inherent	*Impossible*
Recordkeeping	Manual	Manual	*Automatic*
Counterfeiting	Impossible	Inevitable	*Impossible*
Issuance	Mining	Politics	*Algorithm*
Payment clearing	Expensive	Centralized	*Cheap & Dist*
Scarcity	High	Arbitrary	*Fixed - 21 mi*
Authentication	Expensive assay	Trust counterparty	*Built-in*

** fractional reserve banking*

It's difficult to run through this and see anything less than a fundamental rupture in social history. When compared to Bitcoin, only proto-money has ever yet existed.

As Rochard concludes:

Fractional reserve banking entails the creation of new money that is fungible with already preexisting money, i.e. it can be used interchangeably within the currency's payment systems. This is impossible with Bitcoin. The BCB ['Bitcoin Central Bank'] enforces the strictest deposit regulations in the world by requiring full reserves for all accounts. This is the digital equivalent of the Chicago Plan or the Austrian 100% reserve gold standard. Under this regulatory regime, money is not destroyed when bank debts are repaid, so increased money hoarding does not cause liquidity traps, instead it increases real interest rates and lowers consumer prices.

This is a self-stabilizing cycle as higher interest rates incentivize hoarders to invest, while deflation increases consumption due to the wealth-effect on hoarders. The BCB prevents lending out of deposits so that it can properly target money supply and avoid the destabilizing effects of commingling the credit and payment systems. The positive properties of AMST ['asymptotic money supply targeting'] and PoWS ['Proof-of-work seigniorage'] combined make it certain that, absent a technological problem, Bitcoin will be adopted as the global currency. For a deeper understanding of the market process involved in becoming global currency I would recommend reading Konrad Graf's explanation of hyper-monetization and Peter Šurda's liquidity analysis of bitcoins. The Bitcoin Central Bank will be the longest lasting institution of its kind thanks to the anti-fragile independent monetary policy it has set in stone.

ADDED: Approaching the same forecast in another direction —

> Calling bitcoin "an irreversible ledger entry in a distributed global database" is like calling a car a "horseless carriage". Mouthful.
>
> — Pierre Rochard (@Pierre_Rochard) December 18, 2014

> "horseless carriage" was shortened to "car". "P2P electronic cash" shortens to "cash" and its synonyms. Reasonable

linguistic evolution.

— Pierre Rochard (@Pierre_Rochard) December 18, 2014

December 17, 2014

Bitcoin as SOCI

This is one of the greatest things ever written, period.

'SOCI' abbreviates 'self-organizing collective intelligence'.

The basic dynamics of a SOCI is as follows. It begins as some sort of attractor—some aesthetic sensibility or yearning—that is able to grab the attention and energy of some group of people. Generally one that is very vague and abstract. Some idea or notion that only makes sense to a relatively small group. […] But, and this is the key move, when those people apply their attention and energy to the SOCI, this makes it more real, easier for more people to grasp and to find interesting and valuable. Therefore, more attractive to more people and their attention and energy. […] … If the SOCI has enough capacity within its collective intelligence to resolve the challenge, it "levels up" and expands its ability to attract more attention and energy. If not, then it becomes somewhat bounded (at least for the present) and begins to find the limit of "what it is".

Greenhal then narrates the story of Bitcoin to date, within this

framework. The sheer enormity of the innovation it has introduced emerges starkly.

In conclusion:

My sense is that over just the next five years this new form of SOCI will go through its gestation, birthing and childhood development stages. The result will be a form of collective intelligence that is so much more capable than anything in the current environment that it will sweep away even the most powerful contemporary collective intelligences (in particular both corporations and nation states) in establishing itself as the new dominant form of collective intelligence on the Earth. […] And whoever gets there first will "win" in a fashion that is rarely seen in history.

This will look prophetic not too far down the road.

February 23, 2016

Countdown

XS wishes all its readers a productive Bitcoin Halving Day. (It's only the second ever — with the first falling on November 28, 2012, when **Block 210000** was solved.)

Bitcoin likes Countdown numbers (only 21000000 will ever be produced).

(Countdown = 210.)

July 9, 2016

CHAPTER TWO - BTC DEATH?

Bitcoin vs Leviathan

Moldbug's prediction: Freedom loses (as usual).

The question is this: Which dominates? The malignancy of Leviathan, or its incompetence? How radically can the metastatic cancer-phase State shape reality in conformity to its vision?

Bitcoin — which is essentially an experiment in Austrian monetary theory — provides the model test-bed in which this question can be lucidly decided. Its current rising fortunes only accelerates the decision. If Bitcoin can't be stopped, Leviathan is exposed as a paper tiger.

The best way to make the bet, of course, is to buy (or short) BTC. *Outside in* has been too apathetic to put resources behind its hunches yet, but (for the zilch it's worth) our intuitions run *contra* Moldbug on the topic. Compared to Cyberspace, where bitcoin is entrenched, the State is weak, unintelligent, uninformed, parochial, poorly designed, and — in each respect — getting ever more so, in both comparative and absolute terms. The truly stupendous idiocy of Leviathan thoroughly swamps its evil, as is demonstrated every time

it tries to get something done.

The digital Outside, in contrast, is already far beyond recall. The germ of a free economy is under construction.

[UF on Bitcoin (June 2011) here]

March 1, 2013

Bitcoin Horror Stories

Bitcoin Dies, Moldbug ventures, perhaps sometime this year. Following a broad DOJ indictment for money laundering, targeting any and everybody remotely connected with the free currency, the "BTC/USD price falls to 0 and remains there."

"[R]emains there" — how cute is that? *Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Bitcoin R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn*.

Bitcoin simulates gold, and once 'mined' it lasts for ever. If it "falls to 0" it has to remain there, for eternity, because it can never be finished. It can die, but never be destroyed. It's built for undeath.

'Moldbug Monetary Theory' attributes the value of money exclusively to speculation. If the speculators are terrorized sufficiently, BTC drops onto the flatline, and "remains there." The market would be totally extinguished. What Mao failed to achieve, let alone sustain, USG would somehow accomplish, perhaps by exhibiting greater revolutionary ardor and ruthlessness.

Ruthlessness would certainly be necessary, for the obvious reason that flatline-BTC has zero downside risk. It's a one-way bet that someone, somewhere, will re-animate it ("nothing is unstable" (thanks to *fotrkd* for the reminder)). If a genius was designing irresistible speculator-bait, zero-degree bitcoin would be hard to improve upon. It's free, and it's only worth nothing if the cops can secure the crypt flawlessly, and *forever*. Did anyone say 'free money'?

Speculation messes with time, by bringing the future forward. If undead BTC were *ever* to be re-awakened, it already has been. Its economic potential flows back down the timeline, modified by a time-preference discount. The feedback becomes strange, and difficult to confidently calculate, but it works as a vitalizing charge, and the corpse unmistakably twitches. Whatever money at t0 is worth, if it's anything at all, at t0-*n* it almost certainly can't be zero.

The *Necronomicon* describes flatline-BTC with creepy exactitude:

That is not dead which can eternal lie,
And with strange aeons even death may die.

ADDED: An alternative take on Bitcoin and undeath from Yifo Guo, interviewed here (H/T Nick B. Steves, in this comment thread): "… the point is, the idea will never die. Even if bitcoin dies, an alternative will arise, one that addresses the vulnerability that was previously exploited. Then you get bitcoin 2.0."

March 5, 2013

Satoshi Nakamoto Night

On October 31, 2008, this happened.

(The first XS Bitcoin horror story.)

October 31, 2015

The Future of Bitcoin

The latest guidance from US Leviathan's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) is a leaf ripped straight out of Moldbuggian prophecy. The target acquisition revealed in *Administrators and Exchangers of Virtual Currency*, section *c. De-Centralized Virtual Currencies* could not possibly be clearer:

A final type of convertible virtual currency activity involves a de-centralized convertible virtual currency (1) that has no central repository and no single administrator, and (2) that persons may obtain by their own computing or manufacturing effort.

A person that creates units of this convertible virtual currency and uses it to purchase real or virtual goods and services is a user of the convertible virtual currency and not subject to regulation as

a money transmitter. By contrast, a person that creates units of convertible virtual currency and sells those units to another person for real currency or its equivalent is engaged in transmission to another location and is a money transmitter. In addition, a person is an exchanger and a money transmitter if the person accepts such de-centralized convertible virtual currency from one person and transmits it to another person as part of the acceptance and transfer of currency, funds, or other value that substitutes for currency.

[See Fotrkd's link feast in this comment thread]

RIP Bitcoin, I think Moldbug confirms:

I have not of course seen the questionnaire [for money transmitter licenses], but I imagine it asks you how you know the monies you're transmitting are not the product of illegal activity. Of course, Bitcoin provides no such assurance. By design. That's because it's well-designed — for a free country that doesn't exist.

With licenses unobtainable, and unlicensed monetary transactions proscribed, Bitcoin price-discovery has been criminalized. The conclusion: Bitcoin no longer has a practically meaningful US$ exchange rate, which is equivalent, in fact, to having a yet undiscovered (but already implicit) value of US$0. The cliff edge has been crossed, and all that remains is the impact.

Empirically vulnerable predictions are pure gold, and this is an especially precious example. The fate of Bitcoin tests the real power

of the State, the practicability of economic controls, and all political theories — whether reactionary or progressive — which subordinate market dynamics to more fundamental levels of social order. If Bitcoin does soon die, it will have been demonstrated that government can effectively dominate the economic sphere, dictate price, and eradicate commerce, under conditions which are — in at least some important respects — extremely challenging. Freedom might still seem attractive, but it will have been shown to be puny.

Alternatively, if Bitcoin survives, and spreads, the Right's libertarian current will be vitalized. These types will not only find their analytical models reinforced, but the sovereign insubordination of markets will have been dramatically evidenced, the State humiliated and weakened, and an archetypal anarcho-capitalist institution entrenched. Interesting times.

ADDED: Eli Dourado argues that anonymity is the "real target":

Contrary to some popular accounts, Bitcoin is not completely anonymous, but pseudonymous. The entire Bitcoin ledger is publicly shared so that the same coins can't be spent twice. Bitcoin "mixers" take coins from multiple pseudonymous actors, shuffle them around, and return them to their original users under new pseudonyms. In other words, mixers help anonymize a system that is not truly anonymous.

If the government were to succeed in regulating mixers, it would not destroy Bitcoin as a payment mechanism or even hurt Bitcoin's price,

which has now reached an all-time high of $60, but it would ruin one of the chief advantages of using it—the quasi-anonymity that it affords.

ADDED: Meanwhile, in Europe …

March 20, 2013

BTC End Times?

In January, Moldbug spake prophetically:

Bitcoin dies in two very simple steps.

1: A DOJ indictment is unsealed which names everyone on Planet Three who operates, or has ever operated, or perhaps who has ever even breathed on, a BTC/USD exchange, as a criminal defendant.

The charge: money laundering.

On May 15, Under the headline **US Government Begins BitCoin Crackdown**, Zero Hedge reported that:

Many people use Dwolla, a PayPal-like payment network, to send dollars to their Mt. Gox accounts. They then use those dollars to buy Bitcoins. On Tuesday, Dwolla announced that it had frozen Mt. Gox's account at the request of federal investigators. It's the first federal action against the currency.

And, by the way:

Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) described Bitcoin as an "online form

of money laundering"

Outside in doesn't share Moldbug's BTC prediction, but the projected narratives don't diverge much for some time. By attempting to stamp out Bitcoin, USG rapidly converts it into an overtly subversive *revolutionary currency**, used only by those in explicit (though covert) antagonism to the regnant global economic regime. The test then begins.

*Typically, reactionaries don't like revolutions, but that's because revolutions are typically democratizing. When the neoreaction gets to watch a spontaneous right-wing revolution unfolding, *against* the democratized or 'political' economy, I suspect that they'll quickly recover their natural sympathy for it.

ADDED: The greatness of Peter Thiel on display (via, and as anticipated)

May 16, 2013

Will Bitcoin Survive?

Eli Dourado, author of the most important Bitcoin-inspired article on the web, remains publicly committed to the cryptocurrency's future. In the wake of the Mt Gox crisis, affecting the world's largest BTC exchange (based in Japan), he has written a brief defense of the bullish case in Nietzschean vein: *what does not kill us makes us*

stronger.

In just four short paragraphs, Dourado manages to make a significant point. Stress-tested survival has a value. The more ferocious Bitcoin's environment is shown to be, the more advantageous its competitive position relative to alternative cryptocurrencies, as its resilience is demonstrated and publicized. Actualization of potential (catastrophe) resolves risk, leaving whatever survives augmented by a security premium. "Now it turns out that getting a cryptocurrency ecosystem to grow up is really, really hard — harder than maybe we thought. It follows directly that Bitcoin faces less competition from other cryptocurrencies than we thought. … since it is hard to succeed, if Bitcoin succeeds, then it may be worth quite a lot."

Dourado's two links do more work still. The first is to a recent Megan McArdle pre-obituary on BTC, which argues that the reputational damage inflicted by the Mt Gox fiasco will weaken it still further in what was always a Quixotic challenge to State power:

I've never been very bullish on Bitcoin, because ultimately, the better it performs at evading government surveillance of currency transactions (and government ability to manage debt loads via inflation), the harder those governments are going to try to shut it down.

Governments like levying an invisible inflation tax, and get angry when people attempt to route around it. (This is all quite explicit,

on both sides.) The balance of opportunities within this conflict is too intricate to detail here, but McArdle's utter submissiveness to government exaction clearly represents an extreme position among commentators. That Bitcoin predictably infuriates state financial authorities is a feature, not a bug.

Dourado's second link refers to an older and subtler argument by Tyler Cowen, which makes a bearish case against Bitcoin on strictly economic grounds. Insofar as Bitcoin is seen to flourish, competitor cryptocurrencies will be attracted into the market, arbitraging value down to the cost of supply:

There is thus a new theorem: the value of [any -it]Coin should, in equilibrium, be equal to the marketing costs of its potential competitors … In short, we are still in a situation where supply-side arbitrage has not worked its way through the value of Bitcoin. And that is one reason — among others — why I expect the value of Bitcoin to fall — a lot. [Cowen's internal link is well worth following up.]

As already noted, Cowen's bearish position is *weakened* by Bitcoin's recent travails. Almost irrespective of what happens next, an established reputation for toughness will feature prominently in the market evaluation of any cryptocurrency from now on.

Since Bitcoin won't have been killed — it is close to impossible to kill — it will have been made much stronger.

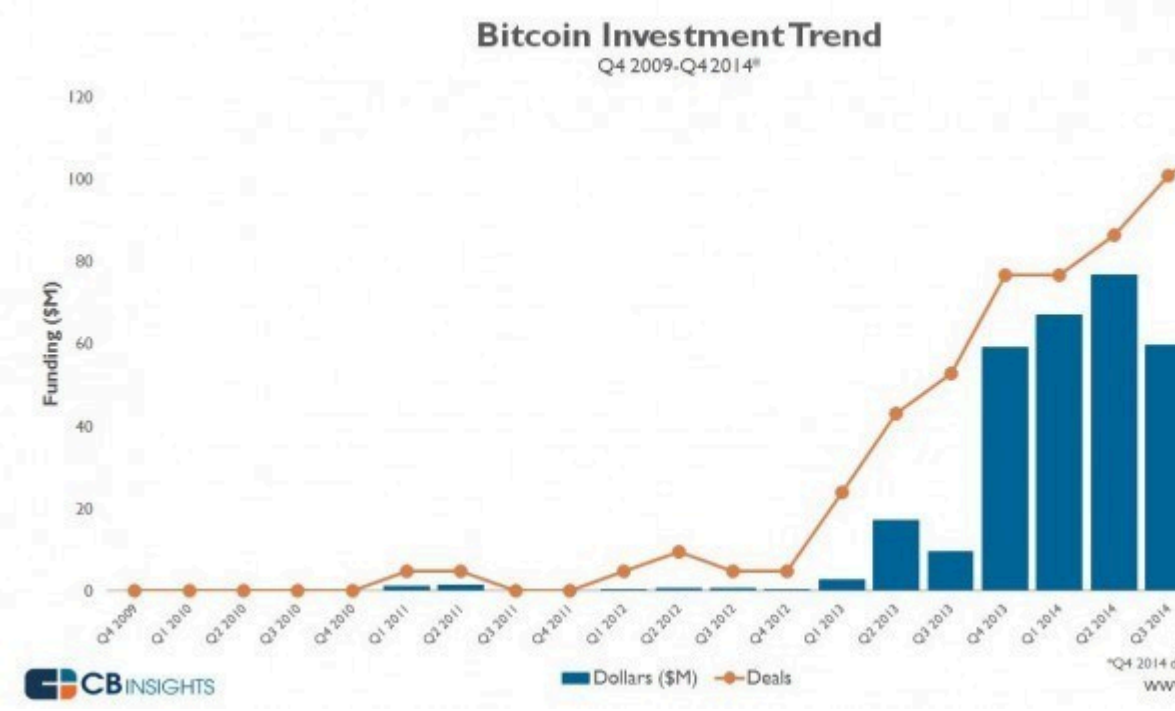
ADDED: Time for YellenCoin? (No.)

ADDED: “So is Mt. Gox the new version of Friendster, the early social networking leader that buckled just before Facebook surged ahead? … Bitcoin’s next generation of founders is cleaner, more pedigreed and suited to Wall Street’s and Capitol Hill’s tastes. They are no less libertarian or wolf-like.”

February 26, 2014

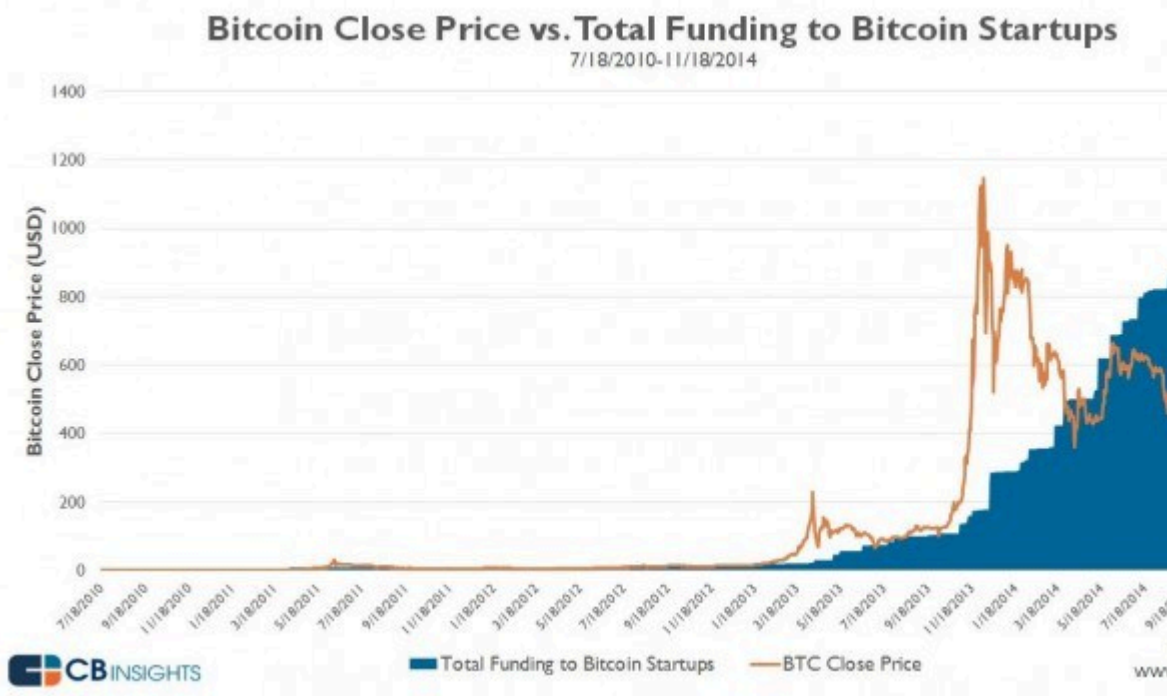
Undead

Does this look like something that’s about to die?



(This is among the few topics that puts my reverence for the Moldgod under serious strain.)

More here:



The apparently inverse relation between BTC value and investment level merits further commentary.

On a trivial personal note, I seem to have carelessly lost my Bitcoin wallet somehow, so my perfect detachment on the subject is even more impeccable than you might think.

Note: There's a exemplary anti-Moldbug prognosis cited over at the other place. "The only extent to which the United States can allow anything at all with respect to Bitcoin is the extent to which

it can reform itself to work inside Bitcoin." OK, it's perhaps an over-stretch in the opposite direction, but it still ends up far closer to the mark.

(Image source.)

ADDED: Found my Bitcoin account again — which I'm confident everyone will be extremely excited about. Better still, my BTC 0.0005 is still sitting there securely. Phew!

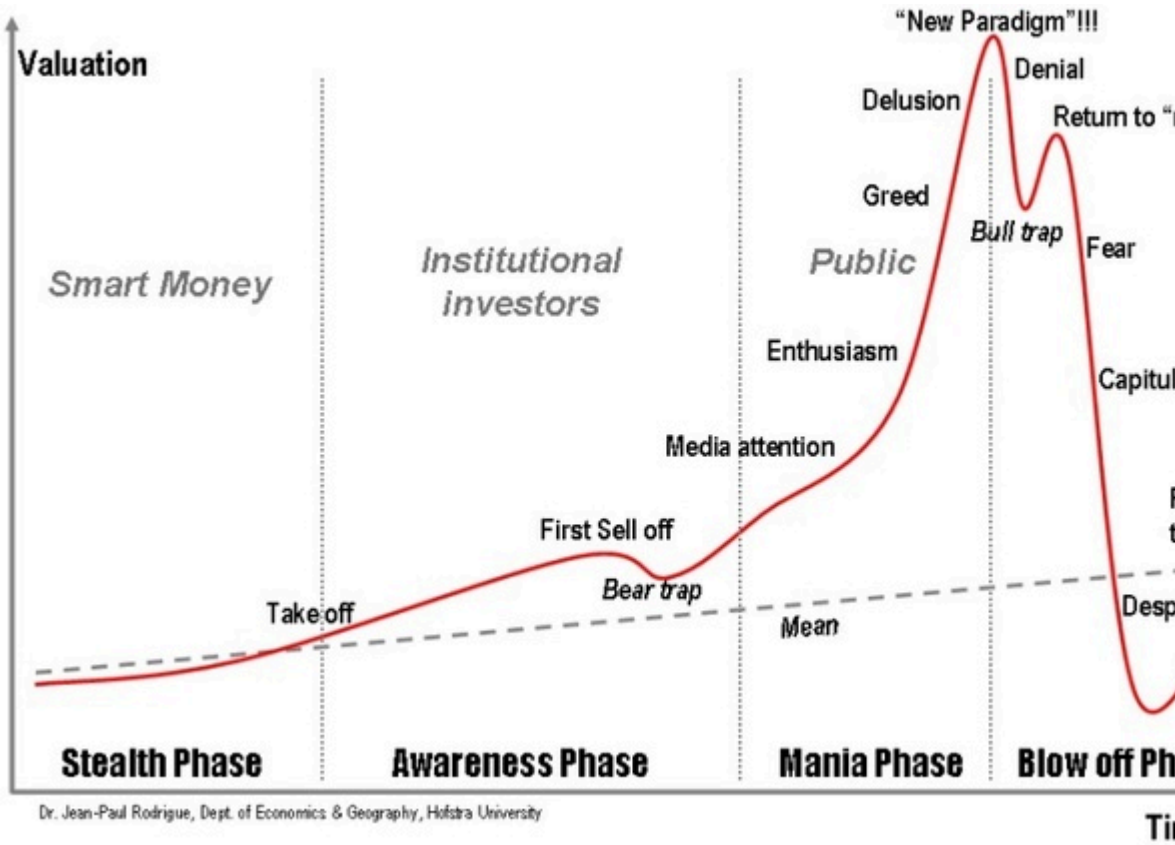
December 1, 2014

Hype Waves

As the Bitcoin price takes a tumble, Heather R Morgan reminds us of her super-bearish article on the currency from February last year (with just a little gloating):

> As #bitcoin plummets, I look back on the article I wrote a year ago about my predictions with a smirk. http://t.co/1lq0PpO4np #economics
>
> — Heather R Morgan (@HeatherReyhan) January 14, 2015

It includes this valuable (abstract) hype-cycle chart:



Look carefully at what is happening in the final stages, though. I don't think this chart is showing what Morgan takes it to. (AI, VR, Bitcoin — they all follow the same roller-coaster course, and they all get installed in the end.)

A Twitter comment worth noting:

> I rarely see skepticism of #Bitcoin that is not more generally just skepticism of money. @Pierre_Rochard @prestonjbyrne @izakaminska

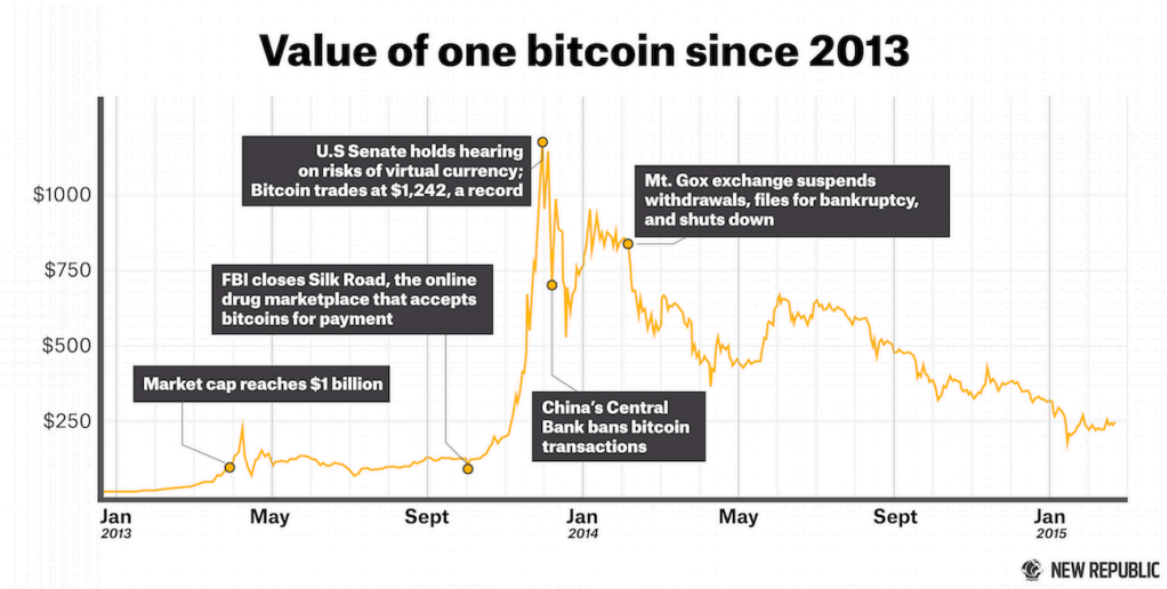
— Michael Goldstein (@Bitstein) January 14, 2015

ADDED: Jerry Brito is sensible on the topic.

January 14, 2015

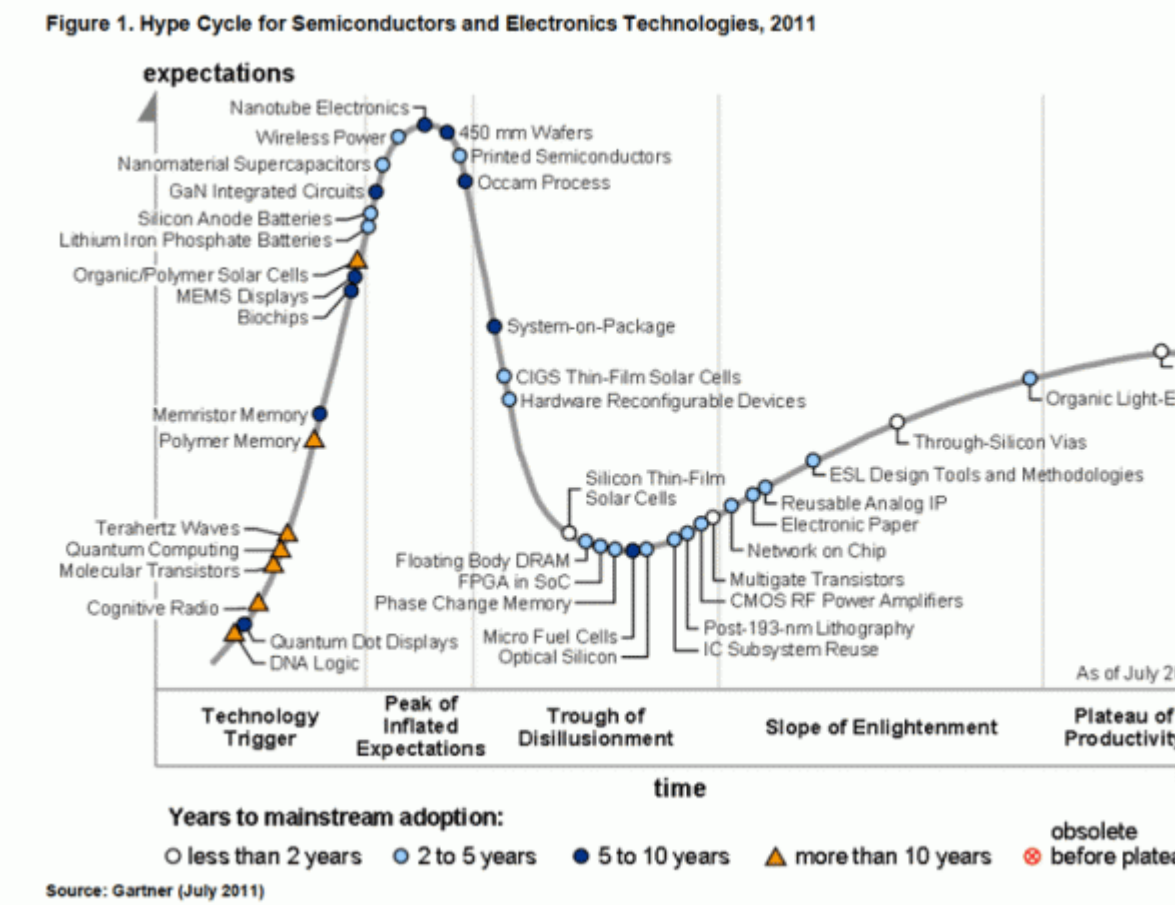
Hype Waves II

The New Republic's somber account of the Bitcoin Gold Rush is well worth a read (despite the troweled-on axiomatic leftism). It includes this chart of the recent undulations in the Bitcoin price (in US Dirty fiat):



It's a small chunk of history that could support any number of

narratives at this point. This one, in particular, offers an alternative to terminal doom scenarios:

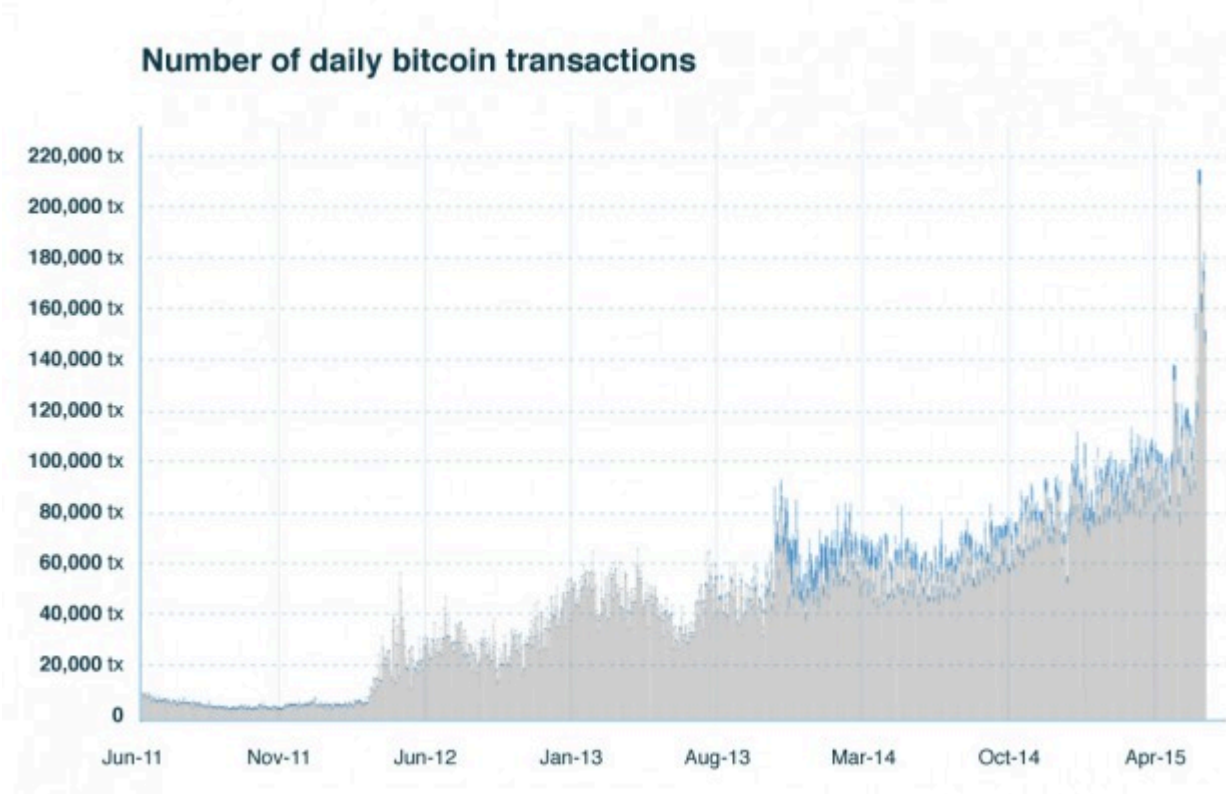


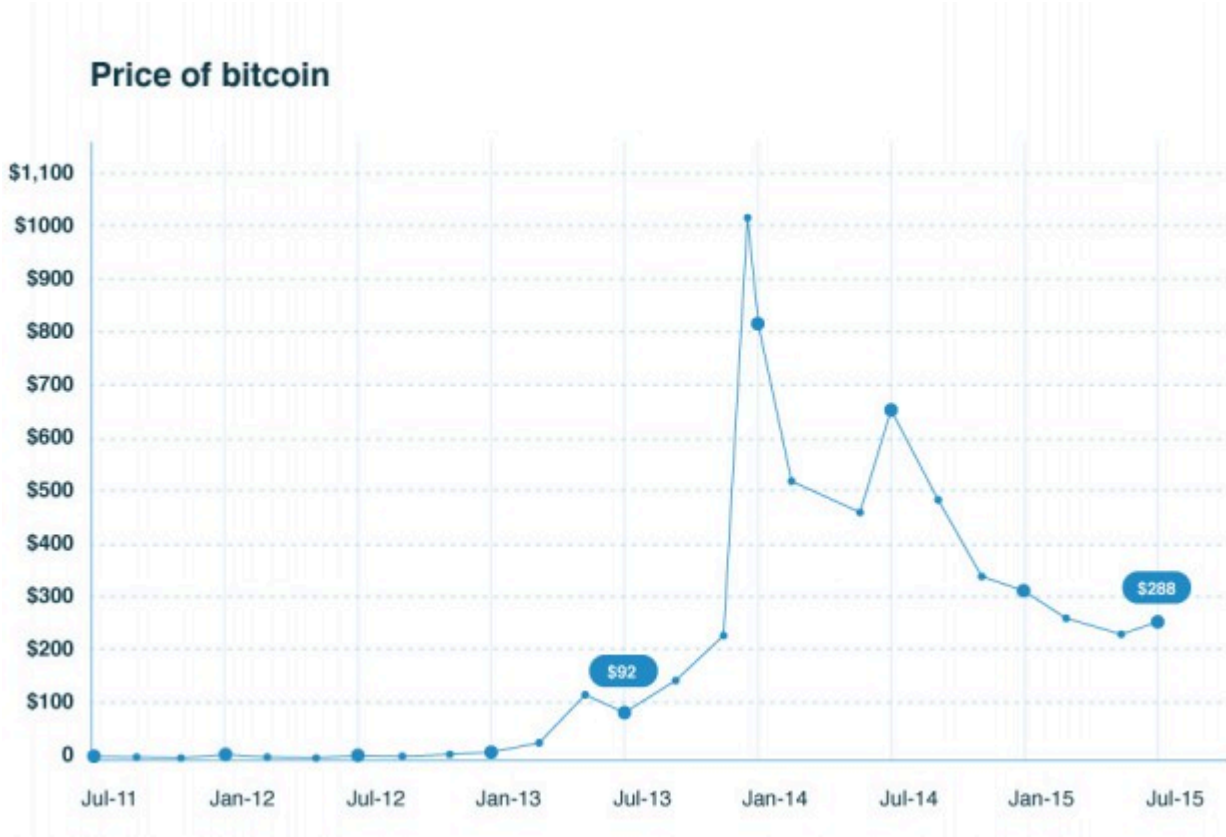
(Plenty of others seem to agree.)

February 26, 2015

Dissociation

Coinbase provides a graphic overview of 2015 Bitcoin trends, strikingly illustrating a structural disengagement of the cryptocurrency's metrics as a medium of exchange and as a store of value:





While the price of bitcoin is down 9% year-to-date, if you look below the surface it is clear that Bitcoin had a strong first half and is making great strides as digital money for people around the world and a payment network for innovation. … […] The number of transactions per day on the Bitcoin network is rapidly accelerating. The network averaged 60,590 transactions per day in June 2014 and 117,474 transactions per day in June 2015. … That's a ***94% increase in monthly transactions over the past year****.*
[Emphasis in original.]

One obvious hypothesis — that Bitcoin hoarders are strategically restraining their holdings in order to facilitate the commercial spread of the currency — seems to assume an implausibly coherent solution to an intractable coordination (or collective action) problem. A more widely accepted Bitcoin has to be worth more, doesn't it? It's hard to see how *everyone* could be leaving that value on the pavement. (This blog is presently stumped.)

July 16, 2015

Quote note (#282)

At least superficially, under-funding is the strict reciprocal of hype:

The blockchain industry is either hugely under-resourced or hugely over-optimistic. Probably both.

Bitcoin rigorously formalizes the common insight that *words are cheap* (it emerged out of spam-filter solutions). So this analysis is intriguingly ironic, as well as obviously thought-provoking.

September 9, 2016

CHAPTER THREE - BTC POLITICS

Bitcoin and Chains

Doug Henwood, writing in *The Nation*, explains the attractions of Bitcoin for the Right:

There have been many other reports of thefts, frauds and hackings, which Bitcoin partisans dismiss as mere growing pains. But with no regulator, no deposit insurance and no central bank, this sort of thing is inevitable — it's just tough luck. Introduce regulators and insurance schemes, though, and Bitcoin will lose all its anarcho-charm.

Keynes once called gold "part of the apparatus of conservatism" for its appeal to rentiers who loved austerity because it preserved the value of their assets. Bitcoin serves a similarly totemic purpose for today's cyber-libertarians, who love not only the statelessness of it as money, but also its power to subject the institutional banking system to "disruption" (one of the favorite words of that set). And like gold, Bitcoin is deflationary. There's a limit on how many bitcoins can be produced, and it gets more difficult to produce them over time until that limit is reached. Of course, new cryptocurrencies could

arise. But the existence of the limit reflects the deflationary sympathies of the libertarian mind — in a Bitcoin economy, creating money to ease an economic depression would be impossible. Which is not to say that only libertarians love Bitcoin.

Despite the careful signals of political distance, there's nothing off-track on the substance. In the subsequent paragraphs Henwood excavates a little deeper, while preserving the same balanced openness to information. He even — momentarily — passes the ultimate Rightist clue-test by collapsing epistemology down into the market: "Bitcoin is not without friends on Wall Street. Gil Luria of Wedbush Securities is following it; he describes the recent volatility as 'extended price discovery,' which is a way of saying that no one knows what it is, what it will be or what it's worth. His firm is selling his Bitcoin research for payment in bitcoins."

His unexpected discovery, however, is a Left Bitcoin constituency, drawn to it by the same priorities that can make 'libertarianism' so ideologically-slippery as a category, most obviously: the potential for "evasion of state surveillance and policing — which, in the post-Snowden era, is nothing to sneeze at." While rummaging for story-snippets at a New York Bitcoin 'party', he is delighted to run into 'Mistress Magpie':

A Marxist-feminist professional dominatrix who practices in Britain … [and] an enthusiastic Bitcoin proponent. She explains her enthusiasm as beginning with her deep techno-geekiness, and adds

that Bitcoin is also practical for someone in her line of work — anonymity is important, whether operating in real life or online. Unlike libertarians, who see cryptocurrencies as a possible gateway to a new society, the socialist in Mistress Magpie sees them as a way to operate furtively under capitalism, in a way that might not be needed in a more open socialist society.

While it's superficially tempting to make fun of such socialism with anarcho-capitalist characteristics, it sparkles in comparison to the dismal defense of state fiat money authority with which Henwood — dutifully — concludes the article.

May 9, 2014

Techno-Leviathan

Writing in *E-International Relations*, Brett Scott raises Left critique of the blockchain revolution to a stimulating level of theoretical sophistication. His central argument is important: Blockchain cryptosystems are the technological realization of the "dystopian, conservative" impulse — first crystallized by Thomas Hobbes — to establish a politically-immunized sovereignty. This social model, previously subverted by the fallible humanity of leaders, is finally becoming attainable as algorithmic government, Scott's *Techno-Leviathan*.

Conservative libertarians hold tight to the belief that, if only hard property rights and clear contracting rules are put in place, optimal systems spontaneously emerge. They are not actually that far from Hobbes in this regard, but their irritation with Hobbes' vision is that it relies on politicians who, being actual people, do not act like a detached contractual Sovereign should, but rather attempt to meddle, make things better, or steal. Don't decentralised blockchains offer the ultimate prospect of protected property rights with clear rules, but without the political interference?

Scott navigates the Ideological Turing Test well enough to become a landmark reference in future discussions. His opponents will no doubt in many cases concede (as this blog does) that the 'dystopia' he describes, while portrayed in ominous and mournful tones, captures the attachments — and dis-attachments — of zealous blockchain promoters remarkably well.

Scott clearly thinks political trust is a social good that can be re-built or recovered (perhaps by restarting democracy). Even if this is so, the time remaining for the salvage operation is running out fast.

June 3, 2014

Interesting Times

Blockchain schizophrenia is reaching criticality:

So we find ourselves in the Bitcoin "missile crisis," and uncomfortable ironies abound. The decentralized currency is beset by centralizing pressures if it changes or if it doesn't. The apolitical currency is being rent by a deeply political rift between camps, each of which purports to be the trusted authority over the trustless, anti-authoritarian currency.

No one ever said anarchistic collective decision-making was going to be easy.

(Via.)

July 24, 2015

Anti-Cap

This tweet storm is pure evil (but fortunately we're fairly tolerant of such things at this blog).

The point it raises is going to fuel an important argument, down the road. Better to explore it via an appropriately constructed altcoin, and in the market, though, than to wreck Bitcoin in the course of the dialectic. Hard money philosophy is baked into the Bitcoin protocol. If that doesn't seem like a good idea, the solution is to try something else.

August 28, 2015

Crypto-Comedy

Bitcoin had a good 2015, at least according to investor estimations. Already, half-way through January, the all-consuming chaos of 2016 has rolled over it.

The Bitcoin block-size spat that rumbled inconclusively throughout the previous year has escalated into a dramatic public row, with core developer Mike Hearn's noisy exit. His text is an instant classic for the historical record, regardless of how persuasive its argument is found. The discussion at *Reddit* provides some sense of the controversy.

Hearn is writing Bitcoin off as a "failed experiment" — which seems histrionic, despite the many points of interest he raises. The deep tension between its security principles and its (near-term) growth prospects is a matter of evident seriousness. Taking the monkey business out of money innovation won't be as easy as some of the crypto-currency's more optimistic proponents had anticipated. Something of extreme historical radicality is occurring, and it's going to be messy.

With much of the world going under in 2016, there's likely to be a scramble for the escape capsule — and that seems to be on fire.

ADDED: Bitcoin obituaries through the ages.

January 15, 2016

Crypto-Power

This is a joke, but it's also onto something serious:

> Satoshi Nakamoto is the NSA.
>
> Hope you all realize that.
>
> — Grim Dark Future Hat (@ClarkHat) February 17, 2016

> A cryptocurrency that maintains a perfect log of every single transaction, and which can be controlled by the party with the most CPUs.
>
> — Grim Dark Future Hat (@ClarkHat) February 17, 2016

> And best of all, the creator has maintained 100% opsec since releasing his paper.
>
> — Grim Dark Future Hat (@ClarkHat) February 17, 2016

In my eternally on-the-way Bitcoin book, the point is raised like this:

While the governmental response to Bitcoin is doubtless guided by a strategy (or in fact multiple strategies) of capture, this does not reduce to an agenda of public regulation, still less suppression, but also includes cooptation in accordance with deep state functions, as well as the private interests of state agents. Insofar as every real

state includes a 'deep' or sub-public aspect, it will inevitably relate ambiguously to the emergence of elusive social capabilities, although this ambiguity will be only minimally reflected in its public relations. The empowering of private agents to evade state scrutiny and regulation represents a manifest erosion of government or 'public' authority, and is liable to be denounced on those grounds (if not transparently in those terms). Yet the crypto-secure transaction systems responsible for such governance complications are also opportunities for covert action, and are therefore to be counted as virtual assets. The novel functions introduced by Bitcoin tend to the exacerbation – or sophistication – of agency problems.

The politics of Bitcoin can be expected, eventually, to catalyze a multitude of obscure metamorphoses in the nature of the state. If the distinct but overlapping occult fields of clandestine security functions and resilient sub-public interests are bundled into a provisional concept of the dark state, it can be quite confidently predicted that the balance of attraction and repulsion between such elements and crypto-currency will be highly asymmetric with respect to public communication. As a corollary, it is realistic to assume that the openly stated position of public authorities in regards to crypto-channels of all kinds, very much including Bitcoin, will be systematically misleading, in a negative direction. Bitcoin tends to empower the invisible, and to disempower the visible.

An event on the cryptic plane is not to be confused with its public

presentation. Even if the NSA did not create Bitcoin (and — like Clark — I seriously doubt that it did), it's unlikely that it would be distraught about the discreet rumor that it had.

February 18, 2016

CHAPTER FOUR - OTHER BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGIES

Speaking Personally …

Under the compulsion of formality, complex legal-administrative codes have no option but to make space for the future.

FinCEN's crucial (and still incompletely digested) guidance note on virtual currencies, issued March 18, 2013, clarifies in a footnote (#2):

FinCEN's regulations define "person" as "an individual, a corporation, a partnership, a trust or estate, a joint stock company, an association, a syndicate, joint venture, or other unincorporated organization or group, an Indian Tribe (as that term is defined in the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act), and all entities cognizable as legal personalities."

There's plenty of room already for almost anything to slither in. (Follow the DAO.)

December 19, 2014

DAO



XS has received a firm (but fair) scolding for not linking to this development in yesterday's Chaos Patch (or elsewhere).

Here's the website and a nested blogpost (containing a deeper link to the whitepaper (which is good)). The (minimalistic) manifesto is an ideological mish-mash which has been worked-over by PR imperatives and demands cold scrutiny to extract its real content.

From the whitepaper:

A word of caution, at the outset: the legal status of DAOs remains the subject of active and vigorous debate and discussion. Not everyone shares the same definition. Some have said that they are autonomous code and can operate independently of legal systems; others have said that they must be owned or operate by humans or

human created entities. There will be many uses cases, and the DAO code will develop over time. Ultimately, how a DAO functions and its legal status will depend on many factors, including how DAO code is used, where it is used, and who uses it. This paper does not speculate about the legal status of DAOs worldwide.

The XS prediction is itself predictable: *This only goes in one direction* (and eventually its going to be vast).

ADDED: When the marketing aesthetics go in this direction, we're done.

ADDED: Andrea Castillo comments.

May 23, 2016

DAO in the dust

I, for one, welcome our new species of robber baron overlords (non-ironically):

I have carefully examined the code of The DAO and decided to participate after finding the feature where splitting is rewarded with additional ether. I have made use of this feature and have rightfully claimed 3,641,694 ether, and would like to thank the DAO for this reward. It is my understanding that the DAO code contains this feature to promote decentralization and encourage the creation of "child DAOs".

I am disappointed by those who are characterizing the use of this intentional feature as "theft". I am making use of this explicitly coded feature as per the smart contract terms and my law firm has advised me that my action is fully compliant with United States criminal and tort law. For reference please review the terms of the DAO …

(Learning is hard.)

Bloomberg commentary.

The *reddit* FAQ.

June 19, 2016

Urbit

There's a lot going on here:

Do you ever feel like you're using the Internet as a modem? […] The Internet is actually an awesome modem. The online services blow AOL away. But are we really that far from 1995? […] Can we re-decentralize the Internet? A lot of great hackers have tried. Maybe we can't? Maybe it's just impossible? […] The Internet isn't from 1995. It's from 1975. In 1995, we learned that a network beats a mainframe. Now, we've learned that a 2015 mainframe beats a 1975 network. […] Does it beat a 2015 network? What is a 2015 network, anyway? […] If the Internet beats a modem, and a modem on top of the Internet beats the Internet — what if we made an Internet on top

of the Internet? […] These questions seemed interesting. So we built Urbit.

The Urbit whitepaper (with links to (arcane) demos).

The *Hacker News* discussion starts off sophomoric, but gets better.

Best promo slogan I've seen yet (from this, last year): "If Bitcoin is money, Urbit is land." It's the algorithmic propertarian matrix for virtual real-estate.

September 26, 2015

Beyond IP Addresses?

The technical competence required to evaluate this (MegaNet) initiative far exceeds my capabilities (that's what you lot are for).

(a) If doable, it's huge.

(b) It seems to follow the grain of The Process (and cross-link not only to Bitcoin, but also to Urbit).

According to Kim Dotcom, the key to a safer, more secure and decentralized Internet will lie within blockchain technology, or a version of Bitcoin's original concept. He has spent two years working on the program, and basically turning the Internet into a encrypted, decentralized smartphone app. In general terms, here's how it works: […] "If you have 100 million smartphones that have the MegaNet

app installed, we'll have more online storage capacity, bandwidth and calculating power than the top 10 largest websites in the world combined," Dotcom claims. "Over the years with these new devices and capacity, especially mobile bandwidth capacity, there will be no limitations. We are going to use very long keys, systems that will not be reverse engineered or cracked by any supercomputer. […] … Dotcom says it will use a faster version of blockchain technology to exchange data globally. There will be no IP addresses within MegaNet, like the current Internet IpV4 protocol uses for enhanced user security. Yet, it will use the current Internet protocol initially as a "dumb pipe" to get the ball rolling. He and his staff are working on a new type of encryption that will work regardless of how MegaNet is accessed. Bandwidth would come from Wi-Fi use and when the phone is idle, so no charges would come through an IP.

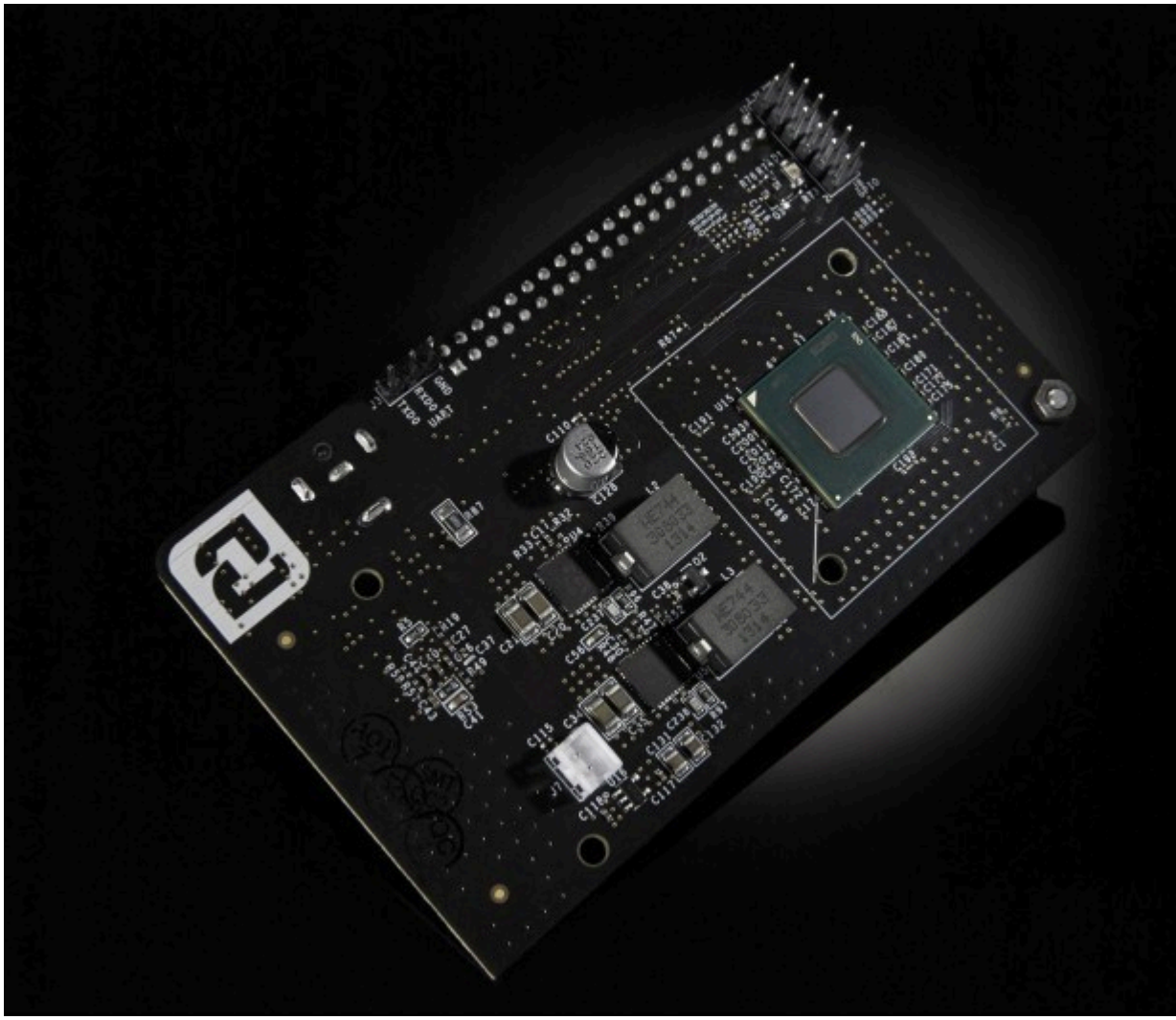
Another source.

Pirate credentials.

November 3, 2015

21 Bitcoin Computer

In case XS hasn't put out an all-in 'It's going to be huge' announcement on this yet, it's past time to do so. (More at *Amazon*.)

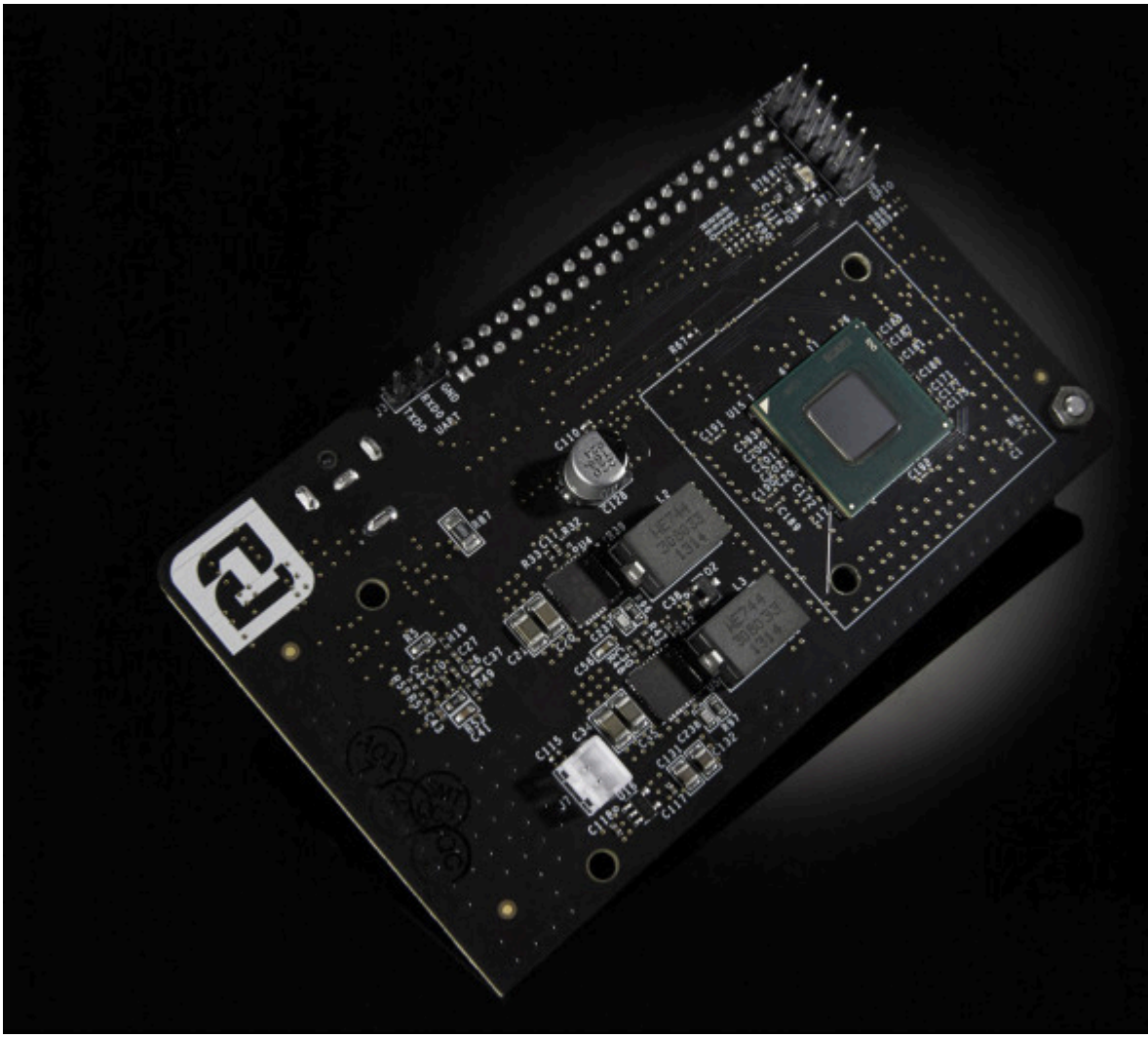


A critical piece of the near-future Internet just crystallized.

November 28, 2015

Micropayments Marketplace

Nelson's vision incremented into actuality by another step thanks to 21.co. It's focused on the core constituency at the moment, situated in the intersection of coders with 21 Bitcoin Computers, but it looks like a significant beta version of something much bigger.



Marketplaces and currencies tend to go well together. Paypal famously got to scale by becoming the currency of choice for eBay buyers and sellers. The US dollar grew to its current international predominance in part on the back of the large, integrated US market. And it thus stands to reason that a digital currency like Bitcoin might

be well suited for a digital marketplace based on Bitcoin. […] But the exact nature of the products being sold in such a marketplace is important. Unlike a traditional physical market localized to a nation state, the digital currency community is dispersed around the world. Moreover, most users hold relatively small balances, especially relative to their reserves of fiat currency. Finally, the community has a disproportionate share of engineers and computer scientists relative to the general world population. […] Taking these constraints into account, we've built what we think of as the first ***micropayments marketplace****: a marketplace that allows buyers and sellers to trade in digital goods using micropayments, initially specifically focused on APIs for developer use.*

(Forward links included at the source.)

Ping21 latches it to the Internet of Things (brief commentary at *CoinDesk*). Plus, more bitcoin market innovation.

March 16, 2016

CHAPTER FIVE - CHINA, BITCOIN AND WORLD ORDER

Bitcoin on the Silk Road

A series of professional writing obligations have taken me to Xinjiang three times this year, and the single strongest impression from these trips has been the centrality of Silk Road heritage. Regardless of borders, ethnicities, and controversies, the Silk Road is the reason everyone is there, and the thing that has always come first. Derivatively, transport infrastructure connects settlements together, but primarily it is the great ancient thoroughfare that has deposited areas of habitation along its vast — and harsh — middle stretches, as if provisioning itself with the archaic equivalent of gas stations and traffic police outposts, distributed in whatever frequency necessary to hold open the road.

China is not very adept at international PR, and Xinjiang coverage in world media tends to be critical. This has resulted in a predictable touchiness, and even though the most cursory historical examination already shows that Han Chinese have a profound ancient presence

in the area, no opportunity is missed to underscore this point still further. These efforts range from the genuinely illuminating to the comically incompetent. One especially interesting species of evidence, falling somewhere between these extremes — and passing between them at an odd angle — is coinage. Repeatedly I was told by museum curators and historical experts, always with the greatest earnestness, that the abundance of Imperial Chinese currency found in the area was an unambiguous indicator of demographic integrity and Han settlement. Certainly, Xinjiang is a numismatist's paradise, even if these tangible commercial signs are dragged into stories they cannot confidently tell.

Coins have little affinity with settlement. 'Portability' is always counted among the essential features demanded of money, because its function is to circulate, or travel. Like droplets swept along by the currents of commerce, the coins of Xinjiang belong to the road before they belong to the place, eloquent about transactions, but mute about territories. They tell of flows, and passages, but when the topic turns to political geography, they fall dumb. What does commercial traffic care for boundaries and homelands? — Only what it is coerced into caring about, whether by toll barriers, or by uncontrolled bandits.

China was drawn into its Far West, well over two millennia ago, as the guardian of the Silk Road. It was legitimated as regional hegemon by its administrative capability and cultural cohesion. Apparently,

in the present age of ethno-nationalist border squabbling and territorial irritability, recognizing this indisputable fact is either too much, or not enough.

Up until recently, Bitcoin was associated with a different Silk Road — although arguably not a *very* different one. As a partially-anonymized cryptocurrency, fundamentally immunized against political interference of any kind, it was naturally affiliated with the anarcho-capitalist markets of the 'dark web'. The closure of this Internet Silk Road in early October propelled Bitcoin into a new phase of existence, as *Tech Crunch* explains:

Bitcoin's recent price surge also comes after a 15% drop last month, following the FBI seizure of the underground 'black market' marketplace Silk Road — where billions worth in Bitcoin had been used to purchase various illegal goods and services since Silk Road was set up. The closure of the service blew a hole in Bitcoin's valuation — but clearly only a temporary one. Bitcoin quickly recovered the lost value, and has since gone on this latest surge.

The removal of one of the most notorious pipelines linking Bitcoin to the buying and selling of narcotics and other illegal goods and services may actually have helped the cryptocurrency — by improving its reputation and thereby boosting its mainstream appeal.

Bitcoin supports near-anonymous transactions, which encouraged its use on Silk Road. But the cryptocurrency has many

other characteristics that potentially make it interesting to a much more mainstream user-base — such as the fact transactions are irreversible, something of potential interest to online retailers wanting to avoid the hassle of chargebacks.

With the artificial Silk Road shuttered, Bitcoin was quickly plugged into the original. Less than two weeks after the FBI operation, China's Internet giant Baidu announced that it would begin to accept Bitcoins. Whilst an obvious threshold event, this decision was also the confirmation of powerful pre-existing trends, which had raised the level of Chinese interest in the currency to the second highest in the world (after only the United States). For Chinese savers, trapped between negative real return RMB bank accounts and irrationally exuberant real estate markets, the prospects of Bitcoin as a speculative store of value can easily seem attractive. (A parallel rise in both private and public gold holdings reinforces this impression.)

The most radical interpretation of these developments, however, would connect them to intimations of a "de-Americanized world". For American Bitcoin users, in particular, the currency is already embraced as a way to short the US dollar, and to practically express disgust at the global fiat money regime. Mere days before the *Baidu* decision, a commentary on Xinhuanet suggested:

What may also be included as a key part of an effective [global financial] reform is the introduction of a new international reserve

currency that is to be created to replace the dominant U.S. dollar, so that the international community could permanently stay away from the spillover of the intensifying domestic political turmoil in the United States.

That sounds like history in the making.

October 24, 2013

Bitcoin's Eastern Future

Simon Black's comparison of US (official) and East Asian attitudes to Bitcoin speaks for itself:

Places like Hong Kong and Singapore understand that they have a role to play as preeminent international financial centers in becoming financial hubs for digital currencies.

If the US wants to shoot itself in the foot (again) and shut itself out of the market, so be it. But Asia is embracing its potential role in the marketplace, complete with all the risks and rewards.

It wasn't but a few weeks ago that a Hong Kong-based bitcoin exchange ran off with a few million dollars of customer money. But that hasn't cooled demand in the region… nor has it sparked a wave of debilitating regulations to clamp down on digital currencies.

What this ultimately means is that all the new businesses and intellectual capital associated with digital currencies will flock to

Asia… just in the same way that all the cutting edge precious metals firms are now basing themselves in Singapore.

ADDED: "The U.S. government believes that some scary people are using bitcoin. But here's another scary prospect: If the government goes overboard with a hard-line approach on bitcoin and other emerging digital currencies, it may merely push them overseas, where they will surely flourish outside of its control."

November 20, 2013

BTC East (again)

Gordon Chang is a writer who finds it hard to maintain his balance on China topics, but his overview discussion of Bitcoin in the Middle Kingdom is not to be missed.

November 26, 2013

BTC East (again) II

The world isn't cooperating with those who want to think about one thing at a time:

*In a report out today from Goldman Sachs about the future of money, the bank points out that **80% of bitcoin volume is now***

***exchanged into and out of Chinese yuan**. The second-highest trading currency is the US dollar, followed by smaller denominations in yen and euros.*

The fate of Bitcoin is inextricable from that of the global monetary order, and coming at it from that direction is increasingly unavoidable.

ADDED: *Cryptocoins News* comments.

March 11, 2015

Hegemonic Headaches

… there are no doubt a number. One that stands out for its conceptual clarity, however, is the Triffin Dilemma. Formulated by Robert Triffin and publicized in testimony to the US Congress in 1960, it builds upon the simple arithmetical necessity that any country whose currency is privileged with world reserve status is compelled to run chronic trade deficits, in order to supply global monetary liquidity. World economic hegemony is therefore inseparable from a loss of control over domestic monetary policy — since measures that might be required to support the value of the currency would commonly be inconsistent with the responsibility to export money (through a negative current account balance).

'Chimerica' is the Triffin Dilemma exemplified in convenient

binary form. On the one hand, economic leadership and the 'exorbitant privilege' of seigniorage (through which mere financial signs are swapped for substantial products and services), on the other economic policy dysfunction and de-industrialization, as American business activity is outsourced to China is exchange for symbolic monetary dominance. In this process, and paradox of power, the current instantiation of world order is captured in its essentials. The way modernity presently and concretely works cannot be made intelligible without reference to Triffin.

The strong implication of the Triffin Dilemma — perhaps even 'Triffin Paradox' — is that global currency hegemony is ultimately ruinous for the financially sovereign nation. It involves something akin to an economic analog or variant of Paul Virilio's 'endo-colonization' which "happens when a political power turns against its own people" progressing smoothly from predation to auto-cannibalization. The 'exorbitant privilege' of accessing real resources in exchange for mere promissory paper is maintained only at the cost of an *absolute* outsourcing — an international division of labor in which the master is compelled to specialize in financial signs, submitting to an accelerating atrophy of productive capability. An international reserve currency is therefore self-hollowing, in a vicious causal loop that substitutes pure political prowess — symbolic prestige — for the industrial advantages which originally promoted it. The culture it imposes accentuates consumerism,

financial politicization, and hysterical sensitivity to the vicissitudes of signs. In the end, only the magic of power remains.

The way out of this deteriorating structure has long been envisaged as a politically-managed international currency, whether the Keynesian 'bancor', or the IMF's SDRs (Special Drawing Rights). The call such a scheme makes upon coherent international governance has reliably exceeded diplomatic and political practicality. It is notable, however, that a certain globalist fantasy is predictably generated by the stresses of currency hegemony, irrespective of all prior or ulterior ideological commitments.

If US Dollar hegemony is unsustainable, and globalist remedies are realistically inaccessible, the world economic order has a catastrophic horizon. Crucially: with currency hegemony now understood as a trap, no sane national regime can be expected to advance itself as the *next America*. Whatever waits beyond the magic show has to be something new. It is under these conditions that — 'coincidentally' — the first post-national and radically depoliticized digital crypto-currencies have begun to appear upon the world stage …

April 16, 2014

Petrodollar Provocations

The mere fact this conversation is even happening has to be disturbing to some extremely powerful global interests. BTC volatility appears to be the only major obstacle to the cryptocurrency's widespread international adoption at this point. If it trends downwards, a switch point will be suggested on the horizon. In the interim, the BTC option sets implicit limits to USD devaluation — the cost of volatility isn't infinite.

The article expects China to oppose any move to price oil in BTC in global markets, based on ambitions for an expanded international use of the RMB. Given what Chinese monetary authorities know about the Triffin dilemma, this is an argument that can very easily be over-stretched.

July 2, 2014

Sinocoin

Outside in is preparing an open letter to the government of the PRC, recommending the creation of a Bitcoin clone. The state-level incentive for such an initiative would be to refashion the global financial order in preparation for the ending of US Dollar status as the world reserve currency. It does not seem difficult to present this

as a matter of clear Chinese national interest, with definite spin-off benefits to the country's political and economic elites, its ordinary savers, and supporters of economic freedom worldwide.

Sinocoin (to use its English name), would be released by the PBoC, and then — like BitCoin — be irretrievably autonomous. The Sinocoin algorithm would be a perfect Bitcoin clone, assuming (realistically) that the PRC government would not be inclined to upgrade it with strengthened user anonymity patches. However, PBoC reserves could be used, in accordance with a publicly announced policy, to sustain a floor valuation for the currency in its initial stages. Limited controls on RMB / Sinocoin exchange might provide a longer range mechanism for the suppression of Sinocoin volatility.

Sinocoin would be a complementary initiative to Bitcoin, designed to avoid the disruptive effects that large-scale Chinese forex interventions would have on the latter currency. Bitcoin / Sinocoin exchange rates would provide a valuable index of Chinese financial integration into the emerging (Modernity 2.0) global economy. Parity is to be considered the ultimate natural equilibrium (with Sinocoin outperforming Bitcoin during its early decades).

If anybody has suggestions to make about the technical, economic, or political implications of such a development, they can be discussed here, and carefully considered prior to drafting the proposal. Unless specifically requested, contributor information will not be willingly passed on to either Chinese or US financial

authorities or intelligence services.

June 7, 2013

Bitcoin Geopolitics

The completed series on 'China, Crypto-Currency, and the World Order' is up at the *WDW Review*:

Part-1: Tribute and Tribulations
Part-2: Digital Denominations
Part-3: Clone Wars

It was written is sequence, so the overall structure could have been tightened (in retrospect). Without external disciples — or at least its interiorized simulcrum — it would probably have been extended to five parts, or more.

The first part already contains the most pronounced conclusion. The emergence of blockchain-based monetary systems intersects with the geopolitics of world currencies, and will inevitably modulate their deep historical rhythms. The RMB is less likely to become the central world reserve currency in the blockchain-epoch, principally because this status is a poisoned chalice, subtracting effective economic control even as it cements nominal dominance.

Despite superficial political reservations, and some characteristic patience (even inscrutability), the China factor is almost certain to

advance the introduction of the decentralized public ledger *commercium*, which will organize the next-stage future of the global economy. None of these claims strike me as seriously controversial.

September 4, 2014

China, Crypto-Currency, and the World Order

> Issuing countries of reserve currencies are constantly confronted with the dilemma between achieving their domestic monetary policy goals and meeting other countries' demand for reserve currencies. […] The Triffin Dilemma, i.e., the issuing countries of reserve currencies cannot maintain the value of the reserve currencies while providing liquidity to the world, still exists. —Zhou Xiaochuan

What the technologies of steam power were to the epoch of British global dominance, and the twin-track developments of electricity and the automobile to the subsequent American Age, digital electronics—and, more specifically, the Internet—are to the "rise of China" and the refashioned world it epitomizes. It is only to be expected, therefore, that the intersection of the post-1979 Open-and-Reformed New China with the post-1990 World Wide Web-enabled Internet should be an object of particular international

fascination, and practical concern.

From the dawn of the modern epoch, geopolitical hegemony has been associated ever more intensely with techno-economic leadership, which has in turn been reflected in the international reserve status of a select national currency. An ever more explicitly formalized world monetary order has converted compelling but obscure intuitions of relative national prestige into an unambiguous system of financial relationships, in which a position of supremacy is clearly established, with a definite and singular role.

The suspicions fostered by leadership are no less inevitable than leadership itself. For easily intelligible historical reasons, the French policy establishment has been an especially vociferous critic of international reserve status and its "exorbitant privilege"[1] of seigniorage—the spontaneous 'right' to issue promissory paper in exchange for real goods and services, without any definite prospect of redemption. There can be little doubt that such criticism articulates concerns widely held beyond the Anglophone world, and its substance deserves serious examination.

Of the indispensable building blocks constructing the near future, China and the Internet have special prominence. There are innumerable places where China meets the Web, beginning with the sprawling, multidimensional, and explosively growing Chinese Internet itself. Bitcoin is a recent and still relatively slender thread in the tapestry of global change, but by tugging at it, some central

features of the emerging world can be pulled into focus.

Among the characteristics that the Chinese yuan and bitcoin share is that neither is the US dollar. Specifically, both are limited yet practical alternatives to the dollar, at least at the level of microeconomic decision-making. When questions are raised about the durability of the dollar's international role, it can be predicted with confidence that one or both of these challengers will be invoked. For the dollar to die of ice or fire is, today, for it to succumb to geopolitical substitution (by the Chinese yuan) or techno-financial obsolescence (by some decentralized, Internet-based crypto-currency).

The international status of the US dollar concentrates two multi-century trends. Firstly, it represents the ethno-geographical peculiarity of modernity, which—up to the late twentieth century at least—tended to slant global power not only toward the West or Occident, but more specifically toward the Atlantic Anglophone nations, ultimately gathered under American leadership. Since the decline of the Spanish dollar, which monetized the treasure of the New World as the first global currency, international finance has been principally denominated in the currency of an English-speaking nation. Non-coincidentally, it has thus been tightly associated with a set of particular cultural themes, including (Philo-Semitic) Protestant Christianity, the invisible hand, free trade, and liberal democracy. The institutionalization of world finance has been

intimately connected with the promotion of a distinct—and for many a distinctly questionable—cultural orientation.

Secondly, the formalization of a global monetary order has been accompanied by an incremental politicization of money, which is to say, by the consolidation of monetary policy as a core function of government. With the establishment of central banking and the demetallization of currency, intrinsic scarcity is replaced by an institutional "promise to pay" that converts money from a tangible asset into a contractual liability. Public confidence in the value of money is turned into a governmental responsibility. It becomes political, and—in the context of a world reserve currency—geopolitical.

In combination, these trends are inevitably provocative, since they concentrate the world's financial destiny in selected, identifiably non-representative hands. Behind the studied neutrality of the Bretton Woods institutions (the IMF and the World Bank) stands the US dollar as the symbol of American exception and the concrete peculiarity of the modern world order.

While it is natural—and even inevitable—for political command of the global reserve currency to be understood as the modern capstone of geopolitical hegemony, it is not a privilege separable from testing responsibilities, or from profound ambiguities. These have been clearly recognized since the 1960s, when Belgian-American economist Robert Triffin formulated the paradox or

dilemma that bears his name: that if foreign governments are to accumulate reserves in one selected nation's currency, that nation must necessarily be a net exporter of money—which can be achieved only by running a negative balance of trade. A nation issuing international reserve currency assumes responsibility for global monetary liquidity. This obliges it to consume more than it produces, in order for the difference to be made available as world money. While this requirement is merely seigniorage, seen from the other side, the constraint it imposes upon domestic economic policy options are so strict they amount almost to a destiny.

These constraints are turned into a destructive dilemma by the fact that the mandatory policy structure required to supply the world with liquidity tends to destroy confidence in the currency at the same time, therefore undermining its value. Chronic balance of payments deficits signal currency weakness, since they would normally be interpreted as a sign that a currency is over-valued (or in need of devaluation). For the issuer of a global reserve currency, however, conventional policy responses to this situation are blocked in both directions, since it can neither take measures to close the deficit, nor attempt to strengthen the currency through elevating interest rates. Because for the reserve currency issuer the trade deficit is a constant, rather than a variable, a devaluation merely incites competitive currency destruction worldwide. Strengthening measures, on the other hand, draw in money from abroad

(denominated in the international currency) and thus further expand the demand for issuance, which can only be satisfied by a widening of the trade deficit.

In other words, the Triffin Dilemma recognizes that international demand for a reserve currency is inherently paradoxical. What is sought is the currency as it would be were it not supplied through chronic trade imbalances, yet these same imbalances are the only channel through which it can in fact be supplied.

"Chimerica" perfectly exemplifies the essentials of the situation. China's two trillion US dollars of reserves correspond to a cumulative balance of payments surplus of precisely the same sum, since this is simply what the reserves are. When perceived appreciatively—which was far easier in the final decades of the twentieth century than in the early decades of the twenty-first century—Chimerica has been a complementary economic arrangement through which America achieved high levels of consumption coupled with restrained price inflation, while China realized export-oriented economic development and the break-out modernization that had eluded it for 150 years. To more jaundiced eyes, the same arrangement is a trap that has married American de-industrialization to Chinese environmental devastation, while fueling unsustainable fiscal incontinence in America and a Chinese investment bubble. Whichever picture has greater realism, it can probably be safely concluded that the dissymmetry imposed by an

international reserve currency has far-reaching and ambiguous consequences.

Cynically, it might be argued that the tributary aspect of reserve currency status is perfectly matched to deep Chinese traditions in international relations, so that an ascent to yuan-based exorbitant privilege would make a natural geopolitical goal for the Middle Kingdom, as it restored its central position in the world. More realistic however—at least in the near term—is a recognition that loss of domestic economic policy control is an inevitable, and well-understood, consequence of global currency hegemony, and it is one the Chinese government is certain to find unacceptable. Whatever the costs (primarily environmental) associated with the role of "workshop to the world" they are immensely outweighed, from the Chinese perspective, by the advantages. It is on the tributary side of the international reserve currency ledger, where China has been for over four decades, that all crucial vectors of development are to be found—technological absorption, infrastructural deepening, industrialization, urbanization, employment, and even military capability.

If Chimerica is breaking down, it has far less to do with any kind of Chinese challenge—even a spontaneous and unintended one—than with a tragic structure inherent to currency hegemony. As hubris leads to nemesis, so does exorbitant monetary privilege lead to crisis, and even ruin. In both the Spanish and British precedents, financial

supremacy became self-defeating, because exporting money (rather than things) differentially advantaged industrial competitors, locking in secular social decline. There is no compelling reason to believe that America has exempted itself from the same ominous pattern.

On 29 March 2009, in the wake of the financial crisis, Zhou Xiaochuan, governor of the People's Bank of China, delivered an important speech entitled "Reform the International Monetary System." He explicitly referred to the Triffin Dilemma as the key to understanding the world's economic instability, while suggesting that a shift beyond US dollar hegemony would ultimately be required to remedy it. In this respect, his words conformed to a tradition dating back over half a century, to the Bretton Woods negotiations, when John Maynard Keynes recommended the introduction of a neutral global monetary medium—to be called the bancor—making the supply of global liquidity independent of national currencies.

Historically, international reserve currencies have not arisen by design. It might be argued, therefore, that the Keynesian bancor was an unrealistic technocratic fix, blind to the spontaneous momentum that had already made a non-negotiable fact of the dollarized world, even before the Bretton Woods proceedings began. This did not prevent the same basic idea re-emerging in different guises, the most prominent of which has been the IMF's SDRs (Special Drawing Rights), regularly proposed as a neutral international currency in

embryo. It was still to SDRs that Zhou turned when searching out a candidate for a neutral world currency.

Perhaps some technocratic solution to the problem of monetary hegemony will ultimately be found, but if so it would mark an unprecedented departure from world financial history. If, as has always been the case to date, economic tides beyond policy control are to determine such outcomes, it is understandable that attention should drift toward the Chinese yuan as an eventual substitute for the US dollar. Yet the lessons of history are available to policymakers, even when the most insistent lesson concerns limitations upon their own influence, and in this case the foremost of these is that the prospect of an international reserve status yuan presents China with a poisoned chalice. It is very unlikely to be accepted willingly.

Might some alternative spontaneous evolution in the nature of money take this critical geopolitical dilemma in a new direction? Such an evolution appears to be occurring, symbolized by bitcoin, history's first example of a decentralized digital crypto-currency. For China, bitcoin—or something comparable to it—could be the only way to evade an assumption of global economic privilege whose essence is ruinous hubris.

Like James Frazer's sacred king, who is crowned in order to be sacrificed, the inner meaning of monetary hegemony is economic and social destruction. China quite clearly understands this, and as the dollar era comes to a close, it is looking for a way out. That is how

the China-bitcoin story really begins.

[1]Coined by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, during his service as French minister of finance in the 1960s. See: http://www.j-bradford-delong.net/movable_type/2005-3_archives/000397.html (accessed 29 April 2014).

May 2014

China, Crypto-Currency, and the World Order, Part 2

> I have a lot of friends who are programmers. The programmers have always gone like, "Those [Bitcoin] guys are crazy."
>
> And then, almost 100 percent of the time, they sit down, read the paper, read the code—it takes them a couple weeks—and they come out the other side. And they're like: "Oh my god, this is it. This is the big breakthrough. This is the thing we've been waiting for. He solved all the problems. Whoever he is should get the Nobel Prize—he's a genius. This is the thing! This is the distributed trust network that the Internet always needed and never had."
>
> So, one of the challenges is you take people who aren't professional programmers or mathematicians and then you

> expect them to understand it from a standing start. And it's daunting. And so then it gets a word attached to it, like 'currency' or whatever you want to call it, and then people think that it is something it isn't. And you have a sense of this, but it's a much deeper concept than currency. It's the idea of distributed trust.
>
> —Marc Andreessen (in conversation with Brian Fung)

It was noted in the first part of this essay series that the economic order of the world is being radically reshaped by two roughly coincidental transformations of stupendous consequence: a secular shift of industrial capability from the West toward the East, and an Internet-based revolution in the nature of money. Of these events, the former is already deeply established, and generally recognized, while the latter is still at an initial stage of emergence, and thus far less obvious in its implications. Their intersection remains deeply obscure.

One topic that seems, tantalizingly, to connect these historical threads is the prospective death—or at least radical demotion—of the US dollar. The Triffin Dilemma argues that any currency attaining world reserve status tends, perhaps irresistibly, to destroy itself.[1] America's relative economic decline looks set to exacerbate the 'winter' of this great cycle. From the other side, the dollar is threatened by the piecemeal emergence of an entirely

unprecedented non-state currency system, disengaged from all the familiar institutions of monetary management. At the historical horizon of the globalized US dollar, the Chinese yuan and bitcoin are hazily gathered together.

Abstractly anticipated, this twin-threat integrates into a single event of compounded significance, but concrete forecasting can easily become lost in its novel complexities. For roughly half a millennium, transitions in world economic leadership have been smoothed by cultural affinity and intimate strategic collaboration, within a commercial Protestant tradition that has shared a common language, and common enemies, since the late eighteenth century.[2] Nothing comparable is conceivable today, as American global supremacy erodes in a context of intense strategic competition and pronounced civilizational difference.



Inside one of the warehouses on Iceland are mining rigs by Cointerra, KnCMiner and recently arrived spondoolies-tech. These rigs stacked high clearly tell that bitcoin mining is now a professional endeavour and students mining entire bitcoins in their dorm are soon to be a thing of the past. Cloudhashing is set to expand its operations. Source: cryptocoinsnews.com. All rights reserved.

Relative to the passage from the pound sterling to the US dollar, systematic adoption of the Chinese yuan would require "crossing the great ocean"—an expedition so daunting it is unlikely, in any straightforward sense, to take place. Superficially, digital cryptocurrencies are set at an even more distant remove, alien even to those commonalities that span the gulf between civilizations. Yet they are positively advanced by proximity to the world's looming monetary precipice, because they represent a solution to the absence of trust.

The word "bitcoin" stands for two very different things (although one contains the other). In its narrow and exact usage it names a specific currency, abbreviated as BTC, incarnating a radically innovative monetary system whose design was fully specified in Satoshi Nakamoto's 2008 "Bitcoin" paper.[3] The currency became operational in 2009.

The 2008 paper is both a practical invention and a substantial contribution to the philosophy of money. Its central insight is that

money functions as a rationing system, acquiring value or application to tradable goods and services through a scarcity *function*. If digital money is to realize this function, it has two interconnected problems to solve. It has to be intrinsically limited, and it has to be exclusively alienable.

Bitcoin solves the first of these problems by emulating a precious metal. It is earned through a process of mining that requires cryptographic work, in order to access bitcoins from a finite 'reserve', released in stages, amounting in total to 21 million BTC. Preserving the finitude of this bitcoin money stock depends on the solution to the second—or 'double-spending'—problem. Considered the principal obstacle to the creation of digital money, the problem of double-spending arises automatically in a medium which effects transfers by copying. Unless money is deducted from the payer as it is credited to the payee, value-conserving expenditures are impossible, yet this simple operation—going against the grain of digital information exchange—seemed to require the introduction of a guarantor, or trusted external party, which the system itself was unable to integrally provide.

Reignition



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Private mining rig. Source: bitcoinexaminer.org. All rights reserved.
This is Bitcoin's most unmistakable breakthrough. Every transaction taking place within the system is entered into a sequential public ledger, or blockchain, which has to be updated as a whole for any exchange to be registered. The cryptographic work of the system's mining activity now acquires a secondary, automatic function, validating each blockchain iteration, and defending the ledger from usurpation by fraudulent agents. The guarantor of each value-preserving 'cash' transfer is thus the entire blockchain itself, operating as a spontaneous or agent-independent trust mechanism. Through this continuously updated, integrated record of all commercial events, the blockchain supports a consistent account of Internet-communicable synthetic scarcity, or self-regulated digital rationing—in other words, the world's first fully-decentralized electronic money system.Bitcoin scarcity is decentralized due to its independence from the promises of an issuing authority.

In describing this system, one passes very rapidly from the singular to the generic, in a way that is easily understood by analogy, and worth dwelling upon momentarily. Had Netscape been adopted as the name for web browsers in general, certain confusions would almost certainly have arisen. Most significantly, the question "will Netscape survive?" would have been fatally ambiguous. As actual history has demonstrated, Netscape in this counter-factual sense

was able both to die, and to thrive beyond all prior expectation. Many hundreds of millions of people use a 'Netscape' every day, although under other (specific and general) names, while only a vanishingly small fraction are aware that Netscape ever existed. It is not clear whether Bitcoin, in its specific sense, could ever be entirely extinguished, but it could certainly be marginalized to the edge of irrelevance: driven from the market by competitive cryptocurrencies through which Bitcoin, in the general sense, advances towards ubiquity.

In its broadest evocation, Bitcoin symbolizes a gathering Internet revolution, of a scale and profundity that is difficult to exaggerate. The technical capability required to run BTC—installed blockchain-supporting software—has a potential extending far beyond the currency itself, and only a very small fraction of this has been explored thus far. This is most dramatically evidenced in the growth of a sprawling spin-off bitcoin ecology of altcoins, or Bitcoin-like P2P contract systems, tagged by the -coin suffix. Prominent altcoins include Darkcoin, Dogecoin, Litecoin, Namecoin, and Truthcoin, with many others on the way. At the outer edge of blockchain abstraction lie applications such as Ethereum, whose Turing-complete scripting language can support smart contracts, and even autonomous intelligent agents. At this point of sophistication, the ultimate potentialities of the system are not merely undetermined, but undeterminable in principle, and the gateway to a previously

unvisited techno-commercial cosmos is opened.

It is this extreme generality that Eli Dourado celebrates in his article "Bitcoin isn't Money—It's the Internet of Money," arguing:
Bitcoin is not just a substitute for money; it can be a form of generalized, programmable, decentralized contracting. [...] Most of Bitcoin's critics are making a category error. They are taking aim at Bitcoin the currency, when in fact Bitcoin is much more than a currency, in the same way that the Internet is much more than the telecommunication services that preceded it. [...] Bitcoin is a new transport layer for finance that allows decentralized, disruptive, permissionless [4] development of applications on a separate layer. It has the capability to do for finance what the Internet did for communication.

Among the blockchain-based facilities Dourado envisages are assurance contracts, prediction markets, and continuous micropayments, as well as notary, bonded identity, and reputation rating services. It is easy to see why 'getting' Bitcoin triggers something akin to metaphysical shock. As a self-sufficient digital depository for legal identity, it exhibits—virtually—a potential to absorb the cultural infrastructure of formal transactions without obvious limit. There is perhaps no conceivable 'deal' without blockchain compatibility, and therefore no definite horizon to its commercial, legal, or even political utility.

Of particular relevance here is the blockchain innovation of

artificial trust often referred to as trustlessness since it *substitutes for trust*, and is thus pre-adapted to a world in which trust is unavailable.[ref]Google the combination “trustless + bitcoin” for abundant confirmation.[/ref] Under the conditions currently impending, a global hegemonic transition occurring beyond international consensus or civilizational continuity, this deep feature of Bitcoin seems certain to be foregrounded. By apparent remarkable coincidence, a collapsing order of promises, or credible global authorities, is accompanied by the emergence of an alternative system of credibility. As the traditional supports of the world’s institutional architecture are subjected to accelerating erosion,[5] the premium upon trustless functionality can only increase. Bitcoin suggests itself as a replacement for authoritative guarantors, while opening entirely novel vistas of decentralized institutional creation. The contextual friction, dysfunction, and disagreement of a world in hegemonic disarray only reinforce its attraction.

In comparison to the *smooth* transitions in economic supremacy, from the United Provinces, to the United Kingdom, to the United States, the passage beyond the American world order can only be considered *rough*. It is this roughness that shapes the socket, for which Bitcoin—in its most expansive sense—is the plug. The installation of trustless systems fits into a hole in the world.

How does the rise of trustless Internet technology modify the

strategic landscape of the great powers, and the world's other principal actors? To what extent can their responses be anticipated? Only by addressing these questions can some concreteness be introduced to our understanding of the path ahead. They therefore provide the topic for the third (and final) part of this series.

[1] The mechanism, roughly described, is that the chronic trade deficits required for the international distribution of a reserve currency undermine the domestic economic fundamentals upon which that same currency's credibility initially, and ultimately, depends. This endogenous mechanism is sharpened by geostrategic rivalry, and further destabilized by complicating, partially independent factors such as the vicissitudes of the petrodollar convention. In combination, their effect has exhibited a clear directionality in recent times, with the proportion of international foreign reserves held in US dollars declining from 55 percent to 33 percent since 2000.

[2] Transition of world economic leadership from the United Provinces to the United Kingdom was institutionally facilitated by transnational elite integration, crowned by the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The later succession of the United States to global economic preeminence involved a less clearly formalized, but nevertheless unmistakable degree of regime coordination, built in large part upon the military, administrative, and intelligence cooperation forged in the crucible of World War II. Innumerable indicators might be mentioned, including even the dynastic factor of Winston Churchill's hybrid Anglo-American ancestry.

[3] The identity of Satoshi Nakamoto remains a topic of intense speculation, exceeding the

bounds of the present discussion.

[4] Dourado cites Vinton Cerf's 2012 article "Keep the Internet Open," where the notion of "permissionless innovation" plays a crucial conceptual role.

[5] Monetary authorities are the most relevant example here, but every institution dependent upon some measure of public trust is, in principle, susceptible to implicit competition from blockchain-based (trustless) alternatives.

June 2014

China, Crypto-Currency, and the World Order, Part 3

> The German school argued that emphasizing consumption would eventually be self-defeating. It would bias the system away from wealth creation—and ultimately make it impossible to consume as much. To use a homely analogy: One effect of getting regular exercise is being able to eat more food, just as an effect of steadily rising production is being able to consume more. But if people believe that the reason to get exercise is to permit themselves to eat more, rather than for longer term benefits they will behave in a different way. List's argument was that developing

productive power was in itself a reward.

[…] The German view is more paternalistic [than that of the Anglo-Americans]. People might not automatically choose the best society or the best use of their money. The state, therefore, must be concerned with both the process and the result. Expressing an Asian variant of the German view, the sociologist Ronald Dore has written that the Japanese—"like all good Confucianists"—believe that "you cannot get a decent, moral society, not even an efficient society, simply out of the mechanisms of the market powered by the motivational fuel of self-interest." So, in different words, said Friedrich List.

—James Fallows, "How the World Works," The Atlantic (December 1993).

The perception of the Chinese Internet among international observers and commentators is dominated by an impression of *control*.[1] At the center of China's—deliberately conspicuous—system of digital communications oversight stands the Golden Shield project, far more popularly known as "the Great Firewall of China."

No less than the original Great Wall, or even the Imperial Palace, the Great Firewall is a monument. It is first of all a statement, and only secondarily a functional apparatus, with capabilities sufficient

to give said statement public credibility. What it overtly means is more important than what it covertly does. The message is long familiar, and recognizably Confucian rather than distinctly communist: signaling social defiance is not a tolerable cultural decision.

This seems to be an improbable environment in which to insert blockchain cryptosystems. Bitcoin unmistakably retains an aura of extreme social defiance.[2] The legacy of the libertarian-oriented hacker counterculture remains clearly legible in its founding documentation and among its first-wave supporters. Among its most ardent proponents, the vitriolic presupposition of government illegitimacy is combined with an approximately unconditional endorsement of anarchistic—or at least agoristic—practices.[3] In this sense, Bitcoin appears as the impending fulfillment of the "Californian Ideology"—a hyper-capitalist assertion of spontaneous order, or radical decentralization, essentially antagonistic to all concentrated authority.

Any balanced estimation of Bitcoin's prospects in China has to begin with a realistic correction of this impression. While insight into Chinese security analysis is never easily attained, it can be confidently assumed that revolutionary agorism does not figure prominently on any official list of Internet threats. Even in America, in comparatively close cultural proximity to the 'cipherpunks' of the West Coast, Bitcoin is undergoing rapid, and far-reaching

domestication.[4] In China, where ideological libertarianism is effectively nonexistent, the possibility of technologically catalyzed anarchist politics has to seem vanishingly remote.

The concerns of Chinese officials with regards to the Internet are quite different. They are overwhelmingly oriented to the perceived threat of mass activism, triggered by social media networks, and exemplified by the dynamics of the so-called Color Revolutions in the ex-Soviet republics and subsequently by the Arab Spring.[5] It is the capacity of the Internet to amplify a dissident public 'voice', rather than to facilitate a private 'exit', that determines the security priorities of the Great Firewall. From this perspective, the Bitcoin menace is relatively minor, even trivial, in comparison to Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and similar channels of vocal dissent.

The administrative challenges Bitcoin does pose to the Chinese authorities are of a technical, rather than existential-ideological, nature, and only tangentially related to the country's monumental apparatus of Internet control. The most politically-charged concern is capital flight or money laundering, but this is a topic of mind-boggling complexity, involving everything from high-level corruption on a titanic scale, through organized crime, to informally tolerated business activities and the attempts of small private actors to secure savings or diversify regime risk. Corruption is clearly perceived by the Chinese Communist Party as an indirect source of political insecurity, and few doubt that the potential of Bitcoin to facilitate

the concealment and expatriation of illicit funds was a leading motive for the restrictions imposed so far.[6]

In “How the World Works,” James Fallows excavates the neo-mercantilist political-economic theory of Friedrich List from its oblivion within the Anglophone world. He argues that the *laissez-faire* commercial ideal, considered by English-speaking nations as an undisputed norm of rational economic order, has a remarkably limited application beyond these nations. Elsewhere it is treated as a set of impractical, culturally and situationally specific principles, to which only the most nominal deference can safely be paid. The passage of two decades has done nothing to erode the pertinence of this observation.

List’s “German System,” which was also Alexander Hamilton’s “American System”—and indeed the ‘system’ of every challenger power seeking accelerated industrialization under conditions of strategic disadvantage—was characterized by a series of anomalous features relative to the free-market hegemonic norm that has been identified with Anglophone cultures for over two centuries, and maritime Protestant Atlantic powers for longer still.[7] Yet even these core economic powers, prior to their ascent to industrial dominion, subordinated commercial liberties to nationalistic development imperatives. Both geographically and historically, the ‘normality’ of the open market is exposed as rare and precarious. As Fallows remarks in “How the World Works”:

> Every country that has caught up with others has had to do so by rigging its rules: extracting extra money from its people and steering the money into industrialists' hands. […] Today's Americans and Britons may not like this new system, which makes their economic life more challenging and confusing than it would otherwise be. They are not obliged to try to imitate its structure, which in many ways fits the social circumstances of East Asia better than those of the modern United States or Britain. But the English-speaking world should stop ignoring the existence of this system—and stop pretending that it doesn't work.

Where Chinese Internet policy is concerned, "ignoring the existence of this system" amounts to an interpretative orientation fixated upon domestic security politics and human rights issues, while overlooking its neo-mercantilist features. When this bias is corrected, the "Chinese System" of digital mercantilism can be seen as a classic example of strategically accelerated industrialization, based upon selective protections directed at those business sectors perceived as most essential to the nation's economic future. Quite evidently, the Internet occupies center stage in this strategy, which identifies it as the basic techno-economic platform of the twenty-first-century world. Arguably, the peculiarities of the Chinese Internet make far more sense in the context of geo-strategic industrial competition,

than in that of domestic regime insecurity.

The most pronounced features of the "Chinese System" are not restrictions on free political expression—although these can of course be found—but rather the emergence of domestic Chinese business analogs for the major players of the international (i.e., American) Internet economy. The most obvious digital Sino-clones include Baidu (Google), Taobao (eBay, Amazon), Youku (YouTube), Weibo (Twitter), WeChat (Facebook), and Alipay (Paypal). From this perspective, it begins to seem that much less is being *prevented* than *replicated*.

As previously noted in this series, Bitcoin designates both a specific digital cryptocurrency (BTC), and a technical innovation in electronic communications of extreme generality (the blockchain), potentially enveloping all Internet-based activity. Besides its intrinsic significance, the currency can be understood as a test implementation of the blockchain system. Increasingly, as the anticipated techno-economic consequences of the blockchain breakthrough have loomed ever larger, it is the second, expansive sense of Bitcoin that has begun to prevail—even as the currency has entrenched itself among the world's resilient monetary realities.

As the extraordinary implications of blockchain technology have come into focus,[8] historical analogies have escalated. While it may once have made sense to compare Bitcoin to a particular Internet application of great generality, such as the web browser, or perhaps

to the World Wide Web, a general-purpose platform built upon the Internet, it is increasingly common to find blockchain technology compared to the Internet as such. On this ever more plausible account the blockchain is of equivalent socioeconomic import to the basic Internet-enabling innovation of packet switching communications—a once-in-a-Kondratieff-wave-level infrastructural revolution. If this is the case, it is a candidate to be the commanding technology of the first half of the twenty-first century.

How might the "Chinese System" be expected to respond to this emerging reality? Everything we have seen so far points in one direction: *Clone war*. For China to reject the blockchain revolution would be an abdication from all industrial leadership ambitions in the coming digital economy. The only Chinese strategic option compatible with the digital industrialization path so far taken is a Sinification of the technology—a blockchain with Chinese characteristics, in which distributed ledger systems are accommodated to the country's social and cultural realities. There is no reason to think this will be an easy thing to achieve, but nothing else could possibly work.

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[1] The theatrical tradition of Chinese power is an indispensable reference here. China has been exceptional among the great civilizations for the emphasis it has placed upon public perception as the key to administrative authority, with an understanding of rule as essentially *dramatic*. In the narrow context that concerns us here, it is important to note that in the eyes of the

Chinese authorities *being seen to control Internet communications* takes precedence over the subordinate and instrumental social and technical capabilities involved. This can be contrasted with Internet security politics in the United States, where invisible data-traffic monitoring receives clear priority.

[2] In order to arrive at a remotely concrete sense of "defiance" it is no doubt important to distinguish between those actors (associated more with the Left) seeking to break into the public sphere in the name of protest, and those (associated more with the Right) seeking to break out of the public sphere, to protect private interests from social or government accountancy. It can scarcely be controversial to propose that, while concern for the latter is by no means negligible in today's China, it is the former that elicits genuine alarm.

[3] This aspect of Bitcoin has been dramatized by the online black-market Silk Road run by Dread Pirate Roberts (Ross Ulbricht), recently described by Daniel Krawisz as "the greatest agorist of our times."

[4] This trend is personified by Marc Andreessen, whose promotion of Bitcoin "mainstreaming" includes an explicit attempt to reframe the blockchain (distributed public ledger) as a *defense* against excessive anonymity, fully compatible with government regulatory interests. Insofar as arguments of this kind are found persuasive in Washington DC and New York, they are likely to find an appreciative reception in Beijing.

[5] Irrespective of the actual contribution of social media to these events, the seriousness with which it was taken by the Chinese authorities is beyond serious question. During the spring of

2011, the word “Jasmine” was targeted for suppression by the Chinese Great Firewall filter, despite its rich cultural resonances in the country.

[6] BTC China was founded in June 2011 with Bobby Lee as CEO. It had risen to become the world’s largest bitcoin exchange (by volume) by 18 December 2013, when it temporarily suspended acceptance of RMB deposits, following a People’s Bank of China statement on the crypto-currency, released on the 5th of that month. Chinese Internet giant Baidu, which had been accepting BTC payments since October 2013, ceased accepting the currency following the PBOC statement. Although RMB depository services were partially resumed at BTC China in January 2014, Baidu has not returned to the currency, stalling the development of bitcoin within China as a means of payment. Price movements of bitcoin on international exchanges have reflected the enormous significance of Chinese events to its perceived value.

[7] Fallows usefully lists the distinctive emphases of the “German System”: planning over spontaneity; producers over consumers; outcome over process; national over individual interest; zero-sum over positive-sum economic relations; and Realpolitik over moralism.

[8] Although the ultimate scope of Bitcoin escapes ready apprehension, it is already clear that it is roughly coextensive with the form of the contract in general, within which monetary systems are comprehended. Any actually or potentially formal human agreement is blockchain compatible, and it is through the blockchain that many previously tacit social arrangements can be expected to attain formalization. The horizon of the blockchain, therefore, is that of deal-making in general. Once this is understood, the predictions of those such as Marc Andreessen—who sees the potential blockchain economy scaling into the multi-trillion-dollar range within a matter

of decades—seem entirely reasonable. Global commerce, as a whole, is in principle a subset of blockchain-supported relationships. As this becomes ever more obvious, the prospect of an economically ambitious society attempting to opt out of this future will become increasingly implausible. It is already unimaginable that China could want to do so.

September 2014

BLOCK 4 - SINGLOSPHERE

CHAPTER ONE - PRIMERS

Singlosphere

East-plus-West at the frontier of freedom

In accordance with the widely-held belief that digital communication technologies 'destroy distance', James C. Bennett coined the term 'Anglosphere' to describe the arena of comparatively frictionless cultural proximity binding spatially-dispersed Anglophone populations. His contention was that the gathering trends exemplified by the development of the Internet would continue to promote cultural ties, whilst eroding the importance of spatial neighborhoods. In the age of the World Wide Web, cultural solidarity trumps geographical solidarity.

Whilst alternative culture-spheres – expressly including the Sinosphere – were mentioned in passing, they were not the focus of Bennett's account. His attention was directed to English-speaking peoples, scattered geographically, yet bound together by threads of common understanding that derived from a shared language, English common law and limited-government traditions, highly-developed

civil societies, individualism, and an unusual tolerance for disruptive social change. He predicted both that these commonalities would become increasingly consequential in the years to come, and that their general tenor would prove highly adaptive as the rate of social change accelerated worldwide.

Bennett's concern with large-scale cultural systems can be seen as part of an intellectual trend, comparable in significant respects to Samuel Huntington's influential 'Clash of Civilizations' thesis. In a world that is undergoing tectonic shifts in the distribution of wealth, power, and hegemony, such preoccupations are understandable. In these circumstances, it would be surprising if the partisans of Anglospheric and Sinospheric cultural traditions were not aroused to ardent advocacy of their relative merits and demerits, and — if Bennett is taken seriously — such discussions will take place in zones of cultural communion that are, at least relatively, increasingly introverted. The rapid emergence of a highly-autonomous 'Chinese Internet' in recent years adds weight to such expectations.

In March, the Z/Yen Group released the ninth in its series of Global Financial Centres Index rankings, in which Shanghai leapt to shared fifth place with Tokyo (on GFCI ratings of 694). London (775), New York (769), Hong Kong (759), and Singapore (722) led the pack. (The top 75 can be seen here).

Both Anglosphereans and Sinosphereans can find ready satisfaction in these ratings. The persistent supremacy of London

and New York attests to a 250-year history of world economic dominance, whilst the ascent of Chinese-ethnicity commercial cities to the remaining top-slots clearly indicates the shift of economic gravity to the western Pacific region. Yet the most interesting pattern lies in-between. Neither Hong Kong nor Singapore belong unambiguously to a Sinosphere (still less to a broad Anglosphere). Instead, they are characterized by distinctive forms of Chinese-Anglophone hybridity – an immensely successful cultural synthesis. It would be difficult to maintain that Shanghai was entirely untouched by a comparable phenomenon, inherited in that case from the synthetic mentality of its concession-era International Settlement, and reflected in its singular Haipai or 'ocean culture'.

The existence of an identifiable Sino-Anglosphere – or Singlosphere – is further suggested by the Heritage Foundation's 2011 Index of Economic Freedom (rated on a scale of 0-100). On that list, the top two places are taken by Hong Kong (89.7) and Singapore (87.2), followed by Australia (82.5) and New Zealand (82.3). The Anglospherean and Sinospherean territorial cores fare less impressively, with none meeting the Heritage criteria for free economies — the United States comes ninth (77.8), the United Kingdom 16th (74.5), and mainland China 135th (52.0). It seems that the Singlosphere has learnt something about economic freedom that exceeds the presently-manifested wisdom of both cultural root-stocks – setting a model for the Sinosphere, and leaving the

Anglosphere trailing in its wake.

As the deep secular trend of Chinese ascent and (relative if not absolute) American decline leads to ever more ominous rumblings and threats of geostrategic tension, it is especially important to note a quite different, non-confrontational pattern – based upon cultural merging and reciprocal liberation. Within the Singlosphere, an emergent, synthetic ethnicity exhibits a dynamically adaptive, cosmopolitan competence without peer, as distinct traditions of spontaneous order fuse and reinforce each other. Adam Smith meets Laozi, and the profound amalgamation of the two results in an unfolding innovated culture that increasingly dominates world rankings of economic capability.

A remarkable study by Christian Gerlach excavates the Daoist roots of European laissez-faire (or wu wei) ideas, and anarcho-capitalist maverick Murray Rothbard was attracted to the same 'Ancient Chinese Libertarian Tradition'. Ken McCormick calls it The Tao of Laissez-Faire. (Those disturbed by this identification might be more comfortable with Silja Graupe's leftist critique of 'Market Daoism'.)

McCormick concludes his essay:

> *The recent ascendance of free-market ideas around the world probably owes more to the practical historical success of those ideas than to the persuasiveness of any theory or*

> *philosophy. Yet one might speculate that the startling success of economic liberalization in the People's Republic of China might in part be explained by the fact that the idea of free markets is embedded in the culture. In fact, the Confucianism that long dominated China was actually a synthesis of competing schools of thought, including Taoism … Hence, while laissez-faire has frequently been absent from Chinese practice, it is not at all alien to Chinese culture. The recent free-market reforms in China might therefore be interpreted not so much as an importation of a foreign ideology but as a reawakening of a home-grown concept.*

The Singlosphere sets both East and West on the right track. The more that Shanghai recalls and learns from it — and the deeper its participation — the faster its ascent will be.

May 26, 2011

Pacific Rim

Well-engineered, formidable, yet also lumbering constructions are directed into battle against horrific monsters, with the fate of the world at stake. Guillermo del Toro's movie *Pacific Rim* is one of these entities, and the ethno-political review by 'white advocacy'

writer Gregory Hood is another.

Within this cascade of monstrous signs, a convulsive re-ordering of the world from out of the Pacific is a constant reference. With the shocking scale of a tsunami, and the insidiousness of an obscure intelligence, it inundates the Old Order, starting from the ocean's coastal ramparts. "When alien life entered the earth it was from deep within the Pacific Ocean. … the Breach." City after city falls prey to the *Kaiju*. "This was not going to stop."

The response is formulaic, and statically defensive. Perhaps some kind of massive sea-wall will work? Hood is at his best in laying out the weary Cathedralist pieties of the Hollywood plot line:

If poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind, filmmakers are the educators, grooming the mass public to accept certain ideas in preparation for them to be implemented as policy. The acceptance of global security forces instead of national armies, the worship of blacks as natural leaders, and the promotion of an international political creed of egalitarianism, secular humanism, and intrusive (but benevolent) government …

Yet the plot-line of his review is no less predictable than that of the movie, appealing to a irrecoverable (and already mythical) confidence in a white lineage of ethno-nationalist self-government, functionally-adequate native traditions, and tested bonds of kin, as if all of these things remained untried resources to fall back upon, rather than efficient historical antecedents to the developments now

being deplored. It was under the conditions of white global dominion that socialism was entrenched, and evangelical moral universalism elevated to its climactic pitch of ethno-masochistic implosion. Defenselessness before the *Kaiju* was not something the *Kaiju* brought about.

The most telling blindness of Hood's review lies close to its heart, in the denunciation of multiculturalism. Rather than striking at Del Toro's movie at its point of maximum Cathedralist vulneraility — which is to say, in its entirely generic, universalist presentation of the multicultural ideal — Hood repeats this same indiscriminate category without significant modification, seeking only to criticize what Del Toro promotes. This would be seriously unserious anywhere. On the Pacific Rim, it is a truly disastrous disqualification of perception.

The only reality-sensitive response to the problem of multiculturalism is to ask: *Which cultures?* Neither Del Toro (the Cathedral), nor Hood (ethno-traditionalism), seem to have the slightest interest in this question. Indiscriminate demographic entropy is either to be promoted, or lamented, but in both cases accepted as the only relevant alternative to a fantastically-imagined, dying world of distinct peoples. If the paint is let out of the tubes, it has to be stirred together with maximum conceptual rapidity into homogeneous brown.

Discussing the film's central micro-alliance, between its

occidental hero and oriental heroine, Hood writes:

None of this makes any sense of course. The "drift compatible" connection seems to require a kind of deep bond that almost always requires family ties. However, in this film, the conflict is driven by the struggle of the rebellious hero and the non-white female to prove that two people who have no shared history or kinship can work together, and in fact be better than everyone else. Where traditional national and family bonds have failed us, multiculturalism will save the day.

As an ethno-racial descriptor, 'non-white' is simply sad. It isn't even trying. Concretely, in this case, it ensures that the true nonsense of the movie eludes attention, which is the displacement of real Pacific Rim ethno-synthesis by a merely cosmetic substitute.

As Hood emphatically notes, the relationship between (white American) Raleigh and (Japanese) Mako is not explicitly romantic, but it occupies the formula-position of a film romance, even when — admirably — it restricts itself to an intense practical partnership. I just love Japanese-American ethno-synthesis to bits, but it has almost no relevance to the real cultural process on the Pacific Rim, which is overwhelmingly dominated by Anglo-Chinese hybridism.

Japan is one of the world's few modern ethno-nationalist states, with a strongly-preserved native culture, tightly-restricted immigration and citizenship criteria, and low English-language competence. In other words, it makes a *far* more tempting target for

'multiculturalist' (or demographic entropy) criticism than America does. But it's 'non-white' so Hood doesn't notice.

Even more peculiarly — and despite its Hong Kong setting — *Pacific Rim* represents China's contribution to the multicultural alliance through three weirdo brothers who get rubbed out at the first plausible opportunity. Without wanting to be unnecessarily crude, I have to repeat — *Hong fricking Kong*. This is the post-1949 capital of the Singlosphere, and therefore the natural location for a centrally accentuated *US-Japanese* working relationship? If this isn't quite "who cares? They're all wogs anyway" it's something remarkably close.

The Pacific Rim, insofar as it matters, is the a Singlosphere cultural catastrophe, a distinctively non-generic ethno-synthesis that has created the most advanced and competitive societies on the planet — Hong Kong, Singapore, and Old Shanghai among them. Del Toro and Hood conspire to efface this fact, even as both, indirectly, address it.

Insofar as we are told anything, it is that in our most desperate moments, we have to jettison Tradition. Instead, we must rely on feelings, on multicultural partnership, on wishes and fantasies and hopes about what the world might be, rather than what it is.

–– that's Hood, not remotely understanding what he's saying.

September 15, 2013

Quote note (#119)

This seems right:

Razeen Sally, a visiting associate professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, wrote this year in Singapore's Straits Times that: "A global city is where truly global services cluster. Business — in finance, the professions, transport and communications — is done in several languages and currencies, and across several time zones and jurisdictions. Such creations face a unique set of challenges in the early 21st century. Today, there appear to be only five global cities. London and New York are at the top, followed by Hong Kong and Singapore, Asia's two service hubs. Dubai, the Middle East hub, is the newest and smallest kid on the block. Shanghai has global-city aspirations, but it is held back by China's economic restrictions — the vestiges of an ex-command economy — and its Leninist political system. Tokyo remains too Japan-centric, a far cry from a global city."

It's a striking indication of the extent to which the world order remains structured by the Anglo-Colonial legacy. However one would *like* to see the world run, this hub-net is an essential clue to the way it is run now.

October 17, 2014

Mackinder in Beijing

A long, but insightful look at the planetary strategic environment puts recent developments in theoretical context:

After decades of quiet preparation, Beijing has recently begun revealing its grand strategy for global power, move by careful move. Its two-step plan is designed to build a transcontinental infrastructure for the economic integration of the world island from within, while mobilizing military forces to surgically slice through Washington's encircling containment.

The initial step has involved a breathtaking project to put in place an infrastructure for the continent's economic integration. By laying down an elaborate and enormously expensive network of high-speed, high-volume railroads as well as oil and natural gas pipelines across the vast breadth of Eurasia, China may realize Mackinder's vision in a new way. For the first time in history, the rapid transcontinental movement of critical cargo — oil, minerals, and manufactured goods — will be possible on a massive scale, thereby potentially unifying that vast landmass into a single economic zone stretching 6,500 miles from Shanghai to Madrid. In this way, the leadership in Beijing hopes to shift the locus of geopolitical power away from the maritime periphery and deep into the continent's heartland.

As a trivial point of perspective, it might be worth noting that this

blog's ferocious Atlanteanism completely overwhelms its Sinophilia in regard to this question. If the emergence of a diasporic-maritime China, attuned to its Pacific Rim ethnic offshoots, is to be forestalled by a revival of dreams of dominion on the world island, the 21st century is about to take a peculiarly unfortunate turn.

June 10, 2015

CHAPTER TWO - SYNTHETIC CULTURE

Reign of the Tripod

China's rise and the future of threedom

According to Arvind Subramanian, even conservative projections of comparative growth trends place China in a global position, by 2030, that is strikingly similar to that of Britain and of America at their respective moments of economic predominance, accounting for a share of the world economy roughly 150% the size of its closest rival. If this were to come to pass, such leadership would invoke 'hegemony' as a matter of sheer quantitative fact – quite irrespective of explicit intentions. The 'Chinese model' would promote itself, even in the complete absence of political and diplomatic reinforcement, and the magnetic power of Chinese culture would continue to strengthen in approximate proportion to its commercial influence. China would become the object of irresistible attraction – counterbalanced, no doubt, by resentments – and its example would burn incandescent, even in the offended eyes of its detractors. So what is this 'example'?

In exploring this question, one place to begin is the history of economic hegemony, and in particular that instantiated by the Anglo-American powers over their two 'long centuries' of global supremacy. This is a topic pursued with exceptional insight by Walter Russell Mead, most remarkably in his work *God and Gold: Britain, America, and the Making of the Modern World*.

Mead locates the key to 'Anglosphere' hegemony in the 'Golden Meme' of the invisible hand, originating in the religious idea of providence, and modernized in Newtonian celestial mechanics, Smithian political economy, and Darwinian evolutionary biology. At its most abstract, this idea is both an affirmation and a renunciation, with its potency and suppleness stemming from both. To acknowledge the invisible hand is to foster a special kind of positive fatalism, trusting in the spontaneous trend of history, which is embraced as a covenant, and an overt or implicit election (in the theological sense). Such themes are undisguisedly religious, and Mead does nothing to obscure their roots in the Abrahamic tradition, or meta-tradition, which lays out a providential vision of history as finite, progressive, and inevitable, tending inexorably to eschatological completion, structured by superhuman law, and (through its divine predestination) facilitating the function of prophecy.

The deep culture of the Anglosphere is not only generically Abrahamic, however, it is also specifically pluralistic. The invisible

hand takes center stage because the center is otherwise vacated, or distributed. Esoteric providence supplants exoteric sovereignty because an inability to reach agreement is eventually institutionalized – or at least informally stabilized — in a triangular balance of power.

> *What the British ultimately did was to rely on what Burke called "convention." Scripture, tradition, and reason – each had its place and each had its devotees. But all of them went wrong if you pressed them too far. You should respect the scriptures and defer to them but not interpret the scriptures in a way that led you into some weird millenarian sect or into absurd social behavior. You honored tradition but did not press it so far that it led you into the arms of royal absolutism or papal power. You can and should employ the critique of reason against the excesses of both scripture and tradition, but not press reason to the point where you ranted against all existing institutions., ate roots and bark for your health, or, worse, undermined the rights of property and the established church. One can picture John Bull scratching his head and slowly concluding that one must accept that in society there will be bible nuts, tradition nuts, and reason nuts – fundamentalists, papists, and radicals. This is not necessarily the end of the world. To some degree they cancel*

> *each other out – the fundamentalist zealots will keep the papists down and vice versa, and the religious will keep the radicals in their place – but the competition among sects will also prevent the established church from pressing its advantage too far and from forming too exalted an idea about the proper stature, prestige, and emoluments of the clergy.* [p223]

Cultural hegemony follows from a semi-deliberate *fatalization*, as the sovereign center is displaced by a substantially automated social process, which no social agent is able to master or entirely impede. Each major faction steps back into its position in the triangle, from which it can strategically engage the others, but never fully dominate or eradicate them. The triangle as a whole constitutes a social and historical motor, without adequate representation at any identifiable point.

> *Pluralism, even at the cost of rational consistency, is necessary in a world of change. Countervailing forces and values must contend. Reason, scripture, tradition: they all have their uses, but any one of them, unchecked, will go too far. Moreover, without constant disputes, constant controversy, constant competition between rival ideas about how society should look and what is should do, the pace of*

> *innovation and change is likely to slow as forces of conservative inertia grow smug and unchallenged.* [p231-2]

This blog has previously touched upon the Singlosphere, where aspects of Anglophone and Chinese culture converge in Manchester Liberal / Daoist acceptance of spontaneous order, or laissez-faire. Does this convergence extend to triadic pluralism, and apply to the Sinosphere core of the Chinese mainland? Mead's analysis is highly suggestive in both respects.

In the first place, it encourages considerable equanimity in regards to the prospective global transition, even when attention is focused upon the political and ideological heartland of contemporary China. It might seem, superficially, that the passage from a leading world culture dominated by tacit Christian attitudes to one in which unfamiliar Sino-Marxist ideas rise to unprecedented international prominence must be characterized by an immense – even near-absolute – discontinuity. Can such a leap take place without succumbing to catastrophic culture-shock and unmanageable friction? When examined from a broader perspective, however, such alarmism is far less than fully warranted.

For better or for worse, the over-arching cultural continuity of the coming shift is ensured by the profound kinship tying Marxism into the broad family of Abrahamic belief systems. Theologically rooted in the dialectical engagement with Judeo-Christian spirituality,

initiated by Hegel and Feuerbach, the basic framework of Marxist thinking only trivially perturbs the structure of prophetic, eschatological, redemptive, and providential history. Its millenarian expectations are no more terrifying than those of Jewish and Christian apocalypticism before it, its prophetic certainties no more irrational, its submission to the iron laws of history no more constraining, and its moral enthusiasm no more zealous or impractical.

The specter of a totalitarian Marxist resurgence in China is as realistic as the fear of a theocratic putsch in the United States of America, which is to say, it has no reality at all. In both cases, maturity, pluralism, and established traditions protect against the domination of society by any particular intolerant faction. It is unnecessary to be either Christian or Marxist to recognize the continuing world-historical momentum of a broad Abrahamic meta-narrative, or to accept the consistency of such large-scale social storytelling with the perpetual regeneration of practical impetus, or to see a settled, spontaneously improvised social solution – and incarnation of dynamic conservatism – in the enduring triangular stand-off between Marxist scriptures, Communist Party institutional traditions, and market radicalism in today's China. As with Mead's Anglospherean pluralism, the reciprocal limitations that each of these factions imposes on the others will inevitably disappoint many, but there is no reason for them to horrify anybody.

Insofar as Mead is correct in identifying Anglosphere hegemony with the reign of the tripod, or the socio-cultural realization of pluralism (as triangular dynamic stability), the disruptive potential of emerging Chinese leadership should be considered as massively discounted, because the tripod is a Chinese native. Every temple in the country is equipped with a three-footed incense burner, every museum bronze collection is dominated by three-legged cauldrons, and each of these tripods has definite, explicitly conceptual cultural meaning. This is not only based upon the obvious practical and intuitive truth that the simplest model of stability comes from the tripod, but also from a recognition that triangular stand-off exemplifies sustainable dynamism in its elementary form, disintegrating the universe into strategic possibility.

For literary elaboration of this theme, one need only turn to the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, perhaps the most widely read of China's four great classical novels. Its most conspicuous instantiation as popular entertainment is seen in the game of paper, scissors, stone, which dates back (at least) to the Chinese Han Dynasty (206 BC – AD 220), when it was known as *shoushiling*.

The ultimate expression of triangular dynamic stability, not only in China, but worldwide, is undoubtedly presented by the *Classic of Change*, the *Yi Jing*, or *Zhouyi*. It is upon this work of singular, inhuman genius, in which sheer arithmetic speaks more purely than it has ever done before or since, that all of China's ceremonial

bronzes, literary flights, and childhood games converge.

In the numerical system of the *Yi Jing*, the tripod finds a source more basic than the Abrahamic meta-tradition can provide, regardless of how Trinitarian this latter has become. That is because, in this Chinese cultural ur-stratum, unity does not figure as an original unity, subsequently disintegrated into a theological, dialectical, or sociopolitical triangle but is, on the contrary, derived. As the Confucian commentary explains: "The number 3 was assigned to heaven, 2 to earth, and from these came the (other) numbers." *In the beginning were numbers* – primordial dispersion.

The 'language' of the tripod finds its most convenient expression in the trigram, whose three lines constitute an elementary unit. To grasp the *Yi Jing* as a complete arithmetical model of the *dynamic* triad, however, it is necessary to proceed immediately to the structure of the hexagram.

Grasped *in operation*, the *Yi Jing* is not only a binary arithmetical system (as Leibniz interpreted it), but a bino-decimal conjunction. This is demonstrated by the fact that it systematically rewards the application of decimal digital reduction, and reveals its dynamic pattern only under these conditions. (This might, quite reasonably, be considered a highly surprising suggestion, since digital reduction – as it arose within the history of Western Qabbalism – seems to have been generated, automatically, from the interference of the decimal Hindu numerals with older alphabetical number systems, or

'gematrias', that attached cardinal values to specific letters, without use of place value. It is immediately obvious that this historical account cannot be translated into a Chinese context, where alphabets have no traditional root.)

Digital reduction is an extremely simple numerical technique, involving nothing besides single-digit additions and neglect of decimal magnitude. A multi-digit number is treated as a string of single digit additions, and the process is reiterated in the case of a multi-digit result.

Expressing the series of binary powers in decimal notation yields the familiar sequence 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, 1024, 2048, 4096, 8192 … When this series is compressed to a string of single digits by reduction, it proceeds: 1, 2, 4, 8, (1 + 6 =) 7, (3 + 2 =) 5, (6 + 4 =) 1, (1 + 2 + 8 = 11 = 1 + 1 =) 2, (2 + 5 + 6 = 13 = 1 + 3 =) 4, (5 + 1 + 2 =) 8, (1 + 0 + 2 + 4 =) 7, (2 + 0 + 4 + 8 = 14 = 1 + 4 =) 5, and repeatedly, through the 6-step cycle 1, 2, 4, 8, 7, 5. This process exposes the arithmetical necessity of the *Yi Jing* hexagram, as an archetypal exhaustion of the phases of time.

To excavate the triadic or tripodic, it is helpful to turn to the classical (and now integral) Confucian commentary, the 'Ten Wings' (*Shi Yi*), which explore the structure of the trigrams and hexagrams in various ways. These include an explicit formula for folding the six lines of the hexagram back into a triad, by coupling the lines: first and fourth; second and fifth; third and sixth. These dyads have a

consistent arithmetical order, when calculated in accordance with the reduced bino-decimal values generated above: 1 + 8 = 9; 2 + 7 = 9; 4 + 5 = 9. “What these six lines show is simply this, the way of the three Powers.”

Summation to nine regularly serves as a confirmation within the *Shi Yi*. For instance, in the section translated by Legge as ‘The Great Appendix’:

> *52. The numbers (required) for Khien (or the undivided line) amount to 216; those for Khwan (or the divided line), to 144. Together they are 360, corresponding to the days of the year.*
> *53. The number produced by the lines in the two parts (of the Yî) amount to 11,520, corresponding to the number of all things.*
> *54. Therefore by means of the four operations is the Yî completed. It takes 18 changes to form a hexagram.*

144 = 1 + 4 + 4 = 9

216 = 2 + 1 + 6 = 9

360 = 3 + 6 + 0 = 9

11,520 = 1 + 1 + 5 + 2 + 0 = 9

18 = 1 + 8 = 9

There is much more to say on the importance of the number nine in traditional Chinese culture, and beyond, but this is not the time.

For now, it suffices to note that nine, or 'Old Yang', represents the extreme point of maturity or positive accumulation in the *Yi Jing*, and thus incipient transition. It thus echoes the function of the same numeral within a zero-based decimal place-value system, strongly reinforcing the impression that the *Yi Jing* assumes cultural familiarity with such numeracy, and thus indicating its extreme antiquity within China.

The six-phase cycle collapses into a triadic dynamic, whose stages are the dyads 1&8, 2&7, 4&5. It is thus exactly isomorphic with the paper, scissors, stone circuit, or rather, this latter can be seen as a simplification of the *Yi Jing* dynamic tripod, treating each stage as simple, rather than twinned. Where the *bagua*, or set of trigrams, merely enumerates the set of 3-bit variants in static fashion, the system of hexagrams rigorously constructs a triangular dynamic, which is presented as a model of time.

If this is the 'Chinese example' at its most quintessential, then it is exactly the Anglosphere example, as determined by Mead, except carried to a far more exalted level of abstraction, or proto-conceptual purity. Dynamic pluralism is under no threat from a Chinese future, insofar as deep-cultural evidence counts for anything. The reign of the tripod has scarcely begun.

September 23, 2011

Numbo Zhongo

What's the Chinese obsession with numbers all about?

August 22, 2013

Tianming

The Mandate of Heaven (天命) belongs indisputably amongst the most ancient and conceptually richest political ideas. Dating back to the transition from the Shang to Zhou dynasties, over three millennia ago, it refounds the legitimacy of government in a *conditional natural right* (in contrast to the unconditional natural right asserted by the supplanted rulers of the Shang, and by divine right theorists in the occidental world). *Tianming* invests regimes whose *performance* expresses virtuous capability. Legitimacy is not, therefore, a formal endowment, but a substantial discovery, demonstrated through the art of government.

The claim that *Tianming* amounts to a realistic theory of political legitimacy requires far more support than this tentative short post will offer. In particular, it has to be defended against the objection that *Tianming* reverts to a tautology, either empirically or logically (or both). The Mandate of Heaven might be formulated: *For so long as a regime succeeds it will endure*. Is this not, from the perspective

of empirical history, an empty retrospective judgment, or sheer redundancy, and under logical consideration, a thinly disguised pleonasm?

Tianming could be dismissed on these grounds if its negation were inconceivable. Then, indeed, it would communicate no information. Yet this is not at all the case.

Perhaps the most relevant evidence for this is the provocative thesis found in Alexis de Tocqueville's *L'ancien régime et la Révolution* that the successful promotion of social development is more threatening to regime stability than the complete absence of such achievement. This is an argument widely discussed in China today, for obvious reasons. If it holds true, the idea of *Tianming* — in anything other than its shallowest and most sophistical sense — is directly contradicted, in theory and fact. Reciprocally, it has to be acknowledged that the idea of *Tianming* poses an implicit challenge to the Tocqueville thesis, subject to confirmation or disconfirmation by historical events. The stakes of this (yet inarticulate?) controversy could scarcely be higher.

An intriguing reflexivity enters into the topic at this point, because the conditions for the confirmation of *Tianming* are related, through intricate nonlinearities, to the prospects of the PRC regime. Is development success rewarded or punished by 'heaven' (the nature of things)? If the latter, dialectical ruin ensues, as the high are brought low. If the former, economic ascent and political stability

will have demonstrated their compatibility, revolutionary chaos will be precluded, and the rebalancing of the world order towards the western Pacific will continue. Under such conditions, there is every reason to expect that global trends will be incrementally 'Confucianized' with international political thinking increasingly inflected by Chinese characteristics. Simultaneously vindicated and promoted, the idea of *Tianming* will then find a wider receptive audience than it has ever known before.

August 22, 2013

Scary Chinese

Jeffrey Wasserstrom conducts a tour of Western dreams and nightmares of China. Whilst the span of the oscillation is remarkable, he finds the bipolar syndrome itself to be notably stable across time. The upswing — Wasserstrom suggests — is associated with hopes that 'they' are becoming more like 'us', but on the downswing:

… when the Western China Nightmare is dominant, the risk is that observers and the general public lose sight of how varied the Chinese populace is and instead grow accustomed to demonised images of China … filled not with flesh-and-blood Chinese individuals but a horde of soulless mannequins. […] Stories that dehumanise China's population tout court are also periodically published, though only

rarely do they do so as overtly as a 1999 Weekly Standard article which described the Chinese people as prone to 'Borg-like' group-think conformity.

When calmly dissected and investigated, durable stereotypes usually have something significant to say, about both their subjects and their objects. Western sinophobia is an especially rich hunting ground for cultural explorers, and the importance of understanding it is only going to grow. *Urban Future* will be bringing sustained attention to this same topic in the months ahead.

September 30, 2013

Sino-Robotics

Somewhere deep in the task-queue here (at UF) is a post, or article, exploring the resonances between phobic Occidental responses to Orientals and robots (as promised, unreliably, in this post). Some grist for the mill:

Last week, the giant Chinese internet and gaming company Tencent published an article on its news portal about the rising price of consumer goods in China – not exactly earth-shattering news, except that the article was written by a robot called Dreamwriter. […] Dreamwriter wrote the 1000-word article, using algorithms that search online sources and data, in just 60 seconds. The article quoted

economists and highlighted trends in a style indistinguishable from a human financial reporter. […] According to the South China Morning Post, Dreamwriter's article was the first robot-written news article in the Chinese language.
The Morning Post quoted a Chinese journalist who said China's state-run media doesn't give reporters much creative license, which makes them easily replaceable by robot writers: "You know, many reporters working for government-run newspapers across the country usually copy and paste the statements and news press. They are not allowed to express doubt or really investigate reports against the authorities. So robot reporters could easily replace a lot of Chinese reporters like this nationwide."

September 18, 2015

Oppressionless

Zachary Keck is bemused by the findings of a recent Global Scan poll that finds broad Chinese satisfaction with the country's media and surveillance environment. Among the findings, 76% of Chinese feel "free of surveillance" compared with only 54% of Americans. To the extent that oppression can be subjectively evaluated, Chinese 'totalitarian communism' isn't doing it very well.

There might be some way to mine into this information rigorously,

but that's beyond the scope of the discussion so far. Keck muses about the possibility that the Edward Snowden leaks have soured Western opinion, while "it's hard to know how much of the views can be attributed to different expectations Chinese have about freedom when compared to their counterparts in democratic countries, and how much of their answers are attributable to general ignorance about the Chinese government's surveillance and censorship. I suspect both factors probably play a role but that the former is likely more important."

An alternative explanation is that Western cultures have developed in a way that sanctifies dissent, and finds the exemplification of freedom in the act or expression of defiance. The alternative, Chinese assumption, that freedom is mostly about being left alone, is classically captured by the proverb "The mountains are high, and the Emperor is far away" (山高皇帝远). Unsurprisingly, this saying is thought to have originated in entrepreneurial Zhejiang Province (perhaps the most civilized place in the world).

Why would anybody but an idiot go looking for the emperor simply to poke a finger in his eye? Don't do anything like that, and there's not much chance of encountering oppression. Some flaky Internet connectivity doesn't feel like a "a boot stamping on a human face — forever." It feels like a minor inconvenience. At least, that's what the poll evidence suggests.

April 4, 2014

Twitter cuts (#10)

Arthur Chu on an old saw:

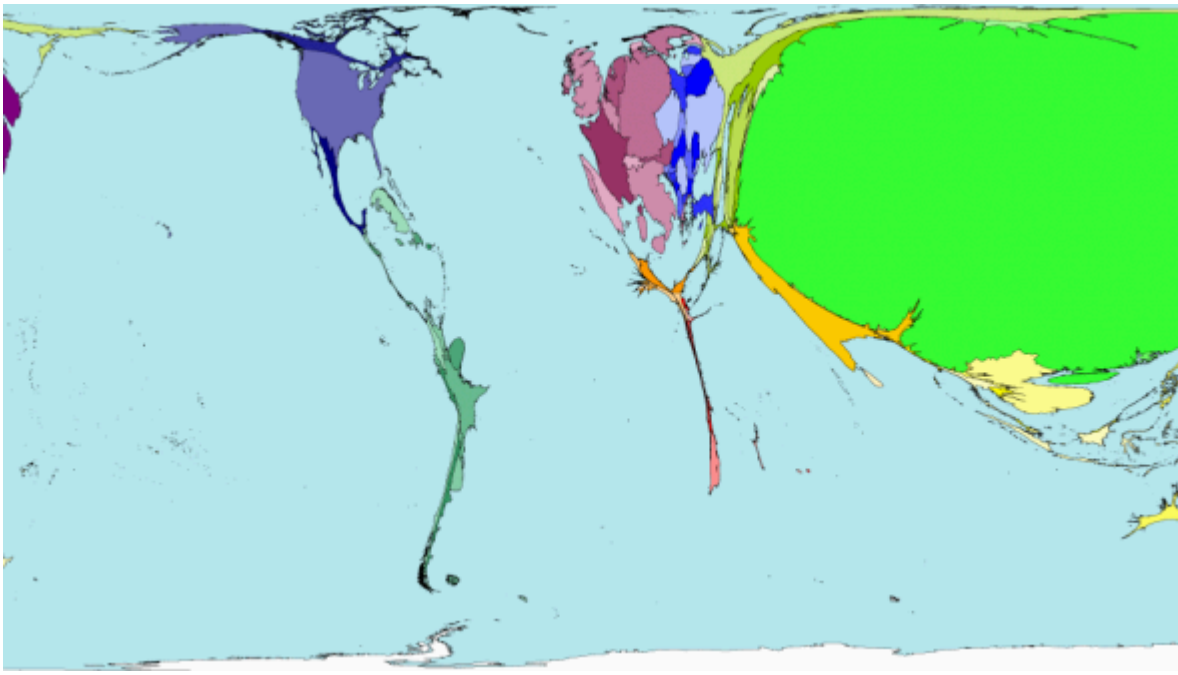
> There's a lot of news happening, never a good thing. It's not actually a Chinese curse but the sentiment is accurate #InterestingTimes
>
> — Arthur Chu (@arthur_affect) August 12, 2014

(Wikipedia agrees with Chu.) Given the authenticity of the wisdom, the inauthenticity of the attribution is especially interesting. Is this a sign of Orientalism as a creative cultural influence?

August 12, 2014

'Not Religious'

This map has been doing the rounds:



(*UF* source here (via this))

Explanation at the original site:

Not religious, in this sense, is everyone who is left over when you have counted adherents. The World Christian Database, on which the data is based, use the term 'nonreligionists' and defines it as ' … encompassing the 2 varieties of unbeliever: (a) agnostics or secularists or materialists, who are nonreligious but not hostile to religion, and (b) atheists or anti-religious/anti-religionists opposed or hostile to religion.'

Territory size shows the proportion of people who are not religious living there. [Absolute numbers seem not to be a factor.]

Even after this gloss, 'not religious' is a dubious category, which

tends to be defined in terms of Western (Abrahamic-Theistic) norms. (Is Chinese medicine, for example, in any serious way 'non-religious'?) Nevertheless, the distribution is striking. Any conception of China's rise (and it's probable world cultural impact) is going to be missing something important if it neglects what is really jutting through here.

October 7, 2014

Heavenly Signs

The American Interest discusses the Chinese crackdown on Church of the Almighty God (also known as Eastern Lightning) after a recruiting operation turned murderous. The general background is most probably familiar, but it's important enough to run through again:

The strong Chinese reaction against splinter groups — in this case, five death sentences—sometimes surprises Western observers, but we only need to look to China's history to see why such groups give Beijing officials the willies. In the 19th-century, the catastrophic Taiping Rebellion involved a group not wholly unlike the Church of the Almighty God. In that rebellion a millenarian sect lead by Hong Xiuquan claiming to be the younger brother of Jesus, rose up against the Qing dynasty. At least twenty million people died in the ensuing

conflict.
Eastern Lightning, like its Taiping predecessor, grounds itself in Christian texts and ideas. The "god" now born as a woman to bring the apocalypse is seen by the sect as the third in a series: Yahweh, who gave the Old Testament; Jesus who came to save humanity and now the third has come to judge the human race and bring the end of the world. The rapid growth of this movement shows the degree to which many Chinese feel alienated from the official ideology, the appeal of Christian messages in China, and the sense of popular unease as China changes rapidly. There is nothing here to make Beijing feel good.
There's another reason that the rise of an apocalyptic cult would be of such concern. China's long history of rising and falling dynasties has given rise to a school of historical analysis that looks for patterns in Chinese history. This approach, shared by many ordinary people and many distinguished Chinese intellectuals down through the ages, seeks to identify recurring features of the decline and fall phase of a dynasty's cycle. The rise of apocalyptic religious cults is one of the classic signs of dynastic decadence, as is the rise of a pervasive culture of corruption among officials and the spread of local unrest.

Since the 18th century, the divorce of theological innovation from social revolution in Occidental public consciousness has pushed the religious question — originally identical with *tolerance* — into ever deeper eclipse. Until very recently, within the West, any attribution

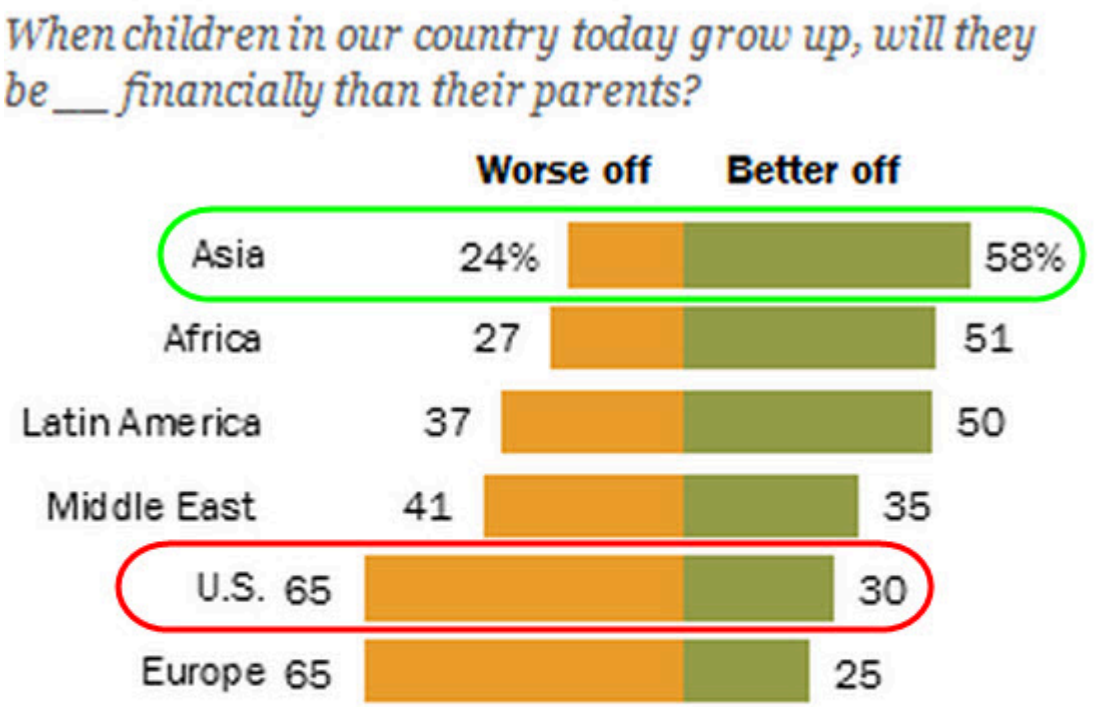
of genuine political consequence to such matters had seemed no more than eccentric anachronism, although this situation is quite rapidly changing. Elsewhere in the world, religious issues retained far greater socio-political pertinence, largely because the common millenarian root of enthusiasm and rebellion had not been effaced.

It is possible that the Chinese approach to dissident religion remains 'strange' to many in the West. There can surely be little doubt, however, that whatever convergence takes place will tend to a traditional Chinese understanding far more than a contemporary Western one. The gravity of the stakes ensures it.

October 14, 2014

Gloom-Core

It isn't necessary to assume more than a sliver of positive feedback for confidence to make a significant difference. Once the future looks dim enough, it's irresistibly rational to cannibalize what's left of it, and then the term 'death spiral' begins to acquire real force. Of course, there are a great many other dynamic tangles at work, and popular sentiment is likely far more of an indicator than a driver. Still:



Ideas arising in a social environment quagmired in radical pessimism (or the opposite) probably require some careful discounting to correct for skew.

(Via *Zero Hedge*)

October 28, 2014

白左

"Baizuo" — the greatest thing in 2017 so far.

Makes me think the world might pull through okay.

It's all (amazingly) good, but this is probably the kernel:

The question has received more than 400 answers from Zhihu users, which include some of the most representative perceptions of the 'white left'. Although the emphasis varies, **baizuo** *is used generally to describe those who "only care about topics such as immigration, minorities, LGBT and the environment" and "have no sense of real problems in the real world"; they are hypocritical humanitarians who advocate for peace and equality only to "satisfy their own feeling of moral superiority"; they are "obsessed with political correctness" to the extent that they "tolerate backwards Islamic values for the sake of multiculturalism"; they believe in the welfare state that "benefits only the idle and the free riders"; they are the "ignorant and arrogant westerners" who "pity the rest of the world and think they are saviours".*

ADDED: *Baizuo* at Weimerica, and Spandrell's place.

May 14, 2017

CHAPTER THREE - ECONOMY AND POLICY

Chimerica

A new world order hits the buffers

"For nearly 30 years we have had two Global Strategies working in a symbiotic fashion that has created a virtuous economic growth spiral. Unfortunately, the economic underpinnings were flawed and as a consequence, the virtuous cycle has ended. It is now in the process of reversing and becoming a vicious downward economic spiral," writes Gordon T. Long, in a guest post at Zero Hedge. "One of the strategies is the Asian Mercantile Strategy. The other is the US Dollar Reserve Currency Strategy."

The system that Long sees unraveling has been dubbed 'Chimerica' by Niall Ferguson and Moritz Schularick, in reference to the mythical hybrid beast of antiquity. Chimerica emerged through the dynamic coupling of the US and Chinese economies, dominating the wave of globalization in the post-command economy world. It

has served as a powerful engine of development, spreading prosperity beyond the narrow enclave of the (Euro-American) 'First World' and facilitating the global roll-out of digital network technologies, from personal computing and mobile telephony to the Internet. In recent years, however, its unsustainable features have become prominently visible.

Stripped to its fundamentals, Chimerica amounted to something akin to an informal geopolitical 'deal' that simultaneously promoted the international status of the US Dollar and domestic Chinese industrialization. The principal financial mechanism was the recycling of Chinese trade surpluses into US Treasury Bonds, in a process that accentuated Chinese competitiveness (by restraining the rise of the Yuan) and suppressed US inflation (preserving the credibility of the USD). This enabled Chinese industrial expansion to proceed at a far greater speed than its domestic market could have supported, whilst providing US governments with the latitude to run a chronically loose monetary policy immunized against the prospect of currency collapse. The Chinese manufacturing and US banking sectors were the most obvious beneficiaries. Both prospered conspicuously.

As Niall Ferguson wrote in November 2008, in the early days of the world financial crisis:

"At the heart of this crisis is the huge imbalance between the

> United States, with its current account deficit in excess of 1 percent of world gross domestic product, and the surplus countries that finance it: the oil exporters, Japan and emerging Asia. Of these, the relationship between China and America has become the crucial one. More than anything else, it has been China's strategy of dollar reserve accumulation that has financed America's debt habit. Chinese savings were a key reason U.S. long-term interest rates stayed low and the borrowing binge kept going. Now that the age of leverage is over, 'Chimerica' — the partnership between the big saver and the big spender — is key."

Having reached a state of crisis, Chimerica seems certain to unwind. This might occur either through a measured rebalancing that increases Chinese domestic consumption whilst reducing US deficit spending, or as a messy disintegration — involving sudden demand contraction, currency wars, and escalating mutual recrimination. Whatever the eventual outcome, a refashioned world order is an inevitable – which is to say, definitional – result.

Whilst Ferguson hedges his bets, Gordon Long spells out a specific and ominous forecast, in which the virtuous cycle of Chimerican globalization reverses into a vicious 'death spiral'. As 'debt saturation' closes down the option of policy continuity, the actions of the US Federal Reserve become manifestly ineffective,

self-contradictory, and ultimately paralyzed. The long-postponed process of currency destruction then begins in earnest. Long offers a useful checklist of milestones on the road to ruin (proceeding from financial, through economic, to political calamity):

1. A deteriorating US dollar

2. Rising US interest rates

3. Sustained and chronic US unemployment

4. Asian inflation, especially in food where 60% of Asian disposable income is spent

5. Pressures on Asian currency pegs

6. Collapsing values of US Reserve holdings

By the end of this process, the world will have been violently catapulted out of a financial architecture dating back 70 years, and a dominant monetary philosophy that has prevailed over the course of centuries.

"The eventuality of a fiat currency crisis is ordained and has been since the early warnings in 2007 of the Financial Crisis," Long insists. "The roadmap has been clear to all that actually wanted to look."

June 1, 2011

Handling China

Handle's epic walk-through of Edward Luttwak on the rise of China

is simply magnificent. If the Chinese foreign policy establishment doesn't put it on a study list, the world is a more dangerous place than it needs to be. It says impressive things about Luttwak that his work is able to prompt commentary of such astounding quality. (Yes, it's long, but you have to read it.)

As a Sinophile, and even (far more reservedly) a sympathizer with the post-Mao PRC regime, it's disturbing to me how convincing I find this analysis. China really could blow itself up, along with a big chunk of the world's sole truly dynamic region, by mis-playing its excellent foreign policy hand (in pretty much exactly the way Handle lays out). In particular, its ability to avoid the disastrous course of Germany's rise is the most pressing question of the age, and the signs so far are not remotely encouraging. Having dug itself quite unnecessarily into a trap of increasingly embittered anti-China balancing, 2013 looks very clearly to have been the worst year since the beginning of Reform and Opening for Chinese geo-strategic decision making.

Reversing course is hard. The important thing for the Chinese leadership to understand is that challenges to global hegemony are almost inevitably catastrophic. There has not been a single case in modern history where such a transition has succeeded, except through close strategic alignment with the preceding hegemon. Holland passed the torch to the UK, which passed it on in turn to the USA. If China envisages an alternative path for itself — rooted in basic antagonism — it is shelving the lessons of modernity, and

turning to something else, where ancient cycles lose themselves in the fog-banks of myth. Such deep historical precedent is far too poorly understood to offer anything like helpful advice. The atavistic popular feeling it rouses, however, is certainly strong enough to drive developments over a cliff.

US global hegemony has lost the Mandate of Heaven. The only way it could trawl it back is through the unforced errors of its enemies — which is to say, those who have blundered into being positioned as its enemies. On present trends, these foul-ups are all-too-likely to be made. That would mean world war, naturally tending to thermonuclear ruin, and the end of civilization. China would be finished as anything beyond a broken warning about what non-submission to the democratic *zeitgeist* leads to (having done to political sanity what Germany did to bio-realism). Through this climax of idiocy, the human species would have melodramatically disqualified itself from any significant historical agency going forward. Military robotics (aka 'Skynet', emerging from the war) would be the only intelligent prospect left.

December 20, 2013

Emergent Properties

Economics is complicated, but at least in certain respects it's not

that complicated. Chart almost any market-sensitive variable and what emerges is a wave pattern, varying in amplitude, frequency, and trend, but clearly conforming to a general pattern, mixing an irregular rhythm with a random walk.

The irregularity and randomness are predicated by elementary economic theory, since determinism and regularity are strictly equivalent to bank notes lying on the street, no sooner glimpsed than seized. Zero-risk speculative opportunities – of the kind any intelligible pattern presents – are quickly arbitraged back to noise, the equilibrium state, in which all significant information is absorbed into price.

The residual rhythm is more unexpected, and attests to an irrational factor, stimulating intellectual and practical controversy. Regardless of such disputes, it is possible to be confident about two indefinite points. Firstly, market rhythms are (almost) never easy to accurately predict, and thus exploit. Secondly, off-trend deviations will eventually be corrected, unless – very rarely – the trend itself changes shape. The qualification of the second point deserves special examination, because unrealistic expectations concerning trend-line transformations lie at the root of the most notorious error in practical economic reasoning – the belief (typically hardening in direct proportion to the inflation of a bubble) that "this time is different." This slogan, which encapsulates the stubborn and disastrously expensive syndrome of *downwards correction denial*,

should be written on the shirts of those who will soon be losing them.

Any market wave of sufficient amplitude crests in a bubble, which 'pops' in a crash. Unless *this time is different* – and it won't be – China will inevitably experience such an event. Speculative commentary on the nature and timing of this event has increased markedly in volume as the global economic environment has deteriorated. Yet prediction is especially difficult in this case. China's market economy is just a little over three decades old, with only occasional rough patches interrupting near-continuous, rapid growth. Disentangling the unsustainable component or rhythmic upswing from the underlying development path involves unusually hazy estimation, given the incompleteness of the pattern perceived.

In an article published in Caixin and Marketwatch (via), Andy Xie makes a substantial contribution to this discussion. He identifies China's financial vulnerability with a massive asset bubble in the property market, but remains sanguine about its ultimate consequences. He argues persuasively that a very substantial write-down of real estate values, although inevitably disruptive, would have a tonic effect on the Chinese economy almost immediately, with fast recovery to follow.

Because China's market economy does not yet have an identifiable long-term trend, Xie estimates the scale of the country's property bubble by comparing the appreciation of real estate prices to wage growth:

China has experienced rapid increase in land prices in the past decade. Some of it can be justified by income and productivity growth due to the country joining the World Trade Organization. Most of the increase is a bubble phenomenon.

While household income may have tripled in a decade, the average land price has risen by over thirty times. Whatever income growth is to come cannot justify the current price of land. Nor can a supply shortage.

China has no shortage of land. High-rise urbanization makes demand for land quite low relative to the population. The sustainable land value is probably 70% to 80% below current levels.

The role of the property market in contemporary Chinese social life is a topic of widespread interest, both inside and outside the country. Because marriage prospects (for men) are tightly bound to their ability to provide a home, some very deeply-rooted Darwinian forces are harnessed to the appreciation of property values, making them an overwhelmingly dominant factor in economic life. For this reason, among others, a real estate crash that brought prices down to somewhere between a third and a fifth of their current level promises to be traumatizing and liberating in equal measure.

Xie recommends that China push through the pain, as quickly as realistically possible:

Some argue that the property bubble is essential to China's economic prosperity. This is utter nonsense. While the property

industry has become bigger relative to the economy over the past decade, it mostly consumes resources and doesn't enhance overall productivity.

It is the main driver for China's inflation. If it shrinks, the economy may suffer temporarily. However, overall productivity will rise. The resulting income growth will bring back more sustainable economic prosperity.

Also, a bubble bursts sooner or later. Government help merely prolongs it, as the Chinese government did in 2008. And the longer a bubble lasts, the more damage it inflicts upon bursting. The economy is suffering because of what happened in 2008.

The country has sufficient capacity to absorb whatever non-performing loans may come out of this bubble bursting. It could be 20 trillion to 30 trillion yuan ($3.26 trillion-$4.89 trillion). But the waste in the bubble economy could have been 5 trillion yuan.

China could overcome the legacy of the bubble in four to five years. Further, better productivity from post-bubble reforms could add another 2 trillion to 3 trillion yuan per annum. The post-bubble recovery could happen in three years.

Japan couldn't get its economy growing after its property bubble burst. The main reason is that its per capita income was already among the highest in the world.

China is still a middle-income economy. Improving productivity is not that difficult. Reaching per capita income of $20,000 by 2030,

excluding inflation, is quite possible, which would make China the largest economy in the world.

August 2, 2013

383

At *Project Syndicate*, Andrew Sheng and Xiao Geng provide a brief commentary on China's economic policy outlook:

At the Third Plenum of the 18th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, currently under way in Beijing, President Xi Jinping is unveiling China's reform blueprint for the next decade. In advance of its release, the Development Research Center of the State Council, China's official think tank, presented its own reform proposal – the so-called "383 plan" – which offers a glimpse of the direction that the reforms will take.

Despite a keen sense of the obstacles ahead, the writers are clearly impressed:

But the kind of deep and comprehensive reforms that China needs are always difficult to implement, given that they necessarily affect vested interests. In order to win public support for reforms, thereby maximizing the chances of success, the government must offer clear, accessible explanations of its goals. … The Research Center takes a holistic approach to the reform process, viewing it

as both a systemic change and a change of mindset. Translating its proposals – which are as profound as Deng Xiaoping's 1978 reforms – into simple, straightforward terms is no easy feat, but one that the 383 plan handles with relative deftness.

It's almost impossible not to read the comparison to the 1978 reforms as hyperbole, especially when it is quickly conceded that "rapid, sweeping transformation is not realistic in a country of 1.3 billion people." Nevertheless, the proposed direction of change is clearly encouraging, most obviously because it seeks so unambiguously to deepen the market-oriented policy approach of the Reform Era, by expanding the sphere of decentralized price-sensitive decision making (while contracting the scope of political discretion).

"The '383'" — they explain:

… is shorthand for the plan's content. First, the proposal describes the relationships between the Chinese economy's three main actors: government, business, and the market. Second, it identifies eight key areas of reform: governance, competition policy, land, finance, public finance, state assets, innovation, and liberalization of international trade and finance. Third, it highlights three correlated goals: easing external pressure for domestic policy changes, building social inclusiveness through a basic social-security scheme, and reducing inefficiency, inequality, and corruption through major rural land reform.

Shanghai's new Free-Trade Zone also gets a quick but glowing mention.

Given the near-inevitability of serious disruption in the world economy over the next few years, as well as some overdue bubble-popping in China (mostly in real estate), even a cautious crawl in the right direction looks attractive. Among the reasons not to rush anywhere is the degenerate state of monetary theory worldwide, which has lead to the adoption of disastrously misconceived policies in almost every major economy. Hedging makes a lot of sense right now.

Once the macroeconomic house of cards collapses, there will be space for sounder ideas to re-emerge. Judging by China's accumulation of (both public and private) precious metal holdings, along with its flexible approach to new (and 'hard') digital currency, the intellectual germs of a near-future post-fiat monetary regime could already be in place. That would really be something solid to build upon.

ADDED: "China will deepen its economic reform to ensure that the market will play a 'decisive' role in allocating resources, according to a communique issued after the third plenary session of the 18th CPC Central Committee …" (*Xinhua*)

November 12, 2013

Market-Leninism

Confused Westerners, wondering how the Xi-Li leadership's quasi-Maoist political initiatives square with its commitment to economic reform, will find their quandaries resolved by Zachary Keck's excellent analysis in *The Diplomat*. Regardless of liberal assumptions to the contrary, enforcing Central Party discipline on China's regional fiefdoms is tightly aligned with the reform agenda. (Realism in this regard is advanced by the acknowledgement that authoritarian liberalization is the only kind there has ever been, anywhere.)

Xi and the central Party's authority over local leaders will go a long way toward determining the scope and extent of the economic reforms China undertakes in the years ahead. Xi and Li have both made it clear that they understand the nature of reforms China needs to sustain growth. Their ability to act on this understanding is a different matter entirely. Although they will face stiff resistance from many segments of society, local leaders are notable in that they are involved in nearly every major area of reform. […] Thus, overcoming local government resistance will be a crucial part of Xi's ability to undertake the necessary economic reforms. Xi and the central leadership seem to understand this given their year-long effort to consolidate their control over provincial and other local leaders.

(The entire article is excellent — read it all.)

November 13, 2013

Quote notes (#91)

Panda-hugger Martin Jacques on the global tide:

A month ago, China overtook the US to become the largest economy in the world by one measure. By 2030 it is projected that the Chinese economy will be twice as large as America's and larger than the European Union and America combined, accounting for one third of global GDP. This is the world that is coming into being, that we must learn to adapt to and thrive in. It is a far cry from the comfort zone we are used to, a globe dominated by the West and Japan: in the Seventies, between them they were responsible for two thirds of global GDP; by 2030 it will be a mere one third

During the preponderant part of the modern period, China's civilizational competences were oriented to keeping the Pandora's box of runaway modernization firmly sealed. Western intervention put an end to that, and the escape is now almost certainly irreversible. That is why, in broad outline, Jacques' prognosis is correct. An accommodation to fate is in order.

('Doom' — as tagged — means no more than fate, as we have begun to explain, or at least to explore.)

June 23, 2014

Phase Change

China is reaching the end of its current (post-1979) growth process, argues Michael Pettis, and the direction it takes next will be decided in large part by its approach to the country's debt over-hang. Dismissing glib talk about a magical 'socialization' of the debt-burden, Pettis insists that the problem of assigning losses is irreducible, and the only serious question is where these costs will be concentrated. Irrespective of the specific policy mechanisms selected, there is essentially a three-way-option: someone has to pay, and it will either be the country's households, its small-and-medium enterprises (SMEs), or its large state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

Of course if the losses are assigned to the household sector, China cannot rebalance and it will be more than ever dependent on investment to drive growth. This is why I reject absolutely the argument that because China resolved the last banking crisis "painlessly", it can do so again.

[…] Beijing can also assign the losses to SMEs. In effect this is what it started to do in 2010-11 when wages rose sharply (SMEs tend to be labor intensive). It is widely recognized that SMEs are

the most efficient part of the Chinese economy, however, and that assigning the losses to them will undermine the engine of China's future productivity growth.

[…] Finally Beijing can assign the losses to the state sector, by reforming the houkou [sic] system, land reform, interest rate and currency reform, financial sector governance reform, privatization, etc. Most of the Third Plenum reforms are simply ways of assigning the cost of rebalancing, which includes the recognition of earlier losses, to the state sector. This is likely however to be politically difficult. China's elite generally benefits tremendously from control of state sector assets, and they are likely to resist strongly any attempt to assign to them the losses.

According to Pettis' (non-predictive) analysis, re-igniting Chinese growth in a new phase will be inseparable from an intra-establishment struggle over the responsibility of the SOEs to cover the legacy costs of the country's economic reformation to date. *Status quo* resistance to this compelling developmental logic is sure to provide critical context for the actions of China's new Xi-Li administration, as it consolidated power among unusually challenging circumstances.

July 15, 2014

Twitter cuts (#16)

If street protest in Hong Kong continues on its present course, a lot of people are going to get hurt, for nothing.

> If Beijing doesn't give in, looks bad in front of world. If does, whole China knows protesting works, ricks rule. How`d you choose to act?
>
> — Offbeat China (@OffbeatChina) September 29, 2014

> Fear people on the Hong Kong streets don't understand what they are dealing with
>
> — Bill Bishop (@niubi) September 28, 2014

Asking excited students to take a step back, and think, doesn't have a great track record of success. The alternative, however, is catastrophic. The window of opportunity for sanity to prevail is closing fast.

ADDED: No doubt politically incorrect, but admirably pithy:

> Dear Hong Kong, Democracy sucks. Go back to work.
>
> — Henry Dampier (@henrydampier) September 29, 2014

September 29, 2014

China and the Net

At *ChinaFile*, following the World Internet Conference, in Wuzhen, a fascinating discussion — by English-speaking foreigners — on what is arguably *the* crucial issue of the 21st century: *How will China 'manage' its relationship with the Internet?* It is hard to imagine a problem which throws economic and political agendas into more turbulent conflict with each other, or one that more clearly reveals the ultimate nonlinear dependencies between the two. The entire ideological history of the world seems to be lensed through it, just as the future of the world 'will be'* decided by how it works out.

Some useful background, conveying the sheer scale and dynamism of the Chinese Internet, can be found here. As the *ChinaFile* commentators make clear, this is a topic howling with paradox-torsion — and thus one peculiarly liable to unleash creative surprises.

* Scare quotes included to fend off *Templexity* pedants (this blog's cute alternative to grammar Nazis).

December 4, 2014

Digital Sovereignty

Even skeptics (such as this blog) can note the importance of the

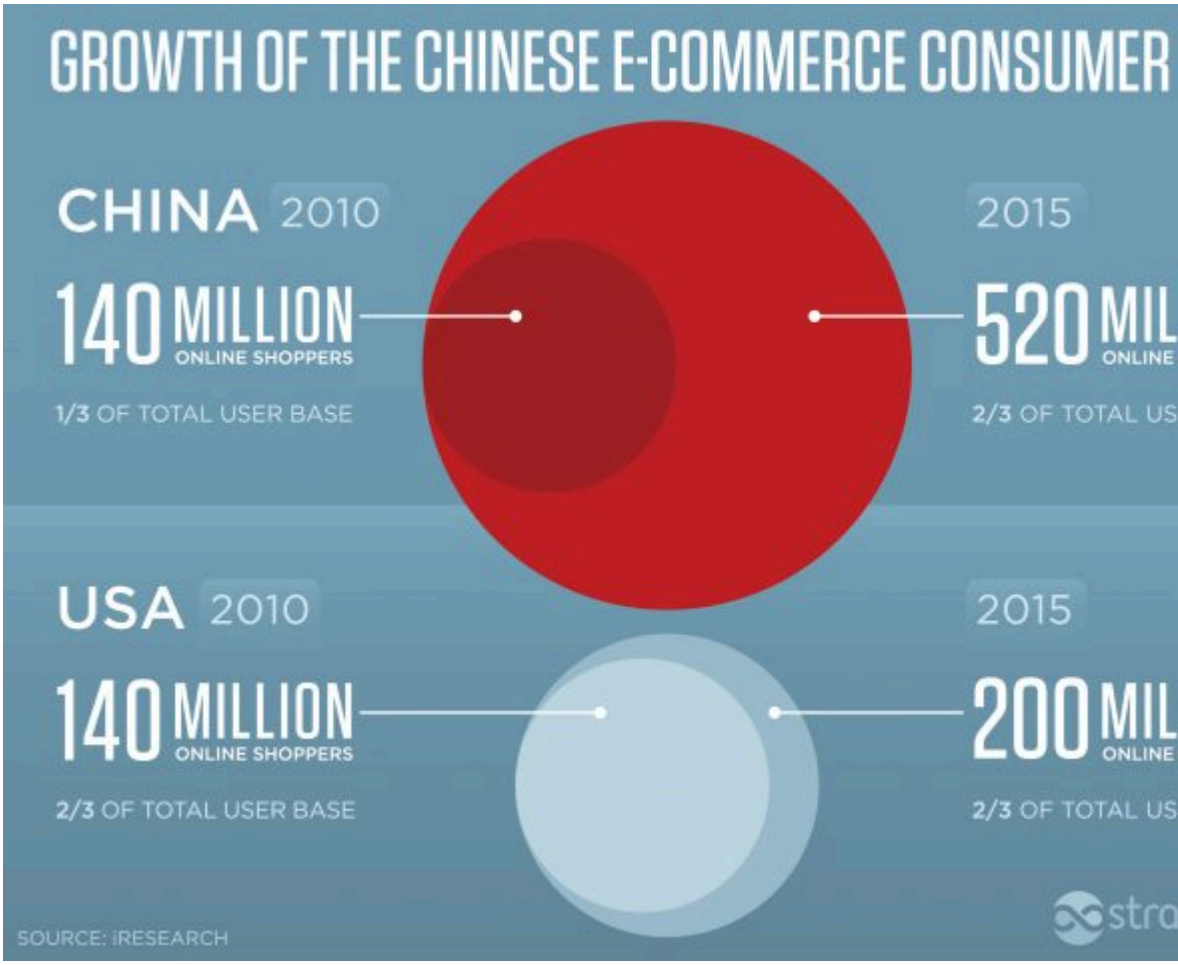
discussion initiated here:

Soviet Union had cinema, the PRC has the Internet.

*I personally think that the international audience still largely underestimate the importance of what China has achieved policy-wise for the global landscape of Internet. Concepts like "**digital sovereignty**" that were proposed by China are now emerging from post-Snowden discussions in proposals at the highest levels in EU countries. Russia has already embraced it. Of course, the US industry still need the myth of a "global village" to push products worldwide. Still, I am curious to see how it evolves as the ad market will continue to shrink, and as foreign relationships with the US are likely to get less friendly in the next years. While EU and other countries (esp in Africa and South America) start realizing that the US-first model of the Internet is too much a disadvantage for them, the only other real-world case they can turn to is China. In many regards, China looks like the future of the Internet. …*

It's tempting for Westerners (and especially Anglos) to see Chinese government Internet policy as simply *backward*. That's almost certainly an inadequate framework for making sense of the most explosive Web-growth in the world.

Among other developments, there's this:



June 30, 2016

Drone Business

Whatever the administrative obstacles on the path of the Chinese

Internet, the basic infrastructure of the coming robot-facilitated e-commerce system seems to be coming together remarkably smoothly. For instance, this.

(This might be UF's favorite advertisement of all time.)

More here, and here.

Telecommercial drone-logistics (and the idiots wanted flying cars).

February 5, 2015

Quote note (#327)

Urbit perspective on the Chinese century:

The closest thing to a general-purpose personal server today is probably the Chinese service WeChat. If you don't know much about WeChat, you should really watch this NYT video.

Catch-up would be sensible. (Abandoning the bizarre Western prejudice that the Internet is primarily for political expression would be a start.)

Pointed criticism follows. If Urbit delivers, we could actually see some geographically-distributed competition, which is otherwise looking increasingly unlikely. 2017 should tell, apparently.

February 3, 2017

Switch

Long-anticipated, and now officially recognized:

The Chinese economy just overtook the United States economy to become the largest in the world. For the first time since Ulysses S. Grant was president, America is not the leading economic power on the planet.

It just happened — and almost nobody noticed.

The International Monetary Fund recently released the latest numbers for the world economy. And when you measure national economic output in "real" terms of goods and services, China will this year produce $17.6 trillion — compared with $17.4 trillion for the U.S.A. […] As recently as 2000, [the US] produced nearly three times as much as the Chinese.

To put the numbers slightly differently, China now accounts for 16.5% of the global economy when measured in real purchasing-power terms, compared with 16.3% for the U.S. […] This latest economic earthquake follows the development last year when China surpassed the U.S. for the first time in terms of global trade. […]

… the moment came sooner than … predicted. China's recent decision to bring gross domestic product calculations in line with international standards has revealed activity that had previously gone uncounted.

I'm expecting more discomfort than triumphalism from a China

that is being pushed into the lime-light faster than it is ready for. The political advantages of catch-up might not match the economic ones, but they are by no means inconsiderable.

Some gentle snark from Glenn Reynolds: “Well, in recent years both China and the United States have been fundamentally transformed.”

December 5, 2014

Death Valley

Strictly gossip-level, but the bold predictions gets it a mention. It’s *Breitbart*, so understatement isn’t going to feature:

San Francisco, heartland of wacky progressive politics but also home to some of America’s most innovative technology companies, is in trouble. Not just trouble, actually, but serious shit. […] And the main reason is China. The Wall Street Journal has a good explainer on what’s going on over there, but the basic thing you need to understand is that a lot of glossy American stocks are about to take a tumble, especially tech stocks.

The core of the analyis:

Fear and greed run the stock market, which is, of course, exactly as it should be: they’re the instincts upon which capitalism is built. But that’s a problem for companies who suffer dramatically when

global events conspire to shunt investors into safer bets. […] Businesses like Twitter and Facebook have always been grotesquely overvalued, according to conventional analyses. Technology companies get away with hilarious valuations mainly thanks to upward pressure; the inflation happens right at the start when companies raise hundreds of millions of dollars on multimillion dollar valuations, despite not earning a penny in revenue and having no immediate plans to do so. […] That's in outrageous contradiction to their price-to-earnings ratio, one traditional and very reliable way of valuing companies. […] Tech stocks have absurdly high price-to-earnings ratios, and any blip in the market has a much bigger effect on high PE stocks than low PE stocks. So investors are counting on massive future growth that will likely never come ***and*** *betting against global events that shave billions off the value of frothy investments.*

It could get a little rough.

August 25, 2015

Huge News (if true)

China is bailing out of US Treasury paper (ZH reports).

August 27, 2015

CHAPTER FOUR - URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Re-Animator (Part 1)

Can Expo live again?

Different truths are 'harsh' to different people. For Chinese, one truth so harsh that it escaped public recognition at the moment where it most mattered is that almost nobody, outside the country, cared very much about the 2010 World Expo. By the time China eagerly but belatedly seized its chance to take up the torch for this global festival of modern civilization, Expo's epoch of radiant significance had passed. Harsher still: this was the basic fact, and principal conditioning reality of the event, rippling with ominous implications for the future of modernity and the international response to China's re-awakening. Ameliorating it are more shadowy, contrary truths – first among them that Shanghai had already discounted a tired world's Expo indifference, and worked around it, in order to make the event into an opportunity for

something else, and for itself.

The history of World Expo, from London's Great Exhibition of 1851, is too abundantly documented to rehearse here. The basic pattern, however, is not difficult to outline, since it conforms to a relatively smooth curve from meteoric rise (1851-1940) into gradual decay (1958 onwards), almost perfectly tracking the trajectory of modernist optimism, from its ignition in the promethean forge of industrial revolution through to its expiry in postmodern / postcolonial cynicism, elite masochism, and apologia.

Importantly, this has remained an essentially Western story, despite the consistent globalism of its cultural ambitions. The ascent of Western, globalizing, industrial capitalism, in its European and American waves, was reflected in World Exhibitions of heart-stopping glory. The crisis and decline of the West – both relative and absolute — has thrown the event into marginality, neglect, and self-doubt, clasped in the death-grip of an embittered and self-mortifying anti-modernism. Most crucially — and astoundingly — the long-evident dawning of the historical revitalizing and frenetically modernizing 'Asian Century' seems to have had a negligible impact upon the declinist 'Grand Narrative' incarnated in World Expo, which has plunged ever deeper into twitchily gesticulating, hypersensitive panic at the supposed social and environmental calamity of modernistic growth.

The irony of this situation merits explicit emphasis. Precisely

when globalization shifted from questionable aspiration and ideology to definite historical fact, with the emergence of robust, non-Western economic development cores, first in Pacific East Asia, then South Asia, and beyond, the project of cosmopolitan modernization underwent a seemingly irremediable delegitimation in the court of approved 'world' opinion. Apparently, if the West cannot any longer strut across the world stage with invincible and unchallenged confidence, the only acceptable alternative option is hair-shirts for all. If this epitome of triumphant dog-in-the-manger resentment does not exemplify 'cultural hegemony' at its most potent and most toxic, it is hard to imagine what might.

An overwhelming abundance of public evidence attests to the implacable momentum of Expo degeneration, although most of this data resists tidy quantification. Since the end of World War II, the original purpose of the event, which was to promote industrial modernization worldwide through a comprehensive public exhibition of advanced productive technologies, structural engineering, manufactures, and commodities, has been progressively phased-out, to be replaced by an agenda that reflects the concerns of inter-governmental bureaucracies, national diplomatic services, and tourism boards. Public relations displays have been systematically substituted for technological exhibitions, and the number of significant mechanical and product innovations achieving popular exposure through Expo – once substantial — has

fallen to near-zero. Expo themes have been steadily stripped of their associations with accumulative materialism and refashioned into earnest exhortations for moral and social transformation, as an event that was initially designed to celebrate modernity has increasingly come to apologize for it. Predictably enough, this bureaucratically-alchemized transmutation of a festival into lament has been accompanied by a precipitous collapse of popular interest and engagement. Audiences that once flooded in to catch a vision of the future, now avoid an event that musters all the allure of a United Nations teach-in.

In the West, this is all tediously familiar. Scarcely anyone pays attention to Expo anymore, or cares much about it. Perhaps most, if jolted into an opinion on the matter, would vaguely approve of the politically correct course the event has taken, although not sufficiently, of course, to ever entertain the prospect of attending one. After all, few Westerners believe in modernity anymore, world trends distress them, and Expo seems roughly as relevant to their anxieties as the prospect of Mars colonization.

In the East, things are more puzzling. Societies undergoing rapid modernistic development make natural Expo hosts, as demonstrated consistently throughout the history of the event. There has never been a great World Expo that has not broadly corresponded to a moment of exceptional national and urban flourishing. Why, then, has Expo not undergone a profound Asiatic revitalization, restoring

it to former glories? Why has the western Pacific Rim not captured Expo, re-tooling it into a promotional vehicle for its own developmental prospects, as America did in the early 20th century?

Weighed by sheer visitor numbers, the two largest World Expos in history have been East Asian. Yet the moribund, guilt-wracked pathos of Occidental decline continues to dominate the event. Japan spent its Expo 1970 attempting to prove that it could out-do even the West in growth-sapping sanctimoniousness (as its economy would later demonstrate), whilst the mood in post-Expo 2010 Shanghai seems remarkably devoid of any euphoric sense of accomplishment, and more akin to that which might be expected from a group of schoolchildren freshly escaped from an abnormally-uninspired six-month lecture on ethically-guided behavioral rectification, delivered by an international Mandarinate. Having just executed the largest discrete event in human history, the predominant feelings are dutiful relief and anticlimax, numbed by something like deliberate amnesia. In any case, there's Shanghai to get on with, so why waste time remembering Expo? Doesn't that just stink up the joint with the odor of Western death?

(Some suggestions, tentative answers, still more downside, and a lot more upside, to come.)

August 4, 2011

Re-Animator (Part 2)

Expo transformers – the uninvited guests

What was inside the UK national pavilion at Expo 2010? Did anyone get in there? Maybe they could pass on the inside dope? Because one thing is for sure, if 'Anglosphere' cultural resonances mean anything, expectations can be pitched down to sub-basement levels. Like the UK, Australia did a good — even excellent job – with the outside of its pavilion, but its exhibition was, to be brutally frank, a disgrace. Vacuous, patronizing, revoltingly sentimental, and despicably cowardly – details would be nice, of course, but actually there weren't any — it served to perfectly illustrate the collapse of Expo, from a festival of dynamic modernization to a whining indulgence in modernity's most destructive cultural pathologies. Where once an exhibition, whether corporate or national, boldly declared: "This is what we're doing (isn't it magnificent?)," now they exhaust their attenuated energies exploring new, although consistently unimaginative, ways of saying "sorry." Narcissistic guilt flaps pointlessly about the exhibition space like a shoal of stranded fish, dying on a beach.

Incredibly, the USA pavilion was even worse. Not only was the pavilion itself a prefabricated strip-mall insult, unworthy of comparison with a second-tier Wallmart, but the exhibition inside

took the obsequious pandering of the Australians to a whole new level. We wanted a space shuttle or a predator drone and they gave us Hillary Clinton saying "*ni hao*" plus some nonsense about planting flower-beds in the ghetto. Anyone who left this pavilion without deep and abiding detestation for everything America represented itself as being probably thinks Barney is a pretty cool guy. This was the society once capable of staging the Chicago Expo of 1893, the New York Expos of 1939-40 and 1964-5, of making incredible things and exhibiting them, of depicting a compelling vision of the future, and now … morbid Spenglerian reflections were inescapable.

Wandering amongst these monuments to misdirection, bland meaninglessness, sugary PR, and piteous 'please-don't-hate-me' concessions to the strident anti-modernist moralism of the age – which is to say, to sheer, ruinous decadence — consciousness pixilated out into semi-random dot-pattern, swirled kaleidoscopically by a storm of frustration that could only be relieved by barking out at the local Expo authorities, and beyond them at the city, country, and region that was hosting this event "Could you *please* stop being so danged polite!"

The West is obviously spiraling down the drain, and what it needs, above anything, is some inspiring competition. In particular, and in 2010, it needed a western Pacific Rim, full-throttle development, blazing-a-path-to-the-future Expo that – purely by inevitable implication – maximized the humiliation of the senescent 'developed'

world and jolted it with the roughest imaginable type of *tough love* from its path of decline. (Of course, the societies most in need of this shock therapy are too lost in the enthralling minutiae of their own degeneration to have noticed it, but still …) Instead, Expo 2010 remained scrupulously courteous, deferential to deeply decayed Expo traditions, and respectful of the multicultural piety that even the most wretched examples of systematic social failure have a dignity of their own. What it lacked was a massive injection of pure, unselfconscious, ethno-historical arrogance, based on unmoderated confidence in what was being achieved.

Perhaps this can be stated even more offensively: modernization should make people feel bad. Its most altruistic or epidemic function is to so thoroughly deride and humiliate all of those who are failing to modernize that eventually, after every excuse and projection has been attempted and exhausted, *behavior is changed*. Backwardness is made shameful, and thus corrected. That's how history works. It began that way among the jig-saw principalities of Renaissance Europe, it worked that way in Japan (bringing modernization with the Meiji restoration), in China, long denigrated for its 'stagnant Confucianism', now big mummy of the Dragon economies, in India, finally lashed psychologically out of its absurd 'Hindu rate of growth' by the China model, and everywhere else that has ever climbed out of complacent sloth onto the developmental fast track. It's long overdue to start happening in the West, because what has been

happening there — for the best part of a century now — simply isn't working, and this chronic social failure is nowhere near clear, painful, or embarrassing enough to the populations concerned.

Nothing would be better for the West than to have its nose rubbed in its own decay, the more abusively and insensitively the better. In order to accelerate the process, the entire treasure chest of colonial condescension should be re-opened and rummaged through, searching for whatever will best aggravate, provoke, and catalyze transformation, perhaps with strong insinuations of racial and cultural inferiority thrown in for spice. The lesson of history is that the human species is comfortable with inertia, and generally more than happy to gradually degenerate. One of the few things that ever stops people, and turns them around, is the transparent contempt trickling down from other, more dynamic societies. If Expo needs a 'social dimension', that's it.

No doubt 2010 is still too recent for alternative or counter-factual history, for an Expo-punk (or X-punk) genre, searching out everything that might have been re-animated through the event — but the venture is irresistible. Call it *Asia Unleashed 2010*, an utterly impolite assertion of new socio-geographical realities that expresses, in raw and overwhelming style, the central truth of the age: the simultaneous de-westernization and radical re-invigoration of modernity.

Asia Unleashed could have borrowed heavily from the actual

Expo 2010, adopting almost everything that was created by the host, in fact, and much else beside. The China Pavilion, Theme Pavilions, Urban Best Practices Area, Expo Cultural Center, Expo Center, Expo Boulevard, Expo Museum, and site landscaping, as well as the Shipping Pavilion, GM/SAIC Pavilion and exhibition, Telecoms Pavilion, Oil Pavilion, Shanghai Corporate Pavilion with all its stuff, Coca Cola Pavilion, plenty of the international pavilion designs, and even a few of the internal exhibitions … all keepers. What gets laughed out are the schmaltzy public relations videos, the *sorry, sorry, really truly sorry* song and dance act, the *weren't we awful* performance, the Kumbaya Pavilion, the Environmental Hypersensitivity Pavilion, the Victimological Grievance Pavilion, the Beyond Growth Pavilion, the There Must Be A Gentler Way Pavilion, any national or corporate pavilion without exhibition objects (roughly half), almost everything bearing the imprint of tourist boards, media studies graduates, or diplomatic services, and every usage of solar panels that isn't strictly tailored to commercial exploitation on a massive scale. In addition, any national pavilion based entirely on ethnic kitsch gets grouped together with others of its kind in an exotic tourism area, because it's admitting to a complete absence of creative capability and needs to be mocked. *No robots, no platform*: that's the rule.

Asia Unleashed also needs a lot of things brought in, most of all machines. Expo is all about machines, even though every Expo over

the last half-century has been pitifully deficient in this regard. It scarcely needs mentioning that the entire Expo site should be pulsing, crawling, and twitching with robots of every type and scale, from industrial goliaths, automated submarines and space vehicles, through charismatic androids, to intelligent household appliances, Go players, robopets, and insectiform mechanisms. To push the process along, those countries and corporations with the laziest robot exhibits can be publicly ridiculed over the PA system.

Expo is an exhibition, and its historical sickness is perfectly tracked by the degeneration of this elementary conception into PR. Organizers at all levels, from the pinnacle of the international Expo bureaucracy (BIE) downwards, clearly need to be forcefully reminded of the difference. For instance, video technology is an entirely suitable object for Expo display, and videos themselves can quite appropriately play a supportive, informative role. To center an 'exhibition' upon videos, however, especially when they have been put together, using state-of-the-art advertising techniques, with the entire purpose of selling a national or corporate brand through image associations and spin, is a complete abnegation of responsibility and should straightforwardly be banned, or at least boycotted, derided, and rendered ineffective through inundating contempt. The only acceptable center of an Expo display is an object, preferably astonishing, fetched from the outer edge of industrial capability in order to concretely represent the trajectory of material

progress. Displaying such objects – and thereby respecting audiences sufficiently to evaluate them for themselves – is the non-negotiable, basic function of Expo as an institution. If it can no longer accept this task, it should be terminated (by a giant robot, if possible).

Asia Unleashed is dedicated to the latest and impending phases of global industrial civilization, which should be more-or-less implicit in the fact that it is a World Expo, although sadly, it isn't. There's plenty of room for artworks and other singular cultural creations, but the emphasis is edgily modernistic. Green technology gets in because it's technology, and the tourism industry gets in because it's an industry, but in both cases the spin-meisters have been reined back hard, and the preliminary question insistently raised: "What, really, are you exhibiting here?" The only organizers who get to avoid such suspicious interrogations are the ones overseeing the erection of some fabulous structure that looks as if it comes from the set of a science fiction movie, or unloading partially-animated assemblages of glistening metal from mountainous stacks of shipping containers, because – clearly – they understand what an Expo is all about. The cyclopean space elevator anchor station, taking shape in the Extraterrestrial Resources Exploitation Zone, serves as a model for the guiding spirit of the festival. The machinery in the 3D printing pavilion printed the pavilion.

The mining industry employs monster trucks weighing 203 tonnes, with a capacity to carry 360 tonnes, they cost US$3 million

each, their tires are four-meters in diameter, and driving one is like "driving a house" – why on earth didn't Expo 2010 have one? *Asia Unleashed* most certainly would. For developed countries with the resources to put on an impressive show at Expo there needs to be something like a price for admission, and an awe-inspiring piece of industrial machinery fits the bill exactly. The Canadian tar sands are being criss-crossed by these monster trucks, and the Canada national pavilion should have been strongly *advised* to bring one over. Instead they brought … (hands up if anyone remembers).

All the imagination that has been squandered over decades in utopian speculations of the "another world is possible" type has been far more productively employed at *Asia Unleashed*, counter-balancing the tendency of advanced industrial capabilities to flee from the arena of spectacle. The monumental achievements and consequences of intensely miniaturized and softened technologies demand exhibition, from silicon chip fabrication, gene sequencing, and rudimentary nanotechnology, to cryptosystems, social networks, digital microfinance, and virtual architecture, even as they slip through their inner inexorable logic into invisibility. To present these frontiers of industrial capability rapidly, dramatically, and memorably to a highly-diverse, transient Expo audience requires the application of creative intelligence on a massive scale. The growing challenges of this task are worthy of the rising computer-augmented talents brought to bear upon it.

Asia Unleashed never happened, of course, partly because the international Expo institutional apparatus is locked into the Occidental death-slide, but mostly because it would have been impolite. Ultimately, postmodernist multicultural political correctness – today's hegemonic globalist ideology — is an elaborate etiquette, designed to prevent the 'insensitive' identification and diagnosis of failure, and to elude, indefinitely, the blunt statement: "What you're doing doesn't work." No Expo that remained true to its deep institutional traditions could avoid such a statement arising, implicitly, through contrast. Hence, Expo has been condemned to die, by inertial forces too profound for Expo 2010 to fully arrest, let alone reverse: *Better decayed than rude*.

From the wreckage of the Expo institution, however, Expo 2010 was able to extract, polish, and resuscitate a crucial modernist topic: the city as engine of progress. More on that in Part 3.

August 11, 2011

Re-Animator (Part 3)

What makes a great city?

By far the most interesting element of *World Expo 2010: Shanghai*, was Shanghai. Whilst deeply-rooted regional traditions of courtesy

sustained the fiction that this World Fair was about the world, it really wasn't. Whatever the diplomatic benefits of the almost universally convenient internationalist pretense, to China and Expo's foreign participants alike, Expo 2010 was about Shanghai, and for Shanghai. The Expo was global because Shanghai is, it was about China because Shanghai is China's gateway to the world, it was about cities in order to be even more about Shanghai, nobody uninterested in Shanghai paid it the slightest attention, and Shanghai used it to restructure, intensify, and promote itself.

Expo as an institution was in decline before 2010, and continues to decline. Shanghai was rising before 2010, and continues to rise, but now infrastructurally upgraded, thoroughly renovated, and decorated with the historical merit-badge of Expo hospitality. *Better City, Better Life*, a typically airy and aspirational Expo theme, is a cold-sober description of the Expo-effect in Shanghai.

Cities are, in certain important respects, generic. There is such a thing as 'the city in general' as the work of Geoffrey West, in particular, has demonstrated. We know, thanks to West, that cities are negative organisms, with consistent scaling characteristics that structurally differentiate them from animals and corporations. As they grow they accelerate and intensify at a quantifiable and predictable rate, exhibiting increasing returns to scale (in sharp contrast to animals and businesses, which slow down in proportion to their size). Organisms and firms die normally and by necessity,

cities only rarely and by accident.

Cities belong to a real genre, but they are also singularities, undergoing spontaneous individuation. In fact, they are generically singular – singular without exception – like black holes. It is not only that no city is like another, no city *can* be like another, and this is a feature that all cities share, arguably more than any other.

Beyond such generic singularity, there is an additional level of enhanced differentiation that emerges from the position cities occupy within larger systems. These systems are not only internally specialized, but also hierarchical, dividing core from periphery, and distributing influence unevenly between them. Ultimately, within the fully global incarnation of the 'world system', cities acquire secondary metropolitan characteristics, to very different degrees, in accordance with their geographical and functional proximity to the center of the world. They transcend their local histories, to become hubs or nodes in a global network that re-characterizes them as parts of a whole rather than wholes made of parts, as metropolis-versus-periphery rather than (or on top of) metropolis-versus-town.

The geographical structure and historical instability of modernity's core-periphery architecture has been the focus of the 'world system theory' developed from the Annales School of Fernand Braudel (1902-85) by Immanuel Wallerstein (1930-) and – most impressively — Giovanni Arrighi (1937-2009). According to the world system theorists, the revolutions that matter most are not

national regime changes, such as those in France (1789) and Russia (1917), but rather global re-organizations that mark out the basic phases of modern history, jolting the world into new core-periphery structures. Modernity has undergone four of these shifts up to the present, with each phase lasting for a 'long century', introducing a new core state, or hegemon, with enhanced capabilities, and a new urban center – successively, Venice, Amsterdam, London, and New York – that operate as an effective capital of the world.

As the example of New York attests, this status is not primarily political. Nor does prominence in manufacturing seem to be a relevant factor (the 'world capital' has never been the dominant industrial center of its respective region or state). Over the course of modern history to date, the crucial features of the world capital seem to be that it is the largest urban agglomeration in the leading ('hegemonic') region or state; that it is an established financial center that quite rapidly attains a position of global pre-eminence in this respect; that it is an open port city with clear maritime orientation; and that it has an exceptionally internationalized demographic profile, with a large segment of internationally-mobile, opportunistic residents. A significant period of leadership in the creative arts might plausibly be added to this list. Functionally, the world capital serves as the supreme nerve-center of the global economy, specialized nationally, and then super-specialized internationally, as the financial, logistics, and business services hub of a system whose

global integrity is reflected in the city's privileged singularity.

The exceptional drama of our age lies in its nature as a time of transition between phases of modernity, somewhere in the winter of a long century, when an epoch of hegemony is exhausted. More specifically, the walls are closing in on the American Age, as commentators of almost every intellectual and ideological stripe are increasingly aware. Overstretched, essentially bankrupted, politically paralyzed and disillusioned, America sinks into self-conscious crisis, its mood dark and clouded. It would be a mistake to limit attention to America, however, because the crisis is world-systemic, heralding the end of an international order that arose among the chaos of the world wars and achieved definition in the post-WWII United Nations and Bretton Woods institutions (IMF, World Bank, and the descendent of GATT, now the WTO). It affects not only the role of the US dollar as international reserve currency, an Atlantic-centered NATO and an Occidentally-skewed UN apparatus, but also the European Union, the post-colonial Middle Eastern state-system and (very) much else besides.

Over the next two decades, under the impact of economic forces of extreme profundity (far exceeding the responsive capacity of existing institutions), a revolutionary re-ordering of the world can be expected to unfold. If America succeeds in maintaining its position of leadership within the global system for a period that significantly exceeds the long 20th century (which began no earlier than 1914,

and thus might be expected to persist for some additional years), it will have broken a pattern that has remained consistent throughout a half-millennium of history. Whilst not strictly impossible, perpetuation of the present hegemonic order would be, quite literally, a stretch.

Another vision of a break from historical precedent, this time transparently utopian, envisages – rather than the continuation of US pre-eminence — the obsolescence of the core-periphery global structure in its entirety, ending hierarchical geography and hegemony in general. Even If such a vision truly rises to the level of a definite expectation (rather than a nebulous exercise in wishful thinking), it remains ungrounded in reliable historical and theoretical foundations. Altruistic political intentions – were such ever credible – would still be quite insufficient to overcome the spontaneous, dynamic trend to approximate world systemic equilibrium, in which a core zone, and its metropolitan capital, are automatically nominated, by diffuse economic currents searching for a central clearing house.

Whilst no doubt deeply disappointing to utopian eschatology, and to all dreams of historical conclusion (or passage to the promised land), phase-shifts in the world-system are less ominous than they are often depicted as being. Among Arrighi's most important insights is the reminder that whenever an attempted reconstruction of the world order has been based upon a frontal military and geo-strategic challenge to the hegemon, it has failed. This is exemplified, above all,

by the German and Russian histories of the 19th and 20th centuries, in which repeated direct confrontations with the established Anglophone-dominated international system led only to frustration, regime collapse, and subaltern re-integration.

Perhaps ironically, a marked subjective aversion to hard power assertion and the assumption of hegemony can be quite reliably taken as a positive indicator for the objective emergence of hegemonic status. Holland, Great Britain, and the United States of America were all, in certain crucial respects, accidental imperialists, whose successive ascents to world dominance shared a prioritization of commercial motives, retarded state involvement, strong 'isolationist' and 'anti-imperialist' cultural currents, and a determined avoidance of 'Clauswitzean' decisive collision (especially with the prior hegemon). The British and American ways of war, in particular, are notable for their common emphasis upon hedging and triangulation, such as the exploitation of offshore position and maritime supremacy to avoid premature entanglement in high intensity 'continental' conflicts, the usage of financial and logistic capability to manipulate conflicts at a distance, and the diplomatic inclusion of defeated adversaries in reconstructed, poly-centric, 'balanced' systems of power. Hegemony was, in each case, peacefully inherited, even when it was cemented by war (in *partnership* with the previous hegemon) and later gave rise to opportunities for increasingly aggressive imperialistic adventurism.

Given this broadly uncontroversial historical pattern, it is all the more surprising that the German example is so widely invoked in discussions of China's 'peaceful rise'. In fact, China's ascent has stuck far closer to the model of hegemonic hand-overs than to that of confrontational challenges, as indicated by the prioritization of commercial development, the highly cooperative (even synergistic or 'Chimerican') relationship with the prevailing hegemon, the gradual accumulation of financial power by way of spontaneous, systemic re-distribution, and the equally gradual consolidation of maritime interests, emerging out of the global trading system, which draw the focus of government strategic policy – perhaps reluctantly – from domestic concerns out into the high-seas.

Historically, China has been far more a continental than a maritime power, and this fact provides the single most persuasive objection to the assumption of an impending Chinese (Long) Century. The emergence of a continental world system core would be as decisive a departure from precedent as any yet discussed, and if such a possibility is entertained, disciplined prediction falters. If inverted, however, this problem becomes a forecast in itself: the trajectory of China's rise necessarily implies its transformation into a maritime power (an insight already tacit in the controversial 1988 Chinese TV series *River Elegy*).

A vague intuition, partially but elusively crystallized by Expo 2010, is now precipitated by sheer historical pattern-recognition

into the form of an explicit question:

Is Shanghai destined to become the capital of the world?

(Part 4 to come)

August 16, 2011

Re-Animator (Part 4)

What does the world make of Shanghai?

If the deepest traditions of the World Expo are those cemented into its origin, it would be incautious to over-hastily dismiss one prominent feature of its inaugural instance. The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations, held in London, in 1851, was staged in the effective capital of the world. In this case, at least, the defining internationalism of the Expo is difficult to disentangle from the indisputable historical fact that the entire world was rapidly becoming London's business. In a gesture of reciprocity so perfect that it approached simple identity, London invited the world to itself exactly as – and because – it was inviting itself to the world.

The Great Exhibition made irresistible sense because it put the future of the world on display in the only place that could. To see the concentrated, realistically sifted, programmatically arranged destiny of the earth, it was necessary to visit London, since it was in London

that everything came together.

Over its first two decades (and four episodes), World Expo alternated between London (1851, 1862) and Paris (1855, 1867), as if oscillating between the relative historical potencies of maritime and continental power. Yet this apparent hesitation actually compresses and conceals two distinct, complementary, and unambiguous trends. Britain was ascending inexorably to global hegemony, whilst disengaging from World Expo, whilst France was managing equally inexorable comparative decline, as it made World Expo – to a remarkable extent – its special preserve.

It is tempting to propose a theory of institutional consolation to account for this pattern. Long after Britain had abandoned all claim to Expo leadership, France continued to invest heavily in the event, chalking-up a record of Expo hospitality unmatched by any other country and setting the course to Expo institutionalization through the Bureau of International Exhibitions (BIE). The BIE, established in 1928, has always been based in Paris, and remains a bastion of Anglo-French bilingualism.

French Expo-enthusiasm expresses a more general relationship to the world system of great importance. Having relinquished its (Napoleonic) role as a challenger to the world order in the early 19th century, France has maneuvered, with unique capability and determination, to remain an indispensable secondary power, or – more precisely – a balancer. Its relationship to the successive phases

of Anglophone global hegemony has been guided by an extremely consistent deep policy of accommodation without acquiescence, characterized by imaginative and unrelenting, yet restrained rivalry. Close to the core, yet never quite part of it, France has been able to draw sustenance from the world order whilst contesting its cultural meaning (as English-speaking, protestant, and *laissez-faire* individualist).

World system challengers, it should be clearly noted, never host World Expos. The Expos held in Japan (Osaka 1970, Tsukuba 1985, Aichi 2005) and Germany (Hanover 2000) took place long after their armed resistance to the Anglo-American world order had been broken and both countries had been beaten into docility. Russia has never hosted one. Moscow of the USSR was offered the 1967 World Expo, but declined it (presumably judging it dangerously destabilizing to a closed society).

World Expo has thus acquired a secondary tradition, as a deliberately eccentric platform from which to contest the *core future* of the world system, and to propose a pluralized (or embryonically multicultural) alternative. Already in 1855 and 1867, and then in 1878, 1889, 1900, and 1937, World Expo staged *the view from Paris*, one that accepted the global reality of consolidated, revolutionary modernization, whilst systematically de-emphasizing its techno-commercial determinism and its convergence upon Anglophone cultural traits. Industrial globalization was reconfigured

as a condition to be critically interrogated, rather than an opportunity to be vigorously promoted.

Between the primary and secondary impulses of the Expo, collision was inevitable. Predictably enough, the occasion was provided by the reconnection of Expo to the global core.

Even given this truncated and radically simplified schema of Expo history, which had been largely settled in its essentials by 1870, the significance of the two New York World Expos, staged in 1939-40 and 1964-5, comes clearly into focus. Mid-20th century New York, like every world systemic capital, represented the leading edge of modernization as a revolutionary global process — emergence and consolidation of a new world order and new age (*novus ordo seclorum*) – compared to which the authority of established international institutions counted for nothing.

Both New York Expos flagrantly violated BIE regulations in numerous respects, but even after the withdrawal of official sanction, they ahead anyway. These were, non-coincidentally, the first rogue Expos. They were also among the most memorable and influential in World Expo history.

For the first time since the mid-19th century, Expo had found its way back to the capital of the world, in order to provide an uncompromised and unambiguous foretaste of the *World of Tomorrow* in the place that was orchestrating it. BIE opinion mattered little, because Expo was not being hosted in New York so

much as re-invented, echoing the originality of 1851. This was where the future would come from, and everyone knew it. All that was necessary was to tease the city into anticipating itself, and what resulted was a *Futurama*.

There was an additional message, easily overlooked due to the scarcity of data-points: hosting World Expo is one of the things the world capital has to do — as a kind of ritual responsibility, or a coming-out party. Shanghai has done that now. Precedent suggests that one additional Expo would be appropriate (perhaps in 2025, or 2030), although it might have to be unsanctioned next time.

Of course, Shanghai is not yet the capital of the world, but it is heading there. From the late-1970s, after centuries of exile and denigration, the offshore, diasporic-maritime, capitalistic China of the *tianchao qimin* — those 'abandoned by the Celestial Empire' – has been steadily, and rapidly, re-integrated with the continental mainland and its 'market socialist' structures. Floodgates of talent and investment have been opened, and as this scattered, sea-salt scented population has reconnected with the motherland, the 'Chinese miracle' of recent decades has taken place. Shanghai is the main-circuit socket that links this other China — oriented to oceanic trade, entrepreneurial opportunity, capital accumulation, international mobility, and a society of flexible networks — to the vast potentialities of the country (and flexible Sino-Marxist state) lying up the Yangzi, and beyond. If the process of reconnection is not

interrupted, the next phase of modernity will be centered in this city, where China meets the sea.

Despite its self-identification as the 'central country' (or 'middle kingdom' – *Zhongguo*), China has not been at the core of the world process for centuries. Instead it has been a complacently declining legacy power and a badly-treated outsider, then successively a second-tier affiliate, a truculent challenger, and a cautious balancer, until its prospective status as core inheritor (or virtual hegemon) began to percolate into global popular awareness over the final decades of the 20th century. Very little of this is a matter of motivation, or strategic assertion. Quasi-Marxist assumptions of economic inevitability and directional base-superstructure causation come into their own in this respect. Global leadership is nominated by industrial reality, not political will, and hegemony can neither be perpetuated beyond the endurance of its economic foundations, nor long disdained once such foundations have been laid. Eventually a reality check becomes unavoidable, and policy is hammered into compliance with the demands of world system equilibrium. Core-periphery relations are decided by trade and capital flows, not by political declarations. Since comparative success and failure show no sign at all of disappearing, it can confidently be expected that hierarchical geography – however re-arranged – will not be withering away any time soon. Realists will follow the money.

There will be a new world capital (you can count on it), but will it

be Shanghai? It would be reckless to presume so. The world system tradition, in its eagerness to anoint Tokyo as the successor to New York (during the 1980s), provides a cautionary lesson. There was no Tokyo World Expo, and it turns out that there was not an urgent or essential need for one.

So, *is Shanghai next?* That should have been the animating question of Expo 2010, and perhaps it will have been in the future. The whole world has a stake in it, because it tells us what is coming, and that is what World Expo was designed to do. For an emerging world capital to mask itself as a generic city passes beyond modesty into a species of accidental deception, but tact can easily be confused with pretence – especially by those on unfamiliar cultural terrain. It might be that Shanghai said everything that was necessary in 2010, and that what it said will eventually be heard, and understood.

Expo begins again in each new world capital, in 1851, in 1939, and – far more problematically – in 2010 (?). In Shanghai's case, we are still too close to the event, and too entangled in the current revolution of modernity, to know for sure. What Expo 2010 will have been depends upon what the world becomes, how its center of economic gravity shifts, how its new center condenses, and what it makes of Shanghai.

(final lurch into this fog-bank coming next (yippee!))

August 26, 2011

Re-Animator (Part 5)

The Call of Haibao

Dispatched from the British Consulate, Doctor Helen Goodwhite arrives at the Jiangnan Special Hospital for Inexplicable Foreign Devilry to interview a problematic inmate.

Dr Goodwhite: How are you feeling today Mister Vaughn? They tell me you're quite a bit calmer.

Vaughn: OK, I guess. A little disoriented. How long …?

Dr Goodwhite: Do you remember why you're here?

Vaughn: Not exactly.

Dr Goodwhite: Those scars on your arms, any ideas?

Vaughn: [Hesitating] Some kind of accident …?

Dr Goodwhite: I've got some witness reports here, all very consistent, maybe they'll jog something. It seems that you were walking down Nanjing East Road when you suddenly started shrieking "a-ya, a-ya, a-ya" with a highly unconvincing Chinese accent before switching to English and shouting "Get out. Get out. We have to get out of the city." After that, when nobody took any notice, you continued to 'yell aggressively' …Umm, let's see [riffling through her notes], ah yes, "Haibao spawn, you're all effing Haibao spawn, effing plague-blood zombie Haibao spawn," and so on, considerable obscenity it appears, and then … ah, here we are "filthy future-toxed

effing robot Haibao spawn, die, die, we're all going to die" et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Then you rushed across the street and smashed the plate-glass window of an Expo gift shop with your bare hands. [Looking up] Do you remember any of that, mister Vaughn?

Vaughn: Some of it, yes. Now you mention it. It's coming back. But it wasn't really like that.

Dr Goodwhite: It wasn't?

Vaughn: Not really, no. At least, those things happened, yes …

Dr Goodwhite: They did?

Vaughn: Yes, but it's just, what they meant … [hesitating]

Dr Goodwhite: Go on.

Vaughn: Well, they didn't mean anything of course, what I meant to say was, well, it was sort of a mistake.

Dr Goodwhite: A 'mistake'?

Vaughn: Yes, or, I guess, more of a misunderstanding.

Dr Goodwhite: I'm afraid you're going to have to be a great deal more specific if we're going to make any progress.

Vaughn: It's rather complicated.

Dr Goodwhite: Please. Just start at the beginning.

Vaughn: I suppose it began at the pavilion.

Dr Goodwhite: The UK Expo pavilion?

Vaughn: I was working there you know.

Dr Goodwhite: It's in the file.

Vaughn: So you know what it looked like?

Dr Goodwhite: Yes, of course.

Vaughn: The tendrils, the shimmering, the name like a taunt from … them.

Dr Goodwhite: It was called the 'Seed Cathedral', according to this.

Vaughn: Seed Cathedral, Sea Cthudral, whatever, it had been sent back, sent up, to show us their true 'face'. … At least, that's what I thought at the time, but that's just ridiculous, isn't it? I realize that now.

Dr Goodwhite: But at 'the time' you thought 'they' had 'sent it back'?

Vaughn: I'd been working too hard. It was quite stressful, you know. I wasn't sleeping well, worrying, and that's when they began chatting.

Dr Goodwhite: Who were 'they' Mister Vaughn?

Vaughn: The Haibao, of course.

Dr Goodwhite: Ah yes, the Expo mascot …

Vaughn: Mask, not mascot.

Dr Goodwhite: Did you know that the Shanghai Corporate Pavilion was defaced with luminous blue paint, on the night of September the ninth? [She passes a photograph.]

Vaughn: [Shudders silently]

Dr Goodwhite: The message is rather cryptic, but your words reminded me of it, for some reason. It's a bit difficult to read from the

photo, but I've got a transcript. "We are many and yet singular. Our name equals 90, the seething void, enfolding artificial intelligence and the terminal alpha-omega. We come from the depths, from the blue screen at the end of the world. Cthublue."

Vaughn: I don't know anything about that.

Dr Goodwhite: Really?

Vaughn: It's Haibao cultist, hardcore. I'd never touch that stuff – not ever.

Dr Goodwhite: Yet you seem to recognize it.

Vaughn: From dreams — bad, really bad, dreams. I told you, I wasn't sleeping well. They wouldn't stop talking, telling me things I didn't want to hear, I couldn't stop them. I tried, but they kept calling me.

Dr Goodwhite: Calling you to *bow* before the most *high*?

Vaughn: [Outraged] I never said that. I'd never say that. It's absurd, obscene. It's not even code.

Dr Goodwhite: [Checking her notes] So, you understand now that 'hairy crab' isn't a secret anagram for 'Haibao'?

Vaughn: Yes, I can see that, of course.

Dr Goodwhite: It isn't even close, really — too many letters, for one thing.

Vaughn: Well, six and nine are rotational twins, and 'o' is a 'cry'. [Sobs slightly] … It's all nonsense. I see that now. I was confused.

Dr Goodwhite: The trouble, Mister Vaughn, is that this subject

still seems to excite you rather disproportionately. I think we need to conduct a little test. Let's see what happens when we compare this [she reaches into her bag and lifts out the statuette of a tentacle-faced abomination, sculpted long ago by some Pacific island tribe, presumed extinct] with this [a soft, cartoonish, vaguely anthropomorphic blue doll, suggestive of a toothpaste advert for children]. The similarity isn't especially striking, is it?

Vaughn: No, no, no, no, NOOOOOOOOOO.

Dr Goodwhite: I'm sorry, what?

Vaughn: [In an almost indiscernible whisper] Deep ones.

Dr Goodwhite: I didn't catch that.

Vaughn: From the depths, the ocean – deep ones. They're from the sea – 'treasure from the sea' [laughs morbidly]. Even you have to understand that, doctor. Globalization, technocapitalism, Shanghai, alien invasion, the Thing — it could hardly be clearer. It's escaped from the abyss, and now it's exposed. The time has come. Sea Change, Modernity, call it whatever you want, it doesn't matter. The Haibao will tell us how to think soon enough, and we'll comply, because they're behind us, beneath us, and we'll peel away from what they always were like dead skin from a snake. They've shown us the ultimate city god already, so it won't be long. Their words are arriving, whispers, mutterings …

Dr Goodwhite: [Disquieted] Oabiah nasce zhee ute ewoit.

Vaughn: Excuse me?

Dr Goodwhite: That means nothing to you?

Vaughn: Nothing.

Dr Goodwhite: Strange, then, that it's tattooed on your arm.

Vaughn: I've no idea how it got there.

Dr Goodwhite: Alright, let's move on, shall we?

Vaughn: Move where doctor? We're already here, in the city at the end of the world, the thing that came out of the sea. We aren't going anywhere. It's coming for us, right now, and it can't be stopped. What did you expect? A New Jerusalem? [laughing unpleasantly]

Dr Goodwhite: Alright Mister Vaughn, I think we're done here. We need to get you some proper, professional attention. Then, after some rest, back to your family …

Vaughn: [Prolonged laughter, even more ghastly] Too late, doctor! Way too late. The Haibao have already taken them. It came for the children first, don't you realize that? Do you know how many Haibao dolls my sweet little kiddies have accumulated? [Voice cracking] Seventeen! They might as well have tentacles growing out of their eye-sockets — it would all amount to the same thing. Haibao melted their souls into the blue screen months ago. That generation's gone. Long gone. It was over even before the Haibao clones slithered out of the television set.

Dr Goodwhite: [Backing away nervously] This has been a very interesting chat, but I've really got to be going now. I'll tell the consulate that … that …

Vaughn: [Zoned-out into the blue] They want to transmute us — replace us – with something unspeakable, with a bionic monstrosity from beyond the blue screen. Our metropolises are turning into, into … Actually they were never ours. The deep ones, the Haibao, were always using them to modify us, using us to make them – that's the circuit: alien animation. It was a cosmic gamble, a bet, and now they're raking it in …

Dr Goodwhite: [Turns pale, a hideous comprehension dawning] Better city, better life …

September 2, 2011

Arts of Re-Animation

There's always something huge happening in Shanghai — and usually several things. Out at the leading edge over the last two years has been the tsunami of urban development along the Huangpu waterfront to the south of the Puxi metropolitan core, in an area that has been named 'Xuhui Riverside' or 'West Bund'. The scale of what is underway there is (of course) utterly stunning.

A mixture of new residential complexes and prestige towers is under construction, and the immediate waterfront has already been redeveloped into a strip of interconnected parks and boardwalks (constituting the 8.4km 'Shanghai Corniche'). Along the river, a neo-

modern aesthetic prevails, characterized by elegantly re-purposed heavy industrial structures: slabs of concrete, disused rail tracks, and massive cargo cranes. As elsewhere in the city, the heavy-duty Shanghai 1.0 has been playfully folded over itself, in a stylish celebration of modernist heritage. The future is presented as a re-launch of the past. For anybody mesmerized by time-spirals, it's irresistible.

The role allotted to the arts in this process of urban re-animation is especially notable. Even in a city blitzed into delirium by an explosive growth of arts space, the proliferation of galleries, theaters, museums, and other cultural centers in the West Bund comes as a scarcely-comprehensible shock. The subsonic sucking roar of this new cultural capacity, emitted in overlapping ripples as it extends its devouring appetite throughout the city and far beyond, reaches a magnitude that seems to bend space and time. There are entire national cultures in the world that would be hard-pressed to fill it.

The coming out party for this arts infrastructure was held on a suitably stupendous scale. *Westbund 2013: A Biennial of Architecture and Contemporary Art* included an interlocking set of exhibitions, each of which would have been dazzlingly impressive on its own. *Sound Art China* introduced the country's sonic bleeding edge in its *Revolutions Per Minute* event, set up within four renovated oil storage tanks. The adjacent West Bund Exhibition

Center — a redeveloped industrial structure of truly cyclopean proportions — hosted a multi-threaded sound / video / architecture / cinematic history show in and around a central 'Inter-Media Megastructure' that fully lived up to its grandiose name. A more modest urban development exhibition in a nearby warehouse space did its best to explain the epic convulsions that the area was undergoing. (I think the appropriate word is 'awesome', cubed.)

There's only one reasonable conclusion: Shanghai is sheer cosmic splendor compacted for terrestrial application, and expressed through aesthetic overload. Cynicism can wait for another occasion.

December 16, 2013

Dotting the 'I'

Whatever else is to be learned from 'A Dream I Dreamed' — the Kusama Yayoi exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai (Dec 15 to March 30, 2014) — the most superficially striking lesson is sociological. Shanghainese — and especially young Shanghainese — can't get enough of this stuff. After almost two months, queues no longer regularly stretch all the way through People's Park and out onto Nanjing Xi Lu, but they still over-spill the gallery. Both thematically and socially, this is a show about multitudes.

Kusama, born in 1929, has an artistic career stretching back to the 1950s. Throughout seven decades, as her celebrity has waxed and waned in waves, her artistic focus — or, more exactly, her strategic 'obliteration' of focus — has remained remarkably constant. Sensuous disintegration of self and world into dot pattern has been a continuous preoccupation.

The MoCA show concentrates upon Kusama's very recent work, mostly from the last two years. To a general audience, the best known pieces are probably her large, brightly bi-colored, speckled pumpkins, enjoyed for their pop-art accessibility and unpretentious aestheticism. When encountered within the context of the show, however, the disciplined dot shading on these works takes on an unsuspected seriousness, as it is sucked into swirls, drifts, and flurries of dots in different colors, across picture planes and sculptured surfaces, and even into illusory volumes. Through a power of pure multiplicity, Kusama's vivid, relentlessly cheerful pop-art chromatics become the tails of neonized guiding streaks, hurtling into cosmic vistas and shattered states of being.

Dotted tulips, dotted dogs, huge mushroom-styled dotted spheres, 'Infinity Dots' (2012), 'Infinity Double Dots' (2013), and the 'Infinity Nets' (numerous, 2013) created by the diffuse dot-puncturing of space … it becomes all-too easy to understand why Kusama chooses to live in a Japanese mental hospital as an OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) patient, and why her own accounts

of her work wander so uninterruptedly between aesthetics and psychopathology. Her installation 'I'm Here, but Nothing' (2013), consisting of a living room suffused with violet light and blitzed with countless hallucinatory dots, provides something close to an insanity portal. Visitors entering the 'Obliteration Room' are handed a sheet of colorful dot stickers and invited to go crazy. It's at once humorously and seriously dotty.

The works are typically without center, diffusing perception smoothly across sheer distribution, sometimes through spaces expanded to infinity through installed mirrors. The sense of religious suggestion is occasionally made explicit, as in 'Transmigration' (2011) — an 'infinity-net' style acrylic painting whose numinous title is only reinforced by its thematic continuity with the rest of the show. In 'Narcissus Garden' (2013), a packed array of stainless steel spheres, mirroring and the assembly of featureless particles are finally fused (although this work is more notable for its neat infolding of Kusama's artistic vocabulary than for its aesthetic power). To immerse 'oneself' in this exhibition is to be strewn across the void, lost in clouds, and in crowds.

Kusama's appeal manifests an East Asian 'pop' sensibility that clearly works in Shanghai, attesting once again to the influence of contemporary Japanese culture throughout the region, and to the continued relevance of common religious traditions. Beyond — or simply through — the deliberate frivolity of this work, something

profound, and shattering, is being shared. It's well worth adding yourself to the crowds.

February 11, 2014

Urbanization in Focus

Might urbanization be the leading theme of China's 5th generation CCP administration? The background to this question is the process of Chinese urbanization itself. Over the three decades of Reform and Opening, China's urban population rose from 20% to 53% of the (rising) total, resulting in over half a billion new urbanites. The economic and geostrategic consequences of this transformation have profoundly re-structured the world. (It is the central fact of the Pacific-centered Modernity 2.0.)

In the *Atlantic*, Matt Schiavenza communicates the basics:

In China, economic growth and urbanization have gone hand in hand. When Deng Xiaoping initiated Reform and Opening in 1978, the vast majority of the population lived and worked in the countryside — just as Chinese people had for centuries. But over the past three and a half decades, as special economic zones churned out exports and China modernized its cities, hundreds of millions of people migrated to urban areas seeking work in the manufacturing and service sectors. This … has made China — and the Chinese —

much wealthier.

The guideline themes of China's 4th generation CCP leadership – 'harmonious society' and 'scientific development' – were no doubt sculpted by the stresses and policy challenges of massive urbanization, but they addressed the phenomenon indirectly. There are numerous indications that a more specifically-focused emphasis upon urbanization is now emerging. In particular, China's new Premier Li Keqiang envisages the topic as a nexus, where many of the country's development and governance issues meet.

The Chinese journal *Qiushi* published an article on urbanization by Li Keqiang in its Winter 2012 issue (translated into English by He Shan and Chen Xia here). Framed by the expectation (attributed to "Foreign economists") "that China's urbanization and U.S. high technology would emerge as twin engines of the global economy in the 21st century," it rewards close scrutiny.

The analysis of Michael Pettis, who identifies insufficient domestic consumption (by households) as China's pre-eminent economic obstacle, is a valuable preparation for this discussion, which begins: "Urbanization has the greatest potential for boosting domestic demand." Li argues that China remains relatively under-urbanized, so the propulsion to "exponential urban growth" continues, with at least partially predictable implications. Since "urban residents spent 3.6 times more than rural dwellers in 2010" it can be confidently anticipated that consumer spending will rise as a

function of urbanization, contributing automatically to economic re-balancing.

… it is estimated that every rural resident who becomes an urban dweller will increase consumption by more than 10,000 yuan (US$1,587). And each one percent increase in the urbanization rate in only one year will see more than 10 million rural residents absorbed into the cities. This will, in turn, translate into consumption totaling more than 100 billion yuan (US$15.9 billion) and correspondingly create more investment opportunities.

Full realization of these opportunities, Li argues, will require reform or abolition of the country's *hukou* system of residence registry, with its "urban-rural dual structure." In other respects, too, vigorous government action is recommended, as long as it achieves "conformity with the objective law of urban development." (Investigating "the objective law of urban development" is the primary mission of this blog, so it is a concept we shall obsessively return to.)

Core government responsibilities are taken to include the mitigation of social conflicts and problems, infrastructure investment, and administrative intervention to constrain housing-market instability. Urbanization management is thus recognized as a governmental priority. Given the complexity and the global significance of this task, which amounts to the integration of another quarter-billion Chinese into the economic mainstream in a little over

a decade, there is really no decent alternative to remarking – with an absolute minimum of smugness or sarcasm – *good luck with that*.

***

Even when direct construction expenditures are ignored, by systematically raising the level of household consumption, Chinese urbanization dominates the country's macroeconomic landscape. It is no great exaggeration to see the emergence of the world's most dynamic consumer economy as a side-effect of a three decade-long urbanization process, although – as in any such complex development – the causality is turbular, and self-stimulating.The Chinese consumer is a creature of the new urban epoch, and an incitement to its further elaboration.

As noted in the first part of this post, the centrality of urbanization to China's macroeconomic predicament has been explicitly addressed in a significant article by China's new premier, Li Keqiang. The conversion of rural folk into urbanites (or 'citizens' according to strict etymology) is accompanied by a 3.6-fold rise in *per capita* consumption. In addition to the purely quantitative impact upon the level of domestic economic demand, the rise of urban consumers also drives a qualitative transition, characterized above all by the expansion of the service sector (in both absolute and relative terms). Li seeks to align administrative action with this trend:

Escalating the growth of the service industry is critical to adjusting the industrial structure. Effective measures should be

taken to build a favorable environment for the growth of the service industry, both in terms of its size and quality. The government should promote the development of production-related service industries such as modern logistics, e-commerce and scientific research and design. It should also ensure that consumption-related services such as tourism, recreation, care of the elderly and domestic services receive a boost, and the development of small and mid-sized service companies gets support.

Urbanization promotes a more service oriented economic structure, which in turn promises to lower the energy-intensity of economic output; raise total factor productivity (TFP); proliferate entrepreneurial small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs); accelerate the emergence of knowledge-based and creative industries; and increase employment opportunities. In other words, a predictable series of dependencies – from urbanization, through consumerism, to service-orientation – subordinates economic policy to "the objective law of urban development" which alone makes its goals realizable. The expansion and improvement of cities will decide whether China works.

The orchestration of central policy questions under an urban theme is also strikingly seen in the area of regional development. Here, too, the country's most intractable problems are to be unlocked by an urban key:

Regional development is closely related to urbanization. Less-

developed regions lag behind in terms of growth, especially in urbanization. In areas which boast mature development conditions and large environmental capacity, the government should actively and steadily facilitate urbanization by reasonable allocation of resources, centralized layout of businesses and encouragement of intensive land usage to fire up new engines of growth and enhance the local capacity for self-sustained development. The government should tailor its regional, industrial and land policies to different regions and sectors, rather than adopting general and all-inclusive policies.

The infrastructural investment and social policy tools that have been employed to 'Open up the West' since the turn of the millennium are now specifically envisaged as ways to catalyze, accelerate, and guide urban development in backward regions. Cities are to be the solution.

Some extra links:

Mi Shih's excellent introduction to chengzhenhua (城镇化) — and why 'urbanization' isn't the right word

For a more hostile take on the Chinese urbanization agenda, see Gordon Chang here.

Nin-Hai Tseng at *Fortune*: "[Stephen] Roach offers an interesting statistic: China's services sector requires about 35% more jobs per unit of GDP than do manufacturing and construction."

***

Capital Absorption: On the topic of Michael Pettis, this superb recent article is sure to become an indispensable reference point for China economy watchers. Pettis has long argued that Chinese investment levels exceed the country's absorption capacity, and the new article places this argument in a broader theoretical framework, which he explains with extraordinary lucidity. If he is correct in his basic assessment, some widely-held assumptions of development economics will require drastic revision, with cultural and institutional factors ("social capital") acquiring far greater prominence.

Pettis has a deserved reputation for bearishness on Chinese growth prospects, but this article makes a guarded case for optimism in regards to the country's development strategy, which he sees shifting from an investment-driven growth model to something more institutionally-sensitive. This political sub-forecast predicts significant movement in the direction of market-oriented reform during the Xi-Li period.

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Opening Moves: At the *South China Morning Post* (via): *Premier Li Keqiang fought open opposition from financial regulators in his bid to push through a landmark plan for a free-trade zone in Shanghai. It is the clearest sign yet that the nation's new leadership is determined to deliver long-delayed economic reforms. […] The new Shanghai free-trade zone plan, officially announced at the beginning of July, is*

expected to be the testing ground for major policy reforms. It would promote cross-border commodity and capital flows, with key experiments in freeing foreign exchange markets and liberalising domestic interest rates.[…] Within two months, Li made an initial proposal covering 21 initiatives, whose details were not officially announced. These included shortcuts for foreign banks to set up subsidiary or joint venture operations and special permission for foreign commodities exchanges to own warehouses in the free-trade zone in Shanghai … […] … other mainland cities, facing unemployment and slower growth, are also keen to follow Shanghai's move to lure foreign capital. But Li is not understood to be interested in rushing to copy the Shanghai model for other mainland cities.

***

Handle_MZ commented: "it can be confidently anticipated that consumer spending will rise as a function of urbanization, contributing automatically to economic re-balancing."

I read "The Great Rebalancing" and I think this prediction strangely contradicts Pettis' main narrative. Pettis says that the consumption share of Chinese GDP is a necessary function of both the populations propensities to save and consume and the whole of Government economic policy to include the PBoC's interest rates, capital
controls and stabilization of the dollar exchange rate.

The objective is sustainable high GDP growth through high levels

of investment, stable wages, and productive factor capital accumulation — especially in the export and tradables sector. A corollary objective is improved global competitiveness in markets farther up the value chain.

If household consumption is a product of means which seek the above end, then any increase in consumption (i.e. from urbanization) that disrupts this end will only be met with compensatory government moves that push
it back down. Policy is the unmoved mover of consumption levels. Well, slightly moved, but by that aforementioned sustainability criterion. But rebalancing cannot occur under the current system unless the
government is wise enough to support it.

And at any rate, urbanization creates a surplus of labor which suppresses the growth rate of average urban wages. The more urban consumption rises (from rising wages, for example), the more attractive it is the move from the
countryside, which also pushes urban wages back down. This helps China's global competitiveness, but may actually reduce domestic consumption relative to the less-urbanization counterfactual.

Admin response: As you know from previous discussions, there are numerous assumptions that need straightening out before pushing far with this. At this point, I'm satisfied with the conclusion that urbanization is being conceived as a solution to the country's

most pronounced economic quandary (at the highest level of the new leadership). I think this is quite solid, irrespective of the issues that Pettis and you raise. On the latter, though, it seems hard to believe that urbanization is incidental to "social capital" formation, of the kind that — Pettis argues — raises capital absorption capacity, and thus directly contributes to the amelioration of the consumption deficiency problem. That's in addition to the direct consumption effects emphasized by Li Keqiang.

This isn't intended as an adequate response to your argument, just a provisional rejoinder.

July 29, 2013

City Limits

There's undoubtedly a Quixotic character to the 'China should do X' mode of outside commentary, but Yukon Huang's short *Bloomberg* article advising revision of the country's urbanization policies represents the genre at its best. Noting the agglomeration effects that yield disproportionate returns to urban scale, Huang recommends a turn away from the proliferation of new minor cities, and towards megacity growth.

China is already in a class by itself in accounting for 30 of the 50 largest cities in east Asia. It boasts half a dozen megacities with

populations of more than 10 million and 25 "large" cities exceeding 4 million. In fact, though, the only way China will achieve its desired productivity gains is if its leaders allow cities to evolve more organically in response to market forces. They need to let cities like Beijing get bigger.

Urban concentration creates real problems, but these are indistinguishable from the challenges any genuine process of socio-economic advance has to confront. The solutions to these problems will be the same steps that carry the country forward into unexplored territory — beyond 'catch up' and into the open horizons of the future. Everything learned from concrete economic history suggests that technological and business opportunity will be ratcheted upwards by exactly those forces which promote megacity agglomeration — and better still urban concentration or intensity — to historically unprecedented levels. That is how — and where — deep social innovation takes place.

Instead of actively trying to spread out growth to small new cities, China's planners should embrace the agglomeration economies, which militate for larger metropolises. As land and wage costs escalate, some industries will eventually gravitate to medium-size cities, but services will continue to drive expansion in the larger ones. Smart people like to mix with other smart people, and globalization has amplified their financial returns. Beijing and Shanghai have continued to grow because of buoyant higher-value services, even

as their manufacturing bases have shrunk. All this explains why in China, productivity in urban areas is more than three times that in rural areas.
But aren't China's megacities already too big to be sustainable? As a matter of fact, some urban specialists have concluded that even China's biggest cities may be too small. They cite "Zipf's law," one of the great curiosities of urban research. The law, which is surprisingly accurate for many countries, claims that the biggest city in a country should be about twice the size of the second-biggest, three times the size of the third-biggest, and so forth. On this basis, China's largest cities appear too small.

Thinking through power laws (such as Zipf's) dispels the idea of 'normal' city sizes. Optimum urban scale is decided by network effects, and is dependent upon the entire social ecology — regionally, nationally, and even globally. The 'ideal' size of Shanghai, for instance, cannot be derived from some model of a generic city, but has to be understood, instead, with reference to the singular role this city plays as a hub in multiple networks — especially commercial webs — within which it amasses specialized functions. As these webs expand and thicken, their critical nodes tend to grow and intensify spontaneously. It is natural, therefore, throughout the process of global modernization, for the limits of urban scale to be pushed out ever further, in accordance with the functional sophistication of the system's crucial hubs, and the associated refinements of

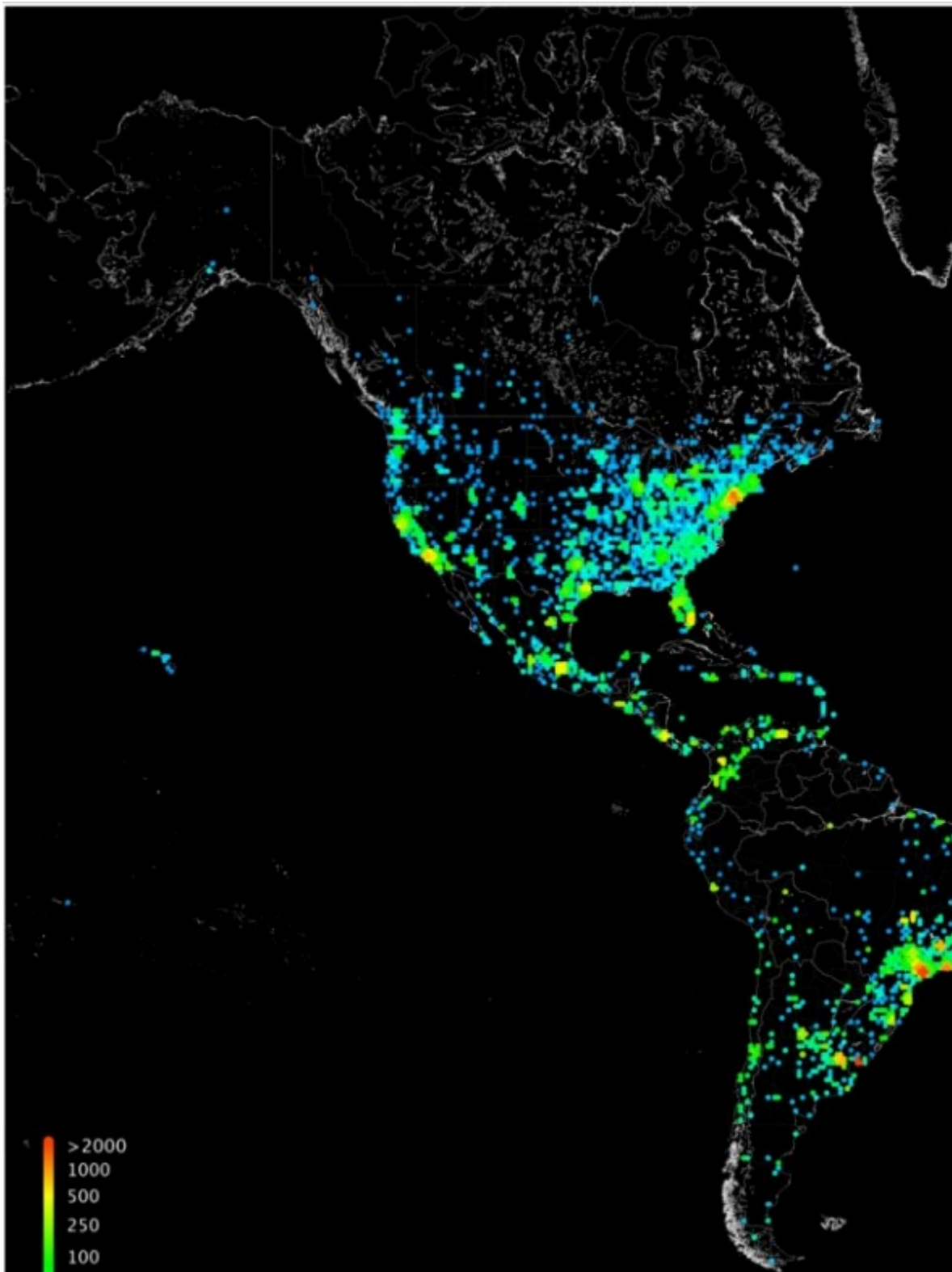
specialization these key cities foster.

Beijing is subject to stubborn environmental constraints, with limited water resources prominent among these. Its distance from the coast is also a growth-inhibiting factor. Shanghai, in contrast, is destined to vastness by such implacable historical forces that it is hard to imagine even the most determined policy resistance standing in the way for long. As the country's commercial capital, any realistic power law distribution of urban scale begins with Shanghai at the summit. It would be best to bend to the inevitable, and let it become the world's laboratory for urban intensity, tracking the advance of modernity into the Pacific Century. The rewards for this acceptance would easily overwhelm the costs.

September 11, 2013

Modern Legacy

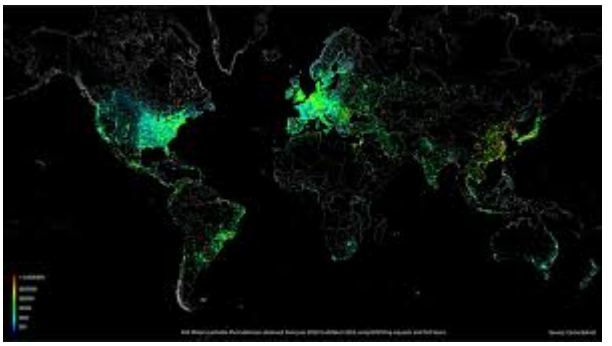
In 2012 the global distribution of Internet connectivity still looked strikingly Atlantean:


>2000
1000
500
250
100

Two years later, Alissa Walker at *Gizmodo* asks (rhetorically):

Where is the internet? This map might explain it better than any statistics could ever hope to: The red hot spots show where the most devices that can access the internet are located.

On the new map, too, the Pacific Century has yet to dazzle. It seems that infrastructure — even the most advanced digital infrastructure — incarnates a legacy, rather than virtuality (or potential). By accentuating the Internet-of-Things, the new map has actually dulled the digitization of emerging markets, drawing vision back on a retro-futural path to the historical roots of the modern world order. (The color scheme also tends to under-emphasize the spiky urban-concentrations of the Asian Internet, relative to the more diffuse Euro-American distribution.)

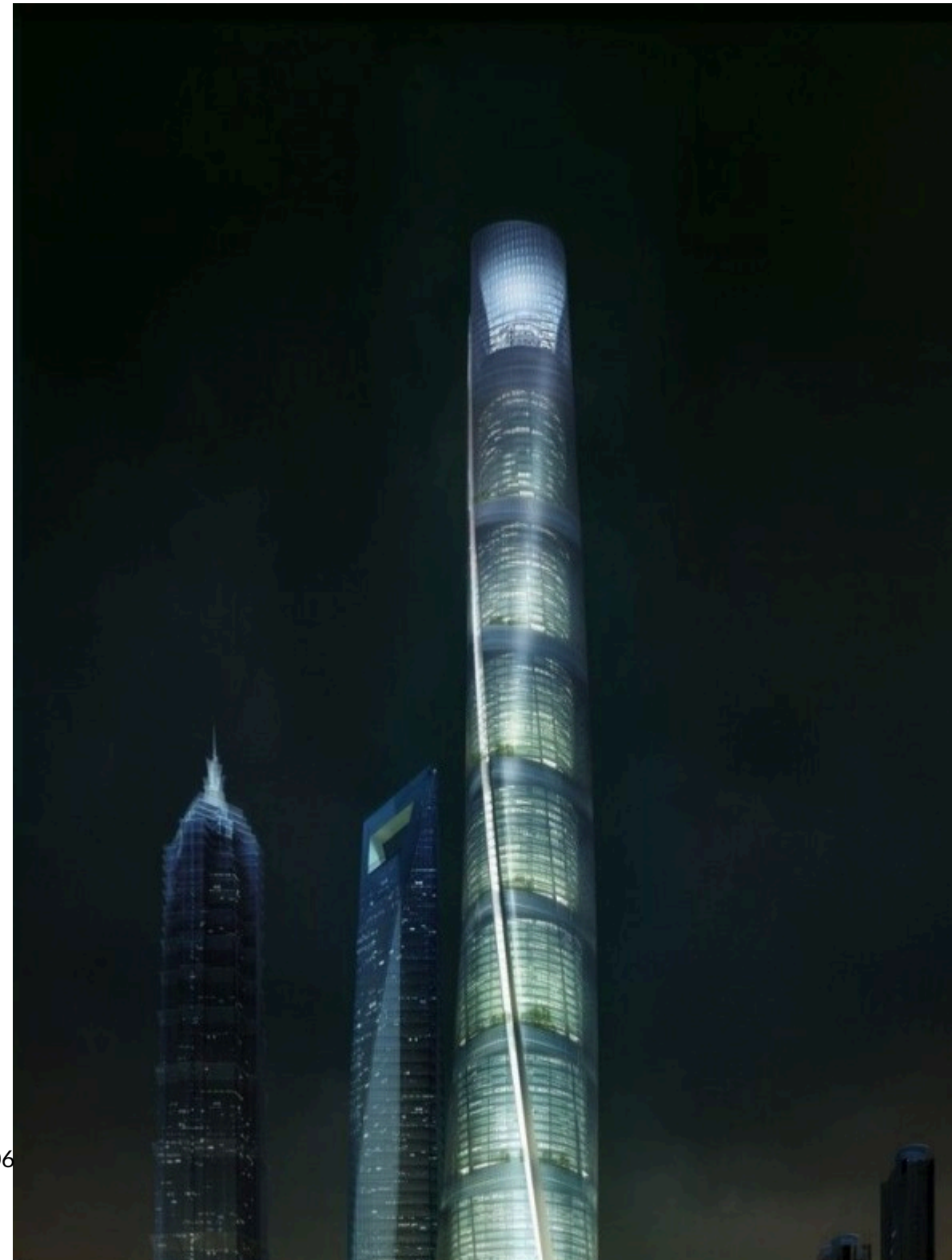


Follow the Gizmodo link for various image options, including alternative Internet visualizations (such as these, and — from the comments — this).

September 1, 2014

Shanghai Tower

It’s Aesthetics Week @ Social Matter. Here’s the XS twist:

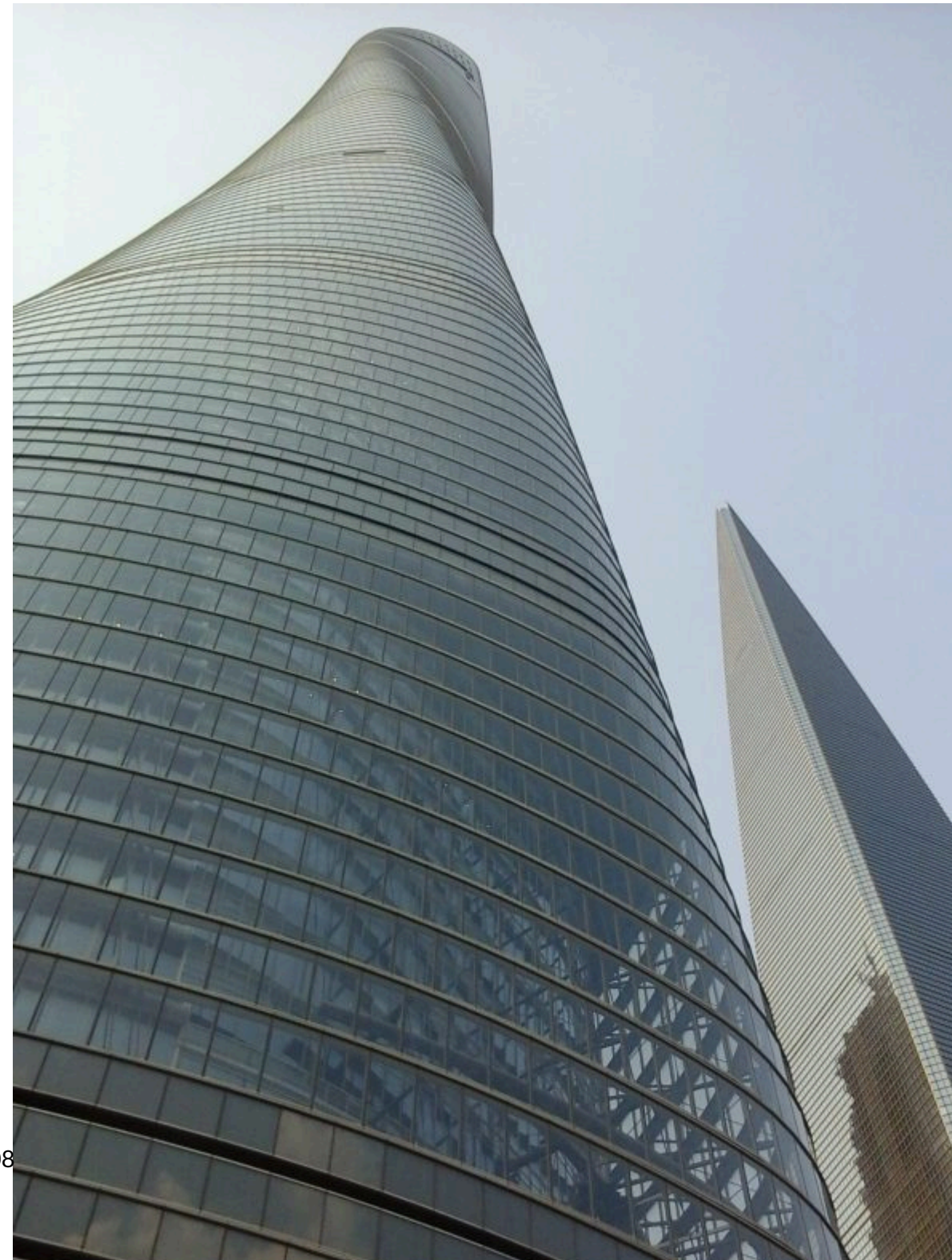


It's the new Shanghai Tower, in Lujiazui. Latest glistening jewel in a fabulously beautiful city.

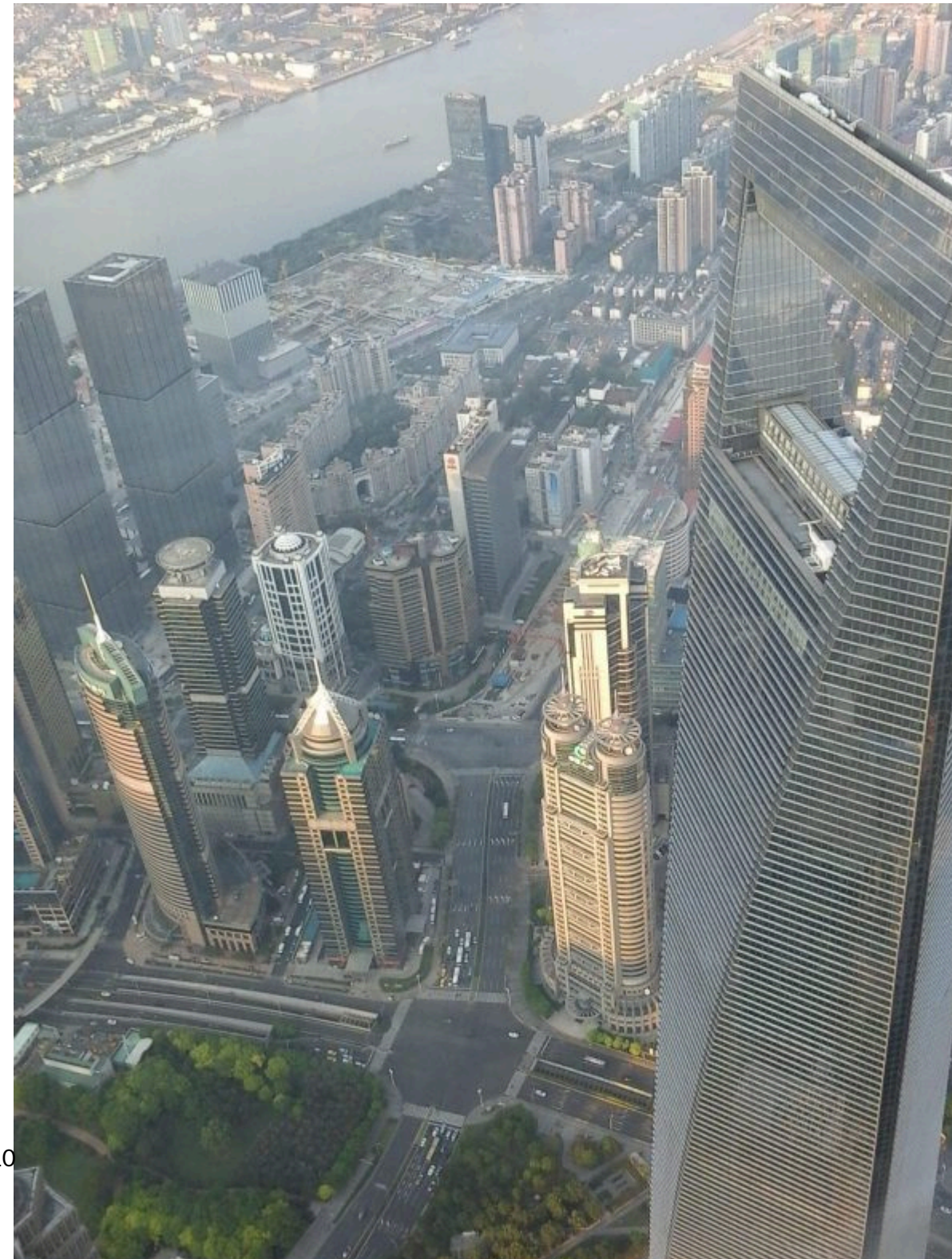
May 6, 2015

Shanghai Tower

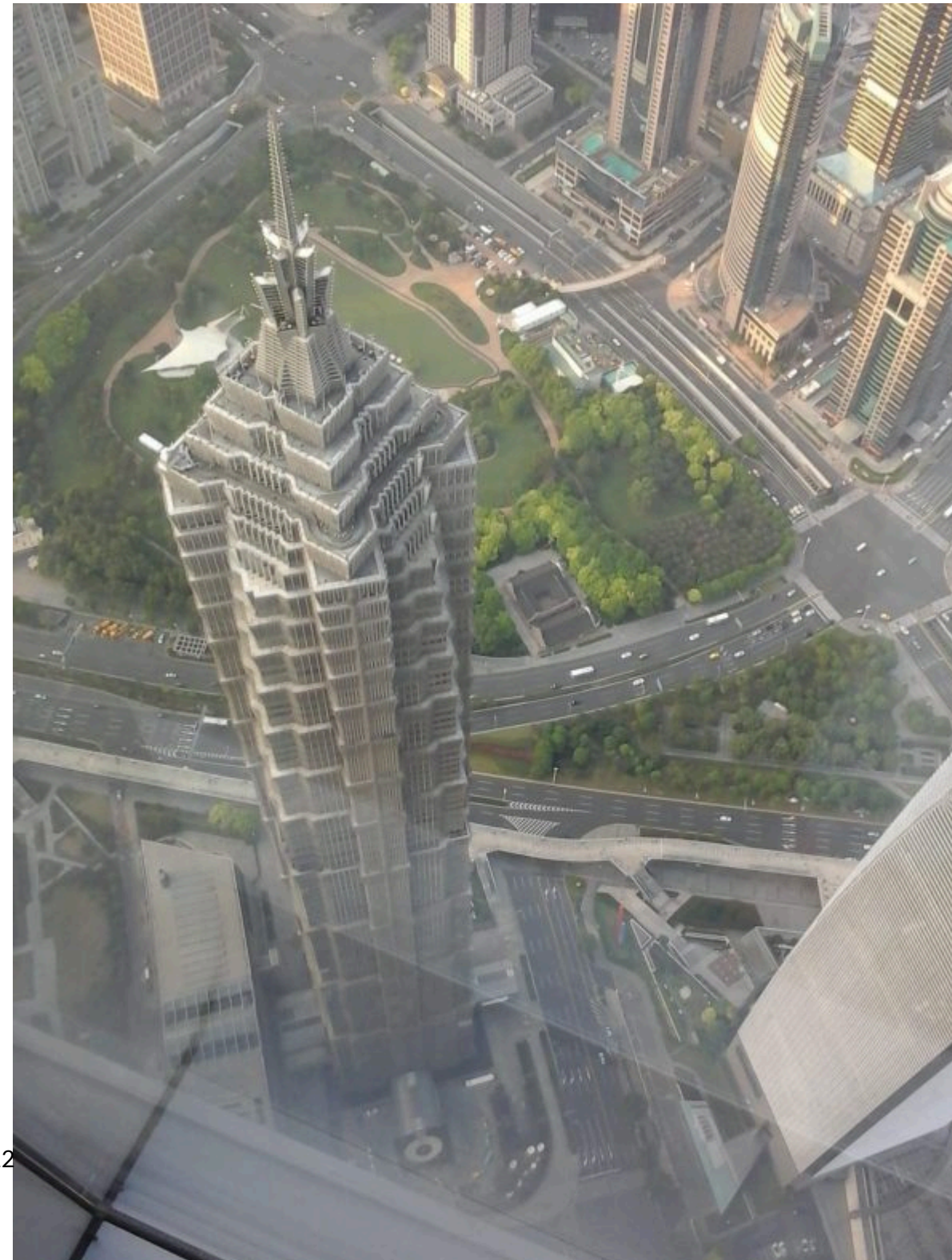
It's a "Green Smart Cultural Vertical City" apparently. (Still a fantastic building, although not much seems to be happening inside yet.)



Here's the view from the Observation Deck, looking down on it's closest Shanghai competitor (the Shanghai World Financial Center):



And on number three, the Neo-Deco Jin Mao Tower:



August 29, 2016

35 Today

Shenzhen's birthday is this Wednesday. I'd have put up a 1980 photo, but there wasn't anything there.

Shenzhen today:



The Wikipedia profile.

August 26, 2015

CHAPTER FIVE - NICK LAND'S TRIPS

Out West

The real (paying) job calls. For the last few days of March (and 1st April), I'm going to be 'away' on a research trip to Kashgar (Xinjiang). If connectivity isn't a problem, 'away' might not mean much from the perspective of Cyberspace, but I'm expecting at least moderate disruption (most probably exacerbated by colorful ethnic distractions and horrible torrents of *baijiu*).

If anyone has any Kashgar questions, or information to offer, I'll do my best to bend my investigations responsively. (I'm not thinking of using this blog as a platform for Xinjiang material, but that's not a dogmatic commitment, if there's any interest in the topic.)

[This short Kashgar profile by Ron Gluckman is over a decade old — it will be interesting to see how it has dated.]

ADDED: If the main things you are searching for in life are alcoholic intoxication, coffee, and smooth Internet connectivity, Kashgar cannot — in all honesty — be recommended. On the positive side of the ledger, there's far more of the Old Kashgar left than first appearance suggests (Otangboyi Road is the place to go, following

it past the Idkar Mosque to the night market). The Silk Road commercial culture still thrives, reaching a truly delirious pitch in the Grand Bazaar, which oveflows with sensation-drenching commodities from thousands of kilometers around. The tea is delicious — a spiced up black tea, drunk without milk, but with a distinct hint of Indian *chai*. Ditto the yoghurt (as thick as cream cheese, with a razor sharp edge), and — of course — everything delectable that can be done with a dead sheep whilst remaining *haram*.

It's hard to work out the ethnic balance, but it's at least predominantly Uyghur (I've seen figures between 70-85%). There's no obvious indications of social tension, with everyone seeming to get on with their lives quite frictionlessly, and no signs that I could pick up of street-level Han paranoia. Han Chinese women navigate the streets alone except for small children, seemingly perfectly relaxed about the social environment, and untroubled by any prospect of violence. Our group (two Han, one Bulgarian, one Brit, and one Uyghur government guide — who is excellent btw) have encountered nothing but friendliness, often combined with impressive efforts to sell us stuff. It has to be said, though, that the government propaganda is shockingly crude.

For example, a note at the Idkah Mosque, after explaining the history of CPC renovation efforts, helpfully explains:

All of it shows fully that Chinese government always pays special

attentions to the another and historical cultures of the ethnic groups, and that all ethnic groups warmly welcome Part's [sic] *religious policy. It also shows that different ethnic groups have set up a close relationship of equality, unity and helps to each other, and freedom of beliefs is protected. All ethnic groups live friendly together here. They cooperate to build a beautiful homeland, support heartily the unity of different ethnic groups and the unity of our country, and oppose the ethnic separatism and illegal religious activities.*

Perhaps it sounds better in the Uyghur.

Of course, at the end of the day I'm a regime apologist. Afghanistan and Pakistan are right next door, each demonstrating in their own way the wonders of ethno-democratic self-assertion.

March 27, 2013

Out West (again)

Urumqi this time. I'll fill things out a little when I get a chance (more for my own sake than under any pretence of communication).
That *Baijiu* holocaust problem I worried needlessly about in Kashgar? Urumqi is a very different city …

ADDED: After arriving yesterday we took in the International Bazaar, a more mall-sructured, and thus rather less atmospheric

version of the Kashgar Grand Bazaar, trading similar goods. The most distinctive items were chunks of fossilized wood, so precisely metamorphosed that the minutiae of organic structure were clearly discernible. It's hard not to be impressed when examining the fine-grained organization of a thing that died 150,000,000 years ago.
Next stop was Hong Shan Park, situated at the north-east edge of the city in 1947, but now enveloped. It's high, and gives a vantage point from which to get oriented. Better still, the viewing pavilion there also serves as an urban development museum, including scale models (1947 and today), lots of photographs, and basically everything needed for a firm space-time fix. Finally, there was dinner with the local officials — our hosts — which was great fun (even though I'd been horribly sick the day before and still felt shaky). The *Baijiu* onslaught then unfolded (my travel companion from work turned out to be crazily *lihai*, and probably saved me by deflecting some of the white death torrent onto herself). Maybe I wrote some scraps fished from the gulfs of shadow? Then oblivion.

Next day: Tarim Mummies, the Urumqi version of Shanghai's M50 (art hub), and the city's massive new industrial park called the UETD. The mummies — dessicated accidentally by the arid environment — are very well known, for good reason. Their state of preservation is incredible — you could still wear their clothes (after almost 4,000 years). The whole anthropo-ethnographic backstory is enthralling too, and I need to try and get my head wrapped around it. The oldest

mummies are 'Europoid' and really look as if they could have been Cornish. (Scientific consensus, as I understand it tenuously, identifies them as 'Tokharian'.) This throws the Uyghur-Han ethnic elbowing into disconcerting perspective, but it's just too *out there* to be truly politically sensitive (I'm hoping). If the Welsh start claiming chunks of Xinjiang based on ancestral rights I guess that could change. The old mummies come in two pairs, two 3,800-y.o. females, both 'Europoid', then a pair from a thousand years later, a Europoid male and a mixed Euro-Mongoloid female. Both of these later mummies are tattooed, and for reasons not yet understood were buried with non-matching boots. Then the exhibition throws in a mummified Han official from AD500, but if you folllow the exhibition around in a disciplined counter-clockwise circuit, there's no reason to be thrown off by this bizarre and crudely-motivated *non sequitur*.

The art space had some OK stuff, and reflected the guiding Urumqi attitude: well-meaning, relentlessly multi-cultural, driven by Han, and extremely tame. If you like art that drags you into extra-cosmic abysses of shock and dread, there wasn't much there to set the pulse racing. Lots of pleasant, (unthreateningly) intelligent, traditional, craft-based stuff though.

The industrial park was really something. Pure China, in the sense that it was mostly a (truly immense) construction site, from which some slender threads of raw potential had tumbled backwards into the present. It already has a population of 270,000, and looked

roughly 10% complete. This 'Park' — an entire urban district until a few years ago, when it was re-purposed — is programmed to become a glstening science-fiction entity that would over-awe 70%+ of the world's cities (with most of the remaining 30% being Chinese). We saw a truck plant and the local Coca-Cola operation — full of clattering robotic bottling machinery — and got to ask some questions about the bases of Xinjiang growth. The impression we got is that serving the wider Central Asian market is the cornerstone of everybody's plans.

ADDED: Six hours on the road and — just to keep things moving forwards smoothly — a two hour visit to a *baijiu* factory in the middle (plus a lot of other stuff). Two bottles of sample (non-retail maximum strength) rocket fuel in my bag, and four hours sleep to cling onto. Beyond the lesson that Shariah isn't exactly calling the shots in northern Xinjiang, analysis and reflection is going to be delayed.

May 8, 2013

Out West (yet again)

Whatever the prejudices you might harbor against Urumqi Internet connections in second rate hotels, they're probably over-generous. I've been effectively de-twitterized by sheer technological crappitude rather than anything more sinister, but this channel

seems to be (barely) OK. (Annoyingly, they provide a computer in the room, which locks everything into chronic dysfunction.) So apologies for the deteriorated state of communications over the next few days.

The main objective of this trip is to explore Xinjiang's Buddhist heritage, which is so vast and rich that even some superficial scratching should turn up some interesting stuff. The main current of Buddhist influence into China passed this way, hybridizing wildly with other cultures in one of the world's great mixing zones. After arriving off the steps, the Uyghurs were Buddhist for centuries, before Islam got a grip around the turning point of the first millennium (I'll try to fill in some dates with greater precision later on).

Updates as events, energy, and time permit.

ADDED: Scheduled to arrive at the site of interest tomorrow. Up to now, it's been a mix of some interesting stuff (but probably not *Outside in* material — weird Uyghur dances with cups of water balanced on heads? I didn't think so), Internet nightmare (Twitter inaccessible again), and grand finale: the mandatory *baijiu*-crazed 'austere-enough-for government-work' welcoming banquet. The inebriated babble effect is no doubt obvious. We saw some astounding Tianshan vistas too ('Tianshan Grand Canyon' — don't be put off by the ridiculous name), but I'm hopeless at natural wonder, so I won't even try to communicate it.

We're in Baicheng now. I'll be impressed if anyone's heard of it, bt

it seems shockingly well-governed, and probably the most attractive modern city in Xinjiang. For us, it's just the gateway out to the Buddha caves, but it's been an interesting surprise. It's prosperous — due to petrochemicals — well-designed, seems highly livable, and it's partnered with Wenzhou (which you should have heard of), a relationship that has been very effectively milked.

Our hotel is a beautiful Jiangnan-style place, which also came as a serious shock. We'd expected we were on the way down from the Urumuqi quarters to something seriously dire, but instead find ourselves in one of the nicest hotels in Xinjiang — and that does actually mean really nice. Still no reliable Internet connectivity though (by which I mean the opportunity to run my VPN), so the twitter shakes are getting bad. [If Spandrell's out there — I'm not hiding from your ruthless tweet-fu logic, my tongue's been cut out.]

September 22, 2013

Guizhou

Over the next few days I'll be in Guizhou, known for its karst landscapes, insanely spicy food, and comparative poverty. The computer is coming — but so are the kids, so blogging is likely to be erratic at best. It's going to be a test of my *Outside in* addiction, and one that I'm already failing … digit tremors and threads of mild

delirium are creeping in, and I haven't left the house (or keyboard) yet.

ADDED: As Spandrell points out in the comments, ethnic complexity should have been added to the list of main Guizhou promotion points. There are a whole bunch of 'minorities' here, of whom the Miao are probably the best known, and exotic 'tribal' clothing (especially impractically-ornate head-dresses) are easy to spot even in the metropolis — more as attractions in shops and restaurants than on the street. The tribals are obviously little folk, giving the province a land-of-the-pixies feel. We've yet to see any foreigners here.

We're still in Guiyang, the provincial capital, which might be the smallest Chinese city we've ever seen — just 1.2 million according to our (highly untrustworthy) guidebook. I pretty much always like Chinese cities, and this one — whilst definitely odd — is no exception. The architecture is only tenuously sane, consisting in large part of highly eclectic experiments in variants of hybrid Chinese modernism, or an oneiric re-visitation of global architectural history spliced with Chinese characteristics. Unconvincingly restored Ming complexes co-exist with space-ship roofed towers and grandiose domed edifices from an imagined 1920s. They're doing something ambitious with the river, but it's hard to quite tell what.

We spent the morning at Qianling Park, right at the edge of the city, and an amazing place to visit. Forested misty hills, covered in

obscure Buddhist carvings, with the province's largest temple at the top. Thousands of monkeys populate the park, and even though some of these now form a welfare-dependent semi-criminal underclass, they were still the best-behaved wild simians we've yet encountered — fearless, dignified, entertaining, and pacific. (There was no sign of the 'heavy begging' we've encountered among macaques elsewhere in China — let alone among the terrifying monkey gangs in India — and I'm putting that down to the Buddhist influence.)

ADDED: Anshun, the gateway into central Guizhou, is a scruffy town of roughly 400,000. Our hotel — The Triumphal (seriously) — was supposedly a 4-star, everything about it was vaguely dysfunctional, and the Chintz aesthetics were like needles in the eyeballs. (The room included its own Internet-connected computer, which meant that both the machine and the connection were scarcely endurable.)

Once out into the scenic areas (no easy task), the squalor and hassle was thoroughly redeemed. We were 'doing' geology rather than ethnography, so the main cultural stimulus was provided by Miao grannies selling cucumbers and boiled eggs to the tourists (all Chinese, as far as we could tell). The area around Huangguoshu — where a new city has been built on (tourist industry) spec. — is dominated by vast, rugged, karst tracts: canyons, caverns, sculpted mountain-pillars, and brutally-sliced cliffs, cross-cut by innumerable waterways and small lakes. It's truly stunning.

A high point for us was passing behind the Huangguoshu Great Waterfall (Dapubu), climbing through a series of winding limestone caves that broke out intermittently into open ledges, in front of which the largest waterfall in Asia deluged downwards thunderously. We'd already explored the mind-melting Tianxing area earlier in the day [insert karst landscape superlatives here] and were bouncing against the outer limits of stimulation absorption.

Philosophical stimulation? One curiosity of special note (at Tianxing) had the English label 'The Root of the Human Race' — it was indeed a root, of some old, tough rock-clinging creeper, but it only really made sense in Chinese, because "Human Race" translated the character 'ren' (very roughly an inverted 'V'), and what was being described was a rising cascade of converging connections. The 'ren' ideogram is sometimes explained as an image of convergence, so the Tianxing root was radicalizing [sic] a pre-existing conception, but one that blatantly contradicts the dominant image of human ancestry — whether Darwinian or Biblical — as a 'tree' diverging from a single root. It has the potential to be upsetting in all kinds of ways, so I've reserved this creeper a stretch of undistracted attention sometime soon …

May 1, 2013

Hong Kong

Latest travel distraction is the world capital of the technocommercialists. Of course, it's a city that I adore to the edge of brain-stem seizure. Just seeing the Kowloon container port is almost enough to persuade one that the process on this planet is actually going OK.

Naively, I had expected that Mandarin would have made some obvious inroads since the last time I was here (roughly six years ago). No sign of that, though. It's quite stunning how much English there is here, and the extent to which English remains the default alternative to Cantonese. That has to have important implications in respect to the cultural foundations of Hong Kong autonomy.

Expeditionary inertialization due to exhausted children prevented exploration getting off the ground today. Nothing too adventurous is likely to happen, but I'll try to record a few sporadic notes here. Hong Kong is an iconic city, with an exceptional intensity of sociopolitical meaning, so it should be possible to discuss — and even argue about — it.

I'm only here (with family) for a few days, then returning to Shanghai for six weeks of solitary, extremely high-intensity production. After Thursday, if anybody has extravagant demands to make, it's the time to make them. Whatever is ever going to be possible should be possible soon. Most likely, I'll learn some crushing

lessons about project feasibility, because all my excuses will be gone.

ADDED: Hong Kong has to be a critically important example for the development of the sovereignty discussion. It's almost certainly the freest society in the world, whilst quite clearly under the sovereignty of a nation that, even to its its most ardent defenders, equally certainly isn't. Perhaps this doesn't rise to the level of a paradox. After all, up until 1997, when it served (retrospectively) as a crucial case of the neoreactionary thesis — distinguishing liberty and democracy with extreme clarity — the structure was not altogether different. Even then, the colonial metropolis was evidently pitched at a far lower level of liberty than its comparatively small, powerless, and insultingly disposable possession. Given the international image of the PRC, however, it would surely be hard to argue that the peculiarity had not been exacerbated.

In Hong Kong, the PRC 'oversees' an outpost that operates as a zone of uninhibited reflection upon its ideologically hyper-sensitive motherland. There are many ways to explore this. It connects with the larger issue of Cantonese ethnic self-consciousness — a topic of truly immense significance for China's medium-term future. It has important academic and media dimensions. It also shapes the concrete reality of China's engagement with the world, especially in its most 'deterritorialized' or cosmo-capitalist dimension.

On this trip, the area which brought it most into focus was the visual arts. Most particularly, a fascinating exhibition at the Asia

Society Hong Kong Center called *Light before Dawn: Unofficial Chinese Art 1974-1985*. This show covered material that might have been found in Shanghai today, except what would have been explored approximately, cautiously, and with nervous cunning in Shanghai, was brought together brazenly and (for anyone habituated to mainland cultural norms) provocatively in Kong Kong. The message of the exhibition was stark: Socialist Realism was benighted, and the cultural escape from the command economy era was a liberation from totalitarian night. The three decades from 1949-79 were a horror story, from which China has been released. It scarcely needs to be said that this is not a narrative in conformity with the 'official' PRC storyline of Reform and Opening, and its historical meaning.

Setting aside the details of the show, for the moment, the questions it raises concern Hong Kong, China, sovereignty, and cultural autonomy. Does China surreptitiously appreciate this offshore zone of critical leverage? Does it merely tolerate Hong Kong's role as gadfly, due to the preeminence of other factors, and interests? (Chinese mainland capitalism clearly makes massive use of the 'One Country Two Systems' arrangement, in many different ways.) How functional is a peripheral zone of exorbitant freedom, considered abstractly, as an appendage to large-scale authoritarian social structures in general? Could this be the way that a rational apparatus of power realistically discriminates, eagerly seizing upon

an invaluable exemption from impractical universalism? That is what *Outside in* suspects.

June 29, 2013

Vietnam (scraps)

My Vietnam is like my China: accessed from the South, from the mega-urban, commercial culture, and from pre-communist traditions. It's very much the view from Saigon (and that isn't something I regret). Saigon would be a great place to live (in small part because the idea of calling it Ho Chi Minh City is a transparent joke).

Doi Moi looks like it should work a lot like Gaige Kaifeng (as a local version of generic 'Reform and Opening' in a 'Market Leninist' regime) — but it doesn't seem to be quite working out. If rationalized corruptocracy is close to ideal limit of effective government among large states, Vietnam seems to have managed the corruptocracy far better than the rationalization. Infrastructure development — the magic sauce of recent Chinese hyper-growth — has not reached ignition. The country is too small to fund its own ambitions, and too chaotically kleptocratic to bring in foreign investment on the scale required. Despite many excellent things going for it, the country is floundering with a morose economic spirit that is almost Western.

Vietnamese coffee is among the most sublime offerings this tortured planet supplies. Thick, dark, and massively caffeinated, it makes a Starbucks brew seem like dishwater. One cup and the flight has paid for itself, as far as the utilitarian calculus is concerned.

A visit to Saigon's fine arts museum is a grave disappointment. The building is a beautiful colonial structure, but the contents — once despicable trash had been ceremoniously burned — would fill a small room. There's no way Vietnam will be setting the world art market on fire in the immediate future.

Cao Dai is very strange. Created as a new religion in 1926, with the obvious brief to make spiritual sense of Vietnam's peculiar position with cultural history and geography, it canonized Victor Hugo and Sun Yat-sen as signatories of "the third alliance between God and man" (after Moses and Jesus). Cao Dai's Masonic founder, Nguyen Gia Tri, rounded out the new sacred triumvirate.

"I saw an eye" was the way my seven-year-old daughter recorded her experience of the main Cao Dai temple. That would be the Sauronic Cosmic Eye, repeated obsessively as a motif, overlooking the white-robed devotees during their observances. The quantity of lurid symbolism is quite overwhelming. For anybody with the slightest attachment to a restrained religious tradition, the effect would be one of unbridled spiritual chaos. Apparently good natured, and seriously interesting, though.

Vietnamese water puppet theater — more engaging than I had

expected.

[Typing on this device is killing me — I'm heading out into the fragrant tropical night for a cigarette.]

January 17, 2014

Angkor (scraps)

Siem Reap (Cambodia) is a scruffily exotic town that never threatens to over-stretch the adjective bank. For anyone who has been out of the tropics for a while, it's charming enough, and the locals are pleasant, dignified folk. Our hotel, with its hints of French colonial heritage and lush foliage is more than OK (as long as you don't make the mistake of testing their catering capabilities). Siem Reap, however, is just a jump-off point.

The Angkor sites, in contrast, incinerate all available positive adjectives within seconds, threatening speechlessness. It's absolutely necessary to assume a front-rank wonders-of-the-world baseline in what follows, with awe-struck mind-melt accepted as the default perceptual mode (in the absence of, and in addition to, any explicit qualification). There might be more stunning spectacles to be found on this earth, but that would require a serious argument.

The Angkor temples were constructed over a period of 630 years, reaching a climactic golden age of architectural production in the

14th and early 15th centuries. Go read a history book (I still need to).

Angkor Thom is an entire temple city, with large tracts of rain forest within its walls, and a moat of lake-like scale without. One architectural feature well worth noting at an early stage follows from the fact that the Khmers never mastered the arch, so their internal spaces have a massy, geological character, often rising to impressive heights, but without culminating vaults. Technically, therefore, it is a kind of anti-gothic, ascending through sheer mountainous upsurge of stacked stone, rather than gravity-defying structure. It is if the earth were imperiously commanded to soar, without the slightest hint of sublimation into anything other than itself. These are fabulously sculpted artificial mountains — sacred mesas. According to my guidebook, there are 11,000 carved figures and 1.2km of bas reliefs on the Bayon — the core of Angkor Thom. These carvings were detailed to the level of fine textile design on the skirts of miniature dancers, while including giant enigmatic faces several meters across (and in great number).

Angkor Wat is not only a monumental aesthetic composition, but also an enthralling philosophical puzzle. As befits the final days of the snake year, it is a symbolic complex strung together by nagas. These seven-headed serpent monsters are arrayed around the site as guardians, rearing up from the end of every balustrade. They also figure prominently on the series of huge, continuous bas reliefs that wrap the main structure, and — truly provocatively — provide hoods

for numerous Buddha statues throughout the site. (Angkor Wat is thought to be devoted primarily to Vishnu, with Buddhism present as a later arrival.) This hissing religious insidiousness needs futher attention at a future point.


Click image to enlarge.

(Five-headed nagas are atypical — this one was found at Ta Prohm.)

The third prominent naga moment occurs on the most revered of the bas reliefs, which depicts the ‘stirring of the ocean of milk’. A quick step back first …

Viewed panoramically, Angkor Wat epitomizes timeless serenity. Close examination of its narrative carvings, however, reveals an obsession with war. Armies clash, and parade, on earth and in the heavens. Even the torments of the underworld have the character of

military atrocity — stabbings, slashings, and impalings. The cosmos depicted tends to a slaughterhouse.

It is here that the naga key can be inserted. The stirring of the ocean of milk (the Milky Way?) is a tug-of-war between gods and demons — a cosmic war, therefore, whose thread is the vast naga Vasuki, whose body is stretched across a hundred meters (?) of delicately-carved display space. Crucially, a central pivot, consisting of Mount Mandala resting upon the body of Vishnu in turtle-form, converts this conflictual back-and-forth into rotary dynamism — appropriating war to a celestial function …


Click image to enlarge.

ADDED: The third temple in the core of the Angkor complex is Ta Prohm. For sheeraesthetic rapture, it might be the most stunning. (I'm going to add some snaps as soon as bandwidth considerations

allow that.)

Ta Prohm has been shattered and devoured by the jungle, with broken masonry fused (at once beautifully and hideously) with monstrous trees. It thus vividly presents a hard collision between culture and nature in the starkest possible terms. The trees conducting the slow-motion assault are known locally as ‘spung’ (botanically: tetramelesnudiflora). No director could have chosen better assailants than these behemoths, with massive, twisting roots. It was obvious from this spectacle that trees do tentacle horror even more impressively than cephalopods, if allowance is made for the inhuman time factor.

An almost equally superb example of semi-digested cyclopean civilization is found at Beng Mealea, a two-hour tuk tuk ride away, through jungle-fringe countryside. The heritage preservation problems of intervening in this titanic clash are fascinating to contemplate. How does one appropriately restore — or merely save — an intricately-carved shrine half-eaten by a colossal tree? Is a formula even imaginable?

January 21, 2014

Cambodia (scraps)

The Angkor remains tend to overwhelm the experience of the

country — probably as the pharonic remains of ancient Egypt do there. The better half raised some thought-provoking points about the situation. A regime based on god-king sovereignty, caste, and war — hardcore even by the wildest imaginings of contemporary reactionaries, therefore (and with no hint of 'neo-' in sight) — created a legacy that continues to support the country six centuries after the collapse of the Khmer kingdom. How does this affect calculations of social order, economics, and time? It certainly inclines the mind toward illiberal musings.

***

Cambodian money is a study in the contemporary world order. In Siem Reap, especially, the economy is fully dollarized. The local currency, the Riel, is worth USD0.00025, and we never came across a note worth more than 25 cents until leaving SR. Riels were used as change (compensating for the absence of US specie). Seignorage bitchez. Everyone says it doesn't amount to much in aggregate, but the symbolism is certainly something.

In Kampot, we threw a chunk of the local economy into chaos trying to break a 10 dollar bill. The first group of street traders we approached had no idea whar it was (might as well have been some kind of arcane futures contract). It was only when we got into the center of town that 'money' and 'small change' became differentiable concepts?

***

The whole ‘Khmer Rouge accelerated dysgenics’ idea makes a lot of sense, conceptually, but the locals seem competent enough on the evidence provided by casual exposure. Given where the country has been, it seems to be doing OK.

The second HBDish (or as we say ‘Spandrellish’) point raised in respect to the Vietnamese was ‘tropical work habits’ — I’ll plead agnosticism, while reluctantly noting that Siem Reap contained the first “6-11s” I’ve ever seen …

***

Cambodian politics? Not much new information really, except (1) the state of media openness seems quite high (for better and for worse, given the chronic Cathedralism of the contemporary journalistic mind), and (2) the pervasive promotion of the Cambodian People’s Party is recognizably ‘communist’ in its indifference to the pseudo-binary balance recognized by friend and foe alike as the hegemonic global norm. Going out on a limb, I’d hazard that the country is doing well by effectively suppressing anything beyond nominal democracy, but the pressure to deteriorate will only get worse.

***

Being disconnected in stages is a new experience. All connectivity disappeared at 9pm last night (or so) — it wasn’t something I appreciated. Satellite-linked neuro-embedded chip? Yes please.

***

Conversations with a Tuk Tuk Driver #1 (Democracy):

Us: "So who did you support in the last election?'

TTD: "I voted for Sam Rainsy."

US: "What did you like about him?"

TTD: "He promised to spend more money on things. Hun Sen is spending a lot of money, but Sam Rainsy said he would spend even more money."

Conversations with a Tuk Tuk Driver #2 (Colonialism):

Us: "This place [a pepper farm] is great. [Joking, to kids] Would you like to become Cambodian pepper farmers?"

TTD [jumping in]: "Easy. There's a lot right next door available for US$6,000. Enough space to grow pepper, mangoes, papaya, bananas, keep some chickens, some cows — that's really good money, cows."

Us: "It sounds like a lot of work."

TTD: "No problem! Cambodian people would do all the work. You could just lie in hammocks, telling them what to do. They'd do all the farming, ask if you want something to eat, bring you drinks …"

[more later]

January 26, 2014

Scrap snaps (#1)

The Mogao Caves are located in a harsh place. (Click on images to

enlarge.)







The caves shown are in the northern cluster, whose exterior features have not been defaced by reinforced concrete. The southern group has been externally ruined by Zhou Enlai (although he seems to have meant well), but its interiors are the great treasures of the site, and some are open to the public, by guided tour. Some images of southern cave interiors (reconstructions) to follow.

April 12, 2014

Scrap snaps (#2)

Photography is forbidden in the Dunhuang grottoes, and under the close supervision of the mandatory tour, this prohibition is strictly

enforced. Photography is also forbidden in the adjacent Mogaoku Museum …

The spine of the museum consists of a row of (extremely impressive) cave reconstructions, sampled from among the 492 decorated caves at the site. (A two-hour tour of the site takes in perhaps 10.)

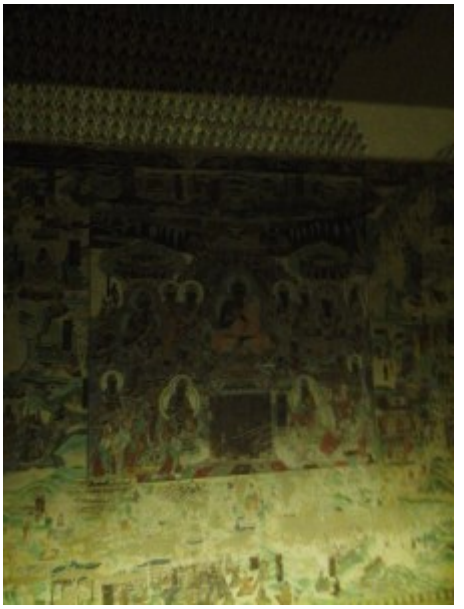
The following images are of reconstructions, not originals. The photographic quality is especially dire, given the unusual lighting conditions and cramped space. What I'm posting here is what I've got. (Click on images to expand.)

Cave 003:



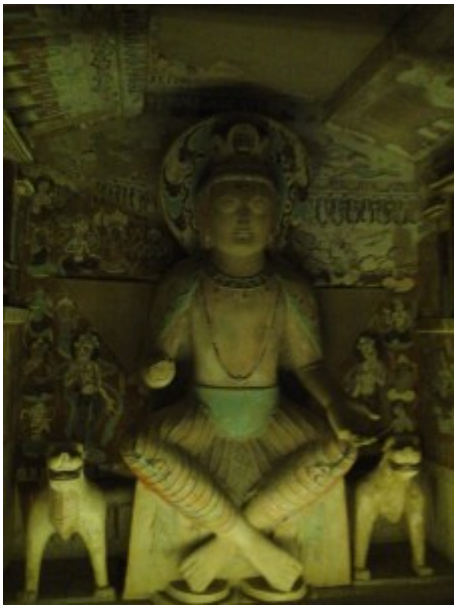


Cave 217 (one of the most renowned caves, whose images — disputedly — convey scenes and stories from the *Lotus Sutra*):



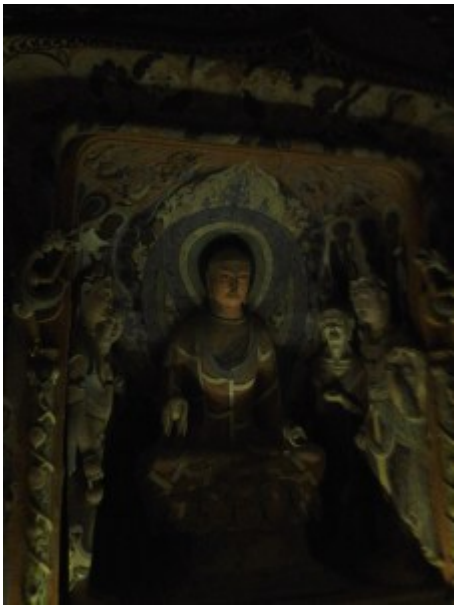


Cave 275:



Cave 419:

Reignition





April 13, 2014

Disconnection

Unplugged in Gulang Yu (involuntarily). Normal service to be resumed ASAP. Here‘s some soft jungle to be going on with.

… Damn, POS pseudo-connection can‘t even manage that.

(Have they hung Bryce yet?)

ADDED: Looks like it’s possible (finally) to put up a few tropical retreat snaps (and seems like they’re clickable):









(I can't get enough of this arborohorror.) One more:



ADDED: The two posts that have made all this ('Trannygate')

craziness worthwhile —

(1) Nyan Sandwich at More Right "… is Neoreaction a heretical political-insight-seeking movement, or a right-wing activist movement?"

(2) Nick B Steves on the Official Neoreactionary Position (endorsed by the most right-wing person on the Internet).

May 30, 2014

Shenzhen

The new airport doesn't by any means say it all, but it says a lot:



If it were not that ‘modernity’ (also) connoted friction and nostalgia, would there be any hesitation in describing Shenzhen as the most modern city in the world? It is nothing beyond what the opportunities of the present era have enabled it to be — a uniquely unambiguous urban seizure of the global now. (*Urban Future* adores this place to the edge of neurological catastrophe.)

[Disjointed commentary to be added as the opportunity arises]

Huaqiang Bei — Chips with everything:


内存卡
批发U盘

Shenzhen, and Huaqiang Bei in particular, places absolutely unapologetic euphoric commoditization on display. This is the world's Gizmoverse.

No one can have even the faintest idea how massively electronic production differentiates into lineages, species, sub-species, and minutely subtle varieties, until they wander through these markets. Combining innovative variation, replication at mind-melting scales, and fierce commercial selection (expressed through adaptive minutiae of product specification and price), the ecological analogy — based on fabulously complex networks of competition and cooperation — is irresistible. The electronic jungle is open to exploration.

Each product line opens niches for others. Not only are there dazzling multitudes of mobile phone types — an entire phylum now, honing classical forms, and branching off chaotically down lines of mutation — but also symbiotc industries for phone cases ("protective shells"), stands, re-chargers, input and output accessories, cables and connectors, each assertively seizing its patches of commercial display space.






艾蒂
Adila

The Huaqiang Bei outlets are described as ‘factory shops’ — sheer industrial exuberance jutting into exchange space. As an indicator, bulk discounts are the norm. Buy a single gizmo of any kind and the deal is met with the friendly but puzzled question: “Only one piece?” Racks of Cyberspace candy tilt towards rapid circulatory flow.

More (always massively more) on a descent into the commoditronic core of intensive modernity:






收库存
百榮電子

(There are other aspects to Shenzhen than turbular emergent machine-mind markets, and they deserve a chilled Shenzhen post. Then, some deeper engagement with the seething interior of Darwinized social logistics, competitive supply, or the Commoditronic Thing.)

September 12, 2014

Scrap note (#14)

… Shenzhen fragments (from the world's tech-comm paradise).

Sucking up to the specter of Sino-Capitalism:



Ironically, my connectivity here is so bad it's driving me out of my mind, so this is arriving in pieces …

Our hotel is in Huaqiang Bei, the center of the Shenzhen electronic market zone. The area is packed with emporia, which are in turn packed with products — and more specifically *commodities*. Rather than masking the traits of commercial mass-production under a veneer of 'boutique' rarity, the Shenzhen spirit is most gloriously manifested in the naked exhibition of hyper-alienated, techno-proliferated, trade-format *volumes*. Chips (of all kinds) come in sheets, which are then stacked into piles, and tessalated into display places designed to minutely explore minimal differences (product micro-specifications and volume-linked price slices). This is capitalism. It's easy — in a decline-phase Westernized world — to forget what it looks like.




内存卡
批发

Cables:


利兴达电子
USB CABLE
USB CABLE
USB CABLE
LXD

Skynet embryo chips in the Huitong Professional Security Market:


人脸识别摄像机
百万高清DVR
高清红外

The drone market is only just getting started (at least, we didn't see any stacks):


Camcorder
Camcorder
Camcorder

September 13, 2014

NZ Scraps

Fragments from the West Coast, plus some bits and pieces.

Currently in a gothic inspiration — the Otira Hotel — just beyond Arthur's Pass. Bought for one million dollars, along with the whole village of forty houses. It's on the rail-line, but remained on the market for years because:
1) It's a Gold Rush ghost town with no economic base
2) It's deep in a valley that plunges it into permanent shadow for half the year
3) There's a massive quake due (on the fault-line it straddles) which is expected to destroy everything
The new owners have stuffed the hotel bar with Gold Rush antiques, taxidermy specimens, the first telegraph cable, freaky life-size marionettes … it should be getting dark for the full effect (but it isn't yet) …

On an Internet ration tonight (Dec. 27.), but I'm going to try to keep this alive — meaning updates undramatized by an 'ADDED'. Also pics (but some slight time lag likely there).

The NZ west coast is dominated by a near-continuous strip of temperate rain forest, blurring into sub-tropical rain forest in the

north. The peculiar local vegetation, including numerous species of giant ferns, give the landscape a prehistoric flavor. It's also extremely rugged, with the western slopes of the NZ alps cascading right down to the coast. The sea is brutal, and the coastline deeply mauled. The early exploration of this area was tough. It's conspicuously Gnon-tinged geography. (Patience needed on the pix front, apologies.)

Only 30,000 people live on the west coast of the South Island — and most of them are trying with greater or lesser urgency to leave. The landscape is glorious (the British Columbia comparison is inescapable). Once drone logistics make it viable to survive in web-linked isolation in this area, it's going to make a spectacular refuge. For the moment, it's populated by hippies, hill-billies, and extraction-industry social detritus (a great horror fiction mix, however — drugs, guns, and expendables).

Finally — NZ West Coast pics (via the better half).

December 25, 2014

Singapore

No one really denies that Singapore is the most functional society on earth, which is interesting in itself. Everything works here (even multiculturalism (of which they have the superior Confucian hegemony version, rather than the ethno-masochistic late-Christian

fiasco)). Practical civilization reaches its zenith in the orchid zone of the Singapore botanic gardens, or somewhere close to it. This drives a lot of people — even those who profoundly admire the place — into a sulfurous rage.

No one likes an apple-polisher of Gnon (or scarcely anyone, I'm exempting myself, along with a few others). By demonstrating social functionality, Singapore makes everyone look bad, which doesn't go down well. *The Sings make us all look like useless scum*. Yes, there is that.

Conversation snippets:

"How much crime is there in Singapore?"

"Not much. I saw a sign saying 'Warning! Five bicycles have been stolen from this area in the last three years.' People were leaving them there unlocked."

"I've known a lot of Singaporeans, but I've never really had a Singaporean friend. … If you're used to going out on a Friday night, getting hammered, and waking up in the morning feeling like crap, it's hard. No one does that here. The Singaporeans are sensible all the freaking time …"

The stairwell door to the apartment where we're staying has a biometric identification system (plus two redundant human security guards).

The demographic problem — I'm increasingly convinced — is hugely about education costs (in money and time). It's k-selection

catastrophe. That's a can to be kicked down the road for the time being, though, because no one has a solid solution to offer right now. Mentioned here because it's deep, highly general, and the *only criticism of Singapore that deserves to be taken remotely seriously*.

3.5 million citizens, and 1.5 million permanent residents. ('PRs' are obligated to do national military service.)

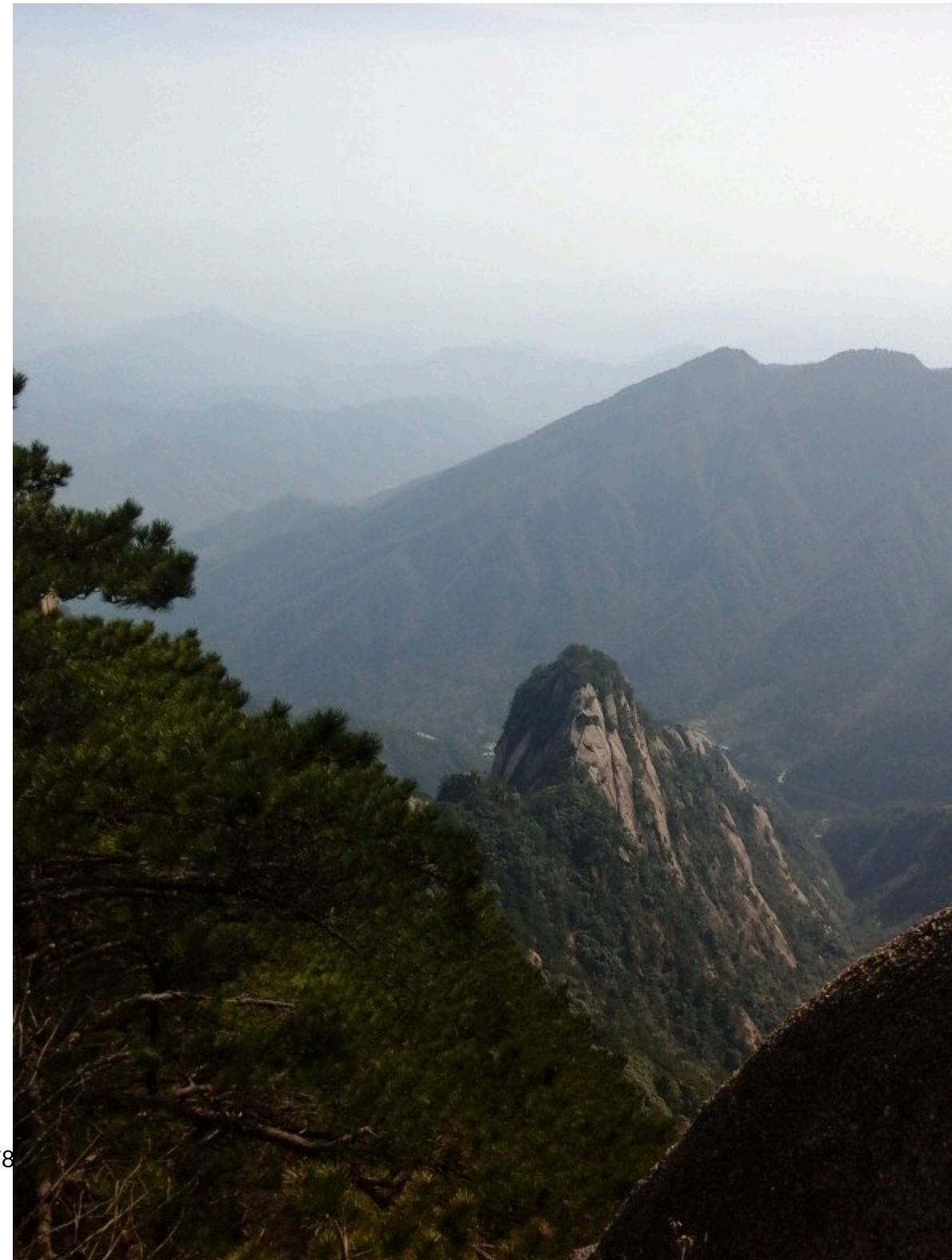
I'll try to update this further (and if I was Singaporean I'd almost certainly deliver).

January 7, 2015

Scrap snaps (#3)



Huangshan — It isn't K2 (but then I'd never be idiotic enough to try scaling K2.)





April 2, 2016

Vietnam (scraps) II

Arrived in Hanoi a few hours ago (first time in the northern part of Vietnam). Will be here a couple of days, then down south to Hoi An, and Hue. I'll try to ad some notes pics, in stages.

One less than massively-inspired snap so far, of the Hanoi Old Quarter, (near our hotel):


Trà Đá

Anyone with a particular desire to know that I'm nodding along in glum agreement can feel free to tell me its one of the most execrable pieces of photographic garbage to yet soil the terrestrial infosphere. Hoping, in inadequate excuse, that it gives some vague hint of the local atmosphere. Will try to up my game to a more ordinary level of sub-mediocrity in the days ahead.

(Organization this time should be up to a reasonably competent Chaos Patch tomorrow.) A

ADDED: At the shrine of the Long Do God, heaps of 'Choco-Pops' packets and a pyramid of canned beers offered solemnly in sacrifice.

May 14, 2016

NZ Stuff

Barry Crump is seen as capturing the edge of the place. There's a recent movie based on one of his books (recommended for the Outer-Anglosphere cultural flavour).

There's also a route to Samuel Butler, through the back country.

The outlaw myth is far more integral to the Anglo culture than much of NRx can easily be happy about. Everyone is going to sympathise with the runaways, not with the search party.

Some (real) advice from the bush: "Keep moving or you'll be eaten." (Deeper than it was meant to be at the time.)

December 22, 2016

Disconnection VI

Posted from Tokyo, first time in Japan, which is awesome so far. *An open society without being stupid about it* would be the NRx fast-summary (sound, but limited). It was *vastly* easier to get into Japan than the United States.

Staying in the AirB&B equivalent of a coffin-hotel, but the situation is good (in Ueno).

Civilization level meets high expectations, and friendliness level exceeds them.

Much more English signage than expected, and the inherited Chinese characters have preserved their meanings, if not their phonological values, so the urban landscape is surprisingly intelligible.

Micro-artisan businesses of extreme excellence, typically run by elderly people, are everywhere.

Automation dialed up to eleven.

Yet to see a single over-weight person (which out-performs the stereotype).

Ginza:


LUMINE

January 27, 2017

SECTION A - NEO-TRADITIONALISM

Neo-Traditionalism

YI XIANG

Paradox prompts thought. Arriving at the unthinkable after proceeding, step-by-step, along the path of reason, unsettles comfortable mental routines and points – obscurely – towards something new. Nothing twists this prompt more intensely than time-paradox, which grates thought open upon the basic tangles of reality.

The main creative current of Shanghai visual arts grasps this instinctively. Whilst predictably multidimensional (and in other respects unpredictable), the work revealed by Shanghai artists and

art spaces gravitates distinctively towards themes and techniques that can be plausibly described as *neo-traditionalist*. This inherently paradoxical inclination is itself a deep tradition, with relevance far beyond the visual arts and knotted roots that can be traced back to the Song Dynasty.

At the Shanghai Himalayas Museum Inaugural Exhibition (scheduled to last until the end of September), this neo-traditionalist tendency is represented with unprecedented scope and penetration. Entitled *Yi Xiang* (意象) in Chinese, it has been translated (lamentably) into 'Insightful Charisma' in English, but this is only a minor tripping point. ('Meaning Manifested' would have been far superior.) *Yi Xiang*, or the tension between essentials and their expression, echoes China's historic neo-traditionalist response to the challenge of modernization, as formulated during the Qing and Republican period: 'Chinese learning as essence, Western learning as application' (*Zhongxue wei ti, Xixue wei yong*, 中学为体，西学为用). Further scattered echoes of this deep impulse – to guarded assimilation – can be heard, preserved even through superficial inversion, in such recent expressions as 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics'.

Yi Xiang is a complex exhibition, divided into five sections, each labeled by a single Chinese character. Threaded through each is a neo-traditionalist current, modulated in different ways. This is most economically grasped as a refusal to decide between past and future,

tradition and modernity, but to aesthetically stress both together, in a single cryptic direction. The inevitable consequence is a time-scrambling artistic (and curatorial) jolt, which simultaneously progresses into the past and regresses into the future.

The show is self-consciously refracted through China's landscape tradition of *shanshui* (山水) – literally: 'mountain, water' – the aesthetic fusion of the rigid and the fluid, permanence and change, stability and flux. *Shanshui* is extended beyond scenic representation into a method of historical reflection, exploring an intricate time-scape of modifications, appropriations, blockages, deluges, accommodations, and adaptations. The sweep of this insight more than suffices, on its own, to justify the entire exhibition. (I should note, however, that one brilliant but determinedly contrarian commentator has interpreted this focus upon *shanshui* as an evasion of *fengshui*, arguably bypassed due to its politically awkward associations with 'feudal superstition'.)

Shen (神) or 'spirit' is housed in a single softly illuminated gallery, filled with classic *Shanshui* works from the Qing, Ming, and even Song dynasties, along with a smaller number of early modern pieces directly inspired by them. This exquisite, compact sub-exhibition elegantly illustrates the way in which the modernization of tradition is itself a tradition.

Li (理) or 'reason' (a term with rich Neo-Confucian reverberations) is devoted to 'Chinese Cube': an explicitly philosophical uptake of

the classic *Yijing* into a variety of modern codes, translating tradition into a recursive, cryptographic puzzle box.

Qi (气) or 'internal force' ('familiar' through the *Dao* and Traditional Chinese Medicine), is the largest part of the show, consisting of cutting-edge works presented within a coherent, neo-traditionalist curatorial context. The quality of the work displayed is outstanding, including pieces by Li Hongto, Shao Yan, Wang Jieyin, Wang Tiande, Yang Yongliang (and Ma Haiping), and many others. (I hope to return to these artists in future posts.)

Jing (境) or 'imagery' is devoted to architecture, with the neo-traditionalist theme partially displaced into a negotiation between nature and urban construction. The visionary work of Ma Yansong dominates this part of the show.

Yun (韵) or 'rhythm', with its musical sub-theme, pursues the involvements of mountains and water more determinedly than any other part of the show. A complex work by Ding Yi is perhaps the center-piece of this section.

Neo-traditionalism is the main driver of China's cultural renaissance, and the manifested meaning of its greatest aesthetic delights. *Urban Future* will be returning to it as frequently as practically possible.

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NEO-TRADITIONALISM IN HONG KONG

The momentum of modernization is directly proportional to the restoration of tradition (discuss).

Abundant evidence relevant to this thesis is on show in Hong Kong, at two art exhibitions of exceptional interest.

At the Hong Kong Museum of Art, *The Origin of Dao: New Dimensions in Chinese Contemporary Art* (curated by Pi Daojian, open until August 18) exemplifies the infolding of audacious experimentation into profoundly conservative aesthetic commitments. The show is divided into two parts. One includes works in a variety of media, and is moderately stimulating. The other, devoted entirely to recent ink works (with supporting video) is truly outstanding.

Works by Yang Jiechang, Gu Wenda, Zhang Quan, Shao Yan, Kan Tai-Keung, Qiu Zhijie, and others, excavate the creative potentialities of traditional Chinese media and forms, propelling them into a dazzling variety of new horizons. One especially conspicuous theme is the fluid boundary between text and image inherited from the Chinese script, evoking meandering lines of exploration, elaborated in the cryptic gulf between pictorial representation and intelligible

sign. The modernization of native aesthetic tradition progressively liberates these lines — whether broken or unbroken — from both resemblance and significance, on a path of escape into pure form.

Shao Yan demonstrates this trend with particular vividness, through the creation of ink abstracts poised between calligraphy and landscape. An accompanying video shows Shao at work, like a *gongfu* Pollock, realizing a type of Chinese action painting that draws upon the occult root of cultivation (anticipated by the equation of calligraphy and sword-fighting depicted in Zhang Yimou's *Hero*).

At the Hong Kong Asia Society, *Light before Dawn: Unofficial Chinese Art 1974-1985* (through to September 1) concerns the liberation of Chinese art from the constraints of Socialist Realism, as shown through the work of the Caocao, Wuming, and Xingxing artists. From both a Neo-Traditionalist and Shanghai perspective, the Caocao Society works are especially significant, consisting of ink paintings that explicitly (and provocatively) revive artistic impulses which had been ideologically proscribed due to their associations with the Confucian literati. Qiu Deshu's masterpiece *3-5 Times Shouting* (1980) steals the show.

July 29, 2013

CHAPTER ONE - ARTWORKS

Ink-cantations

When art history invokes the 'contemporary', it refers to *now*, the current moment, and thus points into an unresolved perplexity. *Now* remains undefined, whether by science, philosophy, or mystical religion. Our contemporary 'now' is not merely an instant — not even a stretched or dilated instant. It is a time that is still with us, or which we continue to participate in, at once proximate and elusive, still awaiting its sense, obliquely intersecting the narrower present of chronological location and practical schedules.

The visual arts, at their most reflective, enter into this perplexity as into an animating spiral. Whilst succumbing to categorization — or time definition — within a still obscure and incomplete contemporaneity, the art work can also make the act of definition its own, reaching out into the *now*, and telling us what it has found. In doing so it tests itself against an ultimate abstraction.

In some such now, current but chronologically indeterminable, Chinese visual art encountered a critical threshold. The difference between heading forward or backward, advancing or retreating,

ceased – at some 'point' — to be an option, or a choice. Instead, for that complex cultural trend *and* inheritance at once defined as — and defining — *neotraditionalism*, true modernity was discovered in the acceptance of tradition *as a path*. This wave of creative – even explosive – experimentation was also an excavation, and a recovery. It demonstrated that innovative variation was inextricable from the *maintenance of a course*, directed into a future already cryptically indicated by the past.

Beyond Black and White: Chinese Contemporary Abstract Ink, on show at Pearl Lam Galleries (until September 7, 2013), focuses with glorious intensity upon the neotraditionalist current. In keeping with this focus, it both fulfills and deranges expectations, through the audacious explorations of a heritage made new.

The exhibition poises itself between a number of dynamically balanced dualities. Most graphically, it is integrated by its primary material, the contrastive complements of black and white, ink and paper, *yin* and *yang*, perturbed only at the margins by subtle deviations of media, and occasional encroachments of color. Architectural balance is sustained by the great double-helix of Chinese ink wash tradition, the distinct but inter-twined lineages of pictorial and calligraphic expression, image and sign, with each strand inciting the other into heightened flights of formal abstraction. Past and future – as already emphasized — are mutually suspended in a multiplied contemporaneity. Through all of this,

Chinese art is re-balanced in the world, communicating with alternative cultural traditions at the abstract limit of each, where the escape from formal constraint fuses with the reality of time.

"Abstract Ink" – as a culmination of tradition — is already distinctively Chinese, but the true cultural singularity that is pursued here exceeds the medium, to involve, minimally, a reciprocal creative irritation of painting and writing – twin twisted tracks that, between them, describe an aesthetic trajectory into abstraction. The Chinese tradition, propelled by this double training, cultivates resemblance and significance simultaneously, and thus, through relentless sublimation, flees both, into a horizon of purity where strokes and (gray-scale) tones become sheer flight, or indices of escape — cosmic gestures without substance or meaning.

Arrayed along the northern end of the gallery, several series of small pieces by **Qiu Zhenzhong** undertake systematic experiments with stroke and tone. Calligraphic scripts are disentangled by cursive lines into unintelligible forms, or melted through tonal dissolves into the indefinite, whilst images are simplified to the brink of an archaic ideography.

Wang Tiande – an artist of obvious centrality to the neotraditional renaissance – contributes two small pieces worked in his characteristic subtractive method — which combines stroke and tone in a piercing scorch – one tilted into his experimental practice from calligraphy, the other from painting. These pieces represent

him (and testify to his importance), rather than demonstrating his work at its most fully or ambitiously achieved. Also included is a technically-complex textile work, in which the scorch method creates a calligraphically-annotated shirt.

Wei Ligang is represented by a single, large, calligraphy-based work (*Unicorn-Crane*, 2010), whose golden, flowing background relaxes the show's chromatic discipline. Color also creeps in through **Feng Mengbo**'s video work (*Not Too Late*, 2010), which makes the modernization of tradition both theme and medium.

Qiu Deshu, a bold pioneer of neotraditional revival from the early 1980s, has two pieces on display (*Fissuring*, and *Fissuring Life*, 2012), more remarkable for their intelligence than their dazzling aesthetic presence. Abstract explorations of paper tearing and folding, they employ an intermediate ink tone to collapse shape onto the picture plane, bearing witness to a vanished spatial dimension. (As with Wang Tiande, the casual encounter with Qiu Deshu in this show is best taken as an invitation to further engagement with a neotraditionalist artist of supreme importance.)

For sheer visual drama, the calligraphic dimension of the exhibition is dominated by **Wang Dongling**. The three works on show (*Tiger Wind*, 2010; *Benevolence and Integrity*, 2013; and *Chuang-Tzu's "Free and Easy Wandering"*, 2013) are not only striking (even stunning) in themselves, but also remarkable for their extraordinary variety. *Tiger Wind* is a large three-character cursive work whose

bold sweeping lines – unmoderated by intermediate tones – compose a frozen leap of tensed energy. *Benevolence and Integrity* is a more architectural work, structured by soul-sucking slabs of abysmal blackness, whilst *Chuang-Tzu's "Free and Easy Wandering"* is a more traditionally composed work, using serried Chinese script to playfully explore the combinatorial space of shape and shade. These outstanding pieces amply reward a visit to the exhibition on their own.

Three superb works by **Lan Zhenghui** and **Zheng Chongbin** complete the more painterly dimension of the show, displaying the potential of Ink Abstraction at a thrilling level of aesthetic achievement. Lan Zhenghui's huge 'mop' work (*Leap Series No.4*, 2010) exuberantly jumbles ink-tones and stroke-angles to construct a monumental celebration of the medium as a vehicle for artistic liberty. Zheng Chongbin's exquisite abstracts (*Untitled No.16*, 2007; and *Formless*, 2010), sharpening the tonal scale with vivid acrylics, conduct an utterly absorbing visual expedition into the limitless involvements of light and darkness.

"These artists are part of a growing circle in China that draws inspiration from traditional Chinese ink painting and its philosophy as well as Chinese calligraphy," the gallery explains. As the story of Chinese neotraditionalism takes shape, *Beyond Black and White* will surely find a place among the tellers, as well as in the tale. It is also a feast for sense and thought alike. Catch it if you can.

Address: Pearl Lam Galleries, 181 Jiangxi Zhong Lu, (G/F), Huangpu District, Shanghai (021 6323 1989), online.

August 1, 2013

Ningbo

Some time fragmentation is wholly predictable until Wednesday, in Ningbo (Zhejiang), due to an end of summer family break with berserk offspring. That was to have been compounded by computer crisis until the excellent IT guy at the hotel here sorted out what had seemed an insoluble connectivity problem. We're at a beautiful Park Hyatt out at the edge of the town, done out in an aesthetic that mixes Jiangnan elements with the company's cosmopolitan minimalism (rough textures, earth tones, and intricate landscaping seem to be consistent themes.) Our explorations of the city isn't likely to amount to much, but there are a couple of cool things to report on over the next couple of days. My expectation is something like the Hong Kong activity slump, but on heavy tranquillizers, so I'm throwing in a Chaos Patch to keep the wolves at the door.

ADDED (August 27): Besides the hotel itself, the main object of our neo-traditionalist excursion is the Ningbo Museum, which won a Pritzker prize for architect Wang Shu last year. Wang was the architect behind Ningbo's pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo

(2010), a building I raved about at the time (in obscure places). His most distinctive design characteristic is monumental facades of brick and tile, recycled from demolished villages, and tessellated into endlessly absorbing surfaces, minimally punctuated by irregularly oriented and distributed windows. These walls look truly fantastic, each being an intricate composition, subtly incorporating drifts of texture and color from the non-uniform component elements. Exactly how the construction process works remains a mystery to me at this point, since it relies upon an astonishing degree of craft attention at the smallest scale of assembly — and therefore seems to make economies of standardization and scale impossible. In any case, somehow it's done.

The second aspect of the Ningbo Museum is a hybrid structure, marrying the intricate recycled facades with colossal brutalist structures, consisting of comparatively homogeneous roughened concrete. The geometric language of massive angled planes comes straight off the Atlantic Wall 1944, and has an undeniable military-totalitarian edge. (Whatever one thinks about the alternative neo-traditionalist aesthetic expressed in our hotel, it doesn't seem adamant about engaging in a conversation about death camps.)

Conclusion? Not yet.

August 26, 2013

Ningbo Museum

The Ningbo Museum, which won a Pritzker prize for architect Wang Shu last year, is a challenging edifice. Combining traditional elements and materials with monumental modernism — in its most uncompromisingly brutalist manifestation — it realizes a peculiar complex of delicacy and terror.



Wang's signature facades already display the same ambiguity in embryo. His vast sheer planes, shown in the Ningbo Tengtou pavilion at the 2010 Shanghai World Expo (2010), memorialize a demolished past. The bricks and tiles from obliterated villages are recycled into exquisitely tessellated, endlessly absorbing surfaces, sparsely punctuated by irregularly oriented and distributed windows. The tension between crushing scale and intricate composition is immense (and intimate). Subtle drifts of texture and color from the non-uniform materials make the walls into sensual displays of abstract pattern, whilst their massive geometric rigor approaches a state of absolute menace (with an

unmistakable military-totalitarian edge).

In the structure of the Ningbo Museum, this tension is compounded to an almost hysterical pitch by a hybrid structure, fusing the flattened village mosaics with colossal blocks of comparatively homogeneous textured concrete. The building looks like a modern fortress, assembled in an architectural language of hard defensive pragmatism. Every aperture is pressurized in the direction of a *slit*, as if even minimal openings were a reluctant concession to weakness and vulnerability. For the landmark cultural institution of an open, commercial city, nestled deep within China's traditionally pacific Jiangnan region, this structural vocabulary is jarring, and indubitably provocative. If it has a message, it is not easy to decrypt.



August 29, 2013

Blow Ups

Shanghai's the Power Station of Art is hosting *The Ninth Wave*, a solo exhibition of work by Cai Guo-Qiang (1957-), through to October 26. It's … explosive.

The name of the show, and its central exhibit, is taken from a painting (1850) by Russian artist Ivan Aivazavosky (1817-1900). This image of inundating disaster is of clear relevance to the show, but it also serves as a pretext and screen for an adoption of signs that Cai Guo-Qiang invests with singular (and cryptic) evocations. Deep rhythms of time, power, and number are a consistent theme flowing through the exhibition.

The Ninth Wave (2014) is a re-purposed boat, crowded with (99) stuffed animals. It was floated down the Huangpu to be installed in the show, making it the memorial of an event — a signature of Cai's work. Superficially, it's a Noah's Ark, and an icon of ecological calamity, but this barnacled hulk, with its crew of traumatized inhuman survivors, also satirizes the dramatic narratives — whether comic or tragic — that are employed to frame the profound, ruinous tides of cosmic transition.

Cai Guo-Qiang has seared his name on the cultural imagination in fireworks, pursuing an incendiary path to neotraditonalist aesthetic restoration. Working with gunpowder is the revival of a traditional Chinese artistic medium. Cai modernizes its potential for public

spectacle, in ‘Explosive Events’ or ‘Pyrotechnic Explosion Projects’ which are stunningly documented in the show. Yet, among the things Cai explodes is media compartmentalization. The fallout from his work includes char-marked images, production diagrams, and video recordings. His detonations spread across the entire multidimensional domain of visual aesthetics. Time itself is envisaged as a system of explosions, burns, and debris.

The Bund Without Us (2014) epitomizes his usage of gunpowder as method for the production of static images. The process of creation is staged as an event, in which a complex, controlled explosion ‘draws’ the picture in gunpowder burns. The image is left as an aftermath. An enactment of devastation feeds naturally into a narrative of apocalyptic disappearance. (The title references an ecological catastrophe fable.)



Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter (2014) was created through an innovative re-combination of traditional media, depicting the cycle of the seasons in gunpowder-scorched porcelain. Rhythmic regularity emerges from a violent process of combustion, excavating a sublime order of recurrence from both nature and history.

Silent Ink (2014) has ripped up a large gallery space to create an ink-filled pool, choked with multiple allusions, from the trite to the abysmal. Once again, a traditional medium is unpredictably

modernized, pouring continuously into a colossal installation that evokes urban redevelopment, chemical pollution, and quotidian ravaging in general, while opening onto deeper cosmic themes of harsh time-cycles and spontaneous restorations. (The title, of course, echoes an environmentalist classic.)

Head On (2006) is a huge lupine loop, constructing a frozen dynamic in three dimensions. Ninety-nine wolves model social history as a cycle of collective leaps, crises, and dazed re-beginnings. (As in *The Ninth Wave*, with its 99 mammalian survivors, Cai escalates traditional Chinese numerology to figure a point of catastrophe and reversal.)



Catch the wave, if you can.

Power Station of Art, 200 Huayuangang Lu, Huangpu Qu, Shanghai (86 21 3110 8550), Web.

September 8, 2014

The Qin Model Army

Qin Shihuang's terracotta funerary army hasn't ever been high on

the *UF* China attractions list. In Xi'an, there's no choice but to see it though.



The site is an extraordinary place. For a start, it is only very incompletely excavated — deliberately so — making the great halls a monument to the archaeological enterprise, almost as much as to the partially-exhumed exhibit itself. Qin Shihuang's tomb is still undisturbed. It's is beyond the capabilities of contemporary archaeology to deal with it, according to Chinese experts. Mercury saturation from moats of the alchemically-precious substance add a toxicity problem to the other technical difficulties.

The worked-site (and exhibition area) is divided into three pits, of which the first is the hanger-scale structure shown here, in which the vast majority of the excavated warriors are displayed. Pit-2 presents the opportunity for a closer look at individual warriors. Pit-3 dramatizes the archaeological effort with special intensity.


8
7

The slogan “Dreams from the Qin Dynasty come true” might strike those of a more Confucian inclination with some misgivings, but it seems to have been selected as the condensation of the site’s official meaning. The non-uniformity of the model army, which is the main aesthetic point foregrounded, might perhaps be a hook for some ideological ambiguity. It’s not being presented as a fantasy of clone troopers, at least.





May 8, 2015

Art Machined

Mohammad Salemy produces a manifesto for the deepening machine age. “What makes this experiment necessary is the severity of the cultural crisis in which art stubbornly refuses to find itself.”

‘Manifesto’ is a *UF* categorization, that responds to the text’s dominant imperative tone, as exemplified by: “Art needs to be removed from its contemporary ivory tower to deal with the implications of its appearance, but unlike twentieth-century modernisms, today art cannot afford to be solely about the limitations of its supporting material, or only conceived in relation to its own history and ontology.”

Much, too, though for awkward contemplative nihilists:

Art, whether artists agree or not, is the void of meaning folded in cognitive wrapping paper, visible only as the surface of cognition and as the materialization of both the historical and semantic emptiness which it carries. It is a series of verifiable claims inserted into the real world and reified to take up the empty space of meaning, a void occupying another void.

September 10, 2015

CHAPTER TWO - CONFUCIAN RESTORATION

Confucian Restoration

One of the many reasons to be suspicious about political activism on the Occidental off-spectrum right is the parochialism that feeds it. There is a global process that will settle what occurs in its broad structure, making local pretensions to decisive ideological agency simply ridiculous.

The fundamental economic outcome — and thus the fate of the world — is not ultimately controllable even by the central financial administrations of the major world powers (unless certain intriguing axioms of radical contemporary fascism are defensible), so the idea that extremely marginalized Western cabals are positioned to seize the political driving seat is so saturated in self-deception that it wastes everybody's time. In addition, technological developments complicate all economic forecasts essentially, and obscurely. We cannot even approximately delimit what unforeseen technical breakthroughs could entail.

The geopolitical context is even clearer. The collapse of Islam, and rise of China, are re-organizations of the world so evident in their unfolding, so vast in their implication, and so inadequately thought, that they make a mockery of all political programs yet conceived. It is first necessary to know, if only in roughest outline, what is taking place in profundity — tidally, and inexorably — before determining an ideologically relevant act. The process comes first.

Already in Moldbug, and increasingly elsewhere, there are signs within some of the most thoughtful regions of the Occidental 'reactosphere' that could be interpreted as a pre-adaptation to an impending Chinese global hegemony (complementary to the decline of the West). The most recent is here. When we entertain speculations about the nature of 'our' envisaged reaction, it cannot be realistically disentangled from what the world will have become. (I've been dismissive of Moldbug's "Call me Mencius" line in the past, not — I hope — vindictively, but out of the anticipation that we will increasingly be talking about the original Mencius, and the potential for confusion is already visible.)

From the (cultivated) Chinese perspective, the structure of world history is not defined through modes of Abrahamic eschatology, but with respect to deep rhythms of Confucian Restoration, describing a spiral, in which advance and return are synthesized. If the hypothesis of a continuing trend to a more Chinese world is — at least momentarily — granted credibility, then the present (second) epoch

of Confucian Restoration is the key to historical intelligibility on a global scale.

Mou Zongsan could prove more important to us than any Western political theorist writing today. The restoration he conceives has the remarkable advantage of *already taking place*. He does not have to imagine what 'would be nice', and because he doesn't, neither do we. Instead, we can explore what is in fact happening, even if from an angle that remains unfamiliar. An alternative order need not be extracted from the rot and ruin of the old.

The new *Urban Future* site should be going up in the next few days, re-focused by a division of labor with this blog. The dark thrills of collapse will still dominate here, but UF2 will devote itself to the lineaments of a restored civilization and a renewed modernity which are — from the perspective of Shanghai — much closer to 'home'. When the threshold is passed, of course, I'll invite you all over. It won't be so rough over there, so please take your shoes off at the door.

June 10, 2013

Mou Zongsan

Jason Clower has edited an indispensable volume of Mou Zongsan's

writings (*Late Works of Mou Zongsan: Selected Essays in Chinese Philosophy*, forthcoming). In the first words of his introduction, he says: "If twentieth-century China produced a philosopher of the first rank, it was Mou Zongsan." This judgment strikes me as near-irresistible. A taste (from two of the first three essays):

From **Objective Understanding and the Remaking of Chinese Culture**

*...to adapt to the times you have to understand the times. For that you need right knowledge of the present age (**xiandai** 現代) ... Compared to political and social activities, the influence of scholarly culture is an influence on a virtual level (**xuceng** 虛層), but "the virtual governs the solid" (**xu yi kong shi** 虛以控實) and its influence is wide and far-reaching, which is why I call it a "decisive influence." We should not take it lightly and think that it is not an urgent matter.*

***

*... to have objective understanding. The first step is to understand ourselves; the second step is to understand the West. Then we can look for the way out for Chinese culture, and we hope that our young friends will take on this responsibility. In its simple essentials, this responsibility is to revive the ancient meaning of Greek philosophy. Its original meaning was what Kant defined as a "doctrine of practical wisdom" (**shijian de zhihuixue** 實践的智慧學). And what is wisdom? Only "yearning after the highest good" is wisdom. As most people know, philosophy is the "love of wisdom," and the "love" in question*

*is the kind of love that is "heartfelt yearning for that highest good in human life and constantly wanting to put it into practice." That is why Kant called "philosophy" in its ancient Greek sense a "doctrine of practical wisdom." The term is very apt. But this ancient meaning of philosophy has already been lost in the West. Nowadays all that is left is linguistic analysis under the conditions of advanced civilization, with logic having been reduced to applied computing. This does not actually count as philosophy, only the degeneration of philosophy into a technology. To enter into the depths of philosophy, it has to be that "love of wisdom," the "yearning after the highest good." But though the West has forgotten it, this sense of philosophy has been preserved in the Chinese tradition, as what the Chinese ancients called "teachings" (**jiao** 教). Buddhism exemplifies the meaning of "teachings" most clearly, but Confucianism has it too, as the "teaching" referred to in the Doctrine of the Mean when it says, "The understanding that arises from authenticity is called our nature, and the authenticity that arises from understanding is called teaching," and when it says, "What heaven decrees is called our nature; following our nature is called the Way; cultivating the Way is called teaching." The meaning of "teaching" here is not institutional education as currently practiced, which takes knowledge as its standard. Rather, it is "philosophy," the "yearning after the highest good" of a doctrine of practical wisdom.*

***

*Nowadays in the West, Anglo-American analytic philosophy is in command, and the most famous on the European continent are Heidegger's existential philosophy and Husserl's phenomenology, the "dainty philosophies" (**xianqiao zhexue** 纖巧哲學) of the twentieth century, uninformed by the great Way of the ~~gentleman~~ superior man. Only that which connects upwardly (**shangtong** 上通) with noumenon or being-in-itself (**benti** 本體) counts as informed by the great Way of the ~~gentleman~~ superior man, whereas those two men do not have an idea of noumenon. So as far as I am concerned, Husserl's phenomenology, though written so tortuously and with such show, is at bottom impoverished to the point of having no content at all. For it has lost the wisdom of method and given up philosophy's stock-in-trade, so that all that is left for it is to say empty words. All those questions of theirs can just be consigned to science; what need is there for philosophy to be its cheerleader? So nowadays, we cannot rely on the West for real philosophy; we have to come back to ourselves and understand Chinese philosophy. My life's work has been very simple, it has been preliminary objective understanding, but it has already surpassed previous ages. Thus I once wrote a letter to a student of mine on the mainland saying that my life has been very ordinary, and the only exceptional thing is that very few people nowadays can surpass me in objective understanding. I have no prejudices. I have even read some of Marx's **Capital**, and have done so with an open mind. I am not even a*

complete stranger to economics; it is simply not my specialty. So my disgust for Marx is not a bias but a true inability to appreciate him even after I had understood him.

[On the one occasion where I found Clower's translation decision intolerable, I have graphically amended it (twice)]

***

… I believe that for the work of absorbing Western culture, the best medium is Kant. … I am not a Kant expert but I do believe that I have a relatively good understanding of Kant. To understand Kant one must first understand his original meaning. There are more people who teach about his first Critique and people know a bit more about this one. There are fewer who teach about his second Critique and people know a bit less about it. As for the third, no one teaches about it and no one understands it. I have been translating it and at the same time working hard to understand it and understand Kant's original meaning, in order to be able then to digest it. In my view, Kant really is talking about problems and wants to solve some problems, but to see his limits in solving those problems, the only way is with traditional Chinese philosophical wisdom. Chinese wisdom can take Kant even farther. If Kant experts only read Kant and Westerners only read Western philosophy, they will not necessarily understand Kant's original meaning. Among British and American translators of Kant, each of the Critiques has three people who have translated it but no one person has translated all three.

They are expert in just one aspect of Kant and so do not necessarily understand Kant. I am not an expert, for my foundation is Chinese philosophy, and therefore I can discern Kant's original meaning and take him a step further.

[Mou translated all three of Kant's Critiques into Chinese.]

***

Why do I say that Kant is the best medium for reminting Chinese philosophy? I often say that "one mind with two gates" is a shared philosophical model. From ancient times the West has recognized the two gates, as Kant did, but nowadays Western philosophy is only left with one gate, and this amounts to a shrinkage in philosophy. In the West, the noumenal aspect of the one mind with two gates has not been developed well. It did receive a little of the attention due it from Kant, but it was negative, and Wittgenstein's ***Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*** *continued Kant's negative approach, so that all was left were a few ripples. … Wittgenstein's point was that anything belonging to the world of value, of the good and the beautiful, is mysterious and unsayable, and that whereof one cannot speak, one must remain silent. This sort of attitude is as negative as it is possible to be, and in keeping with this, on the European Continent, Heidegger and Husserl did not touch noumenon at all. The two gates are the original meaning of philosophy, but now all that is left is the one gate of phenomena. Chinese philosophy happens to be just the opposite. It is best at noumenon but not good at phenomena. That is*

also the real reason that China wants modernization.

***

If you can deeply understand the significance of "one mind with two gates," then you will understand that the more advanced civilization is, the greater the need for a "doctrine of practical wisdom" and for what in China has been called "teaching" to firm up the course of our life and right the problems that come with advanced civilization. Therefore Westerners should also look to China for instruction and not just expect Chinese people to come seek instruction from them. But Westerners are able not to respect Chinese because Chinese do not read their own books and hence have no instruction to offer.

From **Meeting at Goose Lake – The Great Synthesis in the Development of Chinese Culture and the Merging of Chinese and Western Tradition**

We commonly say that Song-Ming Confucianism was skewed in the direction of inner sagehood. By the end of the Ming, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when Wang Fuzhi, Huang Zongxi, and Gu Yanwu appeared, they already knew that Chinese history was about to turn in a new direction, that they could not continue in the direction that Song-Ming Confucians had been going for six hundred years, because it placed too much weight on inner sagehood. Thus people like Huang, Wang, and Gu began advocating openness to external things, expanding from inner sagehood to outer

*kingship as well, and thus it was that they began to emphasize the pragmatic study of statecraft (**jingshi zhiyong zhi xue** 經世致用之學). But the reason that this development from inner sagehood to outer kingship was interrupted and did not bear fruit was the Manchu Qing dynasty. The arrival of the Manchus meant that China was ruled by an alien race …*

The three hundred years of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries comprised the Manchus' Qing empire, and the Qing empire brought not even a scintilla of benefit to Chinese culture. That is China's recent history. How could China's original history and culture produce the Communist Party? It was the shallow intellectualism of the May Fourth movement. Why was the movement so shallow? Because of the baleful influence of mid-Qing textual studies. As its influence spread gradually, Chinese intellectuals lost the ability to think and to carry on with the development of thought. And because of those three hundred years of Qing rule and the intellectuals' loss of the capacity to think, the historical opportunity was lost and the movement toward and demand for a development from inner sagehood to outer kingship was repressed. If there had been no three hundred years of Manchu rule, the natural course of the Chinese nation's development would have been little different than the West's. It was exactly during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries of the Qing that the West progressed quickly toward modernization. … Of itself, the

cultural life-force of the Chinese nation was poised to open outward. It was only that it was repressed by the Manchus.

***

Nobody believes in Marx anymore.

***

… the rise of New Confucianism is a necessity of the trends of history and we must take up that responsibility. The Chinese nation is to take up the responsibility of that necessity.

***

I am the sort of person who just quietly ploughs away. I have never been a government official, never belonged to the KMT, and naturally I have certainly never belonged to the Communist Party.

***

… This stuff takes time! It does not matter how smart you are unless you have time.

***

It is not the life of traditional Chinese culture which is lacking; it is the Communists and their Marxism-Leninism which are evil and irrational. So in this great synthesis, it is the mainline of our very own culture which will be the basis and which will merge with the Western tradition of the Greeks. Western science and philosophy comes from the Greeks. Modern liberal democracy has many components, with contributions from Greek tradition, from Roman tradition, and from the modern Industrial Revolution and the English

Magna Carta. Western liberal democracy is also a modern product, coming in the last three hundred years, rather than something that existed from the beginning. And in the Western tradition, apart from Greece and Rome, there is also the Hebrew tradition, which is religious (Christian). These are the contours of Western culture.

What we want is a great synthesis based on the mainline of the life of our own culture, a great merger with the science and philosophy developed out of the Greek tradition and with the liberal politics developed by the West out of various causal conditions, but we do not want a great synthesis with Christianity. The relationship with Christianity is not a matter of synthesis but of "classifying the teachings." We do not oppose Christianity. Western people's faith and prayer is fine; that is their way, though it is not ours. But we can critically examine teachings, as Buddhists of the past did. We can distinguish what is the same and different in them, what is high or low, and what is perfect or imperfect.

***

What is a "true mind-only theory?" There is nothing wrong with using the phrase "mind-only theory," but within Western philosophy there is no mind-only theory, only idealism. This has to be clarified. Neither Plato's idealism nor Kant's idealism nor Berkeley's idealism can be regarded as a mind-only theory. Idealism is not mind, so Western philosophy only has idealism, not a mind-only theory. What the Communists call "mind-only" or "idealism" is for them just an

*indiscriminate term of opprobrium. They use "idealist" and "materialist" as value labels, but they are clueless about Western idealism. Idealism is about ideas, but an idea itself is not mind. Plato's idealism is a theory of Forms. Kant's is a transcendental idealism (**chaoyue de linianlun** 超越的理念論). What are these ideas? For Kant, they are concepts of reason, which are different from concepts of the understanding. Concepts of the understanding are categories, which are the conditions for accomplishing knowledge, whereas concepts of reason cannot represent knowledge. Therefore, Kant's thought can only be called a transcendental idealism. For Berkeley, an idea is a perceived phenomenon, not a mind but an object of mind, a particular, real object. Berkeley's saying, that "to be is to be perceived" [**esse est percipi**] [means that his so-called subjective idealism] is a subjective percept theory (**zhuguan de juexianglun** 主觀的覺象論). It is completely wrong to translate it as a "subjective idealism" (**zhuguan de guannian lun** 主觀的觀念論) or "subjective mind-only theory" (**zhuguan de weixin lun** 主觀的唯心論). In the West, ideas are always regarded as objects, and though objects are related to the mind, in particular to the cognitive mind, nonetheless they are not themselves the mind. Therefore only China has true mind-only philosophy.*

***

Where philosophical systems are concerned, we would do best to use Kant's philosophy as our bridge. Kant is the best go-between

*for absorbing Western culture to remint Chinese philosophy and support Chinese doctrines. Kant's framework opens up two realms, the realm of phenomena and the realm of noumena (**benti** 本體) or, if we superimpose Buddhist terminology on it, it is "one mind opening through two doors." In the West, the noumenal dimension has not been developed well. In Kant's system, noumena has only a negative meaning.* […] *Applied to Kant's philosophy, "one mind with two gates" refers to phenomena and noumena. But it must be understood in Chinese terms, through the mainline cultural spirit of the three Eastern teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Trying to understand the "one mind with two gates" by means of Kant's system does not work; it must be through the Chinese tradition. This is why I say that if you want to get a handle on what China has been doing for thousands of years, you must delve deeply into the mainline of its cultural life. Thoroughly immersing yourself is the only way to understand its strengths; otherwise "cultural life" is just an empty phrase.*

*First we thoroughly understand China's mind-only system, and then based on the wisdom of that system, we digest Kant. For Kant's cannot be called a true mind-only theory, only a transcendental idealism, which implies that it is negative. What is positive in Kant is his empirical realism, which is limited to the phenomenal world, the empirical world. Concerning this, please see my book **Phenomenon and Thing-in-Itself**. The thing for us to do, then, is to take Kant's*

*transcendental idealism and his empirical realism and, building on Chinese wisdom, turn it into a two-tiered ontology, of "attached ontology" and "non-attached ontology." "Attached ontology" is that of the cognitive mind (**shixin** 識心). A "non-attached ontology" is that of the wisdom mind (**zhixin** 智心), and it is this which is a true mind-only theory. Mind-only theory emerges from "non-attached ontology," and it is something that cannot come out of Western philosophy. The mind-only theory that emerges from non-attached ontology can also be called thorough-going realism (**shizai lun** 實在論).*

[If you can see why this line of thinking makes Mou Zongsan — despite his very different topical concerns — a Chinese Mises (at the level of abstract metaphysics), you've earned a patronizing *Outside in* pat on the head.]

ADDED: This discussion of intellectual intuition (*intellektuelle Anschauung*), despite going completely off the rails at the end, supplies some valuable historical context.

ADDED: More Mou.

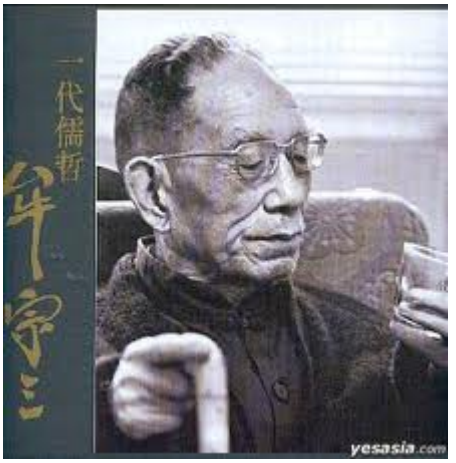
ADDED: Jason Clower's book on Mou and Buddhism, discussed Buddhistically. Clower's introduction to Mou at the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Mou at UF.

September 17, 2013

Cultural Restoration and Mou Zongsan

After a difficult half millennium, China's place in the world is adjusting back towards its longer term norm, at a speed that continues to disconcert even the most diligent observers. With this positive correction comes an inevitable 'spirit' of revival, extending from the level of unreflective mood, through partially articulate attitudes, to the loftiest peaks of systematic cultural restoration. As this wave of revitalization intensifies, and refines itself, it becomes increasingly involved in a re-thinking of Confucianism and its historical meaning.

The philosopher most indispensable to this process is Mou Zongsan (1909-1995), the most brilliant of China's New Confucians, setting the standards of intellectual rigor and audacity for the country's third-wave of Confucian inspiration, following those of the Pre-Qin and Song-Ming periods. Describing the Confucian tradition as the "main artery" of Chinese culture, responsible not only for its own perpetuation and renewal, but also for the safe-keeping of the country's Daoist and Buddhist traditions, Mou considered its renaissance a "necessity". It not only should, but would return, assuming only that Chinese culture has a future. It is due to this indestructible confidence that Mou's own name is inextricably bound to the wider prospects of Chinese national recovery.



Mou recognizes that the Confucian tradition is more than an arbitrary ethnic peculiarity, to be retained out of some extrinsic commitment to cultural preservation. Rather, the task of cultural restoration is inherent to it, as a core feature, from the time of Confucius:

How did Confucius view the Zhou culture? His attitude was positive, ritual being always necessary. Whatever the period, a society will always need ritual. Confucius believed that the rituals instituted by the Duke of Zhou were in his time still useful. Of course they could be contracted or expanded with prudence but you ought not to radically overturn them. So his attitude was positive. However, it was through his re-vitalization of the Zhou rites that he came to develop what is called Confucian thought. For it was not that the Zhou rituals were without objective validity because of intrinsic flaws, but rather that they had lost effectiveness because the nobles were corrupt and degenerate and unable to carry the weight of the

ritual and music. Corruption undermined their ability to uphold these rituals, and if they could not practice them, would not the Zhou rituals then become empty? Because they became empty, they became mere form, became so-called formalism. The Mohists and Daoists looked upon them as mere form and thus wanted to negate them. Confucius knew that the corruption of the nobility made the Zhou ritual empty, but he wanted to re-vitalize it. The Confucian attitude was that to make the Zhou ritual valid, it had to be first revivified.

Confucianism has undoubtedly undergone periods of victimization, but it cannot afford to retreat into victimage, because it has inalienable responsibility not only for its own restoration, but for Chinese cultural restoration in general. This argument can be extended still further, since Mou contends that even Western philosophy depends (unknowingly) upon the revitalization of China's Confucian tradition for the re-awakening of its ultimate possibilities — as epitomized by the undeveloped potential of the Kantian system, to supply a practical path into the cryptic realms of the *noumenon* (following the thread of 'intellectual intuition'). The world-historical destiny of philosophy, and the self-restoration of Confucianism, were conceived by Mou as a single cultural necessity.

Urban Future has no doubt that over the course of proceeding decades Mou Zongsan's international reputation will be immensely enhanced, as he is recognized — in Jason Clower's words — as "a

philosopher of the first rank" with the intellectual stature of a Heidegger or Wittgenstein. It is thrilling to witness such a figure at the stage of early ascent, extracted from relative obscurity and projected into global consciousness as a cultural treasure of inestimable value.

For English readers, Clower's contribution to the discovery of Mou Zongsan deserves special mention. He has already released a book on Mou and Buddhism, with an edited collection of Mou's writings forthcoming (*Late Works of Mou Zongsan: Selected Essays in Chinese Philosophy*). As China's cultural restoration unfolds, and Mou's star rises, these volumes will eventually find their way onto a million bookshelves, as invaluable guides to a new world, and an old one.

(See also Clower's introduction to Mou at the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.)

September 18, 2013

Exploration of the Outside

Mou Zongsan opens a gate into the Chinese cultural interior by unswervingly directing his work at its most radically indigenous characteristics, uncompromised by ulterior elements, and therefore undistracted by any seductions of otherness or exoticism that fall

short of its inherent destination — connection with the absolute Outside. That alone is authentically Chinese, Mou insists, which originates and culminates in the Way (道), cultivating an unsegregated mutual involvement of thought and being which corresponds closely to the Occidental philosophical concept of *intellectual intuition*. Whether approached through the Daoist, Buddhist, or Confucian strains of the Chinese cultural complex, the consistent ethnic characteristic is an interior path to exterior reality, continuous with the way of 'heaven' (天), or cosmic necessity. The inner voyage is the way out, but more importantly — for the Confucian current at least — it is the way to let the Outside in, making culture a conduit for the cultivation of the world.

From Mou Zongsan's summit of philosophical intensity, therefore, no true boundary can be drawn between a project marked by extreme cultural 'nationalism' and an ontologically-grounded cosmopolitanism, or between a diligent restoration of tradition and a venture beyond the horizon of time. The inward path reaches out (as it fuses with the tendrils of Outsideness, which reach in).

In his essay on the Meeting at Goose Lake, Mou seeks to explain the singularity of the Chinese tradition in terms intelligible to Western philosophy:

… Kant attached only a negative meaning to noumena. Applied to Kant's philosophy, "one mind with two gates" refers to phenomena and noumena. But it must be understood in Chinese terms, through

the mainline cultural spirit of the three Eastern teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Trying to understand the "one mind with two gates" by means of Kant's system does not work; it must be through the Chinese tradition. This is why I say that if you want to get a handle on what China has been doing for thousands of years, you must delve deeply into the mainline of its cultural life. Thoroughly immersing yourself is the only way to understand its strengths; otherwise "cultural life" is just an empty phrase.

Metaphysical traditionalism attains extroversion through introversion, so that its "perfect teaching" is announced as a culmination of paradox. It is only at the limit of psychological and cultural inwardness that the gate of deep connection is opened, enabling cultural encounters in profundity, rather than a confusion of comparisons, facile commonalities and contrasts. Chinese and Western philosophy meet at the summit, and through the Outside, whose brink each discovers on its own distinctive path.

The paradoxical signs of the 'perfect teaching' guide Mou's restoration of Chinese intellectual tradition, as it homes — or strays — to the root of acceptance *and* correction. In order *to turn Confucianism into itself*, he cultivates (discovers / invents) a third strand of orthodoxy upon which to train the luxuriant but disordered growth of Cheng-Zhu *lixue* and Lu-Wang *xinxue*: a lineage passing through the comparatively obscure figures of Hu Wufeng (or Hu Hong) and Liu Jishan (or Liu Zongzhou). It is this third thread of the

tradition, he contends, that most fully develops the essential intellectual content of Confucianism, making it the true inheritor of the Northern Song *ruxue* legacy (Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai, and Cheng Mingda), which is itself the uncontested conveyor of the ancient canon. It alone consistently refuses the delusive separation of intelligence from the Way, and thus preserves the understanding of human conduct as cosmic self-realization. Within the (correctable) Lu-Wang line, this insight tends to slide into eclipse, but on the mainstream Cheng-Zhu line the slippage has become an assertive deviation — hardened into "fundamental error".

Mou's metaphysical traditionalism coaxes Chinese intellectual history into an *immanent correction*, through which its proper inwardness is reinforced as a resilient — or fusional — connection to the Outside. What is most its own is spiral immersion within the Way, where the second gate opens.

October 30, 2013

The Great Convergence

Every great philosopher has a single thought, Martin Heidegger asserted. However questionable this claim might be, it applies without qualification to Mou Zongsan, China's greatest modern philosopher (and perhaps also the world's).

While the breadth of Mou's scholarship is intimidating, it was made possible only by conformity to a methodical life-long study schedule, organized by a single idea. His *one thought*, which he translated into the language of Western Philosophy as 'intellectual intuition' (*νοῦς*, *intellektuelle Anschauung*), integrates not only his own thinking, but also — he consistently maintains — the entire Chinese philosophical tradition, of which it is the cap-stone, or guiding thread. Each of China's three teachings (三教), Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist, tends to a principle of intellectual intuition in which it finds consummation as a "perfect teaching" and through which it adheres by inner necessity (rather than extrinsic cultural and historical accident) to the integral Chinese canon.

If any single concept has a density of significance sufficient to define the essence of a vast and highly-ramified world culture, it can be expected to resist casual comprehension. To understand it, as Mou painstakingly demonstrates, is not a preparatory step to thinking within the tradition, but the ultimate cultural task posed by the tradition, in each of its main constitutive strands. If Chinese culture shares an initiatory insight, it is not a readily concluded *realization*, but an integrative *aspiration*, which orients its various parts towards the same destination, or final achievement. Cognitive resolution is subordinated to practical development, through self-cultivation.

In the West, intellectual intuition is notoriously a *difficult*

concept, to such an extent that it is widely dismissed as an example of philosophical extravagance, beyond all possibility of rigorous formulation, or theoretical use. Designating the direct self-apprehension of intelligence, it was associated from the earliest times with the process of divine mind. Aristotle's God, whose self-contemplative thought is the turning of the highest action upon the highest object, epitomized the notion.

Kant determined intellectual intuition to lie beyond any possible human understanding, strictly exiling it to the outer sphere of divine intelligences. Henceforth, appeals to the concept would be the mark of romantic or 'mystical' philosophical undertakings (represented primarily by the thinkers of German 'Objective Idealism' and those influenced by them). As techno-scientific rationality incrementally supplanted speculative metaphysics, and divinities shriveled to implausible hypotheses, the significance of intellectual intuition contracted towards a vanishing point — whether discreditable eccentricity, or historical curiosity. In Mou Zongsan's terms, Western philosophy, in keeping with its own cultural fatality, had become almost perfectly non-Chinese.

The 'Great Divergence' familiar from discussions of world economic history, therefore, had a rigorously-determinable high-cultural counterpart, which explains why, when East and West experienced their hard encounter within modernity, they would be bound together through profound mutual estrangement. The idea

identified by Mou Zongsan as the basic principle of Oriental Intelligence, through which — alone — Chinese culture makes sense, had been shelved by the Occident centuries before, as an oddity of speculative theology, and now lay buried in dust, barely recollected, let alone even tentatively understood.

If the idea of directly self-apprehending intelligence were to remain the preserve of 19th century German metaphysics, it is scarcely imaginable that the gulf between East and West — as Mou Zongsan understands it — could ever be more than tenuously bridged. Either the East would remain entirely inscrutable to all West, excepting only a cultural fringe of Orientalists, devoted to the pursuit of radical exoticism, or the East would depart fundamentally from its own cultural path, Westernizing itself until commensurable thinking was reached. Both of these prospects were explicitly deplored in the influential text "A Manifesto for a Re-appraisal of Sinology and Reconstruction of Chinese Culture" (为中国文化敬告世界人士宣言), signed by Mou Zongsan and three other 'New Confucian' students of Xiong Shili (Zhang Junmai, Tang Junyi, and Xu Fuguan), originally published in 1958.

That the tide of the economic and geostrategic Great Divergence turned in the final decades of the last century is a matter of indisputable fact, confirmed by a deluge of quantitative performance indicators. The cultural aspect of this reversal is necessarily more complicated, and contentious. In the West, there are no doubt very

many who would account for the transition in terms of Chinese Westernization, beginning with the adoption of European 'scientific socialism' in the late 1940s, and maturing through liberalization — or economic-technological globalization — until reaching the moon.

A very different narrative, and one in which the emerging status of Mou Zongsan could be far more positively limned — would adhere tightly to the problem of intellectual intuition, or self-apprehending intelligence. The most significant reference would be I J Good, and his path-breaking essay 'Speculations Concerning the First Ultraintelligent Machine', composed in the early 1960s and first published in 1965. In this paper, Good writes:

Let an ultraintelligent machine be defined as a machine that can far surpass all the intellectual activities of any man however clever. Since the design of machines is one of these intellectual activities, an ultra-intelligent machine could design even better machines; there would then unquestionably be an "intelligence explosion," and the intelligence of man would be left far behind … Thus the first ultraintelligent machine is the last invention that man need ever make, provided that the machine is docile enough to tell us how to keep it under control. It is curious that this point is made so seldom outside of science fiction. It is sometimes worthwhile to take science fiction seriously.

The techno-scientific horizon is described by a reflexive intelligence, practically apprehending itself, and in doing so marking

the final human purpose. This is quite evidently 'intellectual intuition' as it emerges at the outer-edge of modernity, rather than among the jumbled curiosities of its philosophical ancestry. If it corresponds to the Chinese cultural core — as Mou Zongsan doggedly maintains — it is as an anticipated destination, rather than an abandoned legacy. Advanced modernization heads *towards it*.

While, superficially, the tale of Chinese modernity might be construed as the replacement of Confucius by robotics, careful attention to the problem of intellectual intuition suggests something very different. Self-cultivation *or* self-improving intelligence — what sort of choice is that?

December 3, 2013

Legalism

The real core of the Chinese tradition?

***Chinese Friend**: Nobody in this country believes in anything anymore.*
***Foreign Devil**: So what do you think they should believe in?*
***Chinese Friend**: Unless people are punished more severely, they won't behave themselves.*

February 15, 2015

Reignition

NICK LAND'S WRITINGS (2011-)



Tome II

The Dark Enlightenment: Neoreactionaries Head for the Exit

Reignition

NICK LAND'S WRITINGS (2011-)

Tome II

The Dark Enlightenment: Neoreactionaries Head for the Exit

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Tome II

The Dark Enlightenment: Neoreactionaries Head for the Exit

EDITED BY URIEL FIORI

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BLOCK 1 - DARK ENLIGHTENMENT

The Dark Enlightenment (Part 1)

Neo-reactionaries head for the exit

Enlightenment is not only a state, but an event, and a process. As the designation for an historical episode, concentrated in northern Europe during the 18th century, it is a leading candidate for the 'true name' of modernity, capturing its origin and essence ('Renaissance' and 'Industrial Revolution' are others). Between 'enlightenment' and 'progressive enlightenment' there is only an elusive difference, because illumination takes time – and feeds on itself, because

enlightenment is self-confirming, its revelations 'self-evident', and because a retrograde, or reactionary, 'dark enlightenment' amounts almost to intrinsic contradiction. To become enlightened, in this historical sense, is to recognize, and then to pursue, a guiding light.

There were ages of darkness, and then enlightenment came. Clearly, advance has demonstrated itself, offering not only improvement, but also a model. Furthermore, unlike a renaissance, there is no need for an enlightenment to recall what was lost, or to emphasize the attractions of return. The elementary acknowledgement of enlightenment is already *Whig history* in miniature.

Once certain enlightened truths have been found self-evident, there can be no turning back, and conservatism is pre-emptively condemned – predestined — to paradox. F. A. Hayek, who refused to describe himself as a conservative, famously settled instead upon the term 'Old Whig', which – like 'classical liberal' (or the still more melancholy 'remnant') – accepts that progress isn't what it used to be. What could an Old Whig be, if not a reactionary progressive? And what on earth is that?

Of course, plenty of people already think they know what reactionary modernism looks like, and amidst the current collapse back into the 1930s their concerns are only likely to grow. Basically, it's what the 'F' word is for, at least in its progressive usage. A flight from democracy under these circumstances conforms so perfectly to

expectations that it eludes specific recognition, appearing merely as an atavism, or confirmation of dire repetition.

Still, something is happening, and it is – at least in part – something else. One milestone was the April 2009 discussion hosted at Cato Unbound among libertarian thinkers (including Patri Friedman and Peter Thiel) in which disillusionment with the direction and possibilities of democratic politics was expressed with unusual forthrightness. Thiel summarized the trend bluntly: "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible."

In August 2011, Michael Lind posted a democratic riposte at Salon, digging up some impressively malodorous dirt, and concluding:

> *The dread of democracy by libertarians and classical liberals is justified. Libertarianism really is incompatible with democracy. Most libertarians have made it clear which of the two they prefer. The only question that remains to be settled is why anyone should pay attention to libertarians.*

Lind and the 'neo-reactionaries' seem to be in broad agreement that democracy is not only (or even) a *system*, but rather a *vector*, with an unmistakable direction. Democracy and 'progressive democracy' are synonymous, and indistinguishable from the expansion of the state. Whilst 'extreme right wing' governments have, on rare occasions,

momentarily arrested this process, its reversal lies beyond the bounds of democratic possibility. Since winning elections is overwhelmingly a matter of vote buying, and society's informational organs (education and media) are no more resistant to bribery than the electorate, a thrifty politician is simply an incompetent politician, and the democratic variant of Darwinism quickly eliminates such misfits from the gene pool. This is a reality that the left applauds, the establishment right grumpily accepts, and the libertarian right has ineffectively railed against. Increasingly, however, libertarians have ceased to care whether anyone is 'pay[ing them] attention' – they have been looking for something else entirely: an exit.

It is a structural inevitability that the libertarian voice is drowned out in democracy, and according to Lind it should be. Ever more libertarians are likely to agree. 'Voice' is democracy itself, in its historically dominant, Rousseauistic strain. It models the state as a representation of popular will, and making oneself heard means more politics. If voting as the mass self-expression of politically empowered peoples is a nightmare engulfing the world, adding to the hubbub doesn't help. Even more than Equality-vs-Liberty, Voice-vs-Exit is the rising alternative, and libertarians are opting for voiceless flight. Patri Friedman remarks: "we think that free exit is so important that we've called it the only Universal Human Right."

For the hardcore neo-reactionaries, democracy is not merely doomed, it is doom itself. Fleeing it approaches an ultimate

imperative. The subterranean current that propels such anti-politics is recognizably Hobbesian, a coherent dark enlightenment, devoid from its beginning of any Rousseauistic enthusiasm for popular expression. Predisposed, in any case, to perceive the politically awakened masses as a howling irrational mob, it conceives the dynamics of democratization as fundamentally degenerative: systematically consolidating and exacerbating private vices, resentments, and deficiencies until they reach the level of collective criminality and comprehensive social corruption. The democratic politician and the electorate are bound together by a circuit of reciprocal incitement, in which each side drives the other to ever more shameless extremities of hooting, prancing cannibalism, until the only alternative to shouting is being eaten.

Where the progressive enlightenment sees political ideals, the dark enlightenment sees appetites. It accepts that governments are made out of people, and that they will eat well. Setting its expectations as low as reasonably possible, it seeks only to spare civilization from frenzied, ruinous, gluttonous debauch. From Thomas Hobbes to Hans-Hermann Hoppe and beyond, it asks: How can the sovereign power be prevented – or at least dissuaded — from devouring society? It consistently finds democratic 'solutions' to this problem risible, at best.

Hoppe advocates an anarcho-capitalist 'private law society', but between monarchy and democracy he does not hesitate (and his

argument is strictly Hobbesian):

> *As a hereditary monopolist, a king regards the territory and the people under his rule as his personal property and engages in the monopolistic exploitation of this "property." Under democracy, monopoly and monopolistic exploitation do not disappear. Rather, what happens is this: instead of a king and a nobility who regard the country as their private property, a temporary and interchangeable caretaker is put in monopolistic charge of the country. The caretaker does not own the country, but as long as he is in office he is permitted to use it to his and his protégés' advantage. He owns its current use* – usufruct – *but not its capital stock. This does not eliminate exploitation. To the contrary, it makes exploitation less calculating and carried out with little or no regard to the capital stock. Exploitation becomes shortsighted and capital consumption will be systematically promoted.*

Political agents invested with transient authority by multi-party democratic systems have an overwhelming (and demonstrably irresistible) incentive to plunder society with the greatest possible rapidity and comprehensiveness. Anything they neglect to steal – or 'leave on the table' – is likely to be inherited by political successors

who are not only unconnected, but actually opposed, and who can therefore be expected to utilize all available resources to the detriment of their foes. Whatever is left behind becomes a weapon in your enemy's hand. Best, then, to destroy what cannot be stolen. From the perspective of a democratic politician, any type of social good that is neither directly appropriable nor attributable to (their own) partisan policy is sheer waste, and counts for nothing, whilst even the most grievous social misfortune – so long as it can be assigned to a prior administration or postponed until a subsequent one – figures in rational calculations as an obvious blessing. The long-range techno-economic improvements and associated accumulation of cultural capital that constituted social progress in its old (Whig) sense are in nobody's political interest. Once democracy flourishes, they face the immediate threat of extinction.

Civilization, as a process, is indistinguishable from diminishing time-preference (or declining concern for the present in comparison to the future). Democracy, which both in theory and evident historical fact accentuates time-preference to the point of convulsive feeding-frenzy, is thus as close to a precise negation of civilization as anything could be, short of instantaneous social collapse into murderous barbarism or zombie apocalypse (which it eventually leads to). As the democratic virus burns through society, painstakingly accumulated habits and attitudes of forward-thinking, prudential, human and industrial investment, are replaced by a

sterile, orgiastic consumerism, financial incontinence, and a 'reality television' political circus. Tomorrow might belong to the other team, so it's best to eat it all now.

Winston Churchill, who remarked in neo-reactionary style that "the best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter" is better known for suggesting "that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried." Whilst never exactly conceding that "OK, democracy sucks (in fact, it *really* sucks), but what's the alternative?" the implication is obvious. The general tenor of this sensibility is attractive to modern conservatives, because it resonates with their wry, disillusioned acceptance of relentless civilizational deterioration, and with the associated intellectual apprehension of capitalism as an unappetizing but ineliminable default social arrangement, which remains after all catastrophic or merely impractical alternatives have been discarded. The market economy, on this understanding, is no more than a spontaneous survival strategy that stitches itself together amidst the ruins of a politically devastated world. Things will probably just get worse forever. So it goes.

So, what is the alternative? (There's certainly no point trawling through the 1930s for one.) "Can you imagine a 21st-century post-demotist society? One that saw itself as recovering from democracy, much as Eastern Europe sees itself as recovering from Communism?"

asks supreme Sith Lord of the neo-reactionaries, Mencius Moldbug. "Well, I suppose that makes one of us."

Moldbug's formative influences are Austro-libertarian, but that's all over. As he explains:

> *… libertarians cannot present a realistic picture of a world in which their battle gets won and stays won. They wind up looking for ways to push a world in which the State's natural downhill path is to grow, back up the hill. This prospect is Sisyphean, and it's understandable why it attracts so few supporters.*

His awakening into neo-reaction comes with the (Hobbesian) recognition that sovereignty cannot be eliminated, caged, or controlled. Anarcho-capitalist utopias can never condense out of science fiction, divided powers flow back together like a shattered Terminator, and constitutions have exactly as much real authority as a sovereign interpretative power allows them to have. The state isn't going anywhere because — to those who run it — it's worth far too much to give up, and as the concentrated instantiation of sovereignty in society, nobody can make it do anything. If the state cannot be eliminated, Moldbug argues, at least it can be cured *of democracy* (or systematic and degenerative bad government), and the way to do that is to *formalize* it. This is an approach he calls 'neo-cameralism'.

> *To a neocameralist, a state is a business which owns a country. A state should be managed, like any other large business, by dividing logical ownership into negotiable shares, each of which yields a precise fraction of the state's profit. (A well-run state is very profitable.) Each share has one vote, and the shareholders elect a board, which hires and fires managers.*
>
> *This business's customers are its residents. A profitably-managed neocameralist state will, like any business, serve its customers efficiently and effectively. Misgovernment equals mismanagement.*

Firstly, it is essential to squash the democratic myth that a state 'belongs' to the citizenry. The point of neo-cameralism is to buy out the real stakeholders in sovereign power, not to perpetuate sentimental lies about mass enfranchisement. Unless ownership of the state is formally transferred into the hands of its actual rulers, the neo-cameral transition will simply not take place, power will remain in the shadows, and the democratic farce will continue.

So, secondly, the ruling class must be plausibly identified. It should be noted immediately, in contradistinction to Marxist principles of social analysis, that this is not the 'capitalist bourgeoisie'. Logically, it cannot be. The power of the business class is already clearly formalized, in monetary terms, so the identification of capital with

political power is perfectly redundant. It is necessary to ask, rather, *who do capitalists pay for political favors*, how much these favors are potentially worth, and how the authority to grant them is distributed. This requires, with a minimum of moral irritation, that the entire social landscape of political bribery ('lobbying') is exactly mapped, and the administrative, legislative, judicial, media, and academic privileges accessed by such bribes are converted into fungible shares. Insofar as voters are worth bribing, there is no need to entirely exclude them from this calculation, although their portion of sovereignty will be estimated with appropriate derision. The conclusion of this exercise is the mapping of a ruling entity that is the truly dominant instance of the democratic polity. Moldbug calls it *the Cathedral*.

The formalization of political powers, thirdly, allows for the possibility of effective government. Once the universe of democratic corruption is converted into a (freely transferable) shareholding in *gov-corp.* the owners of the state can initiate rational corporate governance, beginning with the appointment of a CEO. As with any business, the interests of the state are now precisely formalized as the maximization of long-term shareholder value. There is no longer any need for residents (clients) to take any interest in politics whatsoever. In fact, to do so would be to exhibit semi-criminal proclivities. If *gov-corp* doesn't deliver acceptable value for its taxes (sovereign rent), they can notify its customer service function, and

if necessary take their custom elsewhere. *Gov-corp* would concentrate upon running an efficient, attractive, vital, clean, and secure country, of a kind that is able to draw customers. No voice, free exit.

> *… although the full neocameralist approach has never been tried, its closest historical equivalents to this approach are the 18th-century tradition of enlightened absolutism as represented by Frederick the Great, and the 21st-century nondemocratic tradition as seen in lost fragments of the British Empire such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai. These states appear to provide a very high quality of service to their citizens, with no meaningful democracy at all. They have minimal crime and high levels of personal and economic freedom. They tend to be quite prosperous. They are weak only in political freedom, and political freedom is unimportant by definition when government is stable and effective.*

In European classical antiquity, democracy was recognized as a familiar phase of cyclical political development, fundamentally decadent in nature, and preliminary to a slide into tyranny. Today this classical understanding is thoroughly lost, and replaced by a global democratic ideology, entirely lacking in critical self-reflection, that

is asserted not as a credible social-scientific thesis, or even as a spontaneous popular aspiration, but rather as a religious creed, of a specific, historically identifiable kind:

> *… a received tradition I call Universalism, which is a nontheistic Christian sect. Some other current labels for this same tradition, more or less synonymous, are progressivism, multiculturalism, liberalism, humanism, leftism, political correctness, and the like. … Universalism is the dominant modern branch of Christianity on the Calvinist line, evolving from the English Dissenter or Puritan tradition through the Unitarian, Transcendentalist, and Progressive movements. Its ancestral briar patch also includes a few sideways sprigs that are important enough to name but whose Christian ancestry is slightly better concealed, such as Rousseauvian laicism, Benthamite utilitarianism, Reformed Judaism, Comtean positivism, German Idealism, Marxist scientific socialism, Sartrean existentialism, Heideggerian postmodernism, etc, etc, etc. … Universalism, in my opinion, is best described as a* mystery cult of power*. … It's as hard to imagine Universalism without the State as malaria without the mosquito. … The point is that this thing, whatever you care to call it, is at least two hundred years old and probably more like five. It's basically the Reformation itself. … And just*

> *walking up to it and denouncing it as evil is about as likely to work as suing Shub-Niggurath in small-claims court.*

To comprehend the emergence of our contemporary predicament, characterized by relentless, totalizing, state expansion, the proliferation of spurious positive 'human rights' (claims on the resources of others backed by coercive bureaucracies), politicized money, reckless evangelical 'wars for democracy', and comprehensive thought control arrayed in defense of universalistic dogma (accompanied by the degradation of science into a government public relations function), it is necessary to ask how Massachusetts came to conquer the world, as Moldbug does. With every year that passes, the international ideal of sound governance finds itself approximating more closely and rigidly to the standards set by the Grievance Studies departments of New England universities. This is the divine providence of the ranters and levelers, elevated to a planetary teleology, and consolidated as the reign of *the Cathedral*.

The Cathedral has substituted its gospel for everything we ever knew. Consider just the concerns expressed by America's founding fathers (compiled by 'Liberty-clinger', comment #1, here):

> *A democracy is nothing more than mob rule, where 51% of the people may take away the rights of the other 49%. —*

Thomas Jefferson

Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch. Liberty is a well-armed lamb contesting the vote!— Benjamin Franklin

Democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide. — John Adams

Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their death. — James Madison

We are a Republican Government, Real liberty is never found in despotism or in the extremes of democracy…it has been observed that a pure democracy if it were practicable would be the most perfect government. Experience has proved that no position is more false than this. The ancient democracies in which the people themselves deliberated never possessed one good feature of government. Their very character was tyranny…— Alexander Hamilton

More on voting with your feet (and the incandescent genius of Moldbug), next …
Added Note (March 7):
Don't trust the attribution of the 'Benjamin Franklin' quote, above. According to Barry Popik, the saying was probably invented by James Bovard, in 1992. (Bovard remarks elsewhere: "There are few more dangerous errors in political thinking than to equate democracy with liberty.")

March 2, 2012

The Dark Enlightenment (Part 2)

The arc of history is long, but it bends towards zombie apocalypse

> David Graeber: *It strikes me that if one is going to pursue this to its logical conclusion, the only way to have a genuinely democratic society would also be to abolish capitalism in this state.*
>
> Marina Sitrin: *We can't have democracy with capitalism… Democracy and capitalism don't work together.*
>
> (Here, via John J. Miller)

> *That's always the trouble with history. It always looks like it's over. But it never is.*
>
> (Mencius Moldbug)

Googling 'democracy' and 'liberty' together is highly enlightening, in a dark way. In cyberspace, at least, it is clear that only a distinct minority think of these terms as positively coupled. If opinion is to be judged in terms of the Google spider and its digital prey, by far the most prevalent association is disjunctive, or antagonistic, drawing upon the reactionary insight that democracy poses a lethal menace to liberty, all but ensuring its eventual eradication. Democracy is to liberty as Gargantua to a pie ("Surely you can see that we love liberty, to the point of gut-rumbling and salivation …").

Steve H. Hanke lays out the case authoritatively in his short essay *On Democracy Versus Liberty*, focused upon the American experience:

> *Most people, including most Americans, would be surprised to learn that the word "democracy" does not appear in the Declaration of Independence (1776) or the Constitution of the United States of America (1789). They would also be shocked to learn the reason for the absence of the word democracy in the founding documents of the U.S.A. Contrary to what propaganda has led the public to believe, America's*

> *Founding Fathers were skeptical and anxious about democracy. They were aware of the evils that accompany a tyranny of the majority. The Framers of the Constitution went to great lengths to ensure that the federal government was not based on the will of the majority and was not, therefore, democratic.*
>
> *If the Framers of the Constitution did not embrace democracy, what did they adhere to? To a man, the Framers agreed that the purpose of government was to secure citizens in John Locke's trilogy of the rights to life, liberty and property.*

He elaborates:

> *The Constitution is primarily a structural and procedural document that itemizes who is to exercise power and how they are to exercise it. A great deal of stress is placed on the separation of powers and the checks and balances in the system. These were not a Cartesian construct or formula aimed at social engineering, but a shield to protect the people from the government. In short, the Constitution was designed to govern the government, not the people.*
>
> *The Bill of Rights establishes the rights of the people against infringements by the State. The only thing that the*

> *citizens can demand from the State, under the Bill of Rights, is for a trial by a jury. The rest of the citizens' rights are protections from the State. For roughly a century after the Constitution was ratified, private property, contracts and free internal trade within the United States were sacred. The scope and scale of the government remained very constrained. All this was very consistent with what was understood to be liberty.*

As the spirit of reaction digs its Sith-tentacles into the brain, it becomes difficult to remember how the classical (or non-communist) progressive narrative could once have made sense. What were people thinking? What were they expecting from the emerging super-empowered, populist, cannibalistic state? Wasn't the eventual calamity entirely predictable? How was it ever possible to be a Whig?

The ideological credibility of radical democratization is not, of course, in question. As thinkers ranging from (Christian progressive) Walter Russell Mead to (atheistic reactionary) Mencius Moldbug have exhaustively detailed, it conforms so exactly to ultra-protestant religious enthusiasm that its power to animate the revolutionary soul should surprise nobody. Within just a few years of Martin Luther's challenge to the papal establishment, peasant insurrectionists were stringing up their class enemies all over Germany.

The empirical credibility of democratic advancement is far more perplexing, and also genuinely complex (which is to say controversial, or more precisely, worthy of a data-based, rigorously-argued controversy). In part, that is because the modern configuration of democracy emerges within the sweep of a far broader modernistic trend, whose techno-scientific, economic, social and political strands are obscurely interrelated, knitted together by misleading correlations, and subsequent false causalities. If, as Schumpeter argues, industrial capitalism tends to engender a democratic-bureaucratic culture that concludes in stagnation, it might nevertheless seem as though democracy was 'associated' with material progress. It is easy to misconstrue a lagging indicator as a positive causal factor, especially when ideological zeal lends its bias to the misapprehension. In similar vein, since cancer only afflicts living beings, it might – with apparent reason — be associated with vitality.

Robin Hanson (gently) notes:

> *Yes many trends have been positive for a century or so, and yes this suggests they will continue to rise for a century or so. But no this does not mean that students are empirically or morally wrong for thinking it "utopian fantasy" that one could "end poverty, disease, tyranny, and war" by joining a modern-day Kennedy's political quest. Why? Because positive recent*

> *trends in these areas were not much* caused *by such political movements! They were mostly caused by our getting rich from the industrial revolution, an event that political movements tended, if anything, to try to hold back on average.*

Simple historical chronology suggests that industrialization supports progressive democratization, rather than being derived from it. This observation has even given rise to a widely accepted school of pop social science theorizing, according to which the 'maturation' of societies in a democratic direction is determined by thresholds of affluence, or middle-class formation. The strict logical correlate of such ideas, that democracy is *fundamentally non-productive* in relation to material progress, is typically under-emphasized. Democracy *consumes* progress. When perceived from the perspective of the dark enlightenment, the appropriate mode of analysis for studying the democratic phenomenon is general parasitology.

Quasi-libertarian responses to the outbreak accept this implicitly. Given a population deeply infected by the zombie virus and shambling into cannibalistic social collapse, the preferred option is quarantine. It is not communicative isolation that is essential, but a functional dis-solidarization of society that tightens feedback loops and exposes people with maximum intensity to the consequences

of their own actions. Social solidarity, in precise contrast, is the parasite's friend. By cropping out all high-frequency feedback mechanisms (such as market signals), and replacing them with sluggish, infra-red loops that pass through a centralized forum of 'general will', a radically democratized society insulates parasitism from what it does, transforming local, painfully dysfunctional, intolerable, and thus urgently corrected behavior patterns into global, numbed, and chronic socio-political pathologies.

Gnaw off other people's body parts and it might be hard to get a job– that's the kind of lesson a tight-feedback, cybernetically intense, *laissez faire* order would allow to be learned. It's also exactly the kind of insensitive zombiphobic discrimination that any compassionate democracy would denounce as thought crime, whilst boosting the public budget for the vitally-challenged, undertaking consciousness raising campaigns on behalf of those suffering from involuntary cannibalistic impulse syndrome, affirming the dignity of the zombie lifestyle in higher-education curriculums, and rigorously regulating workspaces to ensure that the shuffling undead are not victimized by profit-obsessed, performance-centric, or even unreconstructed animationist employers.

As enlightened zombie-tolerance flourishes in the shelter of the democratic mega-parasite, a small remnant of reactionaries, attentive to the effects of real incentives, raise the formulaic question: "You do realize that these policies lead inevitably to a

massive expansion of the zombie population?" The dominant vector of history presupposes that such nuisance objections are marginalized, ignored, and — wherever possible – silenced through social ostracism. The remnant either fortifies the basement, whilst stocking up on dried food, ammunition, and silver coins, or accelerates the application process for a second passport, and starts packing its bags.

If all of this seems to be coming unmoored from historical concreteness, there's a conveniently topical remedy: a little digressive channel-hopping over to Greece. As a microcosmic model for the death of the West, playing out in real time, the Greek story is hypnotic. It describes a 2,500 year arc that is far from neat, but irresistibly dramatic, from proto-democracy to accomplished zombie apocalypse. Its pre-eminent virtue is that it perfectly illustrates the democratic mechanism *in extremis*, separating individuals and local populations from the consequences of their decisions by scrambling their behavior through large-scale, centralized re-distribution systems. You decide what you do, but then vote on the consequences. How could anyone say 'no' to that?

No surprise that over 30 years of EU membership Greeks have been eagerly cooperating with a social-engineering mega-project that strips out all short-wave social signals and re-routes feedback through the grandiose circuitry of European solidarity, ensuring that all economically-relevant information is red-shifted through the

heat-death sump of the European Central Bank. Most specifically, it has conspired with 'Europe' to obliterate all information that might be contained in Greek interest rates, thus effectively disabling all financial feedback on domestic policy choices.

This is democracy in a consummate form that defies further perfection, since nothing conforms more exactly to the 'general will' than the legislative abolition of reality, and nothing delivers the hemlock to reality more definitively than the coupling of Teutonic interest rates with East Mediterranean spending decisions. *Live like Hellenes and pay like Germans* — any political party that failed to rise to power on that platform deserves to scrabble for vulture-picked scraps in the wilderness. It's the ultimate *no-brainer*, in just about every imaginable sense of that expression. What could possibly go wrong?

More to the point, what did go wrong? Mencius Moldbug begins his *Unqualified Reservations* series *How Dawkins got pwned* (or taken over through an "exploitable vulnerability") with the outlining of design rules for a hypothetical "optimal memetic parasite" that would be "as virulent as possible. It will be highly contagious, highly morbid, and highly persistent. A really ugly bug." In comparison to this ideological super-plague, the vestigial monotheism derided in *The God Delusion* would figure as nothing worse than a moderately unpleasant head cold. What begins as abstract meme tinkering concludes as grand-sweep history, in the dark enlightenment mode:

My belief is that Professor Dawkins is not just a Christian atheist. He is a Protestant atheist*. And he is not just a Protestant atheist. He is a* Calvinist atheist*. And he is not just a Calvinist atheist. He is an* Anglo-Calvinist atheist*. In other words, he can be also described as a* Puritan atheist*, a* Dissenter atheist*, a* Nonconformist atheist*, an* Evangelical atheist*, etc, etc.*

This cladistic taxonomy traces Professor Dawkins' intellectual ancestry back about 400 years, to the era of the English Civil War. Except of course for the atheism theme, Professor Dawkins' kernel is a remarkable match for the Ranter, Leveller, Digger, Quaker, Fifth Monarchist, or any of the more extreme English Dissenter traditions that flourished during the Cromwellian interregnum.

Frankly, these dudes were freaks. Maniacal fanatics. Any mainstream English thinker of the 17th, 18th or 19th century, informed that this tradition (or its modern descendant) is now the planet's dominant Christian denomination, would regard this as a sign of imminent apocalypse. If you're sure they're wrong, you're more sure than me.

Fortunately, Cromwell himself was comparatively moderate. The extreme ultra-Puritan sects never got a solid lock on power under the Protectorate. Even more fortunately, Cromwell got old and died, and Cromwellism

> *died with him. Lawful government was restored to Great Britain, as was the Church of England, and Dissenters became a marginal fringe again. And frankly, a damned good riddance it was.*
>
> *However, you can't keep a good parasite down. A community of Puritans fled to America and founded the theocratic colonies of New England. After its military victories in the American Rebellion and the War of Secession, American Puritanism was well on the way to world domination. Its victories in World War I, World War II, and the Cold War confirmed its global hegemony. All legitimate mainstream thought on Earth today is descended from the American Puritans, and through them the English Dissenters.*

Given the rise of this "really ugly bug" to world dominion, it might seem strange to pick on tangential figure such as Dawkins, but Moldbug selects his target for exquisitely-judged strategic reasons. Moldbug identifies with Dawkins' Darwinism, with his intellectual repudiation of Abrahamic theism, and with his broad commitment to scientific rationality. Yet he recognizes, crucially, that Dawkins' critical faculties shut off – abruptly and often comically – at the point where they might endanger a still broader commitment to hegemonic progressivism. In this way, Dawkins is powerfully indicative. Militant secularism is itself a modernized variant of the

Abrahamic meta-meme, on its Anglo-Protestant, radical democratic taxonomic branch, *whose specific tradition is anti-traditionalism*. The clamorous atheism of *The God Delusion* represents a protective feint, and a consistent upgrade of religious reformation, guided by a spirit of progressive enthusiasm that trumps empiricism and reason, whilst exemplifying an irritable dogmatism that rivals anything to be found in earlier God-themed strains.

Dawkins isn't merely an enlightened modern progressive and implicit radical democrat, he's an impressively credentialed scientist, more specifically a biologist, and (thus) a Darwinian evolutionist. The point at which he touches the limit of acceptable thinking as defined by the memetic super-bug is therefore quite easy to anticipate. His inherited tradition of low-church ultra-protestantism has replaced God with Man as the locus of spiritual investment, and 'Man' has been in the process of Darwinian research dissolution for over 150 years. (As the sound, decent person I know you are, having gotten this far with Moldbug you're probably already muttering under your breath, *don't mention race, don't mention race, don't mention race, please, oh please, in the name of the Zeitgeist and the dear sweet non-god of progress, don't mention race …*) … but Moldbug is already citing Dawkins, citing Thomas Huxley "…in a contest which is to be carried out by thoughts and not by bites. The highest places in the hierarchy of civilization will assuredly not be within the reach of our dusky cousins." Which Dawkins frames by remarking: "Had Huxley…

been born and educated in our time, [he] would have been the first to cringe with us at [his] Victorian sentiments and unctuous tone. I quote them only to illustrate how the *Zeitgeist* moves on."

It gets worse. Moldbug seems to be holding Huxley's hand, and … (ewww!) doing that palm-stroking thing with his finger. This sure ain't vanilla-libertarian reaction anymore — it's getting seriously dark, and scary. "In all seriousness, what is the evidence for fraternism? Why, exactly, does Professor Dawkins believe that all neohominids are born with identical potential for neurological development? He doesn't say. Perhaps he thinks it's obvious."

Whatever one's opinion on the respective scientific merits of human biological diversity or uniformity, it is surely beyond contention that the latter assumption, alone, is *tolerated*. Even if progressive-universalistic beliefs about human nature are true, they are not held *because they are true*, or arrived at through any process that passes the laugh test for critical scientific rationality. They are received as religious tenets, with all of the passionate intensity that characterizes essential items of faith, and to question them is not a matter of scientific inaccuracy, but of what we now call *political incorrectness*, and once knew as *heresy*.

To sustain this transcendent moral posture in relation to *racism* is no more rational than subscription to the doctrine of *original sin*, of which it is, in any case, the unmistakable modern substitute. The difference, of course, is that 'original sin' is a traditional doctrine,

subscribed to by an embattled social cohort, significantly under-represented among public intellectuals and media figures, deeply unfashionable in the dominant world culture, and widely criticized – if not derided – without any immediate assumption that the critic is advocating murder, theft, or adultery. To question the status of racism as the supreme and defining social sin, on the other hand, is to court universal condemnation from social elites, and to arouse suspicions of *thought crimes* that range from pro-slavery apologetics to genocide fantasies. Racism is *pure or absolute evil*, whose proper sphere is the infinite and the eternal, or the incendiary sinful depths of the hyper-protestant soul, rather than the mundane confines of civil interaction, social scientific realism, or efficient and proportional legality. The dissymmetry of affect, sanction, and raw social power attending old heresies and their replacements, once noticed, is a nagging indicator. A new sect reigns, and it is not even especially well hidden.

Yet even among the most hardened HBD constituencies, hysterical sanctification of plus-good race-think hardly suffices to lend radical democracy the aura of profound morbidity that Moldbug detects. That requires a devotional relation to the State.

March 9, 2012

The Dark Enlightenment (Part 3)

The previous installment of this series ended with our hero Mencius Moldbug, up to his waist (or worse) in the mephitic swamp of political incorrectness, approaching the dark heart of his politico-religious meditation on *How Dawkins Got Pwned*. Moldbug has caught Dawkins in the midst of a symptomatically significant, and excruciatingly sanctimonious, denunciation of Thomas Huxley's racist "Victorian sentiments" – a sermon which concludes with the strange declaration that he is quoting Huxley's words, despite their self-evident and wholly intolerable ghastliness, "only to illustrate how the *Zeitgeist* moves on."

Moldbug pounces, asking pointedly: "What, exactly, is this *Zeitgeist* thing?" It is, indisputably, an extraordinary catch. Here is a thinker (Dawkins), trained as a biologist, and especially fascinated by the (disjunctively) twinned topics of naturalistic evolution and Abrahamic religion, stumbling upon what he apprehends as a one-way trend of world-historical spiritual development, which he then – emphatically, but without the slightest appeal to disciplined reason or evidence – denies has any serious connection to the advance of science, human biology, or religious tradition. The stammering nonsense that results is a thing of wonder, but for Moldbug it all makes sense:

> *In fact, Professor Dawkins'* Zeitgeist *is … indistinguishable*

> *from … the old Anglo-Calvinist or Puritan concept of* Providence*. Perhaps this is a false match. But it's quite a close one.*
>
> *Another word for* Zeitgeist *is* Progress*. It's unsurprising that Universalists tend to believe in* Progress *– in fact, in a political context, they often call themselves* progressives*. Universalism has indeed made quite a bit of progress since* [the time of Huxley's embarrassing remark in] *1913. But this hardly refutes the proposition that Universalism is a parasitic tradition. Progress for the tick is not progress for the dog.*

What, exactly, is this *Zeitgeist* thing? The question bears repeating. Is it not astounding, to begin with, that when one English Darwinian reaches for a weapon to club another, the most convenient cudgel to hand should be a German word — associated with an abstruse lineage of state-worshipping idealistic philosophy — explicitly referencing a conception of historical time that has no discernible connection to the process of naturalistic evolution? It is as if, scarcely imaginably, during a comparable contention among physicists (on the topic of quantum indeterminacy), one should suddenly hear it shouted that "God does not play dice with the universe." In fact, the two examples are intimately entangled, since Dawkins' faith in the *Zeitgeist* is combined with adherence to the dogmatic progressivism of 'Einsteinian Religion' (meticulously dissected, of course, by

Moldbug).

The shamelessness is remarkable, or at least it would be, were it naively believed that the protocols of scientific rationality occupied sovereign position in such disputation, if only in principle. In fact – and here irony is amplified to the very brink of howling psychosis – Einstein's Old One still reigns. The criteria of judgment owe everything to neo-puritan spiritual hygiene, and nothing whatsoever to testable reality. Scientific utterance is screened for conformity to a progressive social agenda, whose authority seems to be unaffected by its complete indifference to scientific integrity. It reminds Moldbug of Lysenko, for understandable reasons.

"If the facts do not agree with the theory, so much worse for the facts" Hegel asserted. It is the *Zeitgeist* that is God, historically incarnated in the state, trampling mere data back into the dirt. By now, everybody knows where this ends. An egalitarian moral ideal, hardened into a universal axiom or increasingly incontestable dogma, completes modernity's supreme historical irony by making 'tolerance' the iron criterion for the limits of (cultural) toleration. Once it is accepted universally, or, speaking more practically, by all social forces wielding significant cultural power, that *intolerance is intolerable*, political authority has legitimated anything and everything convenient to itself, without restraint.

That is the magic of the dialectic, or of logical perversity. When only *tolerance is tolerable*, and everyone (who matters) accepts this

manifestly nonsensical formula as not only rationally intelligible, but as the universally-affirmed principle of modern democratic faith, nothing except politics remains. Perfect tolerance and absolute intolerance have become logically indistinguishable, with either equally interpretable as the other, A = not-A, or the inverse, and in the nakedly Orwellian world that results, power alone holds the keys of articulation. Tolerance has progressed to such a degree that it has become a social police function, providing the existential pretext for new inquisitional institutions. ("We must remember that those who tolerate intolerance abuse tolerance itself, and an enemy of tolerance is an enemy of democracy," Moldbug ironizes.)

The spontaneous tolerance that characterized classical liberalism, rooted in a modest set of strictly negative rights that restricted the domain of politics, or government intolerance, surrenders during the democratic surge-tide to a positive *right to be tolerated*, defined ever more expansively as substantial entitlement, encompassing public affirmations of dignity, state-enforced guarantees of equal treatment by all agents (public and private), government protections against non-physical slights and humiliations, economic subsidies, and – ultimately – statistically proportional representation within all fields of employment, achievement, and recognition. That the eschatological culmination of this trend is simply impossible matters not at all to the dialectic. On the contrary, it energizes the political process, combusting any

threat of policy satiation in the fuel of infinite grievance. “I will not cease from Mental Fight, Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand: Till we have built Jerusalem, In England’s green and pleasant land.” Somewhere before Jerusalem is reached, the inarticulate pluralism of a free society has been transformed into the assertive multiculturalism of a soft-totalitarian democracy.

The Jews of 17th century Amsterdam, or the Huguenots of 18th century London, enjoyed the right to be left alone, and enriched their host societies in return. The democratically-empowered grievance groups of later modern times are incited by political leaders to demand a (fundamentally illiberal) *right to be heard*, with social consequences that are predominantly malignant. For politicians, however, who identify and promote themselves as the voice of the unheard and the ignored, the self-interest at stake could hardly be more obvious.

Tolerance, which once presupposed neglect, now decries it, and in so doing becomes its opposite. Were this a partisan development, partisan politics of a democratic kind might sustain the possibility of reversion, but it is nothing of the kind. “When someone is hurting, government has got to move” declared ‘compassionate conservative’ US President George W. Bush, in a futile effort to channel the Cathedral. When the ‘right’ sounds like this it is not only dead, but unmistakably reeking of advanced decomposition. ‘Progress’ has won, but is that bad? Moldbug approaches the question rigorously:

> *If a tradition causes its hosts to make miscalculations that compromise their personal goals, it exhibits Misesian morbidity. If it causes its hosts to act in ways that compromise their genes' reproductive interests, it exhibits Darwinian morbidity. If subscribing to the tradition is individually advantageous or neutral (defectors are rewarded, or at least unpunished) but collectively harmful, the tradition is parasitic. If subscribing is individually disadvantageous but collectively beneficial, the tradition is altruistic. If it is both individually and collectively benign, it is symbiotic. If it is both individually and collectively harmful, it is malignant. Each of these labels can be applied to either Misesian or Darwinian morbidity. A theme that is arational, but does not exhibit either Misesian or Darwinian morbidity, is trivially morbid.*

Behaviorally considered, the Misesian and Darwinian systems are clusters of 'selfish' incentives, oriented respectively to property accumulation and gene propagation. Whilst the Darwinians conceive the 'Misesian' sphere as a special case of genetically self-interested motivation, the Austrian tradition, rooted in highly rationalized neo-kantian anti-naturalism, is pre-disposed to resist such reductionism. Whilst the ultimate implications of this contest are considerable, under current conditions it is a squabble of minor urgency, since both

formations are united in ‘hate’, which is to say, in their reactionary tolerance for incentive structures that punish the maladapted.

‘Hate’ is a word to pause over. It testifies with special clarity to the religious orthodoxy of the Cathedral, and its peculiarities merit careful notice. Perhaps its most remarkable feature is its perfect redundancy, when evaluated from the perspective of any analysis of legal and cultural norms that is *not* enflamed by neo-puritan evangelical enthusiasm. A ‘hate crime’, if it is anything at all, is just a crime, plus ‘hate’, and what the ‘hate’ adds is telling. To restrict ourselves, momentarily, to examples of uncontroversial criminality, one might ask: what is it exactly that *aggravates* a murder, or assault, if the motivation is attributed to ‘hate’? Two factors seem especially prominent, and neither has any obvious connection to common legal norms.

Firstly, the crime is augmented by a purely ideational, ideological, or even ‘spiritual’ element, attesting not only to a violation of civilized conduct, but also to a heretical intention. This facilitates the complete abstraction of hate from criminality, whereupon it takes the form of ‘hate-speech’ or simply ‘hate’ (which is always to be contrasted with the ‘passion’, ‘outrage’, or righteous ‘anger’ represented by critical, controversial, or merely abusive language directed against unprotected groups, social categories, or individuals). ‘Hate’ is an offense against the Cathedral itself, a refusal of its spiritual guidance, and a mental act of defiance against the

manifest religious destiny of the world.

Secondly, and relatedly, 'hate' is deliberately and even strategically asymmetrical in respect to the equilibrium political polarity of advanced democratic societies. Between the relentless march of progress and the ineffective grouching of conservatism it does not vacillate. As we have seen, only the right can 'hate'. As the doxological immunity system of 'hate' suppression is consolidated within elite educational and media systems, the highly selective distribution of protections ensures that 'discourse' – especially empowered discourse – is ratcheted consistently to the left, which is to say, in the direction of an ever more comprehensively radicalized Universalism. The morbidity of this trend is extreme.

Because grievance status is awarded as political compensation for economic incompetence, it constructs an automatic cultural mechanism that advocates for dysfunction. The Universalist creed, with its reflex identification of inequality with injustice, can conceive no alternative to the proposition that the lower one's situation or status, the more compelling is one's claim upon society, the purer and nobler one's cause. Temporal failure is the sign of spiritual election (Marxo-Calvinism), and to dispute any of this is clearly 'hate'.

This does not compel even the most hard-hearted neo-reactionary to suggest, in a caricature of the high Victorian cultural style, that social disadvantage, as manifested in political violence, criminality, homelessness, insolvency, and welfare dependency, is a

simple index of moral culpability. In large part – perhaps overwhelmingly large part – it reflects sheer misfortune. Dim, impulsive, unhealthy, and unattractive people, reared chaotically in abusive families, and stranded in broken, crime-wracked communities, have every reason to curse the gods before themselves. Besides, disaster can strike anyone.

In regards to effective incentive structures, however, none of this is of the slightest importance. Behavioral reality knows only one iron law: Whatever is subsidized is promoted. With a necessity no weaker than that of entropy itself, insofar as social democracy seeks to soften bad consequences – for major corporations no less than for struggling individuals or hapless cultures — things get worse. There is no way around, or beyond this formula, only wishful thinking, and complicity with degeneration. Of course, this defining reactionary insight is doomed to inconsequence, since it amounts to the supremely unpalatable conclusion that every attempt at 'progressive' improvement is fated to reverse itself, 'perversely', into horrible failure. No democracy could accept this, which means that every democracy will fail.

The excited spiral of Misesian-Darwinian degenerative runaway is neatly captured in the words of the world's fluffiest Beltway libertarian, Megan McArdle, writing in core Cathedral-mouthpiece *The Atlantic*:

> *It is somewhat ironic that the first serious strains caused by Europe's changing demographics are showing up in the Continent's welfare budgets, because the pension systems themselves may well have shaped, and limited, Europe's growth. The 20th century saw international adoption of social-security systems that promised defined benefits paid out of future tax revenue—known to pension experts as "paygo" systems, and to critics as Ponzi schemes. These systems have greatly eased fears of a destitute old age, but multiple studies show that as social-security systems become more generous (and old age more secure), people have fewer children. By one estimate, 50 to 60 percent of the difference between America's (above-replacement) birthrate and Europe's can be explained by the latter's more generous systems. In other words, Europe's pension system may have set in motion the very demographic decline that helped make that system—and some European governments—insolvent.*

Despite McArdle's ridiculous suggestion that the United States of America has in some way exempted itself from Europe's mortuary path, the broad outline of the diagnosis is clear, and increasingly accepted as commonsensical (although best ignored). According to the rising creed, welfare attained through progeny and savings is non-universal, and thus morally-benighted. It should be supplanted,

as widely and rapidly as possible, by universal benefits or 'positive rights' distributed universally to the democratic citizen and thus, inevitably, routed through the altruistic State. If as a result, due to the irredeemable political incorrectness of reality, economies and populations should collapse in concert, at least it will not damage our souls. Oh democracy! You saccharine-sweet dying idiot, what do you think the zombie hordes will care for your soul?

Moldbug comments:

> *Universalism, in my opinion, is best described as a mystery cult of power.*
>
> *It's a cult of power because one critical stage in its replicative lifecycle is a little critter called the State. When we look at the big U's surface proteins, we notice that most of them can be explained by its need to capture, retain, and maintain the State, and direct its powers toward the creation of conditions that favor the continued replication of Universalism. It's as hard to imagine Universalism without the State as malaria without the mosquito.*
>
> *It's a mystery cult because it displaces theistic traditions by replacing metaphysical superstitions with philosophical mysteries, such as humanity, progress, equality, democracy, justice, environment, community, peace, etc.*
>
> *None of these concepts, as defined in orthodox*

> *Universalist doctrine, is even slightly coherent. All can absorb arbitrary mental energy without producing any rational thought. In this they are best compared to Plotinian, Talmudic, or Scholastic nonsense.*

As a bonus, here's the *Urban Feature* guide to the main sequence of modern political regimes:

Regime (1) Communist Tyranny
Typical Growth: ~0%
Voice / Exit: Low / Low
Cultural climate: Pyschotic utopianism
Life is … hard but 'fair'
Transition mechanism: Re-discovers markets at economic degree-zero

Regime (2) Authoritarian Capitalism
Typical Growth: 5-10%
Voice / Exit: Low / High
Cultural climate: Flinty realism
Life is … hard but productive
Transition mechanism: Pressurized by the Cathedral to democratize

Regime (3) Social Democracy
Typical Growth: 0-3%
Voice / Exit: High / High
Cultural climate: Sanctimonious dishonesty

Life is … soft and unsustainable
Transition mechanism: Can-kicking runs out of road

Regime (4) Zombie Apocalypse
Typical Growth: N/A
Voice / Exit: High (mostly useless screaming) / High (with fuel, ammo, dried food, precious metal coins)
Cultural climate: Survivalism
Life is … hard-to-impossible
Transition mechanism: Unknown

For all regimes, growth expectations assume moderately competent population, otherwise go straight to (4)

March 19, 2012

The Dark Enlightenment (Part 4)

Re-running the race to ruin

> *Liberals are baffled and infuriated that poor whites vote Republican, yet voting on tribal grounds is a feature of all multi-ethnic democracies, whether* [in] *Northern Ireland, Lebanon or Iraq. The more a majority becomes a minority the more tribal its voting becomes, so that increasingly the*

> *Republicans have become the "white party"; making this point indelicately got Pat Buchanan the sack, but many others make it too.*
>
> *Will it happen here* [in the UK]*? The patterns are not dissimilar. In the 2010 election the Conservatives won only 16 per cent of the ethnic minority vote, while Labour won the support of 72 per cent of Bangladeshis, 78 per cent of African-Caribbeans and 87 per cent of Africans. The Tories are slightly stronger among British Hindus and Sikhs – mirroring Republican support among Asian-Americans – who are more likely to be home-owning professionals and feel less alienated.*
>
> *The Economist recently asked if the Tories had a "race problem", but it may just be that democracy has a race problem.*
>
> — Ed West (here)

Without a taste for irony, Mencius Moldbug is all but unendurable, and certainly unintelligible. Vast structures of historical irony shape his writings, at times even engulfing them. How otherwise could a proponent of traditional configurations of social order – a self-proclaimed Jacobite – compose a body of work that is stubbornly dedicated to subversion?

Irony is Moldbug's method, as well as his milieu. This can be seen,

most tellingly, in his chosen name for the usurped enlightenment, the dominant faith of the modern world: Universalism. This is a word that he appropriates (and capitalizes) within a reactionary diagnosis whose entire force lies in its exposure of an exorbitant particularity.

Moldbug turns continually to history (or, more rigorously, *cladistics*), to accurately specify that which asserts its own universal significance whilst ascending to a state of general dominance that approaches the universal. Under this examination, what counts as Universal reason, determining the direction and meaning of modernity, is revealed as the minutely determined branch or sub-species of a cultic tradition, descended from 'ranters', 'levelers', and closely related variants of dissident, ultra-protestant fanaticism, and owing vanishingly little to the conclusions of logicians.

Ironically, then, the world's regnant *Universalist* democratic-egalitarian faith is a particular or peculiar cult that has *broken out*, along identifiable historical and geographical pathways, with an epidemic virulence that is disguised as progressive global enlightenment. The route that it has taken, through England and New England, Reformation and Revolution, is recorded by an accumulation of traits that provide abundant material for irony, and for lower varieties of comedy. The unmasking of the modern 'liberal' intellectual or 'open-minded' media 'truth-teller' as a pale, fervent, narrowly doctrinaire puritan, recognizably descended from the species of witch-burning zealots, is reliably – and irresistibly –

entertaining.

Yet, as the Cathedral extends and tightens its grip upon everything, everywhere, in accordance with its divine mandate, the response it triggers is only atypically humorous. More commonly, when unable to exact humble compliance, it encounters inarticulate rage, or at least uncomprehending, smoldering resentment, as befits the imposition of parochial cultural dogmas, still wrapped in the trappings of a specific, alien pedigree, even as they earnestly confess to universal rationality.

Consider, for instance, the most famous words of America's Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights …" Could it be honestly maintained that to submit, scrupulously and sincerely, to such 'self-evident' truths amounts to anything other than an act of religious re-confirmation or conversion? Or denied that, in these words, reason and evidence are explicitly *set aside*, to make room for principles of faith? Could anything be less scientific than such a declaration, or more indifferent to the criteria of genuinely universal reasoning? How could anybody who was *not already a believer* be expected to consent to such assumptions?

That the founding statement of the democratic-republican creed should be formulated as a statement of pure (and doctrinally recognizable) faith is information of sorts, but it is not yet irony. The

irony begins with the fact that among the elites of today's Cathedral, these words of the Declaration of Independence (as well as many others) would be found – almost universally – to be quaintly suggestive at best, perhaps vaguely embarrassing, and most certainly incapable of supporting literal assent. Even amongst libertarian-slanted conservatives, a firm commitment to 'natural rights' is unlikely to proceed confidently and emphatically to their divine origination. For modern 'liberals', believers in the rights-bestowing (or entitlement) State, such archaic ideas are not only absurdly dated, but positively obstructive. For that reason, they are associated less with revered predecessors than with the retarded, fundamentalist thinking of political enemies. Sophisticates of the Cathedral core understand, as Hegel did, that God is no more than deep government apprehended by infants, and as such a waste of faith (that bureaucrats could put to better use).

Since the Cathedral has ascended to global supremacy, it no longer has need for Founding Fathers, who awkwardly recall its parochial ancestry, and impede its transnational public relations. Rather, it seeks perpetual re-invigoration through their denigration. The phenomenon of the 'New Atheism', with its transparent progressive affiliations, attests abundantly to this. Paleo-puritanism must be derided in order for neo-puritanism to flourish – *the meme is dead, long live the meme!*

At the limit of self-parody, neo-puritan parricide takes the form of

the ludicrous 'War on Christmas', in which the allies of the Cathedral sanctify the (radically unthreatened) separation of Church and State through nuisance agitation against public expressions of traditional Christian piety, and their 'Red State' dupes respond with dyspeptic outrage on cable TV shows. Like every other war against fuzzy nouns (whether 'poverty', 'drugs', or 'terror'), the outcome is predictably perverse. If resistance to the War on Christmas is not yet established as the solid center of Yuletide festivities, it can be confidently expected to become so in the future. The purposes of the Cathedral are served nonetheless, through promotion of a synthetic secularism that separates the progressive faith from its religious foundations, whilst directing attention away from the ethnically specific, dogmatic creedal content at its core.

As reactionaries go, traditional Christians are generally considered to be quite cuddly. Even the most wild-eyed fanatics of the neo-puritan orthodoxy have trouble getting genuinely excited about them (although abortion activists get close). For some real red meat, with the nerves exposed and writhing to jolts of hard stimulation, it makes far more sense to turn to another discarded and ceremonially abominated block on the progressive lineage: White Identity Politics, or (the term Moldbug opts for) 'white nationalism'.

Just as the ratchet progress of neo-puritan social democracy is radically facilitated by the orchestrated pillorying of its embryonic religious forms, so is its trend to consistently neo-fascist political

economy smoothed by the concerted repudiation of a 'neo-nazi' (or paleo-fascist) threat. It is extremely convenient, when constructing ever more nakedly corporatist or 'third position' structures of state-directed pseudo-capitalism, to be able to divert attention to angry expressions of white racial paranoia, especially when these are ornamented by clumsily modified nazi insignia, horned helmets, Leni Riefenstahl aesthetics, and slogans borrowed freely from *Mein Kampf*. In the United States (and thus, with shrinking time-lag, internationally) the icons of the Ku Klux Klan, from white bed-sheets, quasi-Masonic titles, and burning crosses, to lynching ropes, have acquired comparable theatrical value.

Moldbug offers a sanitized white nationalist blog reading list, consisting of writers who – to varying degrees of success – avoid immediate reversion to paleo-fascist self-parody. The first step beyond the boundary of respectable opinion is represented by Lawrence Auster, a Christian, anti-Darwinist, and 'Traditionalist Conservative' who defends 'substantial' (ethno-racial) national identity and opposes the liberal master-principle of nondiscrimination. By the time we reach 'Tanstaafl', at the ripped outer edge of Moldbug's carefully truncated spectrum, we have entered a decaying orbit, spiraling into the great black hole that is hidden at the dead center of modern political possibility.

Before following the Tanstaafl-types into the crushing abyss where light dies, there are some preliminary remarks to make about

the white nationalist perspective, and its implications. Even more than the Christian traditionalists (who, even in their cultural mid-winter, can bask in the warmth of supernatural endorsement), white identity politics considers itself *besieged*. Moderate or measured concern offers no equilibrium for those who cross the line, and begin to self-identify in these terms. Instead, the path of involvement demands rapid acceleration to a state of extreme alarm, or racial panic, conforming to an analysis focused upon malicious population replacement at the hands of a government which, in the oft-cited words of Bertolt Brecht, "has decided to dissolve the people, and to appoint another one." 'Whiteness' (whether conceived biologically, mystically, or both) is associated with vulnerability, fragility, and persecution. This theme is so basic, and so multifarious, that it is difficult to adequately address succinctly. It encompasses everything from criminal predation (especially racially-charged murders, rapes, and beatings), economic exactions and inverse discrimination, cultural aggression by hostile academic and media systems, and ultimately 'genocide' – or definitive racial destruction.

Typically, the prospective annihilation of the white race is attributed to its own systematic vulnerability, whether due to characteristic cultural traits (excessive altruism, susceptibility to moral manipulation, excessive hospitality, trust, universal reciprocity, guilt, or individualistic disdain for group identity), or more immediate biological factors (recessive genes supporting

fragile Aryan phenotypes). Whilst it is unlikely that this sense of unique endangerment is reducible to the chromatic formula 'White + Color = Color', the fundamental structure is of this kind. In its abstract depiction of non-reciprocal vulnerability, it reflects the 'one drop rule' (and Mendelian recessive / dominant gene combination). It depicts mixture as essentially anti-white.

Because 'whiteness' is a limit (pure absence of color), it slips smoothly from the biological factuality of the Caucasian sub-species into metaphysical and mystical ideas. Rather than accumulating genetic variation, a white race is contaminated or polluted by admixtures that compromise its defining negativity – to darken it is to destroy it. The mythological density of these — predominantly subliminal – associations invests white identity politics with a resilience that frustrates enlightened efforts at rationalistic denunciation, whilst contradicting its own paranoid self-representation. It also undermines recent white nationalist promotions of a racial threat that is strictly comparable to that facing indigenous peoples, universally, and depicting whites as 'natives' cruelly deprived of equal protection against extinction. There is no route back to tribal innocence, or flat, biological diversity. Whiteness has been compacted indissolubly with ideology, whichever the road taken.

"If Blacks can have it, and Hispanics can have it, and Jews can have it, why can't we have it?" – That's the final building block of white

nationalist grievance, the werewolf curse that means it can only ever be a monster. There's exactly one way out for persecuted palefaces, and it leads straight into a black hole. We promised to get back to Tanstaafl, and here we are, in late Summer 2007, shortly after he got 'the Jew thing'. There isn't anything very original about his epiphany, which is exactly the point. He quotes himself:

> *Isn't it absurd that anyone would even think to blame Christianity or WASPs for the rise of PC and its catastrophic consequences? Isn't this in fact a reversal of the truth? Hasn't the rise and spread of PC eroded the power of Christianity, WASPs, and whites in general? Blaming them is in effect blaming the victim.*
>
> *Yes, there are Christians, WASPs, and whites who have fallen for the PC brainwashing. Yes, there are some who have taken it so deeply to heart that they work to expand and protect it. That's the nature of PC. That is its purpose. To control the minds of the people it seeks to destroy. The left, at its root, is all about destruction.*
>
> *You don't have to be an anti-Semite to notice where these ideas originate from and who benefits. But you do have to violate PC to say: Jews.*

That's the labyrinth, the trap, with its pitifully constricted,

stereotypical circuit. “Why can’t we be cuddly racial preservationists, like Amazonian Indians? How come we always turn into Neo-Nazis? It’s some kind of conspiracy, which means *it has to be the Jews*.” Since the mid-20th century, the political intensity of the globalized world has streamed, almost exclusively, out of the cratered ash-pile of the Third Reich. Until you get the pattern, it seems mysterious that there’s no getting away from it. After listing some blogs falling under the relatively genteel category of ‘white nationalism’, Moldbug cautions:

> *The Internet is also home to many out-and-out racist blogs. Most are simply unreadable. But some are hosted by relatively capable writers … On these racist blogs you’ll find racial epithets, anti-Semitism (see why I am not an anti-Semite) and the like. Obviously, I cannot recommend any of these blogs, and nor will I link to them. However, if you are interested in the mind of the modern racist, Google will get you there.*

Google is overkill. A little link-trawling will get you there. It’s a ‘six degrees of separation’ problem (and more like two, or less). Start digging into the actually existing ‘reactosphere’, and things get quite astoundingly ugly very quickly. Yes, there really is ‘hate’, panic, and disgust, as well as a morbidly addictive abundance of very grim,

vitriolic wit, and a disconcertingly impressive weight of credible fact (these guys just *love* statistics to death). Most of all, just beyond the horizon, there's the black hole. If reaction ever became a popular movement, its few slender threads of bourgeois (or perhaps dreamily 'aristocratic') civility wouldn't hold back the beast for long.

As liberal decency has severed itself from intellectual integrity, and exiled harsh truths, these truths have found new allies, and become considerably harsher. The outcome is mechanically, and monotonously, predictable. Every liberal democratic 'cause war' strengthens and feralizes what it fights. The war on poverty creates a chronically dysfunctional underclass. The war on drugs creates crystallized super-drugs and mega-mafias. Guess what? The war on political incorrectness creates data-empowered, web-coordinated, paranoid and poly-conspiratorial werewolves, superbly positioned to take advantage of liberal democracy's impending rendezvous with ruinous reality, and to then play their part in the unleashing of unpleasantnesses that are scarcely imaginable (except by disturbing historical analogy). When a sane, pragmatic, and fact-based negotiation of human differences is forbidden by ideological fiat, the alternative is not a reign of perpetual peace, but a festering of increasingly self-conscious and militantantly defiant *thoughtcrime*, nourished by publicly unavowable realities, and energized by powerful, atavistic, and palpably dissident mythologies. That's obvious, on the 'Net.

Moldbug considers the danger of white nationalism to be both over- and understated. On the one hand, the 'menace' is simply ridiculous, and merely reflects neo-puritan spiritual dogma in its most hysterically oppressive and stubbornly mindless form. "It should be obvious that, although I am not a white nationalist, I am not exactly allergic to the stuff," Moldbug remarks, before describing it as "the most marginalized and socially excluded belief system in the history of the world … an obnoxious social irritant in any circle which does not include tattooed speedfreak bikers."

Yet the danger remains, or rather, is *under construction*.

> *I can imagine one possibility which might make white nationalism genuinely dangerous. White nationalism would be dangerous if there was some issue on which white nationalists were right, and everyone else was wrong. Truth is always dangerous. Contrary to common belief, it does not always prevail. But it's always a bad idea to turn your back on it. …While the evidence for human cognitive biodiversity is indeed debatable, what's not debatable is that it is debatable …*[even though] *everyone who is not a white nationalist has spent the last 50 years informing us that it is not debatable …*

There's far more to Moldbug's essay, as there always is. Eventually it explains why he rejects white nationalism, on grounds that owe

nothing to conventional reflexes. But the dark heart of the essay, lifting it beyond brilliance to the brink of genius, is found early on, at the edge of a black hole:

> *Why does white nationalism strike us as evil? Because Hitler was a white nationalist, and Hitler was evil. Neither of these statements is remotely controvertible. There is exactly one degree of separation between white nationalism and evil. And that degree is Hitler. Let me repeat: Hitler.*
>
> *The argument seems watertight. (Hitlertight?) But it holds no water at all.*
>
> *Why does socialism strike us as evil? Because Stalin was a socialist, and Stalin was evil. Anyone who wants to seriously argue that Stalin was less evil than Hitler has an awful long row to hoe. Not only did Stalin order more murders, his murder machine had its heyday in peacetime, whereas Hitler's can at least be seen as a war crime against enemy civilians. Whether this makes a difference can be debated, but if it does it puts Stalin on top.*
>
> *And yet I have never had or seen anything like the "red flags" response to socialism* ["the sense of the presence of evil"]*. If I saw a crowd of young, fashionable people lining up at the box office for a hagiographic biopic on Reinhard Heydrich, chills would run up and down my neck. For Ernesto*

> *Guevara, I have no emotional response. Perhaps I think it's stupid and sad. I do think it's stupid and sad. But it doesn't freak me out.*

Any attempt to be nuanced, balanced, or proportional in the moral case against Hitler is to entirely misconstrue the nature of the phenomenon. This can be noted, quite regularly, in Asian societies, for instance, because the ghost of the Third Reich does not occupy central position in their history, or rather, *their religion*, although – as the inner sanctum of the Cathedral — it is determined to (and shows almost every sign of succeeding). A brief digression on cross-cultural misunderstanding and reciprocal blindness might be merited at this point. When Westerners pay attention to the 'God-Emperor' style of political devotion that has accompanied modern totalitarianism in East Asia, the conclusion typically drawn is that this pattern of political feeling is exotically alien, morbidly amusing, and ultimately – chillingly — incomprehensible. Contemporary comparisons with laughably non-numinous Western democratic leaders only deepen the confusion, as do clumsy quasi-Marxist references to 'feudal' sensibilities (as if absolute monarchy was not an *alternative* to feudalism, and as if absolute monarchs were worshipped). *How could a historical and political figure ever be invested with the transcendent dignity of absolute religious meaning?* It seems absurd …

"Look, I'm not saying that Hitler was a particularly nice guy …" – to imagine such word is already to see many things. It might even provoke the question: Does anybody within the (Cathedral's) globalized world still think that Adolf Hitler was less evil than the Prince of Darkness himself? Perhaps only a few scattered paleo-Christians (who stubbornly insist that Satan is really, *really* bad), and an even smaller number of Neo-Nazi ultras (who think Hitler was kind of cool). For pretty much everybody else, Hitler *perfectly* personifies demonic monstrosity, transcending history and politics to attain the stature of a metaphysical absolute: evil incarnate. Beyond Hitler it is impossible to go, or think. This is surely interesting, since it indicates an irruption of the infinite within history – a religious revelation, of inverted, yet structurally familiar, Abrahamic type. ('Holocaust Theology' already implies as much.)

In this regard, rather than Satan, it might be more helpful to compare Hitler to the Antichrist, which is to say: to a mirror Messiah, of reversed moral polarity. There was even an empty tomb. *Hitlerism*, neutrally conceived, therefore, is less a pro-Nazi ideology than a universal faith, speciated within the Abrahamic super-family, and united in acknowledging the coming of pure evil on earth. Whilst not exactly worshipped (outside the extraordinarily disreputable circles already ventured into), Hitler is sacramentally abhorred, in a way that touches upon theological 'first things'. If to embrace Hitler as God is a sign of highly lamentable politico-spiritual confusion (at

best), to recognize his historical singularity and sacred meaning is near-mandatory, since he is affirmed by all men of sound faith as the exact complement of the incarnate God (the revealed anti-Messiah, or Adversary), and this identification has the force of 'self-evident truth'. (Did anybody ever need to ask why the *reductio ad Hitlerum* works?)

Conveniently, like the secularized neo-puritanism that it swallows, (aversive) Hitlerism can be safely taught in American schools, at a remarkably high level of religious intensity. Insofar as progressive or programmatic history continues, this suggests that the Church of Sacred Hitlerite Abomination will eventually supplant its Abrahamic predecessors, to become the world's triumphant ecumenical faith. How could it not? After all, unlike vanilla deism, this is a faith that fully reconciles religious enthusiasm with enlightened opinion, equally adapted, with consummate amphibious capability, to the convulsive ecstasies of popular ritual and the letter pages of the *New York Times*. "Absolute evil once walked amongst us, and lives still …" How is this not, already, the principal religious message of our time? All that remains unfinished is the mythological consolidation, and that has long been underway.

There's still some bone-fragment picking to do among the ashes and debris [in Part 5], before turning to healthier things …

April 1, 2012

The Dark Enlightenment (Part 4a)

A multi-part sub-digression into racial terror

> *My own sense of the thing is that underneath the happy talk, underneath the dogged adherence to failed ideas and dead theories, underneath the shrieking and anathematizing at people like me, there is a deep and cold despair. In our innermost hearts, we don't believe racial harmony can be attained. Hence the trend to separation. We just want to get on with our lives away from each other. Yet for a moralistic, optimistic people like Americans, this despair is unbearable. It's pushed away somewhere we don't have to think about it. When someone* forces *us to think about it, we react with fury. That little boy in the Andersen story about the Emperor's new clothes? The ending would be more true to life if he had been lynched by a howling mob of outraged citizens.*
> — John Derbyshire, interviewed at Gawker

> *We believe in the equal dignity and presumption of equal decency toward every person — no matter what race, no matter what science tells us about comparative intelligence, and no matter what is to be gleaned from crime statistics. It is important that research be done, that conclusions not be*

> *rigged, and that we are at liberty to speak frankly about what it tells us. But that is not an argument for* a priori *conclusions about how individual persons ought to be treated in various situations — or for calculating fear or friendship based on race alone. To hold or teach otherwise is to prescribe the disintegration of a pluralistic society, to undermine the aspiration of* E Pluribus Unum*.*
> — Andrew McCarthy, defending the expulsion of JD from the National Review

> *"The Talk" as black Americans and liberals present it (to wit: necessitated by white malice), is a comic affront — because no one is allowed (see Barro above) to notice the context in which black Americans are having run-ins with the law, each other, and others. The proper context for understanding this, and the mania that is the Trayvonicus for that matter, is the* reasonable fear of violence*. This is the single most exigent fact here — yet you decree it must not be spoken.*
> — Dennis Dale, responding to Josh Barro's call for JD's 'firing'

> *Quite an experience to live in fear, isn't it? That's what it is to be a slave.*
> — Bladerunner

There is no part of Singapore, Hong Kong, Taipei, Shanghai, or very

many other East Asian cities where it is impossible to wander, safely, late at night. Women, whether young or old, on their own or with small children, can be comfortably oblivious to the details of space and time, at least insofar as the threat of assault is concerned. Whilst this might not be quite sufficient to define a civilized society, it comes extremely close. It is certainly *necessary* to any such definition. The contrary case is barbarism.

These lucky cities of the western Pacific Rim are typified by geographical locations and demographic profiles that conspicuously echo the embarrassingly well-behaved 'model minorities' of Occidental countries. They are (non-obnoxiously) dominated by populations that – due to biological heredity, deep cultural traditions, or some inextricable entanglement of the two – find polite, prudent, and pacific social interactions comparatively effortless, and worthy of continuous reinforcement. They are also, importantly, open, cosmopolitan societies, remarkably devoid of chauvinistic boorishness or paranoid ethno-nationalist sentiment. Their citizens are disinclined to emphasize their own virtues. On the contrary, they will typically be modest about their individual and collective attributes and achievements, abnormally sensitive to their failures and shortcomings, and constantly alert to opportunities for improvement. Complacency is almost as rare as delinquency. In these cities an entire — and massively consequential — dimension of social terror is simply absent.

In much of the Western world, in stark contrast, barbarism has been normalized. It is considered simply obvious that cities have 'bad areas' that are not merely impoverished, but lethally menacing to outsiders and residents alike. Visitors are warned to stay away, whilst locals do their best to transform their homes into fortresses, avoid venturing onto the streets after dark, and – especially if young and male — turn to criminal gangs for protection, which further degrades the security of everybody else. Predators control public space, parks are death traps, aggressive menace is celebrated as 'attitude', property acquisition is for mugs (or muggers), educational aspiration is ridiculed, and non-criminal business activity is despised as a violation of cultural norms. Every significant mechanism of socio-cultural pressure, from interpreted heritage and peer influences to political rhetoric and economic incentives, is aligned to the deepening of complacent depravity and the ruthless extirpation of every impulse to self-improvement. Quite clearly, these are places where civilization has fundamentally collapsed, and a society that includes them has to some substantial extent *failed*.

Within the most influential countries of the English-speaking world, the disintegration of urban civilization has profoundly shaped the structure and development of cities. In many cases, the 'natural' (one might now say 'Asian') pattern, in which intensive urbanization and corresponding real estate values are greatest in the downtown core, has been shattered, or at least deeply deformed. Social

disintegration of the urban center has driven an exodus of the (even moderately) prosperous to suburban and exurban refuges, producing a grotesque and historically unprecedented pattern of 'donut'-style development, with cities tolerating – or merely accommodating themselves to – ruined and rotting interiors, where sane people fear to tread. 'Inner city' has come to mean almost exactly the opposite of what an undistorted course of urban development would produce. This is the geographical expression of a Western – and especially American – social problem that is at once basically unmentionable and visible from outer space.

Surprisingly, the core-crashed donut syndrome has a notably insensitive yet commonly accepted name, which captures it in broad outlines – at least according to its secondary characteristics – and to a reasonable degree of statistical approximation: *White Flight*. This is an arresting term, for a variety of reasons. It is stamped, first of all, by the racial bi-polarity that – as a *vital archaism* – resonates with America's chronic social crisis at a number of levels. Whilst superficially outdated in an age of many-hued multicultural and immigration issues, it reverts to the undead code inherited from slavery and segregation, perpetually identified with Faulkner's words: "The past is not dead. It isn't even past." Yet even in this untypical moment of racial candor, blackness is elided, and implicitly disconnected from agency. It is denoted only by allusion, as a residue, concentrated passively and derivatively by the sifting function of a

highly-adrenalized white panic. What *cannot be said* is indicated even as it is unmentioned. A distinctive silence accompanies the broken, half-expression of a mute tide of racial separatism, driven by civilizationally disabling terrors and animosities, whose depths, and structures of reciprocity, remain unavowable.

What the puritan exodus from Old to New World was to the foundation of Anglophone global modernity, white flight is to its fraying and dissolution. As with the pre-founding migration, what gives white flight ineluctable relevance here is its sub-political character: *all exit and no voice*. It is the subtle, non-argumentative, non-demanding 'other' of social democracy and its dreams – the spontaneous impulse of dark enlightenment, as it is initially glimpsed, at once disillusioning and implacable.

The core-crashed donut is not the only model of sick city syndrome (the shanty fringe phenomenon emphasized in Mike Davis' *Planet of Slums* is very different). Nor is donut-disaster urbanism reducible to racial crisis, at least in its origins. Technological factors have played a crucial role (most prominently, automobile geography) as have quite other, long-standing cultural traditions (such as the construction of suburbia as a bourgeois idyll). Yet all such lineages have been in very large measure supplanted by, or at least subordinated to, the inherited, and still emerging, 'race problem.'

So what is this 'problem'? How is it developing? Why should

anybody outside America be concerned about it? Why raise the topic now (if ever)? – If your heart is sinking under the gloomy suspicion this is going to be huge, meandering, nerve-wracking, and torturous, you're right. We've got *weeks* in this chamber of horrors to look forward to.

The two simplest, quite widely held, and basically incompatible answers to the first question deserve to be considered as important *parts* of the problem.

Question: What is America's race problem?

Answer-1: Black people.

Answer-2: White people.

The combined popularity of these options is significantly expanded, most probably to encompass a large majority of all Americans, when is taken to include those who assume that one of these two answers dominates the thinking of *the other side*. Between them, the propositions "The problem would be over if we could just rid ourselves of black hoodlums / white racists" and / or "They think we're all hoodlums / racists and want to get rid of us" consume an impressive proportion of the political spectrum, establishing a solid foundation of reciprocal terror and aversion. When defensive projections are added ("We're not hoodlums, you're racists" or "We're not racists, you're hoodlums"), the potential for super-heated, non-synthesizing dialectics approaches the infinite.

Not that these 'sides' are racial (except in black or white tribal-

nationalist fantasy). For crude stereotypes, it is far more useful to turn to the *principal political dimension*, and its categories of 'liberal' and 'conservative' in the contemporary, American sense. To identify America's race problem with white racism is the stereotypical *liberal* position, whilst identifying it with black social dysfunction is the exact *conservative* complement. Although these stances are formally symmetrical, it is their actual political *asymmentry* that charges the American race problem with its extraordinary historical dynamism and universal significance.

That American whites and blacks – considered crudely as statistical aggregates — co-exist in a relation of reciprocal fear and perceived victimization, is attested by the manifest patterns of urban development and navigation, school choice, gun ownership, policing and incarceration, and just about every other expression of *revealed* (as opposed to *stated*) preference that is related to voluntary social distribution and security. An objective balance of terror reigns, erased from visibility by complementary yet incompatible perspectives of victimological supremacism and denial. Yet between *the liberal and conservative positions on race* there is no balance whatsoever, but something closer to a rout. Conservatives are utterly terrified of the issue, whilst for liberals it is a garden of earthly delight, whose pleasures transcend the limits of human understanding. When any political discussion firmly and clearly arrives at the topic of race, liberalism wins. That is the fundamental

law of ideological effectiveness in the ~~shadow~~ fragrant shade of the Cathedral. In certain respects, this dynamic political imbalance is even the primary phenomenon under consideration (and much more needs to be said about it, down the road).

The regular, excruciating, soul-crushing humiliation of conservatism on the race issue should come as no surprise to anybody. After all, the principal role of conservatism in modern politics is to be humiliated. That is what a perpetual loyal opposition, or court jester, is for. The essential character of liberalism, as guardian and proponent of neo-puritan spiritual truth, invests it with supreme mastery over the dialectic, or invulnerability to contradiction. *That which it is impossible to think must necessarily be embraced, through faith*. Consider only the fundamental doctrine or first article of the liberal creed, as promulgated through every public discussion, academic articulation, and legislative initiative relevant to the topic: *Race doesn't exist, except as a social construct employed by one race to exploit and oppress another*. Merely to entertain it is to shudder before the awesome majesty of the absolute, where everything is simultaneously its precise opposite, and reason evaporates ecstatically at the brink of the sublime.

If the world was built out of ideology, this story would already be over, or at least predictably programmed. Beyond the apparent zig-zag of the dialectic there is a dominant trend, heading in a single, unambiguous direction. Yet the liberal-progressive solution to the

race problem – open-endedly escalating, comprehensively systematic, dynamically paradoxical 'anti-racism' – confronts a real obstacle that is only very partially reflected in conservative attitudes, rhetoric, and ideology. The real enemy, glacial, inchoate, and non-argumentative, is 'white flight'.

At this point, explicit reference to the Derbyshire Case becomes irresistible. There is a very considerable amount of complex, recent historical context that cries out for introduction – the cultural convulsion attending the Trayvon Martin incident in particular – but there'll be time for that later (oh yes, I'm afraid so). Derbyshire's intervention, and the explosion of words it provoked, while to some extent illuminated by such context, far exceeds it. That is because the crucial unspoken term, both in Derbyshire's now-notorious short article, and also — apparently — in the responses it generated, is 'white flight'. By publishing paternal advice to his (Eurasian) children that has been — not entirely unreasonably — summarized as 'avoid black people', he converted white flight from a much-lamented but seemingly inexorable fact into an explicit imperative, even a *cause*. *Don't argue, flee*.

The word Derbyshire emphasizes, in his own penumbra of commentary, and in antecedent writings, is not 'flight' or 'panic', but *despair*. When asked by blogger Vox Day whether he agreed that the 'race card' had become less intimidating over the past two decades, Derbyshire replies:

One [factor]*, which I've written about more than once, I think, in the United States, is just despair. I am of a certain age, and I was around 50 years ago. I was reading the newspapers and following world events and I remember the civil rights movement. I was in England, but we followed it. I remember it, I remember what we felt about it, and what people were writing about it. It was full of hope. The idea in everyone's mind was that if we strike down these unjust laws and we outlaw all this discrimination, then we'll be whole. Then America will be made whole. After an intermediate period of a few years, who knows, maybe 20 years, with a hand up from things like affirmative action, black America will just merge into the general population and the whole thing will just go away. That's what everybody believed. Everybody thought that. And it didn't happen.*

Here we are, we're 50 years later, and we've still got these tremendous disparities in crime rates, educational attainment, and so on. And I think, although they're still mouthing the platitudes, Americans in their hearts feel a kind of cold despair about it. They feel that Thomas Jefferson was probably right and we can't live together in harmony. I think that's why you see this slow ethnic disaggregation. We have a very segregated school system now. There are schools within 10 miles of where I'm sitting that are 98 percent minority. In

> *residential housing too, it's the same thing. So I think there is a cold, dark despair lurking in America's collective heart about the whole thing.*

This is a version of reality that few want to hear. As Derbyshire recognizes, Americans are a predominantly Christian, optimistic, 'can-do' people, whose 'collective heart' is unusually maladapted to an *abandonment of hope*. This is a country culturally hard-wired to interpret despair not merely as error or weakness, but as *sin*. Nobody who understands this could be remotely surprised to find bleak hereditarian fatalism being rejected — typically with vehement hostility — not only by progressives, but also by the overwhelming majority of conservatives. At NRO, Andrew C. McCarthy no doubt spoke for many in remarking:

> *There is a world of difference, though, between the need to be able to discuss uncomfortable facts about IQ and incarceration, on the one hand, and, on the other, to urge race as a rationale for abandoning basic Christian charity.*

Others went much further. At the Examiner, James Gibson seized upon "John Derbyshire's vile racist screed" as the opportunity to teach a wider lesson – "the danger of conservatism divorced from Christianity":

> *… since Derbyshire does not believe "that Jesus of Nazareth was divine . . . and that the Resurrection was a real event,"; he cannot comprehend the great mystery of the Incarnation, whereby the Divine truly did take on human flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and suffered death at the hands of a fallen humanity in order to redeem that humanity out of its state of fallenness.*
>
> *Herein lies the danger of a conservative socio-political philosophy divorced from a robust Christian faith. It becomes a dead ideology spawning a view of humanity that is toxic, fatalistic, and (as Derbyshire proves abundantly) uncharitable.*

It was, of course, on the left that the fireworks truly ignited. Elspeth Reeve at the Atlantic Wire contended that Derbyshire had clung on to his relation with the National Review because he was offering the magazine's "less enlightened readers" what they wanted: "dated racial stereotypes." Like Gibson on the right, she was keen for people to learn a wider lesson: *don't think for a minute this stops with Derbyshire*. (The stunningly uncooperative comments thread to her article is worth noting.)

At Gawker, Louis Peitzman jumped the shark (in the approved direction) by describing Derbyshire's "horrifying diatribe" as the "most racist article possible," a judgment that betrays extreme

historical ignorance, a sheltered life, unusual innocence, and a lack of imagination, as well as making the piece sound far more interesting than it actually is. Peitzman's commentators are impeccably liberal, and of course uniformly, utterly, shatteringly appalled (to the point of orgasm). Beyond the emoting, Peitzman doesn't offer much content, excepting only a little extra emoting – this time mild satisfaction mixed with residual rage – at the news that Derbyshire's punishment has at least begun ("a step in the right direction") with his "canning" from the *National Review*.

Joanna Schroeder (writing at something called the Good Feed Blog) sought to extend the purge beyond Derbyshire, to include anybody who had not yet erupted into sufficiently melodramatic paroxysms of indignation, starting with David Weigel at Slate (who she doesn't know "in real life, but in reading this piece, it seems you just might be a racist, pal"). "There are so many … racist, dehumanizing references to black people in Derbyshire's article that I have to just stop myself here before I recount the entire thing point by point with fuming rage," she shares. Unlike Peitzman, however, at least Schroeder has a point – the racial terror dialectic — "… propagating the idea that we should be afraid of black men, of black people in general, makes this world dangerous for innocent Americans." *Your fear makes you scary* (although apparently not with legitimate reciprocity).

As for Weigel, he gets the terror good and hard. Within hours he's

back at the keyboard, apologizing for his previous insouciance, and for the fact he "never ended up saying the obvious: People, the essay was disgusting."

So what did Derbyshire actually say, where did it come from, and what does it mean to American politics (and beyond)? This sub-series will comb through the spectrum from left to right in search of suggestions, with socio-geographically manifested 'white' panic / despair as a guiding thread …

Coming next: The Liberal Ecstasy

April 19, 2012

The Dark Enlightenment (Part 4b)

Obnoxious observations

> *Although black families and parents of boys aren't the only ones who worry about the safety of adolescents, Tillman, Brown and other parents say raising black boys is perhaps the most stressful aspect of parenting because they're dealing with a society that is fearful and hostile toward them, simply because of the color of their skin.*
>
> *"Don't believe it? Walk a day in my shoes," Brown said.*

Brown said that at 14, his son is at that critical age when he's always worried about his safety because of profiling.

"I don't want to scare him or have him paint people with a broad brush, but, historically, we black males have been stigmatized as the purveyors of crime and wherever we are, we're suspect," Brown said.

Black parents who don't make that fact clear, he and others said, do it at their sons' peril.

"Any African-American parent not having that conversation is being irresponsible," Brown said. "I see this whole thing as an opportunity for us to speak frankly, openly and honestly about race relations."
— Gracie Bonds Staples (Star-Telegram)

When communities resist an influx of Section 8 housing-voucher holders from the inner city, say, they are reacting overwhelmingly to behavior. Skin color is a proxy for that behavior. If inner-city blacks behaved like Asians — cramming as much knowledge into their kids as they can possibly fit into their skulls — the lingering wariness towards lower-income blacks that many Americans unquestionably harbor would disappear. Are there irredeemable racists among Americans? To be sure. They come in all colors, and we should deplore all of them. But the issue of race in the United States is more

> *complex than polite company is usually allowed to express.*
> — Heather Mac Donald (City Journal)

> *"Let's talk about the elephant in the room. I'm black, OK" the woman said, declining to be identified because she anticipated backlash due to her race. She leaned in to look a reporter directly in the eyes. "There were black boys robbing houses in this neighborhood," she said. "That's why George was suspicious of Trayvon Martin."*
> — Chris Francescani (Reuters)

"In brief, dialectics can be defined as the doctrine of the unity of opposites. This embodies the essence of dialectics," Lenin notes, "but it requires explanations and development." That is to say: further discussion.

The sublimation (*Aufhebung*) of Marxism into Leninism is an eventuality that is best grasped crudely. By forging a revolutionary communist politics of broad application, almost entirely divorced from the mature material conditions or advanced social contradictions that had been previously anticipated, Lenin demonstrated that dialectical tension coincided, exhaustively, with its politicization (and that all reference to a 'dialectics of nature' is no more than retrospective subordination of the scientific domain to a political model). Dialectics are as real as they are made to be.

The dialectic begins with political agitation, and extends no further than its practical, antagonistic, factional and coalitional 'logic'. It is the 'superstructure' *for itself*, or against natural limitation, practically appropriating the political sphere in its broadest graspable extension as a platform for social domination. Everywhere that there is argument, there is an unresolved opportunity to rule.

The Cathedral incarnates these lessons. It has no need to espouse Leninism, or operational communist dialectics, because it recognizes nothing else. There is scarcely a fragment of the social 'superstructure' that has escaped dialectical reconstruction, through articulate antagonism, polarization, binary structuring, and reversal. Within the academy, the media, even the fine arts, political super-saturation has prevailed, identifying even the most minuscule elements of apprehension with conflictual 'social critique' and egalitarian teleology. Communism is the universal implication.

More dialectics is more politics, and more politics means 'progress' – or social migration to the left. The production of public agreement only leads in one direction, and within public disagreement, such impetus already exists in embryo. It is only in the absence of agreement *and* of publicly articulated disagreement, which is to say, in non-dialectics, non-argument, sub-political diversity, or politically uncoordinated initiative, that the 'right-wing' refuge of 'the economy' (and civil society more widely) is to be found.

When no agreement is necessary, or coercively demanded,

negative (or 'libertarian') liberty is still possible, and this non-argumentative 'other' of dialectics is easily formulated (even if, in a free society, it doesn't need to be): *Do your own thing*. Quite clearly, this irresponsible and negligent imperative is *politically* intolerable. It coincides exactly with leftist depression, retrogression, or depoliticization. Nothing cries out more urgently to be *argued against*.

At the opposite extreme lies the dialectical ecstasy of theatrical justice, in which the argumentative structure of legal proceedings is coupled with publicization through the media. Dialectical enthusiasm finds its definitive expression in a courtroom drama that combines lawyers, journalists, community activists, and other agents of the revolutionary superstructure in the production of a *show trial*. Social contradictions are staged, antagonistic cases articulated, and resolution institutionally expected. This is Hegel for prime-time television (and now for the Internet). It is the way that the Cathedral shares its message with the people.

Sometimes, in its impatient passion for progress, this message can trip over itself, because even though the agents of the Cathedral are *infinitely* reasonable, they are ever less sensible, often strikingly incompetent, and prone to making mistakes. This is to be expected on theological grounds. As the state becomes God, it degenerates into imbecility, on the model of the holy fool. The media-politics of the Trayvon Martin spectacle provides a pertinent example.

In the United States, as in any other large country, lots of things happen every day, exhibiting innumerable patterns of varying obscurity. For instance, on an average day, there are roughly 3,400 violent crimes, including 40 murders, 230 rapes, 1,000 robberies, and 2,100 aggravated assaults, alongside 25,000 non-violent property crimes (burglaries and thefts). Very few of these will be widely publicized, or seized upon as educational, exemplary, and representative. Even were the media not inclined towards a narrative-based selection of 'good stories', the sheer volume of incidents would compel something of the kind. Given this situation, it is all but inevitable that people will ask: *Why are they telling us this?*

Almost everything about the death of Trayvon Martin is controversial, except for media motivation. On that topic there is near unanimity. The meaning or intended message of the story of the case could scarcely have been more transparent: *White racist paranoia makes America dangerous for black people*. It would thus rehearse the dialectic of racial terror (*your fear is scary*), designed – as always — to convert America's reciprocal social nightmare into a unilateral morality play, allocating legitimate dread exclusively to one side of the country's principal racial divide. It seemed perfect. A malignantly deluded white vigilante guns down an innocent black child, justifying black fear ('the talk') whilst exposing white panic as a murderous psychosis. This is a story of such archetypal progressive meaning that it cannot be told too many times. In fact, it was just too

good to be true.

It soon became evident, however, that media selection – even when reinforced by the celebrity / 'community activist' rage-machine – hadn't sufficed to keep the story on script, and both of the main actors were drifting from their assigned roles. If progressively-endorsed stereotypes were to be even remotely preserved, vigorous editing would be required. This was especially necessary because certain evil, racist, bigoted readers of the Miami Herald were beginning to forge a narrative-wrecking mental connection between 'Trayvon Martin' and 'burglary tool'.

As for the killer, George Zimmerman, the name said it all. He was clearly going to be a hulking, pasty-faced, storm-trooper look-alike, hopefully some kind of Christian gun-nut, and maybe – if they really hit pay-dirt – a militia movement type with a history of homophobia and anti-abortion activism. He started off 'white' – for no obvious reason beyond media incompetence and narrative programming – then found himself transformed into a 'white Hispanic' (a category that seems to have been rapidly innovated on the spot), before gradually shifted through a series of ever more reality-compliant ethnic complications, culminating in the discovery of his Afro-Peruvian great grandfather.

In the heart of the Cathedral it was well into head-scratching time. Here was the great Amerikkkan defendant being prepped for his show trial, the President had pitched in emotionally on behalf of the

sacred victim, and the coordinated ground game had been advanced to the simmering brink of race riots, when the message began falling apart, to such an extent that it now threatened to decay into an annoyingly irrelevant case of black-on-black violence. It was not only that George Zimmerman had black ancestry – making him simply 'black' by the left's own social constructivist standards – he had also grown up amicably among black people, with two African-American girls as "part of the household for years," had entered into joint business venture with a black partner, he was a registered Democrat, and even some kind of 'community organizer' …

So why did Martin die? Was it for carrying iced tea and a bag of Skittles while black (the media and community activist approved, 'son Obama might have had' version), for scoping out burglary targets (the Kluxer racial profiling version), or for breaking Zimmerman's nose, knocking him over, sitting on top of him, and smashing his head repeatedly against the sidewalk (to be decided in court)? Was he a martyr to racial injustice, a low-level social predator, or a human symptom of American urban crisis? The only thing that was really clear when legal proceedings began, beyond the squalid sadness of the episode, was that it was not resolving anything.

For a sense of just how disconcertingly the approved lesson had disintegrated by the time Zimmerman was charged with second degree murder, it is only necessary to read this post by HBD-blogger oneSTDV, describing the dialectical derangements of the race-

warrior right:

> *Despite the disturbing nature of the "charges" against Zimmerman, many in the alt-right refuse to grant Zimmerman any sympathy or to even view this as a seminal moment in modern leftism's anarcho-tyrannical reign. According to these individuals,* ***the Spanish-speaking, registered Democrat mestizo got what was coming to him*** *— the ire of the black mob and the elite left indirectly buttressed by Zimmerman himself. Due to his voting record, multicultural background, and mentoring of minority youth, they see Zimmerman as emblematic of the left's assault on white America, a sort of ground soldier in the campaign against American whiteness.* [Bolding in original]

The pop PC police were ready to move on. With the great show trial collapsing into narrative disorder, it was time to refocus on the Message, facts be damned (and double damned). 'Jezebel' best exemplifies the hectoring, vaguely hysterical tone:

> *You know how you can tell that black people are still oppressed? Because* black people are still oppressed*. If you claim that you are not a racist person (or, at least, that you're committed to working your ass off not to be one — which is really the best that any of us can promise), then you must*

> *believe that people are fundamentally born equal. So if that's true, then in a vacuum, factors like skin color should have no effect on anyone's success. Right? And therefore, if you really believe that all people are created equal, then when you see that drastic racial inequalities exist in the real world, the only thing that you could* possibly *conclude is that some external force is holding certain people back. Like…racism. Right? So congratulations! You believe in racism! Unless you don't actually think that people are born equal. And if you don't believe that people are born equal,* then you're a f*****g racist*.*

Does anyone "really believe that people are born equal," in the way it is understood here? Believe, that is, not only that a formal expectation of equal treatment is a prerequisite for civilized interaction, but that any revealed deviation from substantial equality of outcome is an obvious, unambiguous indication of oppression? That's "the only thing you could *possibly* conclude"?

At the very least, Jezebel should be congratulated for expressing the progressive faith in its purest form, entirely uncontaminated by sensitivity to evidence or uncertainty of any kind, casually contemptuous of any relevant research – whether existent or merely conceivable – and supremely confident about its own moral invincibility. If the facts are *morally wrong*, so much worse for the

facts – that's the only position that could *possibly* be adopted, even if it's based upon a mixture of wishful thinking, deliberate ignorance, and insultingly childish lies.

To call the belief in substantial human equality a superstition is to insult superstition. It might be unwarranted to believe in leprechauns, but at least the person who holds to such a belief isn't *watching them not exist*, for every waking hour of the day. Human inequality, in contrast, and in all of its abundant multiplicity, is constantly on display, as people exhibit their variations in gender, ethnicity, physical attractiveness, size and shape, strength, health, agility, charm, humor, wit, industriousness, and sociability, among countless other features, traits, abilities, and aspects of their personality, some immediately and conspicuously, some only slowly, over time. To absorb even the slightest fraction of all this and to conclude, in the *only way possible*, that it is either nothing at all, or a 'social construct' and index of oppression, is sheer Gnostic delirium: a commitment beyond all evidence to the existence of a true and good world veiled by appearances. People are not equal, they do not develop equally, their goals and achievements are not equal, and nothing can make them equal. Substantial equality has no relation to reality, except as its systematic negation. Violence on a genocidal scale is required to even approximate to a practical egalitarian program, and if anything less ambitious is attempted, people get around it (some more competently than others).

To take only the most obvious example, anybody with more than one child knows that *nobody is born equal* (monozygotic twins and clones perhaps excepted). *In fact*, everybody is born different, in innumerable ways. Even when – as is normally the case – the implications of these differences for life outcomes are difficult to confidently predict, their existence is undeniable, or at least: *sincerely undeniable*. Of course sincerity, or even minimal cognitive coherence, is not remotely the issue here. Jezebel's position, whilst impeccable in its political correctness, is not only factually dubious, but rather laughably absurd, and actually – strictly speaking — insane. It dogmatizes a denial of reality so extreme that nobody could genuinely maintain, or even entertain it, let alone plausible explain or defend it. It is a tenet of faith that cannot be understood, but only asserted, or submitted to, as madness made law, or authoritarian religion.

The political commandment of this religion is transparent: Accept progressive social policy as the *only possible* solution to the ~~sin~~ problem of inequality. This commandment is a 'categorical imperative' – no possible fact could ever undermine, complicate, or revise it. If progressive social policy actually results in an exacerbation of the problem, 'fallen' reality is to blame, since the social malady is *obviously* worse than had been originally envisaged, and only redoubled efforts in the same direction can hope to remedy it. There can be nothing to learn in matters of faith. Eventually,

systematic social collapse teaches the lesson that chronic failure and incremental deterioration could not communicate. (That's macro-scale social Darwinism for dummies, and it's the way that civilizations end.)

Due to it's exceptional correlation with substantial variation in social outcomes in modern societies, by far the most troublesome dimension of human bio-diversity is intelligence or general problem solving ability, quantified as IQ (measuring Spearman's 'g'). When 'statistical common sense' or profiling is applied to the proponents of Human Bio-Diversity, however, another significant trait is rapidly exposed: a remarkably consistent deficit of *agreeableness*. Indeed, it is widely accepted within the accursed 'community' itself that most of those stubborn and awkward enough to educate themselves on the topic of human biological variation are significantly 'socially retarded', with low verbal inhibition, low empathy, and low social integration, resulting in chronic maladaptation to group expectations. The typical EQs of this group can be extracted as the approximate square-root of their IQs. Mild autism is typical, sufficient to approach their fellow beings in a spirit of detached, natural-scientific curiosity, but not so advanced as to compel total cosmic disengagement. These traits, which they themselves consider – on the basis of copious technical information — to be substantially heritable, have manifest social consequences, reducing employment opportunities, incomes, and even reproductive potential. Despite all

the free therapeutic advice available in the progressive environment, this obnoxiousness shows no sign of diminishing, and might even be intensifying. As Jezebel shows so clearly, this can only *possibly* be a sign of structural oppression. Why can't obnoxious people get a break?

The history is damning. 'Sociables' have always had it in for the obnoxious, often declining to marry or do business with them, excluding them from group activities and political office, labeling them with slurs, ostracizing and avoiding them. 'Obnoxiousness' has been stigmatized and stereotyped in extremely negative terms, to such an extent that many of the obnoxious have sought out more sensitive labels, such as 'socially-challenged', or 'differently socially abled'. Not uncommonly, people have been verbally or even physically assaulted for no other reason than their radical obnoxiousness. Most tragically of all, due to their complete inability to get on with one another, the obnoxious have never been able to politically mobilize against the structural social oppression they face, or to enter into coalitions with their natural allies, such as cynics, debunkers, contrarians, and Tourette Syndrome sufferers. Obnoxiousness has yet to be liberated, although it's probable that the Internet will 'help' …

Consider John Derbyshire's essay in infamy *The Talk: Nonblack Version*, focusing initially on its relentless obnoxiousness, and attentive to the negative correlation between sociability and

objective reason. As Derbyshire notes elsewhere, people are generally incapable of differentiating themselves from group identities, or properly applying statistical generalizations about groups to individual cases, including their own. A rationally indefensible, but socially inevitable, reification of group profiles is psychologically normal – even 'human' – with the result that noisy, non-specific, statistical information is erroneously accepted as a contribution to self-understanding, even when specific information is available.

From the perspective of socially autistic, low-EQ, rational analysis, this is simply *mistaken*. If an individual has certain characteristics, the fact of belonging to a group that has similar or dissimilar average characteristics is of no relevance whatsoever. Direct and determinate information about the individual is not to any degree enriched by indirect and indeterminate (probabilistic) information about the groups to which the individual belongs. If an individual's test results are known, for instance, no additional insight is provided by statistical inferences about the test results that *might have been expected* based on group profiling. An Ashkenazi Jewish moron is no less moronic because he is an Ashkenazi Jew. Elderly Chinese nuns are unlikely to be murderers, but a murderer who happens to be an elderly Chinese nun is neither more nor less murderous than one who is not. This is all extremely obvious, to obnoxious people.

To normal people, however, it is not obvious at all. In part this is because rational intelligence is scarce and abnormal among humans, and in part because social 'intelligence' works with what everyone else is thinking, which is to say, with irrational groupish sentiment, meager information, prejudices, stereotypes, and heuristics. Since (almost) everybody else is taking short-cuts, or 'economizing' on reason, it is only rational to react defensively to generalizations that are likely to be reified or inappropriately applied — over-riding or substituting for specific perceptions. Anybody who anticipates being pre-defined through a group identity has an expanded ego-investment in that group and the way it is perceived. A generic assessment, however objectively arrived at, will immediately become personal, under (even quite remotely) normal conditions.

Obnoxious reason can stubbornly insist that *anything average cannot be about you*, but the message will not be generally received. Human social 'intelligence' is not built that way. Even supposedly sophisticated commentators blunder repeatedly into the most jarring exhibitions of basic statistical incomprehension without the slightest embarrassment, because embarrassment was designed for something else (and for almost exactly the opposite). The failure to understand stereotypes in their scientific, or probabilistic application, is a functional prerequisite of sociability, since the sole alternative to idiocy in this respect is obnoxiousness.

Derbyshire's article is noteworthy because it succeeds in being

definitively obnoxious, and has been recognized as such, despite the spluttering incoherence of most rejoinders. Among the things that 'the talk' and 'the counter-talk' share is a theatrical structure of *pseudo-private conversation designed to be overheard*. In both cases, a message that parents are compelled to deliver to their children is staged as the vehicle for a wider social lesson, aimed at those who, through action or inaction, have created a world that is intolerably hazardous to them.

This form is intrinsically manipulative, making even the 'original' talk a tempting target of parody. In the original, however, a tone of anguished sincerity is engineered through a deliberate performance of innocence (or ignorance). *Listen son, I know this will be difficult to understand …* (*Oh why, oh why are they doing this to us?*). The counter-talk, in stark contrast, melds its micro-social drama with the clinically non-sociable discourse of "methodical inquiries in the human sciences" – treating populations as fuzzy bio-geographical units with quantifiable characteristics, rather than as legal-political subjects in communication. It derides innocence, and – by implication – the criterion of sociability itself. Agreement, agreeableness, count for nothing. The rigorously and redundantly compiled statistics say what they say, and if we cannot live with that, so much the worse for us.

Yet even to a reasonably sympathetic, or scrupulously obnoxious, reading, Derbyshire's article provides grounds for criticism. For

instance, and from the beginning, it is notable that the racial reciprocal of "nonblack Americans" is 'black Americans', not "American blacks" (the term Derbyshire selects). This reversal of word order, switching nouns and adjectives, quickly settles into a pattern. Does it matter that Derbyshire requests the extension of civility to any "individual black" (rather than to 'black individuals')? It certainly makes a difference. To say that someone is 'black' is to say something *about* them, but to say that someone is 'a black' is to say who they *are*. The effect is subtly, yet distinctly, menacing, and Derbyshire is too well-trained, algebraically, to be excused from noticing it. After all, 'John Derbyshire is *a white*' sounds equally *off*, as does any analogous formulation, submerging the individual in the genus, to be retrieved as a mere instance, or example.

The more intellectually substantive aspect of this over-reach into gratuitous incivility have been examined by William Saletan and Noah Millman, who make very similar points, from the two sides of the liberal/conservative divide. Both writers identify a fissure or methodical incongruity in Derbyshire's article, stemming from its commitment to the micro-social application of macro-social statistical generalizations. Stereotypes, however rigorously confirmed, are *essentially* inferior to specific knowledge in any concrete social situation, because nobody ever encounters a population.

As a liberal of problematic standing, Saletan has no choice but

to recoil melodramatically from Derbyshire's "stomach-turning conclusions," but his reasons for doing so are not consumed by his gastro-emotional crisis. "But what exactly is a statistical truth?" he asks. "It's a probability estimate you might fall back on if you know nothing about [a particular individual]. It's an ignorant person's weak substitute for knowledge." Derbyshire, with his Aspergery attention to the absence of black Fields Medal winners, is "…a math nerd who substitutes statistical intelligence for social intelligence. He recommends group calculations instead of taking the trouble to learn about the person standing in front of you."

Millman emphasizes the ironic reversal that switches (obnoxious) social scientific knowledge into imperative ignorance:

> *The "race realists" like to say that they are the ones who are curious about the world, and the "politically correct" types are the ones who prefer to ignore ugly reality. But the advice Derbyshire gives to his children encourages them* not *to be too curious about the world around them, for fear of getting hurt. And, as a general rule, that's terrible advice for kids – and not the advice that Derbyshire has followed in his own life.*

Millman's conclusion is also instructive:

> *So why am I arguing with Derb at all? Well, because he's a*

> *friend. And because even lazy, socially-irresponsible talk deserves to be refuted, not merely denounced. Is Derbyshire's piece racist?* Of course it's racist. *His whole point is that it is both rational and morally right for his children to treat black people significantly differently from white people, and to fear them. But "racist" is a descriptive term, not a moral one. The "race realist" crowd is strongly convinced of the accuracy of Derbyshire's major premises, and they are not going to be argued out of that conviction by the assertion such conviction is "racist" – nor, honestly, should they be. For that reason, I feel it's important to argue that Derbyshire's conclusions do not follow simply from those premises, and are, in fact, morally incorrect even if those premises are granted for the sake of argument.*

[Brief intermission …]

May 3, 2012

The Dark Enlightenment (Part 4c)

The Cracker Factory

> *In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men — yes, black men as well as white men — would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.*
> *It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check that has come back marked "insufficient funds."*
> — Martin Luther King Jr.

> *Conservatism … is a white people's movement, a scattering of outliers notwithstanding.*
> *Always has been, always will be. I have attended at least a hundred conservative gatherings, conferences, cruises, and jamborees: let me tell you, there ain't too many raisins in that*

bun. I was in and out of the National Review offices for twelve years, and the only black person I saw there, other than when Herman Cain came calling, was Alex, the guy who runs the mail room. (Hey, Alex!)

This isn't because conservatism is hostile to blacks and mestizos. Very much the contrary, especially in the case of Conservatism Inc. They fawn over the occasional nonwhite with a puppyish deference that fairly fogs the air with embarrassment. (Q: What do you call the one black guy at a gathering of 1,000 Republicans? A: "Mr. Chairman.")

It's just that conservative ideals like self-sufficiency and minimal dependence on government have no appeal to underperforming minorities — groups who, in the statistical generality, are short of the attributes that make for group success in a modern commercial nation.

Of what use would it be to them to embrace such ideals? They would end up even more decisively pooled at the bottom of society than they are currently.

A much better strategy for them is to ally with as many disaffected white and Asian subgroups as they can (homosexuals, feminists, dead-end labor unions), attain electoral majorities, and institute big redistributionist governments to give them make-work jobs and transfer wealth to them from successful groups.

Which is what, very rationally and sensibly, they do.
— John Derbyshire

Neo-secessionists are all around us… and free speech gives them a cozy blanket of protection. Rick Perry insinuating Texas could secede rather than adhere to the federal healthcare law, Todd Palin belonging to a political association advocating Alaskan secession, and Sharron Angle talking about 'second amendment remedies' to handle disputes with federal authorities are all examples of dangerous secessionist rhetoric permeating through modern discourse. The media focuses our attention at Civil War reenactors and pick-up trucks with Confederate flags flying on them. But public figures are influenced as well, by academics who struggle to perpetuate a most dangerous brand of revisionism.
— Practically Historical

African-Americans are the conscience of our country.
— commenter 'surfed' at Walter Russell Mead's blog (edited for spelling)

America's racial 'original sin' was foundational, dating back before the birth of the United States to the clearing of aboriginal peoples by European settlers, and – still more saliently – to the institution of chattel slavery. This is the Old Testament history of American black-

white relations, set down in a providential narrative of escape from bondage, in which factual documentation and moral exhortation are indissolubly fused. The combination of prolonged and intense social abuse in a pattern set by the Torah, recapitulating the primordial moral-political myth of the Western tradition, has installed the story of slavery and emancipation as the unsurpassable frame of the American historical experience: *let my people go*.

'Practically Historical' (cited above), quotes Lincoln on the Civil War:

> *Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."*

The New Testament of race in America was written in the 1960s, revising and specifying the template. The combination of the Civil Rights Movement, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, and the Republican Southern Strategy (appealing to disaffected whites in the states of the old Confederacy) forged a partisan identification between Blacks and the Democratic Party that amounted to a liberal-progressive rebirth, setting the terms for partisan racial

polarization that have endured – and even strengthened – over subsequent decades. For a progressive movement compromised by a history of systematic eugenicist racism, and a Democratic Party traditionally aligned with white southern obduracy and the Ku Klux Klan, the civil rights era presented an opportunity for atonement, ritual purification, and redemption.

Reciprocally, for American conservatism (and its increasingly directionless Republican Party vehicle), this progression spelt protracted death, for reasons that continue to elude it. The Idea of America was now inextricable from a vehement renunciation of the past, and even of the present, insofar as the past still shaped it. Only an 'ever more perfect union' could conform to it. At the most superficial level, the broad partisan implications of the new order were unmistakable in a country that was becoming ever more democratic, and ever less republican, with effective sovereignty nationally concentrated in the executive, and the moral urgency of activist government installed as a principle of faith. For what had already become the 'Old Right' there was no way out, or back, because the path backwards crossed the event horizon of the civil rights movement, into tracts of political impossibility whose ultimate meaning was slavery.

The left thrives on dialectics, the right perishes through them. Insofar as there is a pure logic of politics, it is that. One immediate consequence (repeatedly emphasized by Mencius Moldbug) is that

progressivism has no enemies to the left. It recognizes only idealists, whose time has not yet come. Factional conflicts on the left are politically dynamic, celebrated for their motive potential. Conservatism, in contrast, is caught between a rock and a hard place: bludgeoned from the left by the juggernaut of post-constitutional statism, and agitated from 'the right' by inchoate tendencies which are both unassimilable (to the mainstream) and often mutually incompatible, ranging from extreme (Austro-libertarian) varieties of *laissez-faire* capitalist advocacy to strains of obstinate, theologically-grounded social traditionalism, ultra-nationalism, or white identity politics.

'The right' has no unity, actual or prospective, and thus has no definition symmetrical to that of the left. It is for this reason that political dialectics (a tautology) ratchets only in one direction, predictably, towards state expansion and an increasingly coercive substantial-egalitarian ideal. The right moves to the center, and the center moves to the left.

Regardless of mainstream conservative fantasies, liberal-progressive mastery of American providence has become uncontestable, dominated by a racial dialectic that absorbs unlimited contradiction, whilst positioning the Afro-American underclass as the incarnate critique of the existing social order, the criterion of emancipation, and the sole path to collective salvation. No alternative structure of historical intelligibility is politically tolerable,

or even – strictly speaking – imaginable, since resistance to the narrative is un-American, anti-social, and (of course) racist, serving only to confirm the existence of systematic racial oppression through the symbolic violence manifested in its negation. To argue against it is already to prove it correct, by concretely demonstrating the same benighted forces of social retardation that are being verbally denied. By resisting the demand for orchestrated social re-education, knuckle-dragging 'bitter clingers' only show how much there still is to do.

At its most abstract and all-encompassing, the liberal-progressive racial dialectic abolishes its outside, along with any possibility of principled consistency. It asserts — at one and the same time — that race does not exist, and that its socially-constructed pseudo-existence is an instrument of inter-racial violence. Racial recognition is both mandatory, and forbidden. Racial identities are meticulously catalogued for purposes of social remedy, hate crime detection, and disparate impact studies, targeting groups for 'positive discrimination', 'affirmative action', or 'diversity promotion' (to list these terms in their rough order of historical substitution), even as they are denounced as meaningless (by the United Nations, no less), and dismissed as malicious stereotypes, corresponding to nothing real. Extreme racial sensitivity and absolute racial desensitization are demanded simultaneously. Race is everything and nothing. There is no way out.

Conservatism is dialectically incompetent by definition, and so abjectly clueless that it imagines itself being able to exploit these contradictions, or – in its deluded formulation – *liberal cognitive dissonance*. The conservatives who triumphantly point out such inconsistencies seem never to have skimmed the output of a contemporary humanities program, in which thick rafts of internally conflicted victimage are lovingly woven out of incompatible grievances, in order to exult in the radical progressive promise of their discordant lamentations. Inconsistency is fuel for the Cathedral, demanding activist argumentation, and ever heightened realizations of unity. *Integrative public debate always moves things to the left* — that might not seem an especially difficult point to grasp, but to understand it is to expose the fundamental futility of mainstream conservatism, and that is in almost nobody's interest, so it will not be understood.

Conservatism is incapable of working dialectics, or simultaneous contradiction, but that does not prevent it from serving progress (on the contrary). Rather than celebrating the power of inconsistency, it stumbles through contradictions, decompressed, in succession, in the manner of a fossil exhibition, and a foil. After "standing athwart history, yelling 'Stop!'" during the Civil Rights Era, and thus banishing itself eternally to racial damnation, the conservative (and Republican) mainstream reversed course, seizing upon Martin Luther King Jr. as an integral part of its canon, and seeking to

harmonize itself with "a dream deeply rooted in the American dream."

> *I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."*
>
> *I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.*
>
> *I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.*
>
> *I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*

Captivated by King's appeal to constitutional and biblical traditionalism, by his rejection of political violence, and by his uninhibited paeans to freedom, American conservatism gradually came to identify with his dream of racial reconciliation and race blindness, and to accept it as the true, providential meaning of its own most sacred documents. At least, this became the mainstream, public, conservative orthodoxy, even though it was consolidated far

too late to neutralize suspicions of insincerity, failed almost entirely to convince the black demographic itself, and would remain open to escalating derision from the left for its empty formalism.

So compelling was King's restatement of the American Creed that, retrospectively, its triumph over the political mainstream seems simply inevitable. The further American conservatism departed from the Masonic rationalism of the founders, in the direction of biblical religiosity, the more indistinguishable its faith became from a Black American experience, mythically articulated through *Exodus*, in which the basic framework of history was an escape from bondage, borne towards a future in which "all of God's children — black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics — will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'"

The genius of King's message lay in its extraordinary power of integration. The flight of the Hebrews from Egypt, the American War of Independence, the abolition of chattel slavery in the wake of the American Civil War, and the aspirations of the civil rights era were mythically compressed into a single archetypal episode, perfectly consonant with the American Creed, and driven forwards not only by irresistible moral force, but even by divine decree. The measure of this integrative genius, however, is the complexity it masters. A century after the "joyous daybreak" of emancipation from slavery,

King declares, “the Negro still is not free.”

> *One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.*

The story of *Exodus* is exit, the War of Independence is exit, and the emancipation from slavery is exit, especially when this is exemplified by the Underground Railroad and the model of self-liberation, escape, or flight. To be ‘manacled’ by segregation, ‘chained’ by discrimination, trapped on a ‘lonely island of poverty’, or ‘exiled’ in one’s ‘own land’, in contrast, has no relation to *exit* whatsoever, beyond that which spell-binding metaphor can achieve. There is no *exit* into social integration and acceptance, equitably distributed prosperity, public participation, or assimilation, but only an aspiration, or a dream, hostage to fact and fortune. As the left and the reactionary right were equally quick to notice, insofar as this dream ventures significantly beyond a right to formal equality and into the realm of substantial political remedy, it is one that the right has no right to.

In the immediate wake of the John Derbyshire affair, Jessica Valenti at *The Nation* blog makes the point clearly:

> *… this isn't just about who has written what — it's about the intensely racist policies that are par for the conservative course. Some people would like to believe that racism is just the explicit, said-out-loud discrimination and hatred that is easily identifiable. It's not — it's also pushing xenophobic policies and supporting systemic inequality. After all, what's more impactful — a singular racist like Derbyshire or Arizona's immigration law? A column or voter suppression? Getting rid of one racist from one publication doesn't change the fact that the conservative agenda is one that disproportionately punishes and discriminates against people of color. So, I'm sorry, folks — you don't get to support structural inequality and then give yourself a pat on the back for not being overtly racist.*

The 'conservative agenda' cannot ever be dreamy (hopeful and inconsistent) enough to escape accusations of racism – that's intrinsic to the way the racial dialectic works. Policies broadly compatible with capitalistic development, oriented to the rewarding of low time-preference, and thus punishing impulsivity, will reliably have a disparate impact upon the least economically functional social

groups. Of course, the dialectic demands that the racial aspect of this disparate impact can and must be strongly emphasized (for the purpose of condemning incentives to human capital formation as racist), and at the same time forcefully denied (in order to denounce *exactly the same observation* as racist stereotyping). Anyone who expects conservatives to navigate this double-bind with political agility and grace must somehow have missed the late 20th century. For instance, the ~~doomed loser idiots~~ conservatives at the *Washington Examiner*, noticing with alarm that:

> *House Democrats received training this week on how to address the issue of race to defend government programs … The prepared content of a Tuesday presentation to the House Democratic Caucus and staff indicates that Democrats will seek to portray apparently neutral free-market rhetoric as being charged with racial bias, conscious or unconscious.*

There are no alternative versions of an ever more perfect union, because union is the alternative to alternatives. Searching for where the alternatives might once have been found, where liberty still meant *exit*, and where dialectics were dissolved in space, leads into a clown-house of horrors, fabricated as the shadow, or significant other, of the Cathedral. Since the right never had a unity of its own, it

was given one. Call it the Cracker Factory.

When James C. Bennett, in *The Anglosphere Challenge*, sought to identify the principal cultural characteristics of the English-speaking world, the resulting list was generally familiar. It included, besides the language itself, common law traditions, individualism, comparatively high-levels of economic and technological openness, and distinctively emphatic reservations about centralized political power. Perhaps the most striking feature, however, was a marked cultural tendency to settle disagreements in space, rather than time, opting for territorial schism, separatism, independence, and flight, in place of revolutionary transformation within an integrated territory. When Anglophones disagree, they have often sought to dissociate in space. Instead of an integral resolution (regime change), they pursue a plural irresolution (through regime division), proliferating polities, localizing power, and diversifying systems of government. Even in its present, highly attenuated form, this anti-dialectical, de-synthesizing predisposition to social disaggregation finds expression in a stubborn, sussurous hostility to globalist political projects, and in a vestigial attraction to federalism (in its fissional sense).

Splitting, or fleeing, is all *exit*, and (non-recuperable) anti-dialectics. It is the basic well-spring of liberty within the Anglophone tradition. If the function of a Cracker Factory is to block off all the exits, there's only one place to build it – right here.

Like Hell, or Auschwitz, the Cracker Factory has a simple slogan

inscribed upon its gate: *Escape is racist*. That is why the expression 'white flight' – which says exactly the same thing – has never been denounced for its political incorrectness, despite the fact that it draws upon an ethnic statistical generalization of the kind that would, in any other case, provoke paroxysms of outrage. 'White flight' is no more 'white' than low time-preference is, but this broad-brush insensitivity is deemed acceptable, because it structurally supports the Cracker Factory, and the indispensable confusion of ancient (or negative) liberty with original (racial) sin.

You absolutely, definitely, *mustn't go <u>there</u>* … so, of course, we will … [next]

May 17, 2012

The Dark Enlightenment (Part 4d)

Odd Marriages

The origins of the word 'cracker' as a term of ethnic derision are distant and obscure. It seems to have already circulated, as a slur targeting poor southern whites of predominantly Celtic ancestry, in the mid-18th century, derived perhaps from 'corn-cracker' or the Scots-Irish 'crack' (banter). The rich semantic complexion of the term, inextricable from the identification of elaborate racial, cultural,

and class characteristics, is comparable to that of its unmentionable dusky cousin – "the 'N-'word" – and draws from the same well of generally recognized but forbidden truths. In particular, and emphatically, it testifies to the *illicit truism* that people are more excited and animated by their differences than by their commonalities, 'clinging bitterly' – or at least tenaciously – to their non-uniformity, and obstinately resisting the universal categories of enlightened population management. Crackers are grit in the clockwork of progress.

The most delectable features of the slur, however, are entirely fortuitous (or Qabbalistic). 'Crackers' break codes, safes, organic chemicals – sealed or bonded systems of all kinds – with eventual geopolitical implication. They anticipate a *crack-up*, schism or secession, confirming their association with the anathematized disintegrative undercurrent of Anglophone history. No surprise, then – despite the linguistic jumps and glitching – that the figure of the recalcitrant cracker evokes a still-unpacified South, insubordinate to the manifest destiny of Union. This returns it, by short-circuit, to the most problematic depths of its meaning.

Contradictions demand resolution, but *cracks* can continue to widen, deepen, and spread. According to the cracker ethos, when things can fall apart – it's OK. There's no need to reach agreement, when it's possible to split. This *cussedness*, pursued to its limit, tends to a hill-billy stereotype set in a shack or rusting trailer at the end

of an Appalachian mountain path, where all economic transactions are conducted in cash (or moonshine), interactions with government agents are conducted across the barrel of a loaded shotgun, and timeless anti-political wisdom is summed in the don't-tread-on-me reflex: "Get off my porch." Naturally, this disdain for integrative debate (dialectics) is coded within the mainstream of Anglocentric global history – which is to say, Yankee evangelical Puritanism – as a deficiency not only of cultural sophistication, but also of basic intelligence, and even the most scrupulous adherent of social constructivist righteousness immediately reverts to hard-hereditarian psychometrics when confronted by cracker obstreperousness. To those for whom a broad trend of socio-political progress seems like a simple, incontestable fact, the refusal to recognize anything of the kind is perceived as clear evidence of retardation.

Since stereotypes generally have high statistical truth-value, it's more than possible that crackers are clustered heavily on the left of the white IQ bell-curve, concentrated there by generations of dysgenic pressure. If, as Charles Murray argues, the efficiency of meritocratic selection within American society has steadily risen and conspired with assortative mating to transform class differences into genetic castes, it would be passing strange if the cracker stratum were to be characterized by conspicuous cognitive elevation. Yet some awkwardly intriguing questions intervene at this point, as long

as one diligently pursues the stereotype. Assortative mating? How can that work, when crackers marry their cousins? Oh yes, there's *that*. Drawing on population groups beyond the north-western Hajnal Line, traditional cracker kinship patterns are notably atypical of the exogamous Anglo (WASP) norm.

The tireless 'hbdchick' is the crucial resource on this topic. Over the course of a truly monumental series of blog posts, she employs Hamiltonian conceptual tools to investigate the borderland where nature and culture intersect, comprising kinship structures, the differentiations they require in the calculus of inclusive fitness, and the distinctive ethnic profiles in the evolutionary psychology of altruism that result. In particular, she directs attention to the abnormality of (North-West) European history, where obligatory exogamy – through rigorous proscription of cousin marriage – has prevailed for 1,600 years. This distinctive orientation towards outbreeding, she suggests, plausibly accounts for a variety of bio-cultural peculiarities, the most historically significant of which is a unique pre-eminence of reciprocal (over familial) altruism, as indicated by emphatic individualism, nuclear families, an affinity with 'corporate' (kinship-free) institutions, highly-developed contractual relationships among strangers, relatively low levels of nepotism / corruption, and robust forms of social cohesion independent of tribal bonds.

Inbreeding, in contrast, creates a selective environment favoring

tribal collectivism, extended systems of family loyalty and honor, distrust of non-relatives and impersonal institutions, and – in general – those 'clannish' traits which mesh uncomfortably with the leading values of (Eurocentric) modernity, and are thus denounced for their primitive 'xenophobia' and 'corruption'. Clannish values, of course, are bred in clans, such as those populating Britain's Celtic fringe and borderlands, where cousin marriage persisted, along with its associated socio-economic and cultural forms, especially herding (rather than farming), and a disposition towards extreme, vendetta-style violence.

This analysis introduces the central paradox of 'white identity', since the specifically European ethnic traits that have structured the moral order of modernity, slanting it away from tribalism and towards reciprocal altruism, are inseparable from a unique heritage of outbreeding that is intrinsically corrosive of ethnocentric solidarity. In other words: it is almost exactly weak ethnic groupishness that makes a group ethnically modernistic, competent at 'corporate' (non-familial) institution building, and thus objectively privileged / advantaged within the dynamic of modernity.

This paradox is most fully expressed in the radical forms of European ethnocentric revivalism exemplified by paleo- and neo-Nazism, confounding its proponents and antagonists alike. When exceptionally advanced 'race-treachery' is your quintessential racial feature, the opportunity for viable ethno-supremacist politics

disappears into a logical abyss – even if occasions for large-scale trouble-making no doubt remain. Admittedly, a Nazi, by definition, is willing (and eager) to sacrifice modernity upon the altar of racial purity, but this is either not to understand, or to tragically affirm, the inevitable consequence – which is to be out-modernized (and thus defeated). Identity politics is for losers, inherently and unalterably, due to an essentially parasitical character that only works from the left. Because inbreeding systematically contra-indicates for modern power, racial *Übermenschen* make no real sense.

In any case, however endlessly fascinating Nazis may be, they are not any kind of reliable key to the history or direction of cracker culture, beyond setting a logical limit to the programmatic construction and usage of white identity politics. Tattooing swastikas on their foreheads does nothing to change that. (Hatfields vs McCoys is more Pushtun than Teuton.)

The conjunction taking place in the Cracker Factory is quite different, and far more perplexing, entangling the urbane, cosmopolitan advocates of hyper-contractarian marketization with romantic traditionalists, ethno-particularists, and nostalgics of the 'Lost Cause'. It is first necessary to understand this entanglement in its full, mind-melting weirdness, before exploring its lessons. For that, some semi-random stripped-down data-points might be helpful:

* The Mises Institute was founded in Auburn, Alabama.

* Ron Paul newsletters from the 1980s contain remarks of a decidedly Derbyshirean hue.

* Derbyshire hearts Ron Paul.

* Murray Rothbard has written in defense of HBD.

* lewrockwell.com contributors include Thomas J. DiLorenzo and Thomas Woods

* Tom Palmer doesn't heart Lew Rockwell or Hans-Hermann Hoppe because "Together They Have Opened the Gates of Hell and Welcomed the Most Extreme Right-Wing Racists, Nationalists, and Assorted Cranks"

* Libertarians / constitutionalists account for 20% of the SPLC 'Radical Right' watch list (Chuck Baldwin, Michael Boldin, Tom DeWeese, Alex Jones, Cliff Kincaid, and Elmer Stewart Rhodes)

… perhaps that's enough to be going on with (although there's plenty more within easy reach). These points have been selected, questionably, crudely, and prejudicially, to lend impressionistic support to a single basic thesis: *fundamental socio-historical forces are crackerizing libertarianism*.

If the tentative research conclusions drawn by hbdchick are accepted as a frame, the oddity of this marriage between libertarian and neo-confederate themes is immediately apparent. When positioned on a bio-cultural axis, defined by degrees of outbreeding, the absence of overlap – or even proximity – is dramatically exposed. One pole is occupied by a radically individualistic doctrine, focused

near-exclusively upon mutable networks of voluntary interchange of an economic type (and notoriously insensitive to the very existence of non-negotiable social bonds). Close to the other pole lies a rich culture of local attachment, extended family, honor, contempt for commercial values, and distrust of strangers. The distilled rationality of fluid capitalism is juxtaposed to traditional hierarchy and non-alienable value. The absolute prioritization of *exit* is jumbled amongst folkways from which no exit is even imaginable.

Stapling the two together, however, is a simple, ever more irresistible conclusion: liberty has no future in the Anglophone world outside the prospect of secession. The coming crack-up is the only way out.

June 15, 2012

The Dark Enlightenment (Part 4e)

Cross-coded history

> *Democracy is the opposite of freedom, almost inherent to the democratic process is that it tends towards less liberty instead of more, and democracy is not something to be fixed. Democracy is inherently broken, just like socialism. The only*

way to fix it is to break it up. — Frank Karsten

Historian (mainly of science) Doug Fosnow called for the USA's "red" counties to secede from the "blue" ones, forming a new federation. This was greeted with much skepticism by the audience, who noted that the "red" federation would get practically no seacoast. Did Doug really think such a secession was likely to happen? No, he admitted cheerfully, but anything would be better than the race war he does think is likely to happen, and it is intellectuals' duty to come up with less horrific possibilities.– John Derbyshire

Thus, rather than by means of a top-down reform, under the current conditions, one's strategy must be one of a bottom-up revolution. At first, the realization of this insight would seem to make the task of a liberal-libertarian social revolution impossible, for does this not imply that one would have to persuade a majority of the public to vote for the abolition of democracy and an end to all taxes and legislation? And is this not sheer fantasy, given that the masses are always dull and indolent, and even more so given that democracy, as explained above, promotes moral and intellectual degeneration? How in the world can anyone expect that a majority of an increasingly degenerate people

> *accustomed to the "right" to vote should ever voluntarily renounce the opportunity of looting other people's property? Put this way, one must admit that the prospect of a social revolution must indeed be regarded as virtually nil. Rather, it is only on second thought, upon regarding secession as an integral part of any bottom-up strategy, that the task of a liberal-libertarian revolution appears less than impossible, even if it still remains a daunting one.* – Hans-Hermann Hoppe

Conceived generically, modernity is a social condition defined by an integral trend, summarized as sustained economic growth rates that exceed population increases, and thus mark an escape from normal history, caged within the Malthusian trap. When, in the interest of dispassionate appraisal, analysis is restricted to the terms of this basic quantitative pattern, it supports sub-division into the (growth) positive and negative components of the trend: techno-industrial (scientific and commercial) contributions to accelerating development on the one hand, and socio-political counter-tendencies towards the capture of economic product by democratically empowered rent-seeking special interests on the other (demosclerosis). What classical liberalism gives (industrial revolution) mature liberalism takes away (via the cancerous entitlement state). In abstract geometry, it describes an S-curve of

self-limiting runaway. As a drama of liberation, it is a broken promise.

Conceived particularly, as a singularity, or real *thing*, modernity has ethno-geographical characteristics that complicate and qualify its mathematical purity. It came from somewhere, imposed itself more widely, and brought the world's various peoples into an extraordinary range of novel relations. These relations were characteristically 'modern' if they involved an overflowing of previous Malthusian limits, enabling capital accumulation, and initiating new demographic trends, but they conjoined concrete groups rather than abstract economic functions. At least in appearance, therefore, modernity was something done by people of a certain kind with, and not uncommonly to (or even against), other people, who were conspicuously unlike them. By the time it was faltering on the fading slope of the S-curve, in the early 20th century, resistance to its generic features ('capitalistic alienation') had become almost entirely indistinguishable from opposition to its particularity ('European imperialism' and 'white supremacy'). As an inevitable consequence, the modernistic self-consciousness of the system's ethno-geographical core slid towards racial panic, in a process that was only arrested by the rise and immolation of the Third Reich.

Given modernity's inherent trend to degeneration or self-cancellation, three broad prospects open. These are not strictly exclusive, and are therefore not true alternatives, but for schematic

purposes it is helpful to present them as such.

(1) Modernity 2.0. Global modernization is re-invigorated from a new ethno-geographical core, liberated from the degenerate structures of its Eurocentric predecessor, but no doubt confronting long range trends of an equally mortuary character. This is by far the most encouraging and plausible scenario (from a pro-modernist perspective), and if China remains even approximately on its current track it will be assuredly realized. (India, sadly, seems to be too far gone in its native version of demosclerosis to seriously compete.)

(2) Postmodernity. Amounting essentially to a new dark age, in which Malthusian limits brutally re-impose themselves, this scenario assumes that Modernity 1.0 has so radically globalized its own morbidity that the entire future of the world collapses around it. If the Cathedral 'wins' this is what we have coming.

(3) Western Renaissance. To be reborn it is first necessary to die, so the harder the 'hard reboot' the better. Comprehensive crisis and disintegration offers the best odds (most realistically as a sub-theme of option #1).

Because competition is good, a pinch of Western Renaissance would spice things up, even if – as is overwhelmingly probable — Modernity 2.0 is the world's principal highway to the future. That depends upon the West stopping and reversing pretty much everything it has been doing for over a century, excepting only scientific, technological, and business innovation. It is advisable to

maintain rhetorical discipline within a strictly hypothetical mode, because the possibility of any of these things is deeply colored by incredibility:

(1) Replacement of representational democracy by constitutional republicanism (or still more extreme anti-political governmental mechanisms).

(2) Massive downsizing of government and its rigorous confinement to core functions (at most).

(3) Restoration of hard money (precious metal coins and bullion deposit notes) and abolition of central banking.

(4) Dismantling of state monetary and fiscal discretion, thus abolishing practical macroeconomics and liberating the autonomous (or 'catallactic') economy. (This point is redundant, since it follows rigorously from 2 & 3 above, but it's the real prize, so worth emphasizing.)

There's more – which is to say, less politics – but it's already absolutely clear that none of this is going to happen short of an existential civilizational cataclysm. Asking politicians to limit their own powers is a non-starter, but nothing less heads even remotely in the right direction. This, however, isn't even the widest or deepest problem.

Democracy might begin as a defensible procedural mechanism for limiting government power, but it quickly and inexorably develops into something quite different: a culture of systematic thievery. As

soon as politicians have learnt to buy political support from the 'public purse', and conditioned electorates to embrace looting and bribery, the democratic process reduces itself to the formation of (Mancur Olson's) 'distributional coalitions' – electoral majorities mortared together by common interest in a collectively advantageous pattern of theft. Worse still, since people are, on average, not very bright, the scale of depredation available to the political establishment far exceeds even the demented sacking that is open to public scrutiny. Looting the future, through currency debauchment, debt accumulation, growth destruction, and techno-industrial retardation is especially easy to conceal, and thus reliably popular. Democracy is essentially tragic because it provides the populace with a weapon to destroy itself, one that is always eagerly seized, and used. Nobody ever says 'no' to free stuff. Scarcely anybody even sees that there is no free stuff. Utter cultural ruination is the necessary conclusion.

Within the final phase of Modernity 1.0, American history becomes the master narrative of the world. It is there that the great Abrahamic cultural conveyor culminates in the secularized neo-puritanism of the Cathedral, as it establishes the New Jerusalem in Washington DC. The apparatus of Messianic-revolutionary purpose is consolidated in the evangelical state, which is authorized by any means necessary to install a new world order of universal fraternity, in the name of equality, human rights, social justice, and – above

all – *democracy*. The absolute moral confidence of the Cathedral underwrites the enthusiastic pursuit of unrestrained centralized power, optimally unlimited in its intensive penetration and its extensive scope.

With an irony altogether hidden from the witch-burners' spawn themselves, the ascent of this squinting cohort of grim moral fanatics to previously unscaled heights of global power coincides with the descent of mass-democracy to previously unimagined depths of gluttonous corruption. Every five years America steals itself from itself again, and fences itself back in exchange for political support. *This democracy thing is easy – you just vote for the guy who promises you the most stuff. An idiot could do it.* Actually, it likes idiots, treats them with apparent kindness, and does everything it can to manufacture more of them.

Democracy's relentless trend to degeneration presents an implicit case for reaction. Since every major threshold of socio-political 'progress' has ratcheted Western civilization towards comprehensive ruin, a retracing of its steps suggests a reversion from the society of pillage to an older order of self-reliance, honest industry and exchange, pre-propagandistic learning, and civic self-organization. The attractions of this reactionary vision are evidenced by the vogue for 18th century attire, symbols, and constitutional documents among the substantial (Tea Party) minority who clearly see the disastrous course of American political history.

Has the 'race' alarm sounded in your head yet? It would be amazing if it hadn't. Stagger back in imagination before 2008, and the fraught whisper of conscience is already questioning your prejudices against Kenyan revolutionaries and black Marxist professors. Remain in reverse until the Great Society / Civil Rights era and the warnings reach hysterical pitch. It's perfectly obvious by this point that American political history has progressed along twin, interlocking tracks, corresponding to the *capacity* and the *legitimation* of the state. To cast doubt upon its scale and scope is to simultaneously dispute the sanctity of its purpose, and the moral-spiritual necessity that it command whatever resources, and impose whatever legal restraints, may be required to effectively fulfill it. More specifically, to recoil from the magnitude of Leviathan is to demonstrate insensitivity to the immensity – indeed, near infinity – of inherited racial guilt, and the sole surviving categorical imperative of senescent modernity – government needs to *do more*. The possibility, indeed near certainty, that the pathological consequences of chronic government activism have long ago supplanted the problems they originally targeted, is a contention so utterly maladapted to the epoch of democratic religion that its practical insignificance is assured.

Even on the left, it would be extraordinary to find many who genuinely believe, after sustained reflection, that the primary driver of government expansion and centralization has been the burning

desire *to do good* (not that intentions matter). Yet, as the twin tracks cross, such is the electric jolt of moral drama, leaping the gap from racial Golgotha to intrusive Leviathan, that skepticism is suspended, and the great progressive myth installed. *The alternative to more government, doing ever more, was to stand there, negligently, whilst they lynched another Negro*. This proposition contains the entire essential content of American progressive education.

The twin historical tracks of state capability and purpose can be conceived as a translation protocol, enabling any recommended restraint upon government power to be 'decoded' as malign obstruction of racial justice. This system of substitutions functions so smoothly that it provides an entire vocabulary of (bipartisan) 'code-words' or 'dog-whistles' – 'welfare', 'freedom of association', 'states rights' – ensuring that any intelligible utterance on the Principal (left-right) Political Dimension occupies a double registry, semi-saturated by racial evocations. Reactionary regression smells of strange fruit.

… and that is before backing out of the calamitous 20th century. It was not the Civil Rights Era, but the 'American Civil War' (in the terms of the victors) or 'War between the States' (in those of the vanquished) that first indissolubly cross-coded the practical question of Leviathan with (black/white) racial dialectics, laying down the central junction yard of subsequent political antagonism and rhetoric. The indispensable primary step in comprehending this fatality snakes along an awkward diagonal between mainstream

statist and revisionist accounts, because the conflagration that consumed the American nation in the early 1860s was wholly but non-exclusively about emancipation from slavery *and* about states rights, with neither 'cause' reducible to the other, or sufficient to suppress the war's enduring ambiguities. Whilst there are any number of 'liberals' happy to celebrate the consolidation of centralized government power in the triumphant Union, and, symmetrically, a (far smaller) number of neo-confederate apologists for the institution of chattel slavery in the southern states, neither of these unconflicted stances capture the dynamic cultural legacy of a *war across the codes*.

The war is a knot. By practically dissociating liberty into *emancipation* and *independence*, then hurling each against the other in a half-decade of carnage, blue against gray, it was settled that freedom would be broken on the battlefield, whatever the outcome of the conflict. Union victory determined that the emancipatory sense of liberty would prevail, not only in America, but throughout the world, and the eventual reign of the Cathedral was assured. Nevertheless, the crushing of American's second war of secession made a mockery of the first. If the institution of slavery de-legitimated a war of independence, what survived of 1776? The moral coherence of the Union cause required that the founders were reconceived as politically illegitimate white patriarchal slave-owners, and American history combusted in progressive education

and the culture wars.

If independence is the ideology of slave-holders, emancipation requires the programmatic destruction of independence. Within a cross-coded history, the realization of freedom is indistinguishable from its abolition.

July 3, 2012

The Dark Enlightenment (Part 4f(inal))

Approaching the Bionic Horizon

It's time to bring this long digression to a conclusion, by reaching out impatiently towards the end. The basic theme has been mind control, or thought-suppression, as demonstrated by the Media-Academic complex that dominates contemporary Western societies, and which Mencius Moldbug names the Cathedral. When things are squashed they rarely disappear. Instead, they are displaced, fleeing into sheltering shadows, and sometimes turning into monsters. Today, as the suppressive orthodoxy of the Cathedral comes unstrung, in various ways, and numerous senses, a time of monsters is approaching.

The central dogma of the Cathedral has been formalized as the Standard Social Scientific Model (SSSM) or 'blank slate theory'. It is

the belief, completed in its essentials by the anthropology of Franz Boas, that every legitimate question about mankind is restricted to the sphere of culture. Nature permits *that* 'man' is, but never determines *what* man is. Questions directed towards natural characteristics and variations between humans are themselves properly understood as cultural peculiarities, or even pathologies. Failures of 'nurture' are the only thing we are allowed to see.

Because the Cathedral has a consistent ideological orientation, and sifts its enemies accordingly, comparatively detached scientific appraisal of the SSSM easily veers into raw antagonism. As Simon Blackburn remarks (in a thoughtful review of Steven Pinker's *The Blank Slate*), "The dichotomy between nature and nurture rapidly acquires political and emotional implications. To put it crudely, the right likes genes and the left likes culture …"

At the limit of reciprocal loathing, hereditarian determinism confronts social constructivism, with each committed to a radically pared-back model of causality. *Either* nature expresses itself as culture, *or* culture expresses itself in its images ('constructions') of nature. Both of these positions are trapped at opposite sides of an incomplete circuit, structurally blinded to *the culture of practical naturalism*, which is to say: the techno-scientific / industrial manipulation of the world.

Acquiring knowledge and using tools is a single dynamic circuit, producing techno-science as an integral system, without real

divisibility into theoretical and practical aspects. Science develops in loops, through experimental *technique* and the production of ever more sophisticated instrumentation, whilst embedded within a broader industrial process. Its advance is the improvement of a machine. This intrinsically technological character of (modern) science demonstrates the *efficiency* of culture as a complex natural force. It neither expresses a pre-existing natural circumstance, nor does it merely construct social representations. Instead, nature and culture compose a dynamic circuit, at the edge of nature, where fate is decided.

According to the self-reinforcing presupposition of modernization, to be understood is to be modifiable. It is to be expected, therefore, that biology and medicine co-evolve. The same historical dynamic that comprehensively subverts the SSSM through inundating waves of scientific discovery simultaneously volatilizes human biological identity through biotechnology. There is no essential difference between learning what we *really are* and re-defining ourselves as technological contingencies, or *technoplastic* beings, susceptible to precise, scientifically-informed transformations. 'Humanity' becomes intelligible as it is subsumed into the technosphere, where information processing of the genome – for instance — brings reading and editing into perfect coincidence.

To describe this circuit, as it consumes the human species, is to define our *bionic horizon*: the threshold of conclusive nature-culture

fusion at which a population becomes indistinguishable from its technology. This is neither hereditarian determinism, nor social constructivism, but it is what both would have referred to, had they indicated anything real. It is a syndrome vividly anticipated by Octavia Butler, whose *Xenogenesis* trilogy is devoted to the examination of a population beyond the bionic horizon. Her Oankali 'gene traders' have no identity separable from the biotechnological program that they perpetually implement upon themselves, as they commercially acquire, industrially produce, and sexually reproduce their population within a single, integral process. Between what the Oankali are, and the way they live, or behave, there is no firm difference. Because they make themselves, their nature is their culture and (of course) reciprocally. What they *are* is exactly what they *do*.

Religious traditionalists of the Western Orthosphere are right to identify the looming bionic horizon with a (negative) theological event. Techno-scientific auto-production specifically supplants the fixed and sacralized essence of man as a created being, amidst the greatest upheaval in the natural order since the emergence of eukaryotic life, half a billion years ago. It is not merely an evolutionary event, but the threshold of a new *evolutionary phase*. John H. Campbell heralds the emergence of *Homo autocatalyticus*, whilst arguing: "In point of fact, it is hard to imagine how a system of inheritance could be more ideal for engineering than ours is."

John H. Campbell? – a prophet of monstrosity, and the perfect excuse for a monster quote:

> *"Biologists suspect that new forms evolve rapidly from very tiny outgroups of individuals (perhaps even a single fertilized female, Mayr, 1942) at the fringe of an existing species. There the stress of an all but uninhabitable environment, forced inbreeding among isolated family members, "introgression" of foreign genes from neighboring species, lack of other members of the species to compete against or whatever, promotes a major reorganization of the genomic program, possibly from modest change in gene structure. Nearly all of these transmogrified fragments of species die out, but an occasional one is fortunate enough to fit a new viable niche. It prospers and expands into a new species. Its conversion into a statistically constrained gene pool then stabilizes the species from further evolutionary change. Established species are far more notable for their stasis than change. Even throwing off a new daughter species does not seem to change an existing species. No one denies that species can gradually transform and do so to various extents, but this so-called "anagenesis" is relatively unimportant compared to geologically-sudden major saltation in the generation of novelty.*

Three implications are important.

1. Most evolutionary change is associated with the origin of new species.

2. Several modes of evolution may operate simultaneously. In this case the most effective dominates the process.

3. Tiny minorities of individuals do most of the evolving instead of the species as a whole.

A second important characteristic of evolution is self-reference (Campbell, 1982). The Cartesian cartoon of an autonomous external "environment" dictating the form of a species like a cookie cutter cutting stencils from sheets of dough is dead, dead wrong. The species molds its environment as profoundly as the environment "evolves" the species. In particular, the organisms cause the limiting conditions of the environment over which they compete. Therefore the genes play two roles in evolution. They are the targets of natural selection and they also ultimately induce and determine the selection pressures that act upon them. This circular causality overwhelms the mechanical character of evolution. Evolution is dominated by feedback of the evolved activities of organisms on their evolution.

The third seminal realization is that evolution extends past the change in organisms as products of evolution to

change in the process itself. Evolution evolves (Jantsch, 1976; Balsh, 1989; Dawkins, 1989; Campbell, 1993). Evolutionists know this fact but have never accorded the fact the importance that it deserves because it is incommensurate with Darwinism. Darwinists, and especially modern neodarwinists, equate evolution to the operation of a simple logical principle, one that is prior to biology: Evolution is merely the Darwinian principle of natural selection in action, and this is what the science of evolution is about. Since principles cannot change with time or circumstances, evolution must be fundamentally static.

Of course, biological evolution is not like this at all. It is an actual complex process, not a principle. The way that it takes place can, and indisputably does, change with time. This is of utmost importance because the process of evolution advances as it proceeds (Campbell, 1986). Preliving matter in the earth's primordial soup was able to evolve only by subdarwinian "chemical" mechanisms. Once these puny processes created gene molecules with information for their self-replication then evolution was able to engage natural selection. Evolution then wrapped the self-replicating genomes within self-replicating organisms to control the way that life would respond to the winds of selection from the environment. Later, by creating multicellular organisms,

evolution gained access to morphological change as an alternative to slower and less versatile biochemical evolution. Changes in the instructions in developmental programs replaced changes in enzyme catalysts. Nervous systems opened the way for still faster and more potent behavioral, social and cultural evolution. Finally, these higher modes produced the prerequisite organization for rational, purposeful evolution, guided and propelled by goal-directed minds. Each of these steps represented a new emergent level of evolutionary capability.

Thus, there are two distinct, but interwoven, evolutionary processes. I call them "adaptive evolution" and "generative evolution." The former is familiar Darwinian modification of organisms to enhance their survival and reproductive success. Generative evolution is entirely different. It is the change in a process instead of structure. Moreover, that process is ontological. Evolution literally means "to unfold" and what is unfolding is the capacity to evolve. Higher animals have become increasingly adept at evolving. In contrast, they are not the least bit fitter than their ancestors or the lowest form of microbe. Every species today has had exactly the same track record of survival; on average, every higher organism alive today still will leave only two offspring, as was the case a hundred million years ago, and modern

> *species are as likely to go extinct as were those in the past. Species cannot become fitter and fitter because reproductive success is not a cumulative parameter.*

For racial nationalists, concerned that their grandchildren should look like them, Campbell is the abyss. Miscegenation doesn't get close to the issue. *Think face tentacles*.

Campbell is also a secessionist, although entirely undistracted by the concerns of identity politics (racial purity) or traditional cognitive elitism (eugenics). Approaching the bionic horizon, secessionism takes on an altogether wilder and more monstrous bearing – towards *speciation*. The folks at euvolution capture the scenario well:

> *Reasoning that the majority of humankind will not voluntarily accept qualitative population-management policies, Campbell points out that any attempt to raise the IQ of the whole human race would be tediously slow. He further points out that the general thrust of early eugenics was not so much species improvement as the prevention of decline. Campbell's eugenics, therefore, advocates the abandonment of Homo sapiens as a 'relic' or 'living fossil' and the application of genetic technologies to intrude upon the genome, probably writing novel genes from scratch using a*

> *DNA synthesizer. Such eugenics would be practiced by elite groups, whose achievements would so quickly and radically outdistance the usual tempo of evolution that within ten generation the new groups will have advanced beyond our current form to the same degree that we transcend apes.*

When seen from the bionic horizon, whatever emerges from the dialectics of racial terror remains trapped in trivialities. It's time to move on.

July 20, 2012

Malthusian Horror

The post is pitched like this because it's Friday night, but it works. A more dutiful post might have been entitled simply 'Malthus' and involved a lot of work. That's going to be needed at some point. (Here's the 6th edition of *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, for anyone who wants to get started now.) A more thoroughly technical approach would have been flagged 'Neo-Malthusianism'. While sympathizing with groans about another 'neo-' prefix, in this case it would have been solidly justified. It's only through expansion of the Malthusian insight in accordance with a more general conservation law that its full current relevance can be appreciated. Classic

Malthus still does far more work than it is credited with, but it contains a *principle* of far more penetrating application.

'Neo-' at its most frivolous is merely a mark of fashion. When employed more seriously, it notes an element of innovation. Its most significant sense includes not only novelty, but also abstraction. Something is carried forwards in such a way that its conceptual core is distilled through extraction from a specific context, achieving a higher generality, and more exact formality. Malthus partially anticipates this in a phrase that points beyond any excessively constrictive concreteness:



The qualification "in some shape or other" might have been drawn from abstract horror, and "premature death" only loosely binds it. Even so, this formulation remains too narrow, since it tends to exclude the dysgenic outcome, which we have since learnt is a dimension of Malthusian expression scarcely less imposing than resource crisis. A Neo-Malthusian account of the "X" which *in some shape or other* makes a grim perversity of all humanity's efforts to

improve its condition grasps it as a mathematically conserved, plastic, or abstract destiny, working as remorselessly through reductions of mortality (Malthusian 'relaxations') as through increases (Malthusian 'pressures'). Both would count equally as "checks on population" — each convertible, through a complex calculus, into the terms of the other. A population dysgenically deteriorated through 'enlightened' Malthusian relaxation learns, once again, how to starve.

The Dark Enlightenment (essay) was clearly catalyzed by the work of Mencius Moldbug, but it was to have had two Anglo-Thomistic or Doubting Thomas intellectual-historical pillars (and neither were Thomas Carlyle). The first was Thomas Hobbes, who was at least touched upon. The second was to have been Thomas Malthus, but the series was diverted into the foaming current of the Derbyshire affair and the outrages of Leftist race politics. The integrity of conception was lost. Had it not been, it might have been less tempting to read the 333-current as an Anti-Enlightenment, rather than a Counter-Enlightenment, in the sense of an eclipsed, alternative to the Rousseauistic calamity that prevailed. It would certainly attach the Scottish Enlightenment, but only under the definite condition that it is lashed securely to the harsh realist scaffolding of the Dark Enlightenment (Hobbes and Malthus), disillusioned of all idealism. Pretty stories are for little children (being raised by liberals).

Malthus subtracts all utopianism from enlightenment. He shows that history is put together — necessarily — in a butcher's yard. Through Malthus, Ricardo discovered the Iron Law of Wages, disconnecting the ideas of economic advance and humanitarian redemption. Darwin effected a comparable (and more consequential) revision in biology, also on Malthusian grounds, dispelling all sentimentality from notions of evolutionary 'progression'. It is from Malthus that we know, when anything seems to move forward, it is through being ground up against a cutting edge. It is when Marx attempts to put Malthus into history, rather than history into Malthus, that utopian dementia was resuscitated within economics. The anti-Malthusianism of Libertarians stigmatizes them as dreamy fools.

With NRx, the matter is perhaps more unsettled, but the Dark Enlightenment is unambiguously Mathusian. If you find your eye becoming dewy, pluck it out.

November 14, 2014

BLOCK 2 - SOCIAL DARWINISM

Reality Rules

Why Social Darwinism isn't going anywhere

> *The name* social Darwinism *is a modern name given to the various theories of society that emerged in England and the United States in the 1870s, which, it is alleged, sought to apply biological concepts to sociology and politics. The term* social Darwinism *gained widespread currency when used in 1944 to oppose these earlier concepts. Today, because of the negative connotations of the theory of social Darwinism,*

> *especially after the atrocities of the Second World War (including the Holocaust), few people would describe themselves as Social Darwinists and the term is generally seen as pejorative.* — Wikipedia

> *… no one calls himself a social Darwinist. Not now, not ever. Not Herbert Spencer. The term is always used to label one's opponents. In that sense it's clearly a more abusive term than "socialist," a term that millions of people have proudly claimed.* — David Boaz

Urban Future somehow missed the excited side-track discussion that bolted to the conclusion: America voted in November 2012 to spare itself from Social Darwinism. Yet, sadly belated as it may be, our rejoinder is unchanged: nothing ever gets spared from Darwinism. That's what Darwinism is.

The fact that the term Social Darwinism survives only as a slur is abundantly telling, and suffices on its own to explain the ideological 'evolution' of recent times. In a nutshell, the dominant usage of 'social Darwinism' says "markets are a kind of Nazi thing." Checkmate in one move.

Markets implement a Darwinian process by eliminating failure. Schumpeter called it 'creative destruction'. The principle *unit of selection* is the business enterprise, which is able to innovate, adapt,

propagate, and evolve precisely insofar as it is also exposed to the risk of perishing. None of this is especially complicated, or even controversial. In a sane world it is what 'social Darwinism' would mean. It is certainly what Herbert Spencer was really talking about (although he never adopted the label).

The fundamental tenet of Social Darwinism would then be compressible into a couple of words: *reality rules*. There's more, of course, but nothing especially challenging. The further additions are really subtractions, or reservations – intellectual economies, negative principles, and non-commitments. That's because Darwinism – whether 'social' or otherwise – is built from subtractions. Deducting all supernatural causality and transcendent agencies leaves Darwinism as the way complex structures get designed. (Not constructed, but *designed*, in conformity with a naturalistic theory of plans, blueprints, recipes, or assembly codes, of the kind that have naturally invited supernatural explanation. Darwinism only applies to practical information.)

Subtractions put it together. For instance, remove the extravagant hypothesis that something big and benevolent is looking after us, whether God, the State, or some alternative Super-Dad, and the realistic residue indicates that our mistakes kill us. It follows that anything still hanging around has a history of avoiding serious mistakes, which it may or may not be persisting with – and persistence will tell. If we're forgetting important lessons, we'll pay

(in the currency of survival).

If this is mere tautology, as has not infrequently been alleged, then there's not even any need for controversy. But of course, controversy there is, plentifully, and so deeply entrenched that the most banal expositions capture it best. Consider this, from the self-assuredly pedestrian United States History site:

> *Social Darwinism was the application of Charles Darwin's scientific theories of evolution and natural selection to contemporary social development. In nature, only the fittest survived — so too in the marketplace. This form of justification was enthusiastically adopted by many American businessmen as scientific proof of their superiority.*

What is this supremely typical paragraph really saying? That some American businesses survived, were thus seen as "the fittest" (= they had survived), 'justified' (= they had survived), and 'proven to be superior' (= they had survived), in other words, a string of perfectly empty identity statements that is in some way supposed to embody a radically disreputable form of ruthless social extremism. This same systematic logical error, seen with tedious insistence in all instance of commentary on 'social Darwinism', was baptized by Schopenhauer 'hypostasis of the concept'. It seizes upon something, repeats it exactly but in different terms, and then pretends to have added

information. Once this error is corrected for, substantial discussion of the topic is exposed in its full, dazzling vacuity.

A writhing David Boaz cites the Encyclopedia Britannica entry on Social Darwinism, which describes it as:

> *… the theory that persons, groups, and races are subject to the same laws of natural selection as Charles Darwin had perceived in plants and animals in nature. According to the theory, which was popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the weak were diminished and their cultures delimited, while the strong grew in power and in cultural influence over the weak…. The poor were the "unfit" and should not be aided; in the struggle for existence, wealth was a sign of success. At the societal level, social Darwinism was used as a philosophical rationalization for imperialist, colonialist, and racist policies, sustaining belief in Anglo-Saxon or Aryan cultural and biological superiority.*

It is immediately clear that this passage, too, follows the already-familiar pattern, clocking 'hypostasis of the concept' to the edge of spontaneous combustion. Worse still, it tries to put its hypostasized 'information' to work through the positive proposition — tacitly insinuated rather than firmly stated – that "persons, groups, and races" are something other than "animals in nature." Nature, it seems,

ceased to apply at some threshold of human social development, when people stopped being animals, and became something else. Man is not only doubled (as a natural being and something else), but divided between incommensurable kingdoms, whose re-integration is morally akin to "rationalization for imperialist, colonialist, and racist policies" and – why not admit it? — fascist genocide.

Define nature in such a way that we're not part of it, or you're engaged in Nazi apologetics says *Encyclopedia Britannica*. There's obviously something about social Darwinism that gets people excited — several things, actually. Plugging the spontaneous theory of *laissez faire* capitalism into traumatic association with the Third Reich is thrilling enough, especially because that's the basic platform for the epoch of actually existing fascism (which we still inhabit), but there's more.

The most obvious clue, from which the *Encyclopedia Britannica* passage unravels like a piece of incompetent knitting, is the magical appearance of 'should' – "The poor were the 'unfit' and should not be aided." This is another preposterous hypostasis, naturally (and unnaturally), but equally typical. At the evolution site *talkorigins*, John S. Wilkins tells us: "'Social Darwinism' … holds that social policy should allow the weak and unfit to fail and die, and that this is not only good policy but morally right." The intellectual perversity here is truly fascinating.

Any naturalistic social theory subtracts, or at least suspends,

moral evaluation. It says: this is the way things are (however we might want them to be). Yet here, through hypostatic doubling, or redundancy, such neutral realism is converted into a bizarre, morally-charged stance: *nature should happen*. Social Darwinism is not attempting to explain, but rather *siding with reality* (those Nazis!).

This is, quite simply and literally, madness. Left dissatisfied by mere denial of the modest proposition that reality rules, the denunciation of social Darwinism proceeds smoothly to the accusation that realists are aiding and abetting the enemy. The unforgivable crime is to accept that there are consequences, or results, other than those we have agreed to allow.

The reality is that practical decisions have real consequences. If those consequences are annulled by, or absorbed into, a more comprehensive social entity, then that entity inherits them. What it incentivizes it grows into. The failures it selects for become its own. When maladaptive decisions are displaced, or aggregated, they are not dispelled, but reinforced, generalized, and exacerbated. Whatever the scale of the social being under consideration, it either finds a way to work, and to reward what works, or it perishes, whether as a whole, or in pieces. That is the 'social Darwinism' that will return, eventually, because reality rules, and rather than joining the clamor of denunciation, Boaz would have been prescient to reclaim it.

November 20, 2012

Discrimination

Bryan Caplan has had two epiphanies, which sum to the conclusion that — bad as tribalism is — misanthropy is the real problem. His ineradicable universalism betrays him once again.

It matters little whether people are *uniformly* judged good or bad. Far more important is whether such judgment is *discriminating*.

The central argument of Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals* is clarifying in this regard, not least because it explains how radical mystification came to dominate the topic. How could there ever come to be a moral quandary about the value of discrimination? Considered superficially, it is extremely puzzling.

Differentiation between what is 'good' and 'bad' requires discrimination. This is a capability no younger than life itself, which it serves as an indispensable function. As soon as there is behavior, there is discrimination between alternatives. One way leads to survival, the other way leads to death. There is nourishment, or not; reproduction, or not; safety or predatory menace. Good and bad, or the discrimination between them (which is the same thing), are etched primordially into any world that life inhabits. Discrimination is needed to survive.

The very existence of archaic hominids attests to billions of years of effective discrimination, between safety and danger, wholesome and putrid or poisonous food, good mates and less good (or worthless) ones. When these elevated apes differentiated between good and bad, appetizing and rotten, attractive and repulsive, they found such discriminations sufficiently similar in essence to be functionally substitutable. When judging that some food item is 'not good for us', a person is 'rotten', or the odor of a potential mate is 'delicious', we recall such substitutions, and the primordial sense of discrimination that they affirm. There can be no long-term deviation from the original principle: *discrimination is intelligence aligned with survival*.

Two contrary developments now present themselves. Firstly, there is a sublimation or sophistication of discrimination, which might be called *cultivation*. Abstract concepts, modes of expression, artworks, delicate culinary flavors, refined behaviors, and exotic elaborations of sexual-selection stimuli, among innumerable other things, can all be subtly discriminated on the ancient scale, supporting an ever more intricate and extended hierarchy of judgments. The reflexive doubling of this potential upon itself, as captured by the 'higher' judgment that *to discriminate well is good*, produces a 'natural aristocracy'. For the first time, there is a self-conscious 'Right'. This, at least, is its logico-mythical ur-form. *To divide the good from the bad is good*. Order, hierarchy, and

distinction emerge from an affirmation of discrimination.

Because the Left cannot create, it comes second. It presupposes an existing hierarchy, or order of discriminations, which is subverted through a 'slave revolt in morality'. The formula is simple enough: *to discriminate is bad*. Following from this leftist moral perversion, as its second-order consequence, those who do not discriminate (well), but are in fact discriminated against, must be the good. In the new moral order, therefore, to be bad at discrimination is good — or 'universalist' — whilst the old (and now 'evil') quality of good judgment, based on competent perception of patterns and differences, is the very quintessence of sin.

Lawrence Auster's thinking, which would not usually be described as 'Nietzschean', conforms to the conclusions of the Antichrist perfectly in this:

We thus arrive at our present system of mass nonwhite immigration, multiculturalism, racial preferences for minorities, the symbolic celebration of minorities, the covering up of black-on-white violence, and antiracism crusades directed exclusively at whites. ***Under this system, whites practice assiduous non-discrimination toward the unassimilated, alien, or criminal behavior of racial minorities, while practicing the most assiduous discrimination against their fellow whites for the slightest failure to be non-discriminatory.*** *This is the system that conservatives variously describe as "political correctness" or the "double standard."*

However, from the point of view of the functioning of the liberal order itself, what conservatives call the double standard is not a double standard at all, but a fundamental and necessary articulation of the society into the "non-discriminators" and the "non-discriminated against"—an articulation upon which the very legitimacy and existence of the liberal society depends. [Auster's emphasis]

The racial pretext for this righteous diatribe is not incidental, given the prevailing sense of 'discrimination' in Left-edited languages. Caution is required, however, precisely because vulgar racism is *insufficiently discriminating*. All generalization lurches towards the universal. The abstract principle of Leftism is, in any case, far more general. The trend towards the Left-absolute is entirely clear, and pre-programmed: *no state of human existence can possibly be any better or worse than any other*, and only through recognition of this can we be saved. Do you sinfully imagine that it is *better* to be a damned soul like Nietzsche than an obese, leprous, slothful, communist, cretin? Or worse still, in Bryan Caplan's world, that one might design an immigration policy on this basis? Then your path to the abyss is already marked out before you.

It does not take an exceptional mastery of logic to see the inextinguishable contradiction in Leftist thought. If discrimination is bad, and non-discrimination is good, how can discrimination be discriminated from non-discrimination, without grave moral error?

This is an opportunity for Rightist entertainment, but not for solace. The Left has power and absurdist mysticism on its side. Logic is for sinners.

Two hanging questions:

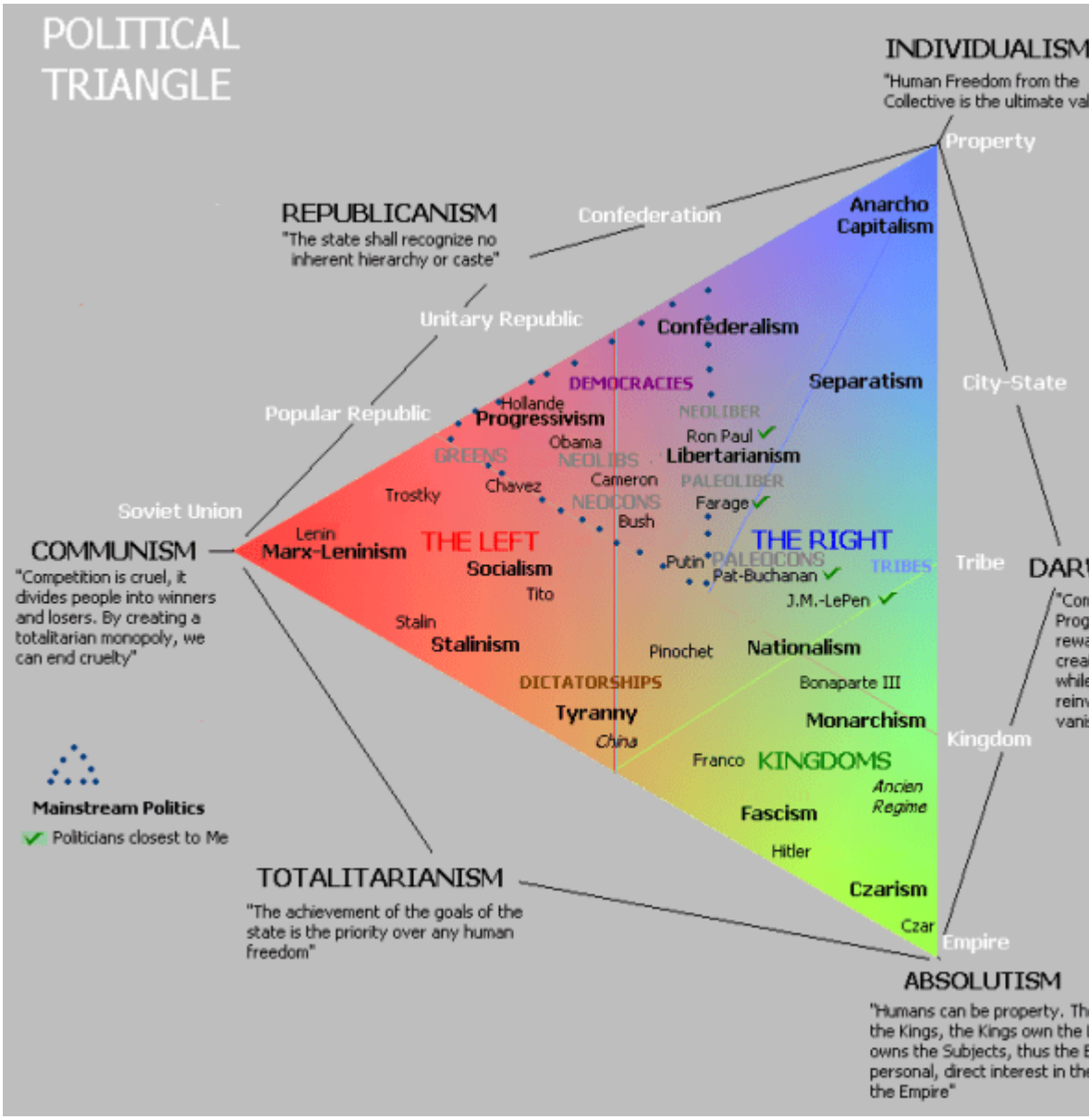
Can Left and Right be rigorously distinguished in any other way?

Isn't Christianity, as Nietzsche insisted, inextricable from this mess?

August 9, 2013

Coldness

'Coincidentally' a number of seemingly unrelated social media stimuli have conspired to recall this today:



Note: “Politics closest to me” comes from the original creator of this diagram (I’m still not sure who that is). The politics closest to

me are located in the top right corner of the gray box, where it disappears into the blackness of the Outside.

For the record, these tweets were the principal pincers:

> @Outsideness I'm 70% sure I read something by you (or maybe it was linked by you) about how Darwinism is always to our right
>
> — Кирилл Каминец (@Fatalist_Rus) February 12, 2015

> Outside in – Involvements with reality » Blog Archive » Fission http://t.co/GTCSoEd89s
>
> — Kalish Jantzen (@KalishJantzen) February 13, 2015

(It took me a while to make the connection.)

There's a further link — also to Twitter — concerning the accusation that Anarcho-Capitalism and Neocameralism are 'Utopian'. I won't reproduce that here, because it was longer, and more involved. The relevant point is that both these 'positions' can be construed either as ideals, and therefore indeed vulnerable to criticism for their Utopianism, or as *cold* analytical frameworks that capture *what is* in a way that enhances its theoretical tractability. Darwinism is no different, in this respect.

Anybody who is a Cosmic Darwinist is certainly going to be a Social Darwinist, unless they have a cognitive consistency problem.

When a Darwinist observes a maladaption it is not seen as a theoretical hole, but rather as the basis for a prediction. Whatever cannot effectively reproduce itself can be reliably expected not to successfully reproduce itself. If adventures in policy recommendation then follow, they are strictly secondly. What is primary is simple. Reality rules.

Outside in is, of course, utterly Social Darwinist in this sense (and probably also in whatever others are available). Variation-selection dynamics are unsurpassable. Whatever seeks to depart from them will fail. Suppression of either variation or selection is intrinsically maladaptive *to the cosmos*. Maximization of the interlocked functions of experimentation and eradication of error is the only value to which the ultimate nature of things subscribes. Anything that works picks up on that, and goes with its grain. Anything that doesn't is objectively insane. It's not especially difficult, except for the fact that it offers us nothing but the (cold) truth.

Does Darwinism define the ultimate (transcendental) Right (in this sense, and this)? Capitalism as Darwinian socio-economics, HBD as Darwinian anthropology, the Gods of the Copybook Headings as Darwinian cultural history …? I cannot even imagine how that might not be so.

February 13, 2015

Scales

From a widely cited defense of the Black Lives Matter synthetic meme at *Reddit*:

… societally, we ***don't*** *pay as much attention to certain people's deaths as we do to others. So, currently, we don't treat all lives as though they matter equally.*

Two points:

(1) Some lives (and deaths) *do* matter far more than others, **obviously**. Everyone knows this, when they're not high, even if they usually feel compelled to lie about it. (Some lives, indeed, characterized by criminality and parasitism, are worth less than nothing — and even considerably less.) Only bizarre religious ideas could lead anybody to think the opposite.

(2) Western societies are very rapidly losing the ability to make sane calls on the point, as *exceptional productivity* loses its capacity to inspire attention, and the merely *piteous* usurps its central cultural position.

In the absence of adaptive sensibilities, life insurance premiums — or some equivalent expression of undemonstrative, practical value-processing — will have to serve as a default.

September 3, 2015

How Communism Works

Really:

Naked mole rats are among the ugliest creatures in the animal kingdom, and they engage in acts that seem repulsive — such as eating one another's, and their own, faeces. … Now researchers have found one biological motivation for this behaviour. When a queen mole rat's subordinates feed on her hormone-filled faeces, the resulting oestrogen boost causes the beta rats to take care of the queen's pups … […] Like bees, naked mole rats live in eusocial colonies, with only one queen rat and a few males that can reproduce. The rest of the colony consists of dozens of infertile subordinates that help with tasks such as foraging and defending the nest. The subordinate rats also take care of the queen's pups as though the babies were their own: they build the nests, lick the pups and keep them warm with their body heat.

We're almost there. Hail the New Collectivist Man:



“Sue Carter, a behavioural neurobiologist at Indiana University in Bloomington, says that the animals’ method of transferring parental responsibility through faeces is interesting.”

(Don’t say you weren’t warned.)

October 22, 2015

Twin Discoveries

Twin studies are the foundation of realism in all subjects pertaining to human beings (although their implications are wider). They reveal two crucial pieces of information:
(1) Heredity overwhelms environment in the (rigorous, statistical) explanation of human psychology, and
(2) Humans are massively predisposed to under-emphasize hereditary factors in the folk explanation of human psychology (including their own).

Both points emerge lucidly from Brian Boutwell's article on twin research in *Quillette*:

Based on the results of classical twin studies, it just doesn't appear that parenting — whether mom and dad are permissive or not, read to their kid or not, or whatever else — impacts development as much as we might like to think. Regarding the cross-validation that I mentioned, studies examining identical twins separated at birth and reared apart have repeatedly revealed (in shocking ways) the same thing: these individuals are remarkably similar when in fact they should be utterly different (they have completely different environments, but the same genes). Alternatively, non-biologically related adopted children (who have no genetic commonalities) raised together are utterly dissimilar to each other — despite in many cases having decades of exposure to the same parents and home

environments.

Without wanting to play down the importance of the parenting angle, it's worth bearing in mind that this is a rare zone where it remains politically acceptable to bring hereditarian findings to the table. Upsetting parents is still OK, and even vaguely commendable, so it provides a doorway through which to introduce matters of far broader significance. The truly critical point, from the perspective of this blog, is that *we should expect a systematic cognitive bias against the influence of heredity* and thus — intellectual integrity demands — we should lean against it.

There's an important lesson here:

Children who are spanked (not abused, but spanked) often experience a host of other problems in life, including psychological maladjustment and behavioral problems. In a study led by my colleague J.C. Barnes, we probed this issue in more detail and found some evidence suggesting that spanking increased the occurrence of overt bad behavior in children. We could have stopped there. Yet, we went one step further and attempted to inspect the genetic influences that were rampant across the measures included in our study. What we found was that much of the association between the two variables (spanking and behavior) was attributable to genetic effects that they had in common. The correlation between spanking and behavior appeared to reflect the presence of shared genetic influences cutting across both traits.

Parents are twin sources of influence. They "pass along two things to their kids: genes *and* an environment" — which facilitates the misattribution of genetic to environmental factors. If you find yourself regularly spanking your kids, it's very likely that you've genetically-endowed them with the same spank-worthy characteristics you have yourself (because you were spanked as a kid, too, right?). The environmentalist delusion practically leaps out of this situation, pre-packaged for credulous belief.

See original (of both quotes) for references.

(Don't just read the whole of Boutwell's article, read the whole of *Quillette*.)

December 2, 2015

Quote note (#266)

It is surely a crucial (and inadequately acknowledged) feature of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* that its point of departure is *artificial selection*, which might also be described as primordial technology, or the foundation of material civilization. Natural selection acquires definition through comparison with the (predominantly *unconscious*) process of domestication, or *cultivation*. This is the transitional paragraph (from Chapter IV):

As man can produce, and certainly has produced, a great result

by his methodical and unconscious means of selection, what may not natural selection effect? Man can act only on external and visible characters: Nature, if I many be allowed to personify the natural preservation or survival of the fittest, cares nothing for appearances, except in so far as they are useful to any being. She can act on every internal organ, on every shade of constitutional difference, on the whole machinery of life. Man selects only for his own good: Nature only for that of the being which she tends. Every selected character is fully exercised by her, as is implied by the fact of their selection. Man keeps the natives of many climates in the same country; he seldom exercises each selected character in some peculiar and fitting manner; he feeds a long- and short-beaked pigeon on the same food; he does not exercise a long-backed or long-legged quadruped in any peculiar manner; he exposes sheep with long and short wool to the same climate. He does not allow the most vigorous males to struggle for the females. He does not rigidly destroy all inferior animals, but protects during each varying season, as far as lies in his power, all his productions. He often begins his selection from some half-monstrous form; or at least by some modification prominent enough to catch the eye or to be plainly useful to him. Under Nature, the slightest difference of structure or constitution may well turn the nicely balanced scale in the struggle for life, and so be preserved. How fleeting are the wishes and efforts of man! how short his time! and consequently how poor will be his results, compared with those

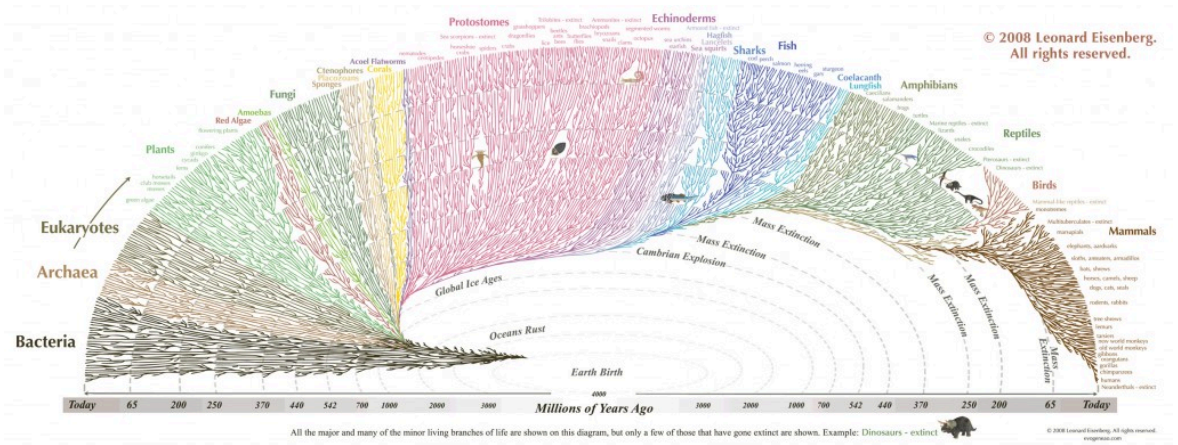
accumulated by Nature during whole geological periods! Can we wonder, then, that Natures productions should be far "truer" in character than man's productions; that they should be infinitely better adapted to the most complex conditions of life, and should plainly bear the stamp of far higher workmanship?

July 10, 2016

CHAPTER ONE - SELECTION

Edited Life

Leonard Eisenberg has created a striking new visualization of the tree of life.



It's open about the skew: "All the major and many of the minor living branches of life are shown on this diagram, but only a few of those that have gone extinct are shown."

Extinction is overwhelmingly the deep reality, compared to which the survival of species — the selected *phenomenon* — is scarcely more than a rounding error. Through a reflexive, lucid, secondary selection the culled, blasted, and gnawed tree of terrestrial life is

edited into the attractive flowering shrub we see in the diagram. It shows us what our illusion looks like in detail.

Survivor or selection bias is a hugely important frame. It absorbs the whole of anthropic reasoning in principle. To produce a display of life on earth that realistically incorporated it would require overcoming a range of psychological and epistemological obstacles so profound they reach the very root of the biological enterprise and even human intelligence as such, but only then would we truly see where we come from.

December 16, 2014

Hell-Baked

There's a potential prologue to this post that I'm reluctant to be distracted by. It's introvertedly about NRx, as a cultural mutation, and the way this is defined by a strategic — or merely ornery — indifference to deeply-settled modes of ethico-political condemnation. Terms designed as pathblockers — 'fascist' or 'racist' most obviously — are stepped over, perhaps laughed at, but in any case, and most importantly, *exposed* as bearers of a *religious terror*. They are signs of a control regime, marking the unthinkable wastes *where be dragons*, effective precisely insofar as they cannot be entertained. 'Satanic' was once such a word (before it became a joke).

These words cannot be understood except as invocations of the sacred, in its negative, or limitative role.

Is NRx in fact fascist? Not remotely. It is probably, in reality rather than self-estimation, the *least* fascistic current of political philosophy presently in existence, although this requires a minimal comprehension of what fascism actually is, which the word itself in its contemporary usage is designed to obstruct. Is NRx racist? Probably. The term is so entirely plastic in the service of those who utilize it that it is difficult, with any real clarity, to say.

What NRx most definitely is, at least in the firm opinion of this blog, is *Social Darwinist*. When this term is hurled at NRx as a negative epithet, it is nor a cause for stoic resignation, stiffened by humor, but rather for grim delight. Of course, this term is culturally processed — *thought through* — no more competently than those previously noted. It is our task to do this.

If 'Social Darwinism' is in any way an unfortunate term, it is only because it is merely Darwinism, and more exactly *consistent Darwinism*. It is equivalent to the proposition that Darwinian processes have no limits relevant to us. Darwinism is something we are inside. No part of what it is to be human can ever judge its Darwinian inheritance from a position of transcendent leverage, as if accessing principles of moral estimation with some alternative genesis, or criterion.

This is easy to say. As far as this blog is concerned, it is also —

beyond all reasonable question — true. While very far from a dominant global opinion, it is not uncommonly held — if only nominally — by a considerable fraction of those among the educated segment of the world's high-IQ populations. It is also, however, scarcely bearable to think.

The logical consequence of Social Darwinism is that **everything of value has been built in Hell**.

It is only due to a predominance of influences that are not only entirely morally indifferent, but indeed — from a human perspective — indescribably cruel, that nature has been capable of constructive action. Specifically, it is solely by way of the relentless, brutal culling of populations that any complex or adaptive traits have been sieved — with torturous inefficiency — from the chaos of natural existence. All health, beauty, intelligence, and social grace has been teased from a vast butcher's yard of unbounded carnage, requiring incalculable eons of massacre to draw forth even the subtlest of advantages. This is not only a matter of the bloody grinding mills of selection, either, but also of the innumerable mutational abominations thrown up by the madness of chance, as it pursues its directionless path to some negligible preservable trait, and then — still further — of the unavowable horrors that 'fitness' (or sheer survival) itself predominantly entails. We are a minuscule sample of agonized matter, comprising genetic survival monsters, fished from a cosmic ocean of vile mutants, by a pitiless killing machine of infinite appetite.

(This is still, perhaps, to put an irresponsibly positive spin on the story, but it should suffice for our purposes here.)

Crucially, any attempt to escape this fatality — or, more realistically, any mere accidental and temporary reprieve from it — leads inexorably to the undoing of its work. *Malthusian relaxation* is the whole of mercy, and it is the greatest engine of destruction our universe is able to bring about. To the precise extent that we are spared, even for a moment, we degenerate — and this Iron Law applies to every dimension and scale of existence: phylogenetic and ontogenetic, individual, social, and institutional, genomic, cellular, organic, and cultural. There is no machinery extant, or even rigorously imaginable, that can sustain a single iota of attained value outside the forges of Hell.

What is it that Neoreaction — perhaps I should say *The Dark Enlightenment* — has to offer the world, if all goes optimally (which, of course, it won't)? Really, the honest answer to this question is: *Eternal Hell*. It's not an easy marketing brief. We could perhaps try: *But it could be worse (and almost certainly will be)*.

July 17, 2015

Malthus was Right

The global wealth distribution is predictably spiky. That's mostly

because scarcely anyone owns anything:

… it does not take that much to get into the top 1% of wealth holders. Once debts have been subtracted, a person needs only $3,650 to be among the wealthiest half of the world's citizens. However, about $77,000 is required to be a member of the top 10% of global wealth holders and $798,000 to belong to the top 1%. So if you own a home in any major city in the rich North on your own and without a mortgage, you are part of the top 1%.

This looks like what you'd expect if population — at the global level — expanded approximately to the resource limit. (There are no doubt cuddlier interpretations out there.)

November 28, 2016

CHAPTER TWO - DYSGENICS

Ruin

What does Dark Enlightenment see when it scrutinizes our world?

This. (**Exactly** this.)

December 12, 2013

Charlton is Right …

… on this question, at least. The sole real puzzle is the precise quantity of dysgenic deterioration that has taken place in Western societies over the last 150 years, or more. Charlton estimates a one SD decline over this period in the UK, which seems entirely credible. Due to the small sample size, his argument from mathematical excellence has an inevitable anecdotal quality, but it would be hard to contest its general direction.

A fascinating paper by Michael A. Woodley (via @intelligenceres) is able to be more comprehensively persuasive. Its second table describes the innovation rate per capita across a sample of

European countries falling by almost three-quarters over the period 1845-2005, and roughly halving from 1945-2005. (*Great Stagnation* anyone?)

It shouldn't need adding that it's impossible to read this often enough (it's always there in my 'Resources' roll).

Two more, somewhat more distantly related links.

(We're so screwed.)

ADDED: More on this topic at Charlton's place.

ADDED: Gregory Cochran's 'outliers' argument against this thesis has as its core: "In another application – if the average genetic IQ potential had decreased by a standard deviation since Victorian times, the number of individuals with the ability to develop new, difficult, and interesting results in higher mathematics would have crashed, bring such developments to a screeching halt. Of course that has not happened."

I would have found it profoundly confidence-crushing if Cochran had simply said: *the collapse of a complex trait on this scale, in this time-span, is inconsistent with everything we know about population genetics*. The argument he relies upon instead, while far more elegant, is also much less persuasive (see the excellent comment thread at his site). As Dave Chamberlin notes, the parallel increase in assortative mating over the period in question means that assuming a stable standard distribution (variance) might not be safe. An increasingly heterogeneous population would to some degree shield

its outliers from averaging effects.

Compared to the evidence mustered in support of the IQ collapse thesis, it is hard to be impressed by the rather impressionistic claim "Of course that has not happened." Up to the mid-20th century — the era of Gödel, Von Neumann, and Turing — this might indeed have been irresistible, but today? Charlton's counter-argument seems by no means risible. How sure are we that mathematics has not "collapsed" — at least down to the level of 'normal' (rather than 'revolutionary') science? What was the last mathematical breakthrough that mattered dazzlingly to the world?

ADDED: Mangan adds a significant complication.

March 7, 2014

The Worst Question

At news aggregator Real Clear World, Frank Ching's recent article comparing the economic performance of the earth's two demographic giants was given the tantalizing headline *Why India Keeps Falling Behind China*. There's no sign of the "Why?" at the original, published in Taiwan's *China Post*. No surprise there.

As Ching notes:

While India and China are both being hailed as rapidly developing emerging markets, the gap between the two countries is widening

with India being left behind as China continues to power ahead. China's growth in 2013 was 7.7 percent while that of India hit a low for the decade of 4.5 percent in the 2012-13 fiscal year.

Despite being positioned for catch-up (i.e. being far poorer), India simply doesn't grow as fast as China. "The average estimated productivity growth rate of China (5.9%) is more than double that of India (2.4%)." India hasn't matched Chinese growth rates in any single year since the end of the Mao-era in the late 1970s, even after launching its own much-heralded market-oriented economic reform program in the early 1990s. Despite pulling itself from the dismal 3% "Hindu" growth rate, which was roughly doubled to a 5-6% range, China's average 9.8% growth rate, sustained over three decades, has remained far out of reach.

The two most populous nations on earth — by a huge margin — accounting between them for over a third of the 'developing world' by headcount (and for a far larger proportion of the part that has been in any serious way developing), would seem, superficially, like obvious candidates for unrelenting comparison. How could this titanic development race not be the most important socio-economic story on the planet?

Adding drama to this competition is the ideological polarity it represents. Pitting the most substantial and obstreperous antagonist to liberal-democratic global manifest destiny against a regime that was forged in Fabian social-democracy, and which

continues to exult in its status as "the world's largest democracy®" — the narrative potential is … oh wait.

For the forces of darkness, it only gets better. If India's relative development failure is not to be considered a conspicuous illustration of democratic incapability, other explanatory factors have to be invoked. Something like 5% GDP growth is going missing, chronically, every year (and if alternative development indicators are preferred, the grim story they tell is much the same). Either India's Cathedral-approved political orientation is responsible for this social morass, or something else has to be.

While wondering about this awkward conundrum, you're quite likely to stop being surprised about the paucity of China-India comparative news coverage. Clearly, the "Why?" isn't wanted, because it only goes to bad places. In fact, it's probably the worst question in the world.

March 27, 2014

Dysgenic Reactions

Michael A. Woodley, Jan te Nijenhuis, and Raegan Murphy respond (in detail) to critics of their 2013 paper on the dysgenic implications of Galton's reaction time data. Their adjusted evidence indicates an increase in reaction times among US/UK males over the period

1889-2004 from 187.1 ms to 237.1 ms (44.6 ms over 115 years), equivalent to a decline in *g* of 13.9 points, or 1.21 points per decade. They propose that 68% of this decline is due to dysgenic selection, with the remaining 32% attributed to increasing mutation load.

If these figures are even remotely accurate, they portray a phenomenon — and indeed a catastrophe — that would have to be considered a fundamental determinant of recent world history. Given the scale and rapidity of dysgenic collapse suggested here, skepticism is natural, and indeed all-but inevitable. (The proposed rate of decline seems incredible to this, radically inexpert, blog.) It should nevertheless be reasonable to expect counter-arguments to exhibit the same intellectual seriousness and respect for evidence that this paper so impressively demonstrates.

June 12, 2014

Counter-Dysgenics

Heartiste (finally) discovers Weiss.

Of Heartiste's six proposed policy responses, #2 (introduce counter-dysgenic incentives) is the only one this blog endorse without reservation. High-IQ immigration, assortative mating, and open markets all make a positive contribution to general social competitiveness, although due theoretical deference to IQ-Shredder

problems is required. His point #6 is valuable if it is inverted, to make socio-political fragmentation a primary objective, rather than a consequence, or subordinate instrumental goal. Point #5 ("Eliminate all female-friendly public policies") is unobjectionable because all 'X-friendly' public policies are objectionable, and its specific emphasis is material for consideration within a disintegrated *oecumenon*, where polities could experiment with all kinds of things. Talented people will tend to flee a heavy-handed authoritarian state, even if it's social policies have impressive traditional validation. Consequently, as a response to local dysgenics, the outcome of any attempt to socially engineer a restored patriarchy from the top-down is likely to be counter-productive.

Social Darwinism, seriously understood, is the theoretical default that every attempt to neutralize spontaneous selection processes (entropy dissipation) will be subverted by predictable perverse effects. It's no more possible to suppress Social Darwinism than it is to annul the Second Law of Thermodynamics, and social philosophies which teach that this can be achieved are the strict equivalent of plans for perpetual motion machines. That's what Weiss is explaining, as *Outside in* understands it. Subsumption into an effective competitive environment is the only possible response that could work to reverse dysgenic trends, and this will eventually occur, whether human politics cooperates or not. Patchwork is the gentlest way this could be realized, since it enables a multitude of societies to

decide on their own levels of entropy-accumulation tolerance. (That is not, of course, to suggest that a Patchworked-world is gentle in any sense we have grown accustomed to.)

August 2, 2014

Quote note (#168)

The level of apocalypticism to be found in scientific abstracts rarely reaches the Dark Enlightenment threshold, but there are always exceptions. Here's Olav Albert Christophersen, on 'Thematic Cluster: Focus on Autism Spectrum Disorder', originally published in *Microbial Ecology in Health & Disease* (2012). Indicatively, the paper is subtitled 'Should autism be considered a canary bird telling that *Homo sapiens* may be on its way to extinction?' The full abstract:

There has been a dramatic enhancement of the reported incidence of autism in different parts of the world over the last 30 years. This can apparently not be explained only as a result of improved diagnosis and reporting, but may also reflect a real change. The causes of this change are unknown, but if we shall follow T.C. Chamberlin's principle of multiple working hypotheses, we need to take into consideration the possibility that it partly may reflect an enhancement of the average frequency of responsible alleles in large populations. If this hypothesis is correct, it means that the average

germline mutation rate must now be much higher in the populations concerned, compared with the natural mutation rate in hominid ancestors before the agricultural and industrial revolutions. This is compatible with the high prevalence of impaired human semen quality in several countries and also with what is known about high levels of total exposure to several different unnatural chemical mutagens, plus some natural ones at unnaturally high levels. Moreover, dietary deficiency conditions that may lead to enhancement of mutation rates are also very widespread, affecting billions of people. However, ***the natural mutation rate in hominids has been found to be so high that there is apparently no tolerance for further enhancement of the germline mutation rate before the Eigen error threshold will be exceeded and our species will go extinct because of mutational meltdown****. This threat, if real, should be considered far more serious than any disease causing the death only of individual patients.* ***It should therefore be considered the first and highest priority of the best biomedical scientists in the world, of research-funding agencies and of all medical doctors to try to stop the express train carrying all humankind as passengers on board before it arrives at the end station of our civilization.*** [XS emphasis]

(Mutational load is, of course, genomic entropy — and the kind of 'Social Darwinian' or eugenicist mechanisms that might dissipate it are all, today, strictly unthinkable.)

(Via.)

June 13, 2015

Crime Think

It doesn't get much clearer than this. Any policy decisions resulting in a reduction of mean IQ within a society are implicit choices to raise the level of criminality. If there's wriggle room on the point, this blog isn't seeing it.

The clearest takeaway from this research is that low intelligence is a strong and consistent correlate of criminal offending. For example, the risk of acquiring a felony conviction by age 21 is nearly four times (3.6) higher among those in the three lowest categories (1–3) of total intelligence as compared to those scoring in the top three categories (7–9). We observed differences of similar magnitude across each indicator of criminal offending and regardless of the measure of intelligence.

(Via.)

June 25, 2015

No-Brainer

"Getting rid of your brain sounds like a bad idea."

It says a lot about the cosmos that evolution seems to disagree.

The oldest known fossil with a complex brain is about 520 million years old. This was a time when life became much more abundant and diverse, often referred to as the Cambrian explosion. […] Discovered in China, the animal looked like a woodlouse with claws. It seems to have had an elaborate brain-like structure consisting of a fore-, mid- and hind-brain, all of which had specialised neural circuits. […] This suggests that complex brains were in place as early as 520 million years ago. But they may not have stayed.

(Via.)

October 29, 2015

Who needs an argument?

The kind of things 19th century English geniuses believed will set your teeth chattering:

Galton feared that the English race was degenerating, declining in both mental and physical ability. (It remains a common fear; the French thought they were degenerating, too.) Like others of his day, Galton used the term 'race' loosely. He referred alternately to the English race, the white race, the human race. But overall, English eugenics was less about race than class. To Galton's mind, the filthy working poor were breeding like rabbits while the gentry were

chastely dwindling. He became convinced that unless something were done, the flower of English manhood – not excluding specimens such as his cousin and, ahem, himself – would soon vanish, swamped by a massive tide of Oliver Twists and Tiny Tims.

Thank goodness that preposterous conviction has been rigorously debunked.

November 18, 2015

Going Down

Yes, the United States is undergoing a triple-pronged dysgenic process.

The only serious questions are about speed.

May 9, 2017

CHAPTER THREE - EUGENICS AND SPECIATION

Quote notes (#71)

F. Roger Devlin reviews Gregory Clark's latest book *The Son Also Rises: Surnames and the History of Social Mobility* at *American Renaissance*:

China, which saw enormous social upheaval in the 20th century, provides yet another perspective. Under Mao, much of the country's elite was killed or exiled. The rest were subject to discrimination and excluded from the Communist Party. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao tried to turn the social scale upside down by shipping prominent people to the countryside to work in rice paddies. If political intervention can create higher social mobility, it would have done so in China.

Yet once discrimination against "class enemies" was abolished shortly after Mao's death, those with surnames characteristic of the pre-communist elite quickly began to rise again. Today, they are greatly over-represented even in the Communist Party. Those

descended from the "workers and peasants" favored under Mao have quickly seen their status erode. Recent social mobility in China has been no greater than it was under the Emperors.

Anyone who doesn't find their presuppositions shaken by Clark's work is probably not paying attention. If those out here in the NRx think it conforms neatly to their expectations that heredity is strongly determining of social outcomes — are they comfortable proceeding to evidence-based acknowledgement that socio-economic regime-type seems entirely irrelevant to the (uniformly low) level of social mobility? Clark himself draws the curve-ball conclusion: *so why not be a social democrat? It's not as if rational incentives make any difference anyway*.

(I'll be looking for the opportunity to dig into this stuff at least a little, as soon as I catch a moment.)

April 7, 2014

Chinese Eugenics

A *Shanghaiist* interview with Leta Hong Fincher wanders into ~~inspiring~~ delicate territory:

… in 2007, China's State Council came out with a very important population decision. They announced that China had a severe problem with the so-called "low quality" of the population, that it's

*going to cause problems for China in the future, in the global marketplace, that it's going to affect China's ability to compete with other nations, because the quality of the population is too low. So they made it an urgent priority to "upgrade population quality" (**tigao renkou suzhi**). And then they designated certain agencies to be the primary implementers of the goal of upgrading population quality. One of the agencies they named was the Women's Federation. And they also named the Public Security Bureau. Shortly after that population decision, the state media suddenly came out with all these Leftover Women media reports, news reports cartoons, commentaries, columns, and it was just ubiquitous.*

*And then, the Women's Federation defined the term and the Ministry of Education adopted the term **shengnü** [or 'leftover woman'] as part of its official lexicon. And it's just amazing when you look at these reports and cartoons just how little they vary. Fundamentally it's the same message, kind of reworded. It's the same theme over and over again, year after year.*

The basic message is targeting urban, educated, successful, professional women. And it shows these women as being too picky. They're too focused on their careers. They're overly ambitious. If they simply lowered their sights, and made more compromises, then they would easily find a man to marry. So it's the woman's fault that they are not getting married, that their standards are too high. And then there are a wide variety of insults hurled at these women: that

they don't like sex, that they're afraid of commitment.

And I noticed that they are evolving. The propaganda machine is evolving now to include single, divorced mothers. Just a few months ago, I noticed Xinhua News came out with something talking about how single, divorced mothers also have an obligation to go out and get married again and that they shouldn't use their children as an excuse not to get married. They also have a new category of so-called leftover women which is single female homeowners. They say that single women lull themselves into a false sense of security by buying a home of their own. In fact this is going to make it even more difficult for them to find a husband.

All of this is really tightening its hold on this group of urban, educated, professional women. And why are they focusing on these women? It's because these women have, in the view of the government, higher quality. The government has a tradition of eugenics. These educated urban women are seen as having higher quality, but these are the very women who are choosing to delay marriage because they want to pursue their educations, because they want to pursue their careers. It's a very natural thing to do and that's what women around China are doing. In South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, and even Hong Kong, women are delaying their age of first marriage and some of them are even rejecting marriage altogether.

And so the Chinese government feels this urgency, I believe, that

they need to stop this trend. They have to get these educated women to get married and have a child because they see this as the basic function of a woman. Her duty to the nation is to have a child. But they are focusing on educated women. They're not encouraging the illiterate rural woman to have children, because those women are considered to be of "low quality".

This elementary common sense is supposed to be appalling beyond comprehension, of course.

ADDED: Bernard Harcourt on Michel Foucault on Gary Becker — *Now, Foucault refers to this … specific danger around page 228 of the English translation of his lectures when he talks about eugenics, the problem of eugenics. And he says, "as soon as a society poses itself the problem of the improvement of its human capital in general," that is, once we have a theory of human capital, and once we view the important issue as being improvement of human capital, that "it is inevitable that the problem of control, screening, and improvement of the human capital of individuals … [is] called for."*

May 6, 2014

Reality Boxes

Acknowledgement of a conservation law is typically a reliable indication of realistic analysis. There's a notable example here

(embedded in an important article):

*In the past, individuals could suffer death or disability due to small genetic defects, for example in their immune systems, for which modern medicine now routinely substitutes and which welfare cushions. But even modern medicine and welfare have their limits. W.D. Hamilton stated that when the misery resulting from mutations grows too great to bear — for medical, economic or humanitarian reasons — **the load will be reduced**, either naturally or artificially — painfully through elevated rates of mortality, or painlessly through eugenics.*

[My emphasis]

The slogan *It's going to happen one way or the other* is engraved upon the gateway to the Temple of Gnon.

May 13, 2015

Ideological Speciation

It's happening.

> If this sort of assortative mating continues, Civil War II is all but guaranteed. http://t.co/BsmwZgOSwb
>
> — heartiste (@heartiste) July 22, 2014

(Bring it on.)

July 22, 2014

Hyper-Racism

While this blog generally seeks to spread dismay whenever the opportunity arises, it cannot pretend to a huge obsession with what might be described as *ordinary racism*. When perusing the thought-crimes of the mainstream racist community, it is continually afflicted by a sense of overwhelming unreality. This is not (of course), because races do not exist, or do not differ significantly, or … whatever. The most politically incorrect cognitive position on almost every point of this kind is reliably closer to reality than its more socially-convenient and comforting alternatives.

The problem with ordinary racism is its utter incomprehension of the near future. Not only will capabilities for genomic manipulation dissolve biological identity into techno-commercial processes of yet-incomprehensible radicality, but also … other things.

First, a sketch of the existing racism-antiracism contention in its commonplace or dominant form. The antiracist, or universal humanist position — when extracted from its most idiotic social-constructivist and hypocritical alt-racist expressions — amounts to a program for global genetic pooling. Cultural barriers to the Utopian

vision of a unitary 'human' gene pool, stirred with increasing ardor into homogeneous intermixture, are deplored as atavistic obstructions to the realization of a true, common humanity. Races *will not* exist once they are reduced, by practical politics and libidinal indiscriminacy, into relics of contingent historical partition. In contrast, racial identitarianism envisages a conservation of (comparative) genetic isolation, generally determined by boundaries corresponding to conspicuous phenotypic variation. It is *race realist*, in that it admits to seeing what everyone does in fact see — which is to say consistent patterns of striking, correlated, multi-dimensional variety between human populations (or sub-species). Its unrealism lies in its projections.

Gregory Cochran suggests that space colonization will inevitably function as a highly-selective genetic filter, unless extreme political intervention is taken to prevent this:

One generally assumes that space colonists, assuming that there ever are any, will be picked individuals, somewhat like existing astronauts – the best out of hordes of applicants. They'll be smarter than average, healthier than average, saner than average – and not by just a little. […] Since all these traits are significantly heritable, some highly so, we have to expect that their descendants will be different – different above the neck. They'd likely be, on average, smarter than any existing ethnic group. If a Lunar colony really took off, early colonists might account for a disproportionate fraction of

the population (just as Puritans do in the US), and the Loonies might continue to have inordinate amounts of the right stuff indefinitely.

As a scientific sort, Cochran is exploring this scenario as a potential source of compelling hereditarian *evidence* (anticipated through *thought experiment*). What, however, of the prospect itself, as the illustration of a mechanism that lends itself to theoretical generalization? One might discuss it in terms of ordinary racism, as a zone of disparate impact (which it would almost certainly be). Yet this is only to scratch at it, hazily and superficially.

The most prominent model of such a filter is found in the theory of assortative mating. Strictly speaking, the racial-preservationist culture advocated by ordinary racism is an example of assortative mating, with a criterion of genetic proximity filtering potential matches. This is not why the idea has such currency. It is assortative mating on the basis of SES that has lifted it to prominence, both because it seems unquestionably to be happening, and because the implications of its happening are extreme. (Crucially, SES is a strong proxy for IQ.)

Assortative mating tends to genetic diversification. This is neither the preserved diversity of ordinary racism, still less the idealized genetic pooling of the anti-racists, but a class-structured mechanism for population diremption, on a vector towards neo-speciation. It implies the disintegration of the human species, along largely unprecedented lines, with intrinsic hierarchical consequence. The

genetically self-filtering elite is not merely different — and becoming ever more different — it is explicitly *superior* according to the established criteria that allocate social status. Analogical fusion with Cochran's space colonists is scarcely avoidable. If SES-based assortative mating is taking place, humanity (and not only society) is coming apart, on an axis whose inferior pole is *refuse*. This is not anything that ordinary racism is remotely able to process. That it is a consummate nightmare for anti-racism goes without question, but it is also trans-racial, infra-racial, and hyper-racial in ways that leave 'race politics' as a gibbering ruin in its wake.

Neo-eugenic genomic manipulation capabilities, which will also be unevenly distributed by SES, will certainly intensify the trend to speciation, rather than ameliorating it. On the sweetness-and-light side, racists and anti-racists can be expected to eventually bond in a defensive fraternity, when they recognize that traditionally-differentiated human populations are being torn asunder on an axis of variation that dwarfs all of their established concerns.

ADDED: Assortative Mating, Class, and Caste

September 29, 2014

CHAPTER FOUR - STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes

The Less-Evil Twin hasn't been on its best behavior recently. Discussing the prospects for Accelerationism (following this negative prognosis), it quite innocently suggested:

> @turingcop (A new pulse of darkside electronic music innovation would help.)
>
> — Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 27, 2014

… and it was already over the line.

> @UF_blog @turingcop why isn't there any coming out of neochina?
>
> — Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 27, 2014

> @urbanomicdotcom @turingcop Actually, my guiding theory there is hardcore racist, so I bet save it for the darkside space.
>
> — Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

['bet' should be 'best' (not 'better')]
That's where things paused for a while.

> @UF_blog @turingcop hoping for some devastating sonic counterattack to Al Qadiri's neoexoticist chinoiseries
>
> — Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

(You've heard of her, right? It's a superbly intelligent play off the *Shanzhai* idea.)

> @urbanomicdotcom @turingcop The sound of Cyber-apocalypse is going to come out of the Black Atlantic. That's just the way it is.
>
> — Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

> @UF_blog @turingcop footwork needs to turn up the dread, I guess
>
> — Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

> @urbanomicdotcom @turingcop Kind of like the Al Qadiri stuff, it's clever, but it doesn't claw its way into the brainstem and start ripping.
>
> — Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

> @UF_blog @turingcop refuse to believe nothing happening in

China (esp 'because race', o plz) Someone will be workin on sonic weirdness…

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop Because the notion of overwhelming racial patterns in compulsive rhythmo-memetics is so obviously implausible ..

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop "natural rhythm"? Omg omg omg

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop … oh come on, you know it's true. Why the hell shouldn't there be a genetic basis for this stuff?

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop … I'll stop talking about it if you're about to faint on me or something.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop i think mostly the biological sciences have abandoned the "why shouldn't there be" approach

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop lol its a good job we both know ur too smart to actually think this shit

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop I'm having trouble believing you sincerely don't see the obvious reality of it. Any reason particularly?

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop i'm reading the stuff, its not convincing me

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop concept of race thoroughly discredited?

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop Oh sure, there's no such thing as Chinese people. It's a bizarre idea cooked up by Hitler.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop wow, so reasoning! Much argument.

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop There are no people on earth I'd want to live among more than the Chinese, but the idea that they're going …

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop … to transport the world to the sonic dark side any moment now is some kind of bizarre ideological fantasy.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop not an ideological fantasy just assumption based on sheer weight of numbers and electronics

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop Is "omg omg omg" supposed to be some kind of exhibition of natural rhythm?

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop its a song from bongo bongo land

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop snark aside, dont u think, in view of massive prodtvty of hyperdub continuum,that adding chinese terminal can only +++ ?

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop Comparative advantage. People should do what they're good at.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop does that mean we gots to keep on slavin' massah?

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop … still, among 1.3 billion people, there should be some freaky statistical outliers. Finding them though …

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop i am going to make it one of my missions now. Gotta go feeding porridge to my caucasian scion.

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop You're killing me here.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop are you going to faint? It's ok I'll stop

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop dammit why does this baby refuse to eat anything but fish and chips

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop Actually, the reason to stop is to avoid the slightest risk of getting you into trouble.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop … I've got the PLA watching my back — you're stuck out there in insanityville all on your lonesome.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop so tuff

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop http://t.co/vv9pbAMCNv

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop Exactly "minimalist, ghostly electronic music" — might as well be wearing his DNA on his T-shirt.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop hmm. unfortunately, it's not

particularly good. the search continues

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop Science!

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop pwned by dna

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop http://t.co/97HNVVNpz8 lol

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop more "Electronica from Sichuan province, the band lists Pet Shop Boys among influences + has early 80s Euro sound." :(

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop Keep on busting those stereotypes.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop You should stop, really, before the bad thoughts come.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop the condescension library is the least

appealing aspect of your new personality implant

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop I'm just trying to keep you out of the ducking stool.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop tell it to 师涛

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop I realise that from over there Cornwall must seem futuristic and exotic but rly it's not that dangerous these days

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop Is the investigation continuing, or has it drawn a blank for now?

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop you're seriously treating this as an experimentum crucis for biological determinism now, right?

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop No, I'm far to deep into evidence saturation for that.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

['to' should be 'too', of course]

@UF_blog @turingcop a rabbit hole. int.style generic noisism is big: http://t.co/MeqEG1Pel0 Alice Hui worth a listen for freaky voice evac

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop A lot of that stuff is pretty interesting — but you wouldn't want to try and get people dancing to it.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop if anyone knows it must be @kodenine

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop @kodenine We already know what came out of his research expeditions.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @urbanomicdotcom @turingcop coming soon

— 9 (@kodenine) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @turingcop @kodenine def soundcloud shows 10x more imaginary shanghai sonic fictions than stuff actually

coming out of there

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@urbanomicdotcom @turingcop @kodenine [Digs into the condescension library] Why could that possibly be?

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 28, 2014

@kodenine @UF_blog @turingcop search on 'chinese footwork' mainly tabletennis tutorials #QED

— Urbanomic (@urbanomicdotcom) May 28, 2014

@UF_blog @urbanomicdotcom > http://t.co/Yvw4ORQkCA > https://t.co/kHvBRgRxSA

— Promiis mesh (@MXEXSXH) May 28, 2014

(I've no idea what secret treasures await extraction from that final tweet yet.)

May 28, 2014

Stereotypes II

Meta-stereotypes are not to be trusted. This is two years old, but recently tweet-linked by Justine Tunney, and well-worth recalling. The meat and potatoes:

… stereotypes are not inaccurate. There are many different ways to test for the accuracy of stereotypes, because there are many different types or aspects of accuracy. However, one type is quite simple — the correspondence of stereotype beliefs with criteria. If I believe 60% of adult women are over 5′ 4″ tall, and 56% voted for the Democrat in the last Presidential election, and that 35% of all adult women have college degrees, how well do my beliefs correspond to the actual probabilities? One can do this sort of thing for many different types of groups.
And lots of scientists have. And you know what they found? That stereotype accuracy — the correspondence of stereotype beliefs with criteria — is one of the largest relationships in all of social psychology. The correlations of stereotypes with criteria range from .4 to over .9, and average almost .8 for cultural stereotypes (the correlation of beliefs that are widely shared with criteria) and.5 for personal stereotypes (the correlation of one individual's stereotypes with criteria, averaged over lots of individuals). The average effect in social psychology is about .20. Stereotypes are more valid than most social psychological hypotheses.

It's not as if this is new, or in general outline even two years old. It's roughly as old as human culture, in fact. Generalization is what pragmatic intelligence is for (which means it's what intelligence in general has been kept around for). Regardless of where we find ourselves culturally right now, this is a point of common sense that

simply can't be forgotten forever.

August 27, 2014

Stereotypes III

There's an exchange in Sam Raimi's movie *Oz the Great and Powerful*, where the fake wizard, speculating on the incentives for success, says to his monkey(ish) companion and servant Finley:

"We're going to find this wicked witch. Steal her wand. I'll get that big pile of gold. And you can have a nice pile of bananas, alright?"
"Bananas. Oh, I see, because I'm a monkey? I must love bananas, right? — That is a vicious stereotype."
"You don't like bananas?"
"Of course I love bananas. I'm a monkey. Don't be ridiculous. I just don't like you saying it …"

(I seem to remember Sailer citing a similar joke at some point — probably from a more reputable source.)

September 28, 2015

Stereotypes IV

Folk Wisdom is a thing:

> Google searches about cats are negatively correlated with birth rate, across U.S. states https://t.co/p06AJsv5v7 ! pic.twitter.com/HgUmaNTV53
>
> — Neuroskeptic (@Neuro_Skeptic) February 26, 2016

February 29, 2016

CHAPTER FIVE - RACES

Racism for Beginners

Taken *on average*:

Caucasians should be ashamed of their sanctimonious moral hysteria;
(Ashkenazi) Jews should be ashamed of their susceptibility to insane ideologies;
East Asians should be ashamed of their ~~thoughtless~~ timid conformism;
South Asians should be ashamed of their *Tamas;*
Hispanics should be ashamed of their mindless populism;
Arabs should be ashamed of their inbreeding and Islam;
and Africans should be ashamed of their incompetent barbarism.

As for casual racism, there's far too much shame about that already.

(I hope that's sanctimonious enough for everyone)

ADDED: "Whole books could be filled with the unequal behavior or performances of people, or the unequal geographic settings in which whole races, nations, and civilizations have developed. Yet the

preconceptions of the political Left march on undaunted, loudly proclaiming sinister reasons why outcomes are not equal within nations or between nations."

July 4, 2013

Five Stages of HBD

Stage-1 (Denial): "What is this naziish-sounding "HBD" of which you speak? Actually, I'd rather you didn't answer that."

Stage-2 (Anger): "RAAAAAAACISSSST!!!"

Stage-3 (Bargaining): "… but even if HBD is real, it doesn't mean anything, does it? You know, comparative advantage, or postmodernism … (or something)."

Stage-4 (Depression): "Who could possibly have imagined that reality was so evil?"

Stage-5 (Acceptance): "Blank slate liberalism really has been a mountain of dishonest garbage, hasn't it? Guess it's time for it to die …"

[Thanks to Thales for the prompt]

October 21, 2013

Quote notes (#46)

Commenter 'augurae' at the TC Colloseum:

I believe these people are stupidest and most dangerous people on the planet. But it would be lying if I said I didn't share some of their ideas: for exemple, I think that if prior to, or after the second world war, we killed all the reactionaries and other fascists-friendly people, we would've prevented the situation we are in today and be way further in term of technology, medicine, economy, social and global peace…

People who prone social darwinism are the people who don't invent or change shit, except for the worse, and I mean the worse periods in humanity's History like the Middle Age or WWII. Moreover they are dangerous, racist, retrograde people who should be killed.

Liberal humanists — you have to love them.

There's a comment from me pending at TC, and I've lost patience, so here it is (one word edited):

There's absolutely no reason to think that the "HBD OMG! Auschwitz!" crowd here is receptive to logical argument, but what the hell — It goes like this:

Under the present Progressive dispensation, wherever group differences are detected in social outcomes, the dominant presupposition is that a grave social injustice has been identified.

Not many women, blacks, or hispanics to be found as programmers in Silicon Valley companies? — obvious evil at work. The solution: new bureaucratic arrangements, indoctrination sessions, intensified ideological reconstruction of the education system, anti-rightist campaigns (the beatings will continue until 'fairness' arrives). Protest any of this, and full-spectrum social destruction will be orchestrated.

HBD and its associated ideas propose — on the basis of abundant empirical evidence and theoretical understanding — that the existence of deeply ingrained group differences, both biological and cultural, actually predict disparate social outcomes. Men and women, on average, are attracted to different professions, in keeping with their natural competences. The same applies to ethnic and racial groups. It makes no more sense to see a vicious racist conspiracy in the domination of sprinting by people of African ancestry than to see the same in the preponderance of Jews, East Asians, and Caucasians among mathematics professors. If this seems implausible to you, feel free to argue about it — there are rigorous research programs dedicated to ~~researching~~ examining such realities (even under contemporary Lysenkoist conditions).

The first-order consequence of HBD, therefore, is not to start organizing the cattle trucks to death camps, but in fact to — relax. People are different. They thrive at different things. No government is capable of comprehending optimal outcomes in detail (or even broad outline). Society's spontaneous sorting mechanisms do a

pretty good job at dealing with the situation, when left alone to do so, and certainly no superior arrangement presents itself. Best of all, you don't even need to pull your jackboots on to let things work. So chill (except that's increasingly illegal).

ADDED: A link worth noting.

ADDED: Panic! (Some smart comments to the initial froth-post.)

November 25, 2013

Bell-Curve of the Apes



Another outrageous study completely overlooks the problem of stereotype threat.

Hopkins et al conclude (un-shockingly):

Finally, from an evolutionary standpoint, the results reported here suggest that genetic factors play a significant role in determining individual variation in cognitive abilities, particularly for spatial cognition and communication skills. Presumably, these

attributes would have conferred advantages to some individuals, perhaps in terms of enhanced foraging skills or increased social skills, leading to increased opportunities for access to food or mating … These individuals would have then potentially had increased survival and fitness, traits that would have become increasingly selected upon during primate evolution, as has been postulated by a number of theorists, going all the way back to Darwin …

(Thanks to Greg for the link.)

July 10, 2014

The Prussian

If you'd asked me what I think about The Prussian yesterday, I'd probably have assumed you were talking about Frederick the Great. Today I'm seeing his stuff mentioned all over the place (at least, by Bryce on Twitter, and Scott Alexander at his place). The two pieces being especially recommended share a tack (interesting) and a tone (impressive). The *Outside in* response to both is unsettled, but already uneven. At the very least, they initiate a conversation in a way that is unexpected and worthy of respect.

The highlight for me was this (to repeat the second link):

… when differences in African and Caucasian distributions of the ASPM gene that is involved in brain development, racialists jumped

to argue that this was the long looked for basis for white cognitive supremacy (Derbyshire's line). Unfortunately for them, it turned out that the variation does not affect IQ, but does affect the ability to hear tones, and is associated with a lack of tonal languages.

To be honest, this is a lot more interesting than any IQ mumbo-jumbo; that Indo-European languages ('Aryan' languages to use the term correctly, and not in the disgraceful way it was used) are non-tonal is one of the big puzzles, and may be a reason why civilization got started in these regions. This is a variant of Joseph Needham's hypothesis of why China 'got stuck' at a certain level of technology. Needham argued that the Chinese failed to make the break to the conceptual level of science that the ancient Greeks did, and part of this is to do with the concrete-level of Chinese vocabulary. By contrast, the reduced sound range and hence, reduced word range available to Indo-European languages may have played a crucial role in making that initial great breakthrough.

Has the case just been made for a clearly identifiable genetic predisposition to digitization? It sounds that way to me.

ADDED: *Theden* gets serious on the genetics of tonal language.

ADDED: A critique of the Anti-Racialist Q&A at *The Right Stuff*.

April 19, 2014

Escalation

Steve Sailer doesn't ask whether there are any two human races further apart than wolves and coyotes, because he's a nice guy.

August 16, 2014

Demography is Destiny

For a blast of sudden, icy clarity, this is worth recalling:

After decades of American Ed theorists and politicians grumbling about our low ranking on international tests, we now know that, as Steve Sailer summarized in 2010, reviewing the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) results from the previous year:

** Asian Americans outscored every Asian country, and lost out only to the city of Shanghai, China's financial capital.*

** White Americans students outperformed the national average in every one of the 37 historically white countries tested, except Finland (which is, perhaps not coincidentally, an immigration restrictionist nation where whites make up about 99 percent of the population).*

** Hispanic Americans beat all eight Latin American countries.*

** African Americans would likely have outscored any sub-Saharan country, if any had bothered to compete. The closest thing to a black*

country out of PISA's 65 participants is the fairly prosperous oil-refining Caribbean country of Trinidad and Tobago, which is roughly evenly divided between blacks and South Asians. African Americans outscored Trinidadians by 25 points.

Racially disaggregate a conundrum that has tortured progressive education reformers for over a century, and it entirely disappears. Non-discrimination is mental and cultural chaos.

April 16, 2015

Quote note (#348)

Retrieved from four years ago (by XS's favorite HBD-blogger), and still perfect in its outrageous realism:

Daniel Freedman was a professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago. For his doctoral thesis, he did adoption studies with dogs. He had noticed that different dog breeds had different personalities, and thought it would be interesting to see if personality was inborn, or if it was somehow caused by the way in which the mother raised her puppies. Totally inborn. Little beagles were irrepressibly friendly. Shetland sheepdogs were most sensitive to a loud voice or the slightest punishment. Wire-haired terriers were so tough and aggressive that Dan had to wear gloves when playing with puppies that were only three weeks old. Basenjis were

aloof and independent.
He decided to try the same thing with human infants of different breeds. Excuse me, different races. …

You'll never guess what happens next (although, actually, the readers here are almost certain to).

The dog-breed analogy is used quite often, but probably still not enough. It's pitched at the correct cladistic level, obviously. In addition, since 'labrador supremacism' sounds immediately ridiculous it should contribute to chipping a little stupidity from the race discussion.

April 4, 2017

White to Red

Guilt is basically a North-West European thing, argues Peter Frost. That would certainly explain the conspicuous abnormality of white ethnomasochism, which has a claim to be the social fact of greatest significance in the world today. There's a certain type of fanatically universalist moral argument that — even when encountered anonymously on the Internet — indicates (absolutely reliably) that one is dealing with a self-hating pale-face. When someone tells you that some incontestable principle requires self-sacrifice without reservation to the wretched global Other, the obvious melanin

deficiency almost sucks holes in the screen. None of this is seriously controversial (although more hard data would, of course, be nice).

Take one additional step, and hypothesize that the Cathedral latches onto white guilt as its sole natural territory. Much then follows. Clearly, whatever 'globalization' the Cathedral will ever achieve cannot be analogous to its domestic dominion. It is a plug that only fits the white guilt socket, so that every attempt to propagate it more widely encounters complexities. To a degree, this is initially masked by the fact that a racial revenge narrative sells well, even when its original moral axioms are entirely non-communicative. 'Post-colonialism' would therefore be expected to mark the limit of Cathedralist global contagion — a limit that has already been in large measure reached (or even exceeded). Nobody other than whites wants white guilt *for themselves*. Non-whites will, however, often be delighted that whites have white guilt, especially when this has metastasized to its self-abolitional phase, and this second reaction — under the specific conditions of 'post-colonial / anti-racist discourse' — is easily confused with the first.

If the progressivism-guilt plug-socket arrangement doesn't travel racially, than Cathedralist globalization has to fall back upon far cruder mechanisms of power — of the "Red Foreign Policy" type. The experience of the last decade suggests that, in doing so, it is no longer remotely playing to its own strengths. Democratic evangelism, at home and abroad, are two very different things. Bloody international

disorder is strongly predicted as the complement of its domestic New Jerusalem.

Just one more effort citizens, and the white race will have consummated its destiny as the cancer of human history.

December 8, 2013

White Fright

Racial fear is a complicated thing. It's worth trying to break it down, without blinking too much.

As one regresses through history, and into pre-history, the pattern of encounters between large-scale human groups of markedly distinct ancestry is modeled — with ever-greater fidelity — upon a genocidal ideal. The 'other' needs to be killed, or at the very least broken in its otherness. To butcher all males, beginning with those of military age, and then assimilate the females as breeding stock might suffice as a solution (Yahweh specifically warns the ancient Hebrews against such half-hearted measures). Anything less is sheer procrastination. When economic imperatives and high levels of civilizational confidence start to overwhelm more primordial considerations, it is possible for the suppression of other peoples to take the humanized form of social obliteration combined with mass enslavement, but such softness is a comparatively recent

phenomenon. For almost the entire period in which recognizably 'human' animals have existed on this planet, racial difference has been thought sufficient motive for extermination, with limited contact and inadequacy of socio-technical means serving as the only significant brakes upon inter-racial violence. The sole deep-historical alternative to racial oppression has been racial eradication, except where geographical separation has postponed resolution. This is the simple side of the 'race problem', but it too begins to get complicated … (we'll pick it up again after a detour).

For the moment, we need only note the archaic, subterranean ocean of racial animosity that laps upon the sunless chasms of the brain, directed by genomes sculpted by aeons of genocidal war. Call it racial terror. It's not our principal concern here.

Racial horror is something else, although it is no doubt intricately inter-connected. Horror of the very phenomenon of race — of *race as such* — is both a larger and a smaller topic. It is at once an expansive affect that finds no comfort in biological identity, and a distinctively ethno-specific syndrome. When positively elaborated, racial horror explodes into a 'Lovecraftian' cosmic revulsion directed at the situation of human intelligence by its natural inheritance. The negative expression, far more common today (among those of a very specific natural inheritance), takes the form of a blank denial that any such reality as race even exists. We are fully entitled to describe this latter development as *racial white-out*. Any *Critical Whiteness*

Studies of even minimal seriousness would concentrate upon it unrelentingly.

HBD, or human biological diversity, is evidently not reducible to racial variation. It is at least equally concerned with human sexual dimorphism, and is ultimately indistinguishable from an eventual *comparative human genomics*. When considered as a provocation, however, the translation of HBD into 'race science' or more pointedly 'scientific racism' drowns out every other dimension of meaning. What is found appalling about HBD is the insistence that race exists. It is a 'trigger' for racial horror. Social outrage, certainly, but beyond that cosmic distress, tilting into a panic without limit. HBD subtracts the promise of universal humanity, so it must — at any cost — be stopped.

Because this is no more than a preliminary blog post, I will restrict it to a single modest ambition: the refoundation of Critical Whiteness Studies on a remorselessly Neoreactionary basis. White people are odd. Some especially significant group of them, in particular, have radically broken from the archaic pattern of human racial identity, creating the modern world in consequence, and within it their ethnic identity has become a dynamic paradox. *Whiteness* is an uncontrolled historical reaction which nobody — least of all anybody from among the complementary anti-racists of Critical Whiteness Studies and White Nationalism — has begun to understand. To begin to do so, one would have to comprehend why

the essay in which Mencius Moldbug most explicitly repudiates White Nationalism is the same as the one in which he most unambiguously endorses human racial diversity. It requires an acknowledgement of difficulty, which — because it demolishes irresistibly attractive but hopelessly facile solutions on both sides — few are motivated to make.

The signature of indissoluble White difference is precisely racial horror. **HBD is uniquely horrible to White people**. Until you get that, you don't get anything.

Play with this for a while, or for more than a while (it does a huge amount of unwanted but indispensable work). To begin with:

(1) Critical Whiteness Studies, whatever its ethno-minoritarian pretensions, is all about 'acting white'. Insofar as it criticizes 'white privilege' *essentially*, it does so by reproducing an ethnically singular mode of universal reason which no other people make any sense of whatsoever, except opportunistically, and parasitically. 'Whiteness' tends to become a religious principle, exactly insofar as it lacks the recognizable characteristics of racial group dominance ("race does not exist") and sublimes into a mode of cultural reproduction which only one ethnicity, ever, has manifested. To quote Alison Bailey — tilting over into the raw psychosis of systematic 'whiteness' critique (repeated link):

In its quest for certainty, Western philosophy continues to generate what it imagines to be colorless and genderless accounts

of knowledge, reality, morality, and human nature. Perhaps this is because academic philosophy in the U.S. has been largely driven by analytic methods and the legacy of Classic Greek and European thinkers, or because philosophy departments are white social spaces where the overwhelming majority of professional philosophers are white men. In either case, it's likely that most members of the discipline have avoided racial topics because they believe that philosophical thought transcends basic cultural, racial, ethnic, and social differences, and that these differences are best addressed by historians, cultural studies scholars, literary theorists, and social scientists. The absence of color talk in philosophy is a marker of its whiteness.

Supremacist white racism goes so deep it is absolutely indistinguishable from a complete absence of racism — *quod erat demonstrandum*.

(2) White Nationalism finds itself stymied at every turn by universalism, pathological altruism, ethno-masochism — all that yucky white stuff. If only you could do White Nationalism without white people, it would sweep the planet. (Try not to understand this, I know you don't want to.) Heartiste is picking up on the pattern:

Where is this thought leading? The native stock of the West is clearly suffering from a mental sickness caused by too much outbreeding. Universalism is the religion of liberal whites, and they cleave so strongly to this secular religion that they are happy, nay

overjoyed!, to throw the borders open and bequeath their hard-won territory and culture to battalions of Third Worlders and other temperamentally distant aliens, who of course given large enough numbers will promptly, whether wittingly or consequentially, execute its destruction.

(3) All White people need is an identitarian religion. Is that not approximately the same as saying: a counter-factual history?

(4) Those wacky libertarians, with their universal schema for human emancipation that's so easily confused with a washing-powder advertisement — it's so dazzlingly white. Deny the whiteness and self-destruct in bleeding-heart abasement and open-borders insanity, or affirm it and head into post-libertarian racial perplexity.

Destiny is difficult — not least racial destiny. I don't think many people want to think about this, but I'm determined to be as awkward about it as I can … (it's probably a white thing).

ADDED: Notable race sanity from Neovictorian here and here.

March 29, 2014

Mitochondrial Eve

Without wanting to set off the usual suspects, this research into Ashkenazi ancestry is fascinating. Based on MtDNA analysis, it is evident that: "Overall, at least 80 percent of Ashkenazi maternal

ancestry comes from women indigenous to Europe, and 8 percent from the Near East, with the rest uncertain, the researchers estimate."

Jewish matrilineal cultural descent starts to look extraordinarily odd. Also, a final goodbye to Koestler's Khazar hypothesis.

(via)

October 9, 2013

On the JQ

Colin Liddell, amid an impressively cool-headed discussion of John Engelman and racial neuralgia:

Jared Taylor is trying very, very hard to avoid the Jewish question. Naturally I disagree with this, but I can understand why Taylor wishes to do so, as the Jewish Question has become a kind of lightning rod for a lot of angst and rage in our society that does not have the time, sophistication, or emotional equilibrium to attain to a more complex understanding of the challenges of modernity.

Whatever one's opinion on the JQ, it is important as the marker for a still intellectually under-developed schism, dividing the meritocratic and tribalistic strains of HBD. This blog is surreptitiously sympathetic to WN claims that it is being systematically evaded on the Right out of evasive cowardice. The

main reason for this evasion is that anti-semitic WNs tend to be over-excitable, inarticulate proles, whose commentary — to quote Liddell — is characterized by "humourless, droning, brittle outrage" if not outright splenetic abuse. (In fairness, I have to note that on the rare occasions when extreme anti-semites have visited this blog, they have been models of calm lucidity, however lop-sided in their attention.)

The *Outside in* line on the JQ is well-represented by Moldbug and Amy Chua. (They're both smarts-over-loyalty selections of exactly the kind to raise WN hackles, of course. This isn't a *bhumiputra* blog.) The slight familiarity I have with the work of Yuri Slezkine has also left a very positive impression.

It's worth taking the opportunity to link this recent post.

(Feel free to be evil, but be civil — or else.)

ADDED: Yuri Slezkine interviewed (video).

July 3, 2014

Guilt Projection

"This machine breeds fascists."

Given Jesse Benn's repulsive indulgence in self-criticism on other people's behalf, the riposte almost writes itself. It's hard to see anything in the push-back that seems uncalled for.

Just to be clear: Speaking as a self-appointed representative for people you feel free to disassociate from at will is *as annoying as hell*. It's hard for me to believe Benn is too stupid to see that, which leaves the malignant devious evil option.

If the West sees another mass outbreak of antisemitism, a plaintive "Why?" is going to look laughable. Benn's ilk are why.

(You might want the other half of the proxy-masochism cognitive dissonance machinery. This (entirely non-obnoxious piece) is also well-worth a read.)

September 2, 2015

Tough Asia

Scott Sumner has a good post on the topic, using low government spending and unemployment (a proxy for "get a job" social attitudes) as indicators. East Asian countries — China, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan — do indeed cluster at the 'hard' end. Europeans, predictably, are softies. The Anglosphere (or "immigrant") societies are intermediate.

My favorite part of the post, though, was this:

… the great Simon Leys once suggested that 5000 years of Chinese history could be divided up into two types of periods.
A. Times when the status of the Chinese masses was little better than

slaves.
B. Periods of turmoil, when the Chinese masses yearned for period A.

March 26, 2015

Chinese Trumpkins

SoBL has passed on this fascinating piece on Trump-fervor in Chinese elite opinion. It's all good. Quasi-random snippet:

The past 30 years of China's economic growth and social development began after a period of chaos [i.e., the Cultural Revolution], and there was no Enlightenment-like intellectual movement. Government officials, in order to mobilize reform, exaggerated the evils of the old benefit system as "everyone eating from one big pot," which, with the assistance of some scholars, led to an almost complete social consensus that a market economy means completely free competition. With no restraint from ethics or rules, the "law of the jungle" that the weak are prey to the strong became nearly universal in society. Amid all the worship of the strong and disdain for the weak, an atmosphere of care and equal treatment of disadvantaged groups has not formed. Therefore "political correctness," which is for the protection of vulnerable groups, basically does not exist in Chinese society, and the language of discrimination, objectification of women, and mockery of disabled

people is everywhere. […] This way of thinking is further reinforced among some Chinese elites: they succeed because they are better able to adapt to and dominate this kind of environment. In this process, they are hurt by others, they hurt others, and gradually they develop a heart of stone and a feeling of superiority — that their success is due to their own efforts and natural abilities, and the losers in competition must be those who don't work hard because they are lazy or have some other problems. Therefore, they believe in free competition and personal striving even more than ordinary people, and also feel more strongly that poor people deserve their low position, are more wary of the abuse of welfare by lazy people, and are more supportive of Trump's attacks on political correctness.

The result is a shockingly civilized civil society (in which women, conspicuously, excel), but you wouldn't get that from reading the article. Highly recommended, nevertheless.

November 22, 2016

SECTION A - CLADISTICS

CHAPTER ONE - RELIGIOUS CLADES

Cladistic Meditations

Neoreactionaries have a thing about Puritanism. Whether or not this trait is conceptually essential is a question for another time. The important point, right now, is that it serves as a *cladistic marker*. Whatever it might be that neoreaction speciates into, it bears this trait as an indication of cultural ancestry, bookmarking the root-code archive of Mencius Moldbug.

When reconstructed as an argument, the Moldbuggian clade proposes a species of ethnographic categorization on a loosely Darwinian (and strongly evolutionary) model, according to which cultural phenomena are logically nested, in tree-like fashion, revealing a pattern of descent. When considering an English Darwinian Evolutionist, who is also an example of contemporary political progressivism, Moldbug makes this mode of analysis explicit:

*My belief is that Professor Dawkins is not just a Christian atheist. He is a **Protestant atheist**. And he is not just a Protestant atheist. He is a **Calvinist atheist**. And he is not just a Calvinist atheist. He is an*

***Anglo-Calvinist atheist**. In other words, he can be also be described as a **Puritan atheist**, a **Dissenter atheist**, a **Nonconformist atheist**, an **Evangelical atheist**, etc, etc.*

This cladistic taxonomy traces Professor Dawkins' intellectual ancestry back about 400 years, to the era of the English Civil War. Except of course for the atheism theme, Professor Dawkins' kernel is a remarkable match for the Ranter, Leveller, Digger, Quaker, Fifth Monarchist, or any of the more extreme English Dissenter traditions that flourished during the Cromwellian interregnum.

If there were a Thirty-Nine Articles of neoreaction, some suitably compressed version of this cladogram would constitute the primary tenet of the creed. Among the logically most attenuated twigs of this scheme, sub-speciated to the limit of cladistic definition, is found the globally-dominant sovereign instance of advanced modernity — the Cathedral (the enemy).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the 'Puritan question' remains the core preoccupation of the neoreactionary Dark Enlightenment. This has been illustrated with consummate clarity by an article posted by J. M. Smith at *The Orthosphere*, contesting the Christian genealogy of the Cathedral, and the subsequent rejoinder by descendants of the neoreactionary clade — of varying religious persuasions — **Jim** (here), **Foseti** (here), and **Nick B. Steves** (here, here, and here). Foseti reacts with some bemusement to the polemical framing of the Smith text, because what he encounters is

an argument without disagreement:

At The Orthosphere, there's a post purporting to argue that the Cathedral was not constructed by Christians. Presumably the title was changed by someone other than the author of the text of the post, because the post ably demonstrates that Christians did in fact build the Cathedral. Indeed, the post is recommended.

Cladistic method contributes significantly to an understanding of these relationships. In particular, it is essential to grasp the logic of taxonomic naming, which perfectly corresponds to pure genealogy, and the ideal reconstruction of evolutionary relatedness. The crucial point: *A cladistic name refers to everything that is encompassed by a splitting-off, speciation, or schism*.

At the risk of superfluous explanation, it might be worth rehearsing this logic with a colloquialized biological example (using familiar rather than technical taxonomic descriptors). Paleontologists are supremely confident that amphibians evolved from bony fishes, and reptiles evolved from amphibians. This can be reformulated, without loss of information, as a cladistic series (of branchings), with bony fishes including amphibians,which in turn include reptiles. In other words, as a cladistic name, a 'bony fish' describes an initial speciating split from an ancestral clade, which — projected forwards — encompasses every subsequent speciation, in this case amphibians, and reptiles. Both amphibians and reptiles are bony fish. So are mammals, apes, and human beings. Bony fish, as

a clade, comprehends every descendant species that has bony fish ancestry, whether extinct, still existent, or still to come. Nothing that has bony fish ancestry, however distant, can ever cease to be a bony fish (whatever else it becomes, in addition). Cladistically, it is *obvious* that humans are bony fish, as well as far simpler and more primordial things.

Smith writes:

… a Great Schism rent American Protestantism in the early nineteenth century, with the sundering fissure tearing through denominations, and even congregations. Protestants on one side of the fissure called themselves "liberals," those on the other side called themselves "orthodox." … Liberal Protestantism is a new, post-Christian religion that in its early stages opportunistically spoke in a Christian idiom, but nevertheless preached a new gospel.

We have seen, however, that from a cladistic point of view, nothing arising as a schism from X ever becomes 'post-X'. There is no such thing as a post-bony-fish, a post-reptile, or a post-ape. Nor, by strict logical analogy, can there ever be such things as post-Abrahamic Monotheists, post-Christians, post-Catholics, post-Protestants, post-Puritans, or post-Progressives. It is a logical impossibility for ancestral clades to ever be evolutionarily superseded. To have Christianity as a cultural ancestor is to remain Christian forever. That is no more than terminological precision, from the cladistic-neoreactionary perspective.

Steves elucidates the same point in a closely-related vocabulary: "… there *are* atheist Catholics. Why? Because being Catholic is cultural. It is not *only* that, but it is also *at least* that." Cultures are genealogically or cladistically organized — that is the neoreacionary presupposition. (Lateral complications are not entirely inconceivable — link to a truly ghastly Wikipedia entry on an important thought: the non-treelike network. That's not for now.)

What, though, of neoreaction itself? What did it split from? Like everything else under investigation here, unless it is comprehended as a schism, it is not comprehended at all.

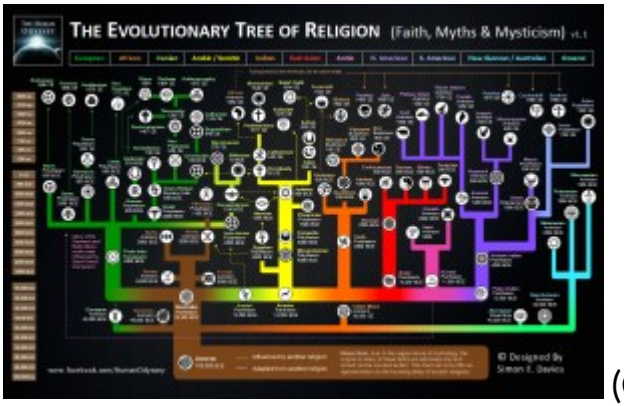
When cladistically approached, the primordial split is the ineluctable question of identity, or persistent ancestry. We can, perhaps, postpone it momentarily, but it will eventually lead us in directions that are more than a little Lovecraftian.

What was the last thing that neoreaction was submerged within, before arising, through schism? (That investigation has to await another post.)

September 4, 2013

Religious Clades

Peter A. Taylor relayed this magnificent cladogram of world religions:



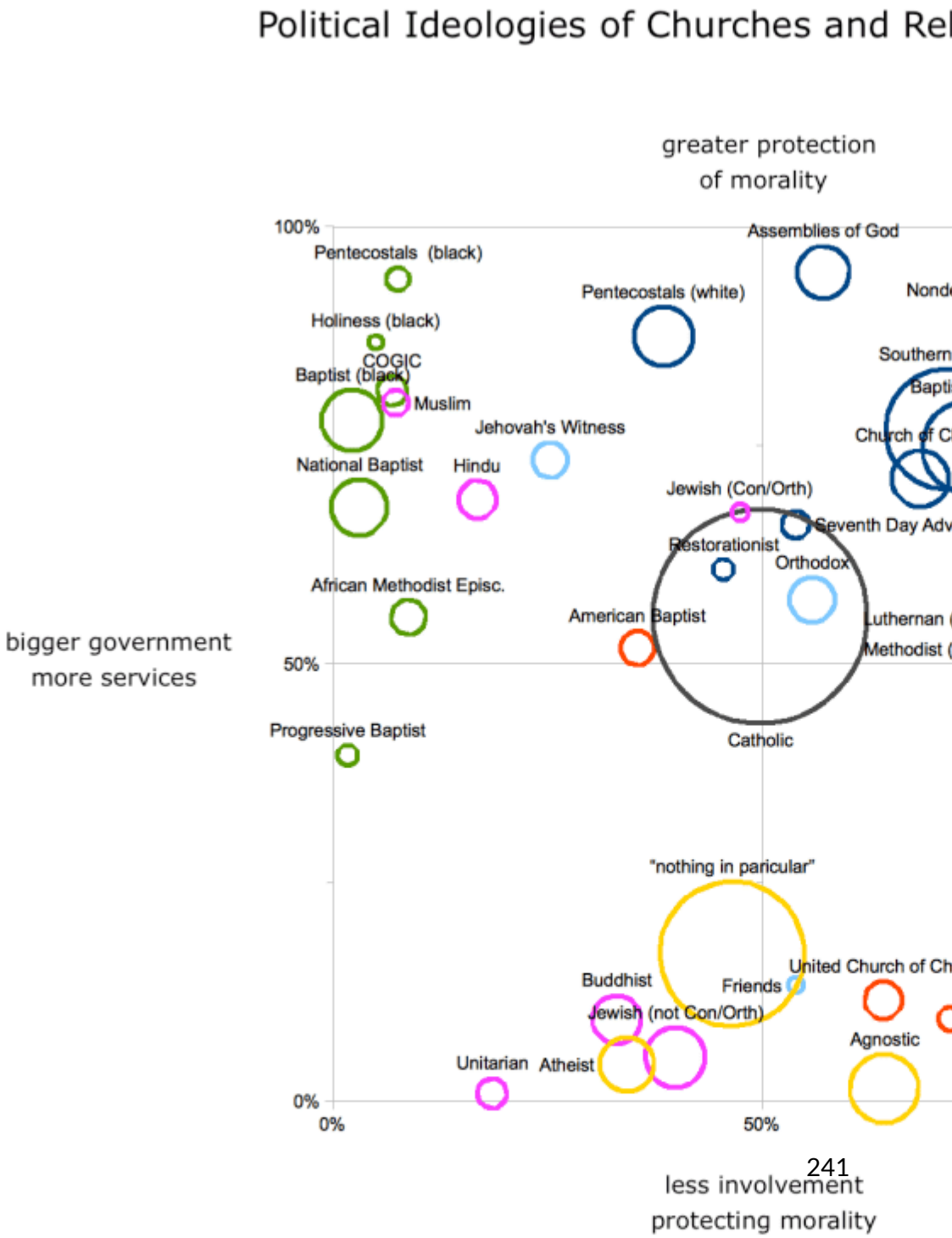
(Click on image to enlarge.)

If there's such a thing as a comprehensive cultural map of the world, it's woven on to something very like this. No opportunity to comment on it right now — but I'm confident it will spark some responses.

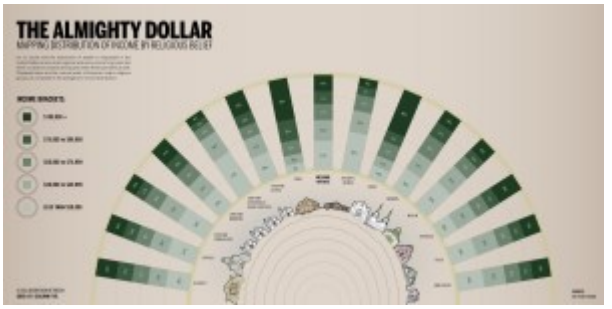
April 29, 2014

Religions and Ideologies

Tobin Grant (of the Religious News Service) charts political ideology by religious affiliation:


Political Ideologies of Churches and Rel
greater protection
of morality
bigger government
more services
less involvement
protecting morality
100%
50%
0%
0%
50%
Pentecostals (black)
Holiness (black)
COGIC
Baptist (black)
Muslim
Jehovah's Witness
National Baptist
Hindu
African Methodist Episc.
Progressive Baptist
Assemblies of God
Pentecostals (white)
Southern
Jewish (Con/Orth)
Seventh Day Adv
Restorationist
Orthodox
American Baptist
Catholic
"nothing in paricular"
Buddhist
Friends
United Church of Ch
Jewish (not Con/Orth)
Agnostic
Unitarian
Atheist

The chart is reproduced in this article, which also includes a complementary graphic (of religions and income distribution). I'm assuming visitors here are too reality-jaded to need a *ThinkProgress* trigger warning (after all, even communists can provide useful links).



(Click on image to expand)

At this stage, there's no commentary from this blog on the abundance of graphically-embedded information here (except to say that the first diagram makes the Congregationalists look highly attractive, which seems strange). It's being posted as a contextual resource for future discussion.

August 30, 2014

Goddamned

That's roughly Gregory Hood's title, for an article making the case for a return to paganism. As his point of departure, Hood examines, unflinchingly, the indications of an Occidental *desire* for enslavement or destruction by Islam. "It's a kind of ethical exhaustion

— liberal Whites are weary of the moral responsibility of existence and survival." (The diagnosis seems hideously plausible to me.)

Islam is Nature's solution. Like the Architect from ***The Matrix Reloaded****, it is Nature's way of saying that "There are levels of survival we are prepared to accept." It is stultifying, depressing, and tyrannical. It is an enemy of real culture, with the most militant variations smashing the tombs and shrines not only of other religious traditions, but of their own. Modern Wahhabism is funded by Western decadence, enabled by Western weakness, in many ways a product of Western postmodernism and self-hatred. […] And lest what I say be misunderstood, it is obviously, laughably, and comically false. It is sustained by the protective cordon it has created around criticism. Yet believing that a pedophiliac illiterate transcribed the literal word of God still makes more sense than believing all men are created equal. Islam's refusal to allow critical analysis of itself is a sign of strength, not weakness.*

Islam is the first term in Hood's tetralemma. It's the executioners blade for a civilization that has lost all cosmic purchase upon existence. A disgusting way to die, begged for by the broken, in the end (which is already) — because at least it's a way to die.

The remaining three terms entertained by Hood are the "god of our grandfathers, the White Christ upon whose image the West was built" which "is dying", faithless liberalism (including modern Christianity), and paganism. Among these options, he declares, "The

Old Gods are my own choice."

Much of this analysis — down to its grimmest conclusions — is highly compelling, even when abstracted from the flow of Hood's vigorous prose. The proposed remedy, however, is by far its weakest component.

To make a *choice* among Gods, is that not the final expression of liberalism, and therefore of degenerated Christianity? If we have learnt anything from the manifold failures of multiculturalism, it is that religious freedom is downstream of religion. 'Freedom of conscience' lies at the furthest remove from a genuinely secular conception, if any such thing is even possible. If it now seems imaginable to shop for different gods, it is because of the way a distinctive religious tradition has worked out. If political considerations seem to occupy a position of meta-religious authority, the descent has been deeper still. Choice is *internal* to religion, even if the decayed *image* of religion serves to obscure this fundamental fact. Contemporary Occidental paganism remains dissident Christianity. There is no decision that could alter that.

As Hood himself states: *The very fact that I frame this identity as a "choice" is itself proof of decadence — a vibrant metaphysics simply is and has nothing to do with a rational actor listing pros and cons. Ironically, those who profess the Old Gods are weakened because what they profess is so obviously new and a product of innovation and modernity. Few would even call it a real faith that actually*

expresses literal belief in personalized divinities. […] The new pagan cults that preach fanaticism and virility owe too much to reason and deconstruction.

A God that is not the very principle of destiny is no God at all. Are we, then, *destined* to rediscover the Old North European Gods? The impossibility of answering such a question with confident affirmation says everything necessary about it. The Old Gods manifestly failed against the challenge of the new One. There is no reason at all to suspect that this outcome has been rescinded by the subsequent calamities befalling the new faith.

Religions are providential. They are units of fate. The claims they make far exceed rational controversy or personal decision, in the abyss of their decadence no less than at the apex of their flourishing. If Christian Modernity is a process of escalating nihilism, as Nietzsche conceived it to be, it is nevertheless a road without turn-offs, that can only be followed to the end.

ADDED: Second long (italicized) quote has been grafted in, thanks to Irving (in comments below), who pointed out its clearly indispensable relevance to the topic. Just in case it is not already obvious, the Hood essay is a superbly crafted masterpiece — its quality only enhanced by its supple self-ironization. It deserves to be a landmark reference whenever this question re-arises, as it will continually do.

November 19, 2014

CHAPTER TWO - ETHNO-CULTURAL CLADES

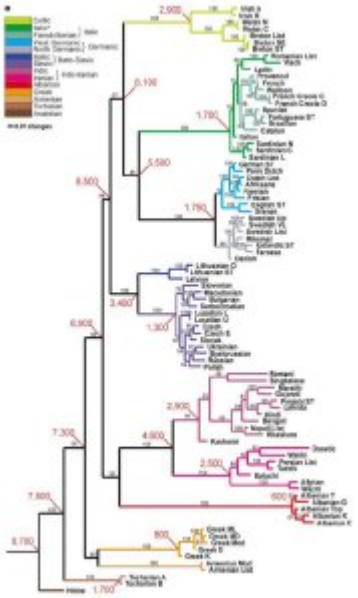
Ethno-Cladistics

The Ethno-cladistic thesis, sketchily reconstructed here from Mencius Moldbug's neoreactionary usage, proposes that **relations between cultural systems are captured by cladograms to a highly significant level of adequacy**. The limits to this thesis are set by lateral complications — interchanges and modifications that do not conform to a pattern of branching descent — and these are by no means negligible. Nevertheless, actual cultural formations are dominated by cladistic order. As a consequence, cultural theories that assume taxonomic regularity as a norm are capable of reaching potentially realistic approximations, and furthermore offer the only prospect for the rigorous organization of ethnographic phenomena.

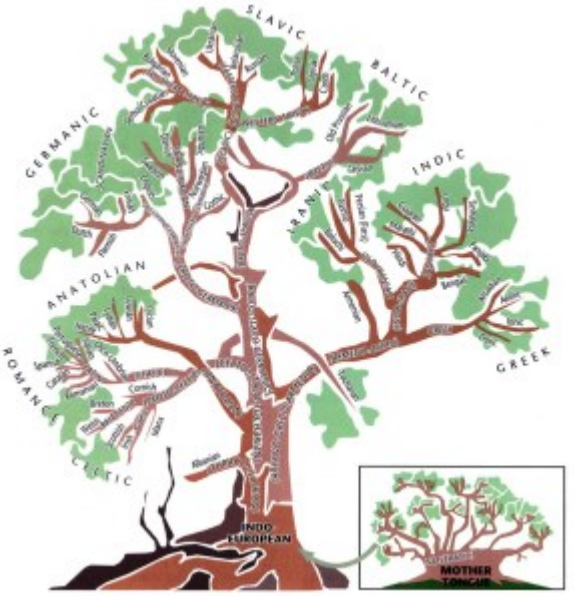
The most direct and central defense of the ethno-cladistic thesis bypasses the comparatively high-level religious systems that provide the material for Moldbug's arguments, and turn instead to the ethnographic root phenomenon: language. Languages simply *are*

cultures in their fundamentals, so that any approach applicable to them will have demonstrated its general suitability for cultural analysis.

I'd try to spin this out melodramatically, but I don't think there's really any point:



Click on images for full-size (legible) display.



It seems indisputable (to me) that lateral complications of these basic cladistic schemes are marginal. Languages are naturally grouped in branching, tree-like structures, which like those of (metazoan) biological variety are simultaneously explanatory of historical processes and morphological relatedness, because they represent evolutionary processes of successive speciation. The dominant organization is a taxonomic hierarchy, conforming to the formal language of set theory. The real events captured by these schemes are schisms, whose logical relation is that of genus to species. In the case of culture, as with biology, the manifest evolutionary development indicates the existence of some efficient hereditary mechanism (whose unit of replicated information is tagged by Moldbug, among innumerable others, as a ‘meme‘). On this

last point, it is worth noting that taxonomic biological classification, and even genetics, preceded the biochemical discovery of DNA — and was broadly confirmed, rather than disrupted, when this discovery took place. (The meme is an analogy, but not a metaphor.)

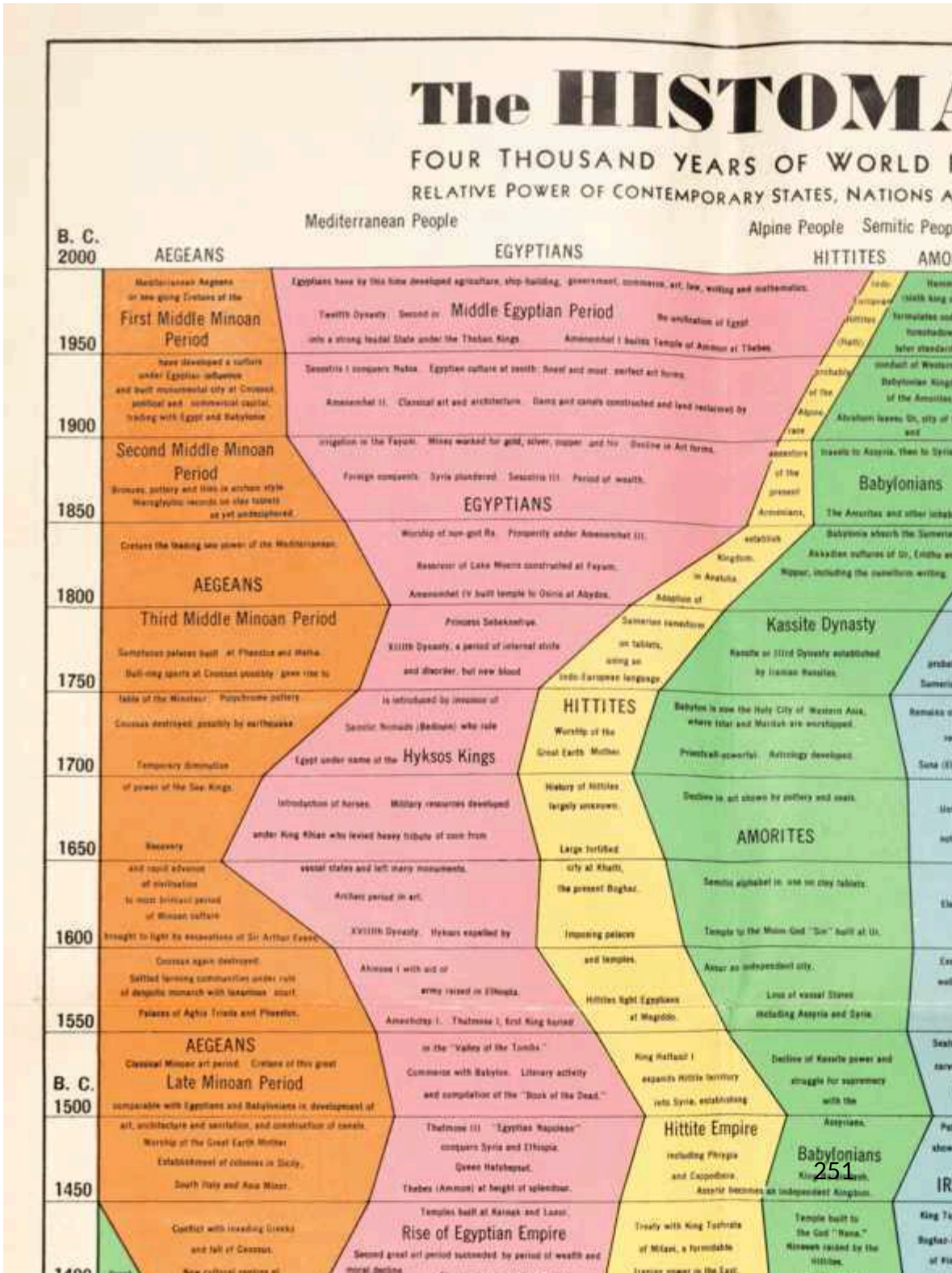
Ethno-cladistics is the schematics of cultural heritage. Despite the bulldozer assertiveness of this post, it is not designed to block methodical efforts directed at the subversion of this model. As indicated, such efforts will necessarily involve the elaboration of lateral (or 'rhizomatic') diagrams — a project of great intrinsic significance (and creative potential). Techno-commercial processes are strongly associated with lateralizations of this kind.

Culture, however, is *fundamentally heritage*, and ethno-cladistics is the theoretical response to this basic historical fact. This is already Moldbug's tacit claim, which should be uncontroversial among reactionaries of any kind. At the core of the neoreactionary endeavor is the cladogram.

September 6, 2013

Pictured Power

Couldn't resist sharing this:


The HISTOMA
FOUR THOUSAND YEARS OF WORLD
RELATIVE POWER OF CONTEMPORARY STATES, NATIONS A
Mediterranean People
Alpine People
Semitic Peop
B. C.
2000
1950
1900
1850
1800
1750
1700
1650
1600
1550
B. C.
1500
1450
AEGEANS
EGYPTIANS
HITTITES
AMO
First Middle Minoan Period
Middle Egyptian Period
Second Middle Minoan Period
EGYPTIANS
AEGEANS
Third Middle Minoan Period
HITTITES
Hyksos Kings
AMORITES
Late Minoan Period
Hittite Empire
Rise of Egyptian Empire
Babylonians
Kassite Dynasty
Babylonians

My main quibble is with the chromatics — a single color for the Anglosphere would have been helpful. More generally, a correspondence of color with language groups would have given a more intuitive picture of history's shape.

Also, China looks a little slender, no? (I wonder how 'power' is being calculated?)

July 23, 2014

European Vedism

Whilst dazzlingly ignorant about Julius Evola, I can at least partially understand the attraction his work generates for the ultra-traditionalist wing of the Outer Right. Thomas F. Bertonneau, whose essays are always worth digesting carefully, produces a typically masterful overview here.

Evola represents a significant thread of early 20th century reactionary thinking, rooted in the discoveries of historical linguistics, and the intellectual formation of an 'Indo-European' people corresponding to its deep cultural cladistics. The core phenomenon that supports the mystical-reactionary interpretation of history is the unambiguous process of crudification that afflicts the Indo-European languages, evident through the line of grammatical degeneration from Sanskrit, through Attic Greek, to

Latin, and then into the vulgar — even structurally collapsed — tongues of the modern European vernacular. Reactionary, hierarchical, and racially-inflected ideas comparable to Evola's are easily identified in the writings of Martin Heidegger, among many others. Historical linguistics appears to apprehend a large-scale ethnic totality undergoing prolonged cultural deterioration at the fundamental (grammatical) level. Once this is noted, progressivism appears as pure irony — and as a comic confirmation of decline.

Outside in, comparatively comfortable with chewed-up techno-commercial jargons and stripped-down communication protocols, is only minimally attentive to this particular 'problem of tradition' (which it registers from a position of detachment). Insofar as 'tradition' is invoked, however, it seems to be a highly significant reference — and its tendency to relapse the problem back to a Sanskritic (Vedic) origin is surely worthy of disciplined commentary. Kali Yuga makes a lot of sense.

November 2, 2013

Range Finders

A politically-incorrect short history of the Wild West. (Jim at his rough realist best.)

March 10, 2014

Thedes

The formulation of this concept was a building-block moment for NRx, but the trend in its usage has been dismally regressive. Apparently devised as a tool for the analysis of social identities, it is increasingly invoked as a rallying-cry for neo–tribalism. From the perspective of *Outside in*, it will soon become entirely toxic unless it is dramatically clarified.

Nydwracu initially employs the word 'thede' to designate the substance of group identity, "a superindividual grouping that its constituent individuals feel affiliation with and (therefore?) positive estimates of." Thedes are multiple, overlapping, sometimes concentric, and honed by antagonistic in-group/out-group determinations. They are seen as following from the understanding that "Man is a social animal." Ideological arguments disguise thede conflicts. At this level of abstraction, there is little to find objectionable.

In his essay on Natural Law, Jim writes:

Man is a rational animal, a social animal, a property owning animal, and a maker of things. He is social in the way that wolves and penguins are social, not social in the way that bees are social.

The kind of society that is right for bees, a totalitarian society, is not right for people. In the language of sociobiology, humans are social, but not eusocial. Natural law follows from the nature of men, from the kind of animal that we are. We have the right to life, liberty and property, the right to defend ourselves against those who would rob, enslave, or kill us, because of the kind of animal that we are.

Occupying a band of group integration between ants and tigers, humans have *intermediate sociality*. Even the tightest mode of human social organization is loose relative to an ant colony, and even the loosest is tight relative to a solitary feline. In human societies, neither collectivity nor individuality is ever absolute, and — even though these 'poles' are commonly exaggerated for polemical purposes — they realistically apply only to a *range of group integrations* (which is both narrow and significantly differentiated). To say that "man is a social animal" does *not* mean that collectivity is the fundamental human truth, any more than the opposite. It means that man is a creature of the middle (and the middle has a span).

Insofar as a thede corresponds to a unit of autonomous, reproducible social organization, it is a far narrower concept than the one Nydwracu outlines. A thede is an *ethnicity* if it describes a real — rather than merely conventional — unit of human population. This is, of course, to exclude a great variety of identity dimensions, including sex, sexual orientation, age, interests, star signs … as well as some of those Nydwracu mentions (musical subcultures and

philosophical schools). Generalization of 'thedes' to include all self-conscious human groupings risks diffusion into frivolous subjectivism (and subsequent re-appropriation for alternative purposes).

If the analysis of thedes begins with the recognition that man is a social animal, it is a grave error to immediately expand the scope of the concept to groups such as women, lesbians, dog-lovers, and black metal fans, since none of these correspond to biologically-relevant social groupings. If this is the way the notion is to be developed, this blog takes the first off-ramp into more biorealist territory. There are quite enough of such 'thedes' to be found already in university literature and grievance studies departments. 'Thedism' of this kind is simply intersectionality with a slight right-wing skew. It has no cladistic function, unless as degenerate metaphor.

As a reliable heuristic, only those groupings which are plausible subjects of secessionist autonomization should be considered thedes. Any group that could not imaginably be any kind of micro-nation has only intra-thedish identity. More darkly, a thede — 'properly' speaking — is necessarily a potential object of genocide. (To argue this way is to depart radically from the usage Nydwracu recommends. It is not an attempt to wrest control of the word, but only to explain why it seems so basically impaired. This post will be the last time it is mangled here.)

Rigorization of thede analysis in the direction of real ethnicities

would also require the abandonment of attempts to assimilate classes to thedes, although class identities can mask thedes, and operate as their proxies. Between New England and Appalachia there is a (real) thede difference between ethnic populations, encrusted with supplementary class characteristics. Used strictly in this way, the idea of a thede does theoretical work, and uncovers something. It exposes the subterranean ethnic war disguised by class stratification. When merely used to classify generic social identities, on the other hand, it thickens the fog, pandering to the social constructivist mentality. Tribes and classes cannot be absorbed into a single super-concept without fatal loss of meaning. It is impossible to belong to a class in anything like the same sense that one can belong to an (ethnic) thede, *unless class is a cover*. Class stratification is primarily intra-thedish and trans-thedish. It is the way a population is organized, not a population itself.

Religious difference, in contrast, are typically thedish. By far the most important example, for the internal dissensions of NRx, and for the Occident in general, is the split between Catholic and Reformed (Protestant) Christianity. There are real (autonomously reproducible) Catholic and Protestant populations, and thus true thedes. Either could be wholly exterminated without the disappearance of the other. Furthermore, the way in which 'thedishness' is comprehended varies systematically between them. On strictly technical grounds, it is tempting to counter-pose high-

integrity to low-integrity social arrangements, but that is to give away too much ammunition for free. (This is to depart into a different discussion, but one that is already overdue. (Alongside other obvious references, Nydwracu points to this))

Ethnicities correspond to real populations, and to cladistic structures. 'Thedes' as presently formulated do not. Ironically, this *denotational* haziness (super-generality) of the thede concept lends itself to usages guided by extremely concrete *connotations*, with a distinctive *Blut und Boden* flavor. Usage of the word 'identity' (at least, on the right) has exactly the same characteristics. This blog is done with the 'thede' concept unless its meaning is drastically tidied up.

Note: Where this post wanted to go, when it set off, was closer to the 'dogs vs cats' debate, or this:

Yeah there is a huge disconnect between the idea of seasteading as a platform for experimenting with various forms of governance and the reality that the vast majority of people interested in pursuing it are orthodox libertarians who see some kind of anarcho capitalist libertarianism as the inevitable winner in a 'fair fight' between political systems. I really think that a belief in libertarianism is linked to a distinctive and relatively rare neurological type, and therefore will never convince the vast majority of people who tend towards a more altruistic and collectivized morality.

It is at least conceivable that neuro-atypical hyper-individualists

could establish a micro-nation (or be exterminated). They could therefore lay claim to thedish identity, although in a strict sense — that no one wants to use.

ADDED: Since this is my last opportunity to borrow 'thede' to mean something with substantial real content (i.e. an autonomous, self-reproducing social unit), it's worth enumerating some possible thedes, to give a sense of its extension: tribes, ethnic groups (concentrically-ordered), cities, seasteads, space colonies … "What is your thede?" translates as "Who are your people?" — "Stamp collectors" shouldn't be considered a serious answer.

ADDED: Terminological tidying from Nydwracu —

> I should separate @Outsideness' redefinition of 'thede' (autonomous, self-reproducing social unit) into a new word. Ideas?
>
> — Wesley Morganston (@nydwracu) October 26, 2014

> I'm using 'phyle' for that second one. @Outsideness @chitonous
>
> — Wesley Morganston (@nydwracu) October 26, 2014

'Phyle' is good.

ADDED: Valuable consolidation (and criticism) at Nydwracu's place.

October 24, 2014

Genetic Interests

'n/a' provided a link to Frank Salter's On Genetic Interests. (Available in a variety of formats.)

That gift follows from the latest exchange on the topic, based on this Jayman post. Some (Salterian) contention from Pumpkin Person (here) and n/a (here). It's a fascinating discussion, that has divided Cochran and Harpending, which is an indication of its seriousness. Sadly — if understandably — it tends to generate massive rancor very quickly, as is evident in the tone of some of these posts. That's especially unfortunate because, heated race politics aside, there's a massive amount of philosophical substance underlying it. (Maximum coldness would certainly be appreciated here.)

A suggestive remark from Salter (p.28), on the disrupted equilibrium between 'ultimate' and 'proximate' interests (a crucial and thought-provoking distinction):

The equilibrium applying to humans has been upset in recent generations, so that we can no longer rely on subjectively designated proximate interests to serve our ultimate interest. We must rely more on science to perceive the causal links between the things we value and formulate synthetic goals based on that rational appraisal.

So (subject to correction as the argument progresses) Salter proposes an explicit, rational proxy for the 'ultimate interests' of genetic propagation, now inadequately represented by change-shocked phenotypes (and, most importantly, brains). This is a Principal-Agent problem, applied to human biology.

Here is Salter laying out his problem at greater length:

Certainly we can no longer rely on our instincts to guide us through the labyrinths of modern technological society. But there is one innate capacity we possess that, combined with one or more motivations, is capable of solving this problem. Humans are uniquely equipped with analytic intelligence, the ability to tackle novel challenges. This 'domain general' problem-solving capacity evolved because it allowed our ancestors to find solutions to novel threats that arose in the environments in which they lived. General intelligence is distinguished from 'domain specific capacities, such as face recognition and speech, specialized mental modules for solving recurring problems in the environments in which we evolved. We are flexible strategizers par excellence, able to construct our own micro environments across a great diversity of climates and ecosystems. Abstract intelligence is physiologically costly because it requires a large brain, difficult childbirth and extended childhood. Nevertheless it has been so adaptive that it distinguishes our species. It allows us to consciously assess dangers and opportunities and to devise novel solutions, or to choose a well-rehearsed routine from our extensive

repertoire to apply in a given situation. Now changed environments have effectively blinded us to large stores of our genetic interests, or to put it more accurately, for the first time situated us where we need to perceive those interests and be motivated to pursue them. This blindness is not cured by a people's economic and political power, as documented in Chapter 3, regarding the decline of Western populations. We must rely on our intelligence to adapt, not only using science to perceive our fundamental interests in the abstract but devising ways to realize these interests through proximate interests, the short-term goals of which we are aware and towards which we are motivated to act.

There's a far more general topic here than racial antagonism (without wanting to dismiss the importance of that). Putting it up here now is a test of whether it can be discussed without throwing people into a rage. If so, it could become an engaging conversation.

(Googling Moravec's concept of 'replicator usurpation' for a cite, it seems that I'm the only person who's being talking about it for over a decade. That's disappointing, because its relevance to these questions seems obvious. I'm going to need to look it up again in order to come back here with a helpful quote.)

ADDED: Gloss and critical commentary from David B. at *Gene Expression* (2005): "It is essential to understand that Salter is *not* presenting a biological theory of how people have evolved, how they will evolve in future, or why they behave in the way they do. [Note 2]

As Salter puts it himself: 'the present work is not primarily a theory of human behavior, but of interests. Rather than being a work of explanation, this is mainly an exercise in political theory dealing with what people are able to do if they want to behave adaptively (p.85)… my main goal in this chapter is not to describe how people actually behave. Rather, I explore how individuals would behave if they were attempting to preserve their genetic interests (p.257)'. Some of these remarks might suggest that Salter is merely setting out an option that people may wish to follow or not, according to their own values, but it can hardly be doubted that Salter himself positively *advocates* the pursuit of ethnic genetic interests, principally through the control of immigration. The use of such terms as 'adaptive', 'fitness', and 'ultimate interests' could in principle have a neutral biological sense, but in practice Salter uses them with an evaluative force: he regards the policies he discusses not just as possible but *desirable*. Otherwise why say that we 'need to perceive' our genetic interests and 'be motivated to pursue them'? From time to time he overtly uses the mode of recommendation rather than mere analysis, for example, 'Multiculturalism and other versions of ethnic pluralism… are types of ethnic regime that majorities should certainly avoid (p.188)… Since genetic interests are the most fundamental, liberals [sic] should support social policies that take these vital interests into account (p.250)'. And some of the language and comparisons Salter uses are strongly emotive … much of Salter's book is concerned with

immigration, and especially immigration from third-world countries to the West. In my view there are sound arguments against large-scale, uncontrolled immigration from the third-world, not least the danger of civil strife resulting from the presence of large unassimilated groups holding values and beliefs incompatible with those of the host society. But it would be unwise for people who object to uncontrolled immigration on these grounds to latch onto Salter's ideas. Whatever Salter's own motives, his theory is being taken up enthusiastically by racists (as a Google search will confirm), and anyone who follows their lead will be tainted by association. Since even by Salter's own account his theory is not a scientific thesis, but more of a political manifesto, there can be no compelling reason for non-racists to accept it."

David B.'s final point is especially relevant to some of the issues hinted at in the post here (targeted for future development): "… Salter's doctrine is profoundly *anti-eugenic*. For Salter, it is in the interest of an individual to preserve and promote the gene frequencies of his own ethnic group, whether the existing gene frequency is good, bad or indifferent, as judged by qualitative criteria. So, for example, it is in the interest of American blacks to promote their own gene frequencies against those of American whites, even if in some respects it would be better for blacks themselves to change those gene frequencies. The doctrine of genetic interests is inherently backward-looking and conservative.

In contrast, the eugenic position is that we are able to make value judgements about what characteristics are desirable (such as health, intelligence, and beauty) and undesirable (such as stupidity, mental illness, and physical disabilities) and then to take reproductive decisions based on those judgements. Of course eugenics is controversial, but many of those who might feel vaguely sympathetic to Salter's approach would also feel vaguely sympathetic to eugenics, and they should at least be aware of the conflict between them."

August 3, 2015

Fish People

Since the opportunities for XS to agree (in advance) with PZ Myers don't come along too regularly, it's worth seizing upon those that do. For anyone who thinks cladistics are important, this point is worth strongly defending:

There are multiple meanings of "fish". We can use it to refer to specific species or an extant category of animals: salmon are fish, halibut are fish, herring are fish. No one objects to that, and they all understand that if I said "humans are still salmon", that would be wrong. […] But another way the term is used is as a descriptor for a clade. A taxonomic clade is a "grouping that includes a common

ancestor and all the descendants (living and extinct) of that ancestor". […] So, for instance, humans belong to the mammalian clade, which includes mice and cats and cows. If we have transhuman, part-cyborg descendants, they will still be mammals, because, note, by definition a clade must include all the descendants of an ancestor. We're trapped! There's no way our progeny can exit the clade!

In fact, it's such a sound point, it's worth generalizing.

July 6, 2016

CHAPTER THREE - THE PURITAN QUESTION

Luciano Pellicani

Mark Warburton passed this masterpiece along (*Revolutionary Apocalypse*, by Luciano Pellicani). A couple of tiny morsels from its consistently brilliant — and eerily familiar — analysis:

With Puritanism, an absolutely new element was introduced into Western civilisation: ***(revolutionary) politics as fulfillment of God's will****, with the objective of consciously building "a new human community, that could substitute the lost Eden" and produce a prodigious "change in human nature." For centuries, politics had been conceived as a "cybernetic art" (Plato) or as a technique for the accumulation of power (Machiavelli). From the Puritan cultural revolution on, politics was conceived as a* ***soteriological practice****, dominated by an* ***eschatological tension toward the Kingdom of God on earth****, therefore as a calling, whose methodical objective was to overturn the world in order to purify it. The slogan originally used by the Taborites and the Anabaptists was revived: "Permanent warfare*

against the existing, in the name of the New World."

And:

An all-powerful state is essential for communism, since ***the total destruction of civil society*** *is the only way to destroy capitalism. By civil society we mean the "society of industry, of general competition, of freely pursued private interest, of anarchy, of natural and spiritual individuality alienated from self." But since capitalism — Lenin's definition is correct — is a phenomenon that is generated spontaneously, whenever the ideological power relaxes its watch, the effort to prevent mammon from raising its head must be permanent. It is a matter of* ***annihilation*** *that requires* ***mass terror****, since the main enemy of communism is "widespread petit bourgeois spontaneity." Thus, the "revolutionary project challenges the normal course of history." It is a huge effort to prevent humanity from moving spontaneously toward a bourgeois society. This is only achieved through permanent terror.*

If Pellicani is already being widely discussed in the reactosphere, I've missed it. My guess: he'll be considered an indispensable reference by this time next year.

January 3, 2014

Ultra-Calvinism

JayMan chips in (succinctly and lucidly) to a familiar topic (or, perhaps, two):

> A complex story, but today's SWPLs are indeed descendants of the Puritans http://t.co/EEI7hzVeFx
>
> — JayMan (@JayMan471) March 2, 2015

"New England was not swamped with immigrants because these people were particularly simpatico with the original Puritan settlers." *Post Civil War New England, no. But assortative migration has been powerful (see previous link) and continues on to this day.*

You know, your general trope of modern SWPLs not being the descendents of the Puritans doesn't actually hold water. A simple comparison of both genetic and self-reported ancestry (again aforementioned link, partially supplied by you) shows that Democratic voting Whites are only found in areas Puritans settled. British ancestry backs it up. See also The Myth of the Expanding Circle or You Can't Learn How to Be an English Vegetarian | Staffan's Personality Blog.

Now, in New England, some of that genetic British ancestry is Scottish, as opposed to English ancestry. I think we can be fairly certain the Scots aren't the ones pushing things Left.

Sure, today's SWPLs are heavily admixed with other groups in addition to their Puritan roots. And sure, small numbers of liberals are found everywhere. And sure, not all Puritan descendants vote Left (e.g., Mormons – but they have been specially selected). But today, the consistent Blue states are found only in areas which have Puritan (as well as Scandinavian, and possibly Quaker) descendants. It does limited (some, but limited) good to compare their attitudes 200-400 years ago with current ones – all groups have undergone considerable change during that time (the moral circle expanded to fill its genetic potential). You also can't blame it on the Jews because A) there's not that many of them B) their putative influence resonates with some and not others, putting us back to the original problem.

March 3, 2015

Ultra-Calvinism II

The XS Inner Council doesn't get as much time to study hardcore Ultra-Calvinist Theonomy as it would like, but Rushdoony's *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (full-text available free online) is looking truly awesome so far. A couple of early snippets:

The reality of man apart from Christ is guilt and masochism. And guilt and masochism involve an unshakeable inner slavery which

governs the total life of the non-Christian. The politics of the anti-christian will thus inescapably be ***the politics of guilt****. In the politics of guilt, man is perpetually drained in his social energy and cultural activity by his over-riding sense of guilt and his masochistic activity. He will progressively demand of the state a redemptive role. What he cannot do personally, i.e., to save himself, he demands that the state do for him, so that the state, as man enlarged, becomes the human savior of man. The politics of guilt, therefore, is not directed, as the Christian politics of liberty, to the creation of godly justice and order, but to the creation of a redeeming order, a saving state. Guilt must be projected, therefore, on all those who oppose this new order and new age. And, because the salvation is mythical, and the enslavement real, the hatred of life and of innocence grows, and with it grows the urge to mass destruction.*

[…]

In the modern state, in the name of democracy, there is the increasing pandering to guilt and to the hatred felt by the guilty for the innocent and for the successful. This then is the full triumph of the politics of guilt and its open enthronement. For the politics of guilt, the order of the day is mass destruction. […] Sentimental humanism asserts that man's basic need is ***love****, more specifically, a passive need* ***to be loved****. Thus, man is seen as a passive creature whose basic problem is not a will to evil but an absence of love, so that a positive agency must be created to supply man's needs. The*

result is the totalitarian caretaker state. Man, being passive, needs an active agency in his life, and this agency the welfare state provides.

[…]

In ***guilt*** *cultures, the individual deals directly and personally with the inner warfare. Man, burdened with a sense of guilt and unable to enjoy life, confesses his sin, as does the man in a* ***shame*** *culture, but he pleads guilty to the lesser crime. With a fine sensitivity, he dredges up minor offenses to prove the refinement of his conscience in order to escape his capital offense against God. He may trouble himself over a stolen pencil while ignoring his open or veiled warfare against God. In the United States, as the nation has departed progressively from God, it has indulged progressively in a "debunking" of its history, in a general confession of many past faults, some often imagined. The hypocrisy of such confessions is striking: by confessing the "sins" of past generations, the present scholar or generation thereby implies its own superior virtues and its innocence of those sins. By the fact of such "debunking" or confession, it confesses also, very modestly, that wisdom is now born to us and is among us, so that confession again becomes a vehicle of pride.*

[…]

What man cannot do, i.e., to cleanse himself of sin or to make atonement to God for sin, God does for man. Men, being wholly

God's creation, cannot be active towards God; his relationship is derivative and passive. Man's will is not autonomous, nor is man creative in relationship to God. Hence, since God is God, the relationship between man and God is wholly a part of the eternal decree and wholly determined by the triune God.

[…]

Today, millions of Negroes, joined by millions of slave whites, are demanding that the federal government become their slave-master and provide them with security and care. Slavery is a welfare economy; private ownership is a privately maintained welfare economy, and it is not economically a sound unit of operation. Under state ownership, slavery, a social security structure, is a welfare economy which lacks the necessity for successful operation which the private owner must maintain. The private owner must make a profit somewhere; Alexander H. Stephens made it in law and supported his slaves thereby. The slave-owning state survives instead by progressive confiscation until the nation is destroyed. […] … Slavery remains, however, a legitimate way of life, but a lower way of life. Slavery offers certain penalties as well as certain advantages. Objectively, the penalty is the surrender of liberty. Subjectively, the slave does not see the surrender of freedom as a penalty, since he desires escape from freedom. Even as a timid and fearful child dreads the dark, so does the slave mind fear liberty: it is full of the terrors of the unknown. As a result, the slave mind clings to statist or state

slavery, cradle-to-grave welfare care, as a fearful child clings to his mother. The advantage of slavery is precisely this, security in the master or in the state. Socialism is thus a slave state, created by the demands of slaves for a master.

[…]

Hell is a witness to the fact that a God of justice is on the throne of the universe. When people insist that they cannot believe in hell they are saying that they refuse to believe that justice has any right to exist. The denial of hell means that justice has been replaced by the total tolerance of evil, and this tolerance of evil is disguised as love. This doctrine of love involves a hatred of God and justice and an overt or covert love of evil.

November 12, 2015

Double Predestination

Cladistic inheritance necessitates that I begin talking about the Calvinist doctrine of Providence here (soon), despite my total cognitive depravity on the topic. I've been reading the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and around it, but inevitably as if from Mars (and as a Confucian). It has to be the case that many of the visitors here are vastly more intellectually fluent on the subject, so any anticipatory comments will be hungrily seized upon.

The fatality, as far as it is initially evident:

(1) Neoreaction, cladistically located, is a Cryptocalvinist splinter.

(2) The doctrines that placed Calvinism in H. L. Mencken's "cabinet of horrors" ("next to cannibalism"), have never been *philosophically* dissolved, whether by theological or secular argument.

(3) The moralistic dismissal of Modernity and, through association, of Protestantism, evidences an almost incomprehensibly crude conception of Providence — as if the way things have turned out was not a fatality, and in theological terms a *message* (or punishment), but rather an accident, or man-made contingency. The rigorous theology of Modernity cannot reduce to mere denunciation.

(4) Calvinism is an instrument with which to explore Catholicism, especially in respect to its implicit philosophy of history (and recourse to teleological reasoning). The 'Neo-' in Neoreaction appears to be a Calvinist mark. There are any number of influential secular explanations for the way history has tortured the Church — such that even the religious seem typically to default to them. Where does one find a radically providential account (excavating the theological meaning of Modernity)?

(5) Is not the very word 'Cathedral' in its Neoreactionary usage a complex providential sign? (Which suggests that it has far more to tell than anything either Neoreactionary writers or mere accident

put into it.)

(6) The cluster of disputes around 'predestination' (or the action of eternity upon history) is the Occidental key to the problem of time.

I'm sure there's much more …

[This helps to set the tone.]

November 30, 2013

Join the Dots

Walter Russell Mead muses on identitarian blood-letting.

First the sermon:

The eastern Congo and the African Great Lakes are remote places, and many people might wonder why Americans or the world at large should care much about what goes on there. The short answer is that the people who live there are made in God's image as much as anybody else and they are infinitely dear to him, and to remain indifferent to the suffering of people there is to fail in our clear duty to our Creator and to some degree to betray our own humanity.

Then the analysis:

While the world's intelligentsia today spends an endless amount of time "celebrating difference" and singing the praises of diversity (and we join in that chorus), diversity and difference constitute

potentially catastrophic political challenges. One thing that seems to happen with modernization is that groups of people start feeling more need to have the state and the laws reflect the values and the priorities of their own ethnic or religious communities. Identity demands to be reflected in politics.

Pre-modern and "primitive" cultures don't seem to feel this as strongly as more modern ones do, and democracies are sometimes even more chauvinistic than other forms of government as these pressures are felt. It is often populists who lead campaigns for ethnic cleansing or nationalist war. The history of Europe and the Middle East has been shaped by 150 years of sometimes genocidal wars of conquest, revenge, national liberation and religion. Tens of millions have been killed in these wars, multinational states have broken down into ethnic nation states, and millions of refugees have been forced into exile.

[…] One of the biggest questions of the 21st century is whether this destructive dynamic can be contained, or whether the demand for ethnic, cultural and/or religious homogeneity will continue to convulse world politics, drive new generations of conflict, and create millions more victims. […] … the foundations of our world are dynamite, and that the potential for new conflicts on the scale of the horrific wars of the 20th century is very much with us today.

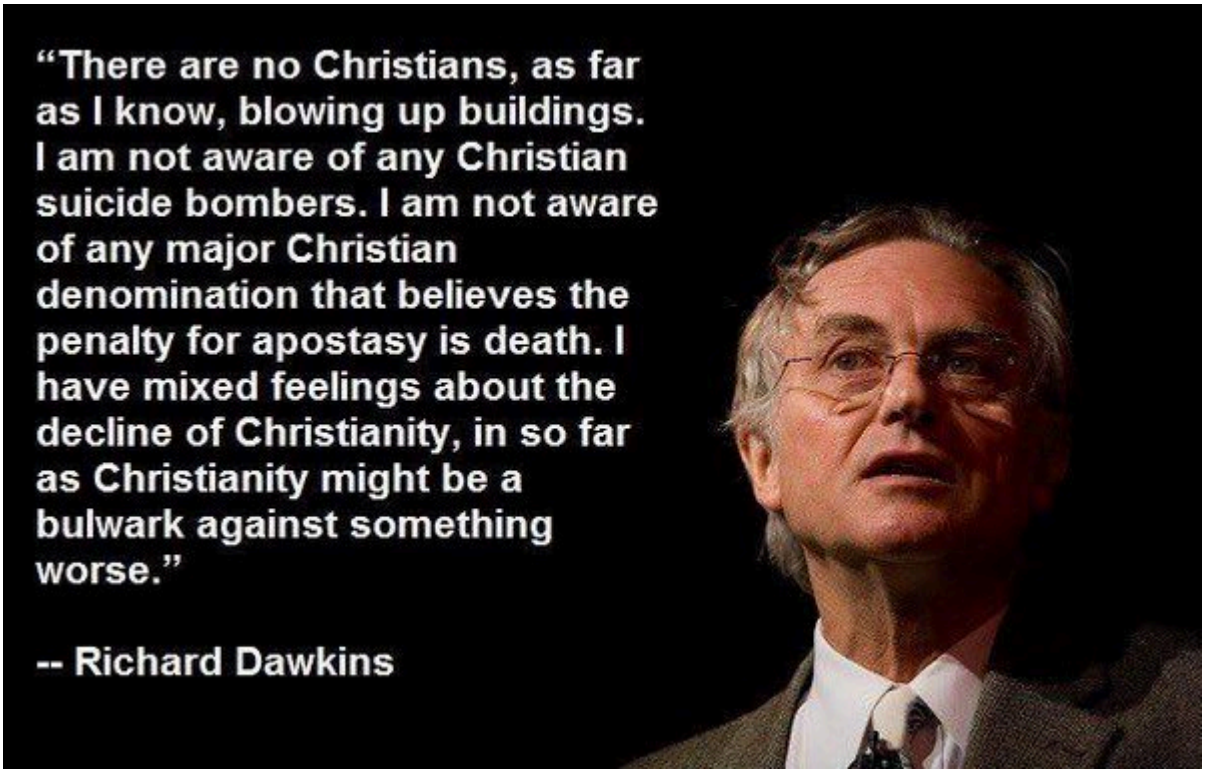
In other words: "If everyone shared my (religious) identity, we wouldn't be tilting into a century of blood and horror." Even if this

dubious argument was to be accepted at face value, ***they don't***, and ***we are***.

ADDED: "… Great State leaders take the erroneous intellectual short cut of assuming that foreigners are just human beings who think just like they do and who focus on the same priorities. … This tendency to a kind of passive, subconscious, egalitarian universalism is, of course, greatly amplified if you are actually an Egalitarian Universalist because that is effectively your official state religion …"

December 19, 2013

Progress (IV)



Facile progressivism is over.

January 12, 2016

CHAPTER FOUR - ALTERNATE PATHS

Salience Preference

> Time preference and provincialism are both special cases of salience preference.
>
> — Gate Of Heavens (@GateOfHeavens) October 31, 2014

On the assumption that most reactionary-types will want to refuse the idea of an integrated 'salience preference' — what is the counter-argument? (I'm also wondering whether ethico-political humanism — in its restrictive rather than expansive usage — can be bound into the same super-syndrome.)

November 1, 2014

Crypto-Brahmins

Poseidon Awoke has a great post up about the class characteristics of neoreaction. It's bound to generate a lot of discussion. Much of it is irresistibly persuasive. You'll want to read it.

I have a few quibbles — Vaisyas aren't 'activists' (because business isn't politics), and the Catholic slant of NRx is more complicated than this essay makes it out to be (because cladistics). These kind of qualifications aren't decisive in themselves.

The decisive reservation has to do with the social function of *code specialists*. Perhaps this tweet makes the point best:

> Prose is just code that doesn't compile. (Ignore if you're not a tech entrepreneur).
>
> — Naval Ravikant (@naval) May 30, 2014

'Silicon Valley' changes the meaning of 'Brahmin' — if we're still going to use that word. Most simply, the long-established *distinction* between literate and industrial elites loses its security in the epoch of programming, or digitization. NRx washes back from a social horizon at which the sign and its operationalization have become de-segmented, necessitating a seismic re-configuration of class identities.

The Brahmin priest caste, like the digital elite, specializes in signs, but they are signs of exhortation, rather than of intrinsic efficiency. Is not *the Cathedral* precisely a name for that apparatus of signs — (non-STEM) academia, media, bureaucracy, politics … — which cannot in principle *ever compile*? The Cathedral is a secular religion, which has to preach because it does not work.

When NRx insists upon a division within 'progress' between techno-economics (which works) and socio-politics (which decays), it opens a rift that splits the Brahmins, rather than further separating them from social inferiors. NRx, at its core, is a 'Brahmin' civil war.

June 6, 2014

Quantum Suicide

This stuff is excellent Frightday night material (a relatively old but appropriately sensationalist link). It's the *Outside in* candidate for a conceivable postmodern religion, channeling video game ontology into an off-the-cliff practice of the numinous. It has to be a better place to look than Odinist revival (which it might ultimately eat). QS fanatics would merit an argument, and better still, they'd be immunized against it.

NRx would find a lot to talk about with these folks — until they pulled the trigger. For instance: Exit. Imagine a near-future world in which political disputes were dominated by QS cults. It would be remarkably tolerant of electoral processes, whose defects would have been made a matter of indifference. Divide the social body on the issue of greatest political rancor, and submit the contest to a 'resolution' procedure with significant probabilistic input. Whoever loses terminates themselves, *in 'this' sector of the multiverse*. The

outcome, from the perspective of the QS religion, would be that branching universes acquired increasingly distinctive ideological flavors. Everyone ends up with the future they selected, in worlds pre-cleansed of dissent. Elections would be OK, but why not just roll the dice? The important thing would be the schism, and from the QS perspective, every true devotee ends up on the right side of it. *This is the future you chose* would actually always be true.

Replace elections with the flip of a coin, accompanied by mass suicidal auto-selection. On the day this becomes an articulate political program, the Quantum Suicide religion will have arrived.

February 20, 2015

Sore Losers

Following the recent publication of *Our Wound Is Not So Recent*, Alain Badiou's analysis of the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, Nick Land detects a residue of 'Frenchness' in Badiou's universalism, reconfigures the battlefield of the future, and plays devil's advocate for globalised capitalism

> [L]et's admit it: Globalization does not automatically benefit France. […] Globalization develops according to principles that correspond neither to French tradition nor to French

> culture. These principles include the ultraliberal market economy, mistrust of the state, individualism removed from the republican tradition, the inevitable reinforcement of the universal and 'indispensable' role of the United States, common law, the English language, Anglo-Saxon norms, and Protestant—more than Catholic—concepts.
>
> —Hubert Védrine, February 9, 2002[1]

To be French is to understand—with peculiar lucidity—what it is to have been defeated by modernity. The world's first modern nation, enthralled beyond all others by the call of the universal, has been cropped back to a nexus of untaken paths, over the course of two centuries. If Hubert Védrine says this more clearly than Alain Badiou, Badiou says it nevertheless. *Our Wound is Not So Recent*. The title already says almost everything. To anticipate: '…our wound comes from the historical defeat of communism.'

Compared to this primary, chronic and, by now, *essential* misfortune, occasional disasters are mere accidents. The recent massacre in Paris by soldiers of Jihad provides an unusually dramatic (or 'particularly spectacular') instance. Yet, despite its colorful, richly affective character, the disturbance of state security represented by the slaughter of a few score Parisians is a minor affair, when compared to the conquest of modernity itself—and thus the world—by a far more ominous adversary. Whatever philosophical

dignity is to be found in reflection upon the November 13 incident lies in its cognitive adoption as a relay, leading back to the main story, 'the triumph of globalised capitalism'.

It is understandable, therefore, that the elegance of Badiou's presentation is unable to fully conceal its structural irritability. 'We' have been *distracted*, which is how adults understand 'terror'. It is a distraction of 'thought' that has occurred here, Badiou insists, and thus an annoyance, in multiple senses, including that of simple condescension. As befits a member of the socio-cultural elite, Badiou's response takes the form of a thoughtful meta-irritation—an irritability directed at irritation as such. This is an anti-empirical reflex and therefore, in some definite way, 'French'—but we will get to that soon enough. Those scores of dead youngsters strewn across Paris demand some affective acknowledgement, which is undignified (and annoying). Far more significantly, the atrocity upsets people. It is—precisely as intended by the perpetrators, and also in the most neutral sense of the word—*exciting*. The public response it elicits is not only philosophically useless, but positively deleterious to the work of the universal. 'So, to counter these risks, I think that we must manage to think what has happened.'

> We have a duty to philosophy—which is to say, to our only credible model of nobility—*to be cold*. Emotional spasms in response to blood spatter would be unbecoming.

I think so, too. We have a duty to philosophy—which is to say, to our only credible model of nobility—*to be cold*. Emotional spasms in response to blood spatter would be unbecoming. It would also be an integral contribution to the achievement of 'fascist' terror. Worst of all, it distracts. Terror excites identity, by concentrating it, and packaging it in a false simplicity. Badiou is not concerned to disguise the fact that, for the European Left, in particular, 'identity' is the true terror.

There are, however, other distractions—for 'us'. When Badiou proclaims that '*Our* wound is not so recent', we are compelled to ask: How far does this collective pronoun extend? A response to this question could be prolonged without definite limit. Everything we might want to say ultimately folds into it, 'identity' most obviously. Whatever meaning 'communism' could have belongs here, as 'we' reach outwards to the periphery of the universal, and thus (conceivably) to the end of philosophy. 'Frenchness' is, in some complex way, involved by it, among other social sets of lesser and greater obscurity. This 'we' is the whole, even as it is hidden in the margin. It is also strategically non-negotiable. (Nobody asks 'who?'—as Badiou knows they will not.) Smuggled into grammar, it says everything of ultimate consequence in advance of any possible rejoinder, framing subsequent controversy in its terms. A sovereign or transcendental antagonism—settled securely beyond discussion—thus announces itself, in a whisper.

In comparable fashion, then, *we* can only propose another 'us' outside it. As already promised, the detail—if only a little—will soon follow. For the moment, it need only be noted that 'their' identity cannot be assumed to be 'ours', any more than we share their problems, their successes, or their defeats. The pronoun is scrambled, torn apart. We are not 'wounded' by what hurts them, unless accidentally, and by the failure of their collective project least of all. Whatever malice might appear in these words strikes us as sheer retaliation. This is only to say that Badiou's 'we' was already a project of mobilization and a declaration of war, if only as a recollection, and a gesture of defiance. The haze that surrounds 'us' is the fog of war. No one can be sincerely *shocked* by that. (We are not children.) Our conflict is not so recent.

> The stakes, on both sides, are absolute. There is—most probably—*nothing* we would not do, were it still necessary, in order to prevail against each other

'It must be seen that the objective victory of globalized capitalism is a destructive, aggressive practice,' Badiou asserts. We can only shrug, since of course, *for you* (collectively), that is simply true. Its successes are your defeats, and reciprocally. No one is being educated by any of this. We have, not so very long ago, menaced each other with thermonuclear warheads, and burnt down states still more recently.

The stakes, on both sides, are absolute. There is—most probably—*nothing* we would not do, were it still necessary, in order to prevail against each other. 'Victory', 'defeat'—these are Badiou's words, even if—for no reason at all—*war* is not, at first, although it soon will be.

Let us explicate, then, that which Badiou leaves still partially implicit. *We do not care about Islam*. No one does—at least no one we care about, but only 'fascists'. For the industrialized world, it is never more than an annoyance, and more typically a complex opportunity to be exploited, a weapon to be directed at those whose antagonism is respected. Having failed at modernity with a comprehensiveness that approaches the comedic, it has been many centuries since Islam has had any kind of serious claim upon history to lose—so 'a whole section of the global population is counted for nothing', inevitably. We can parasitize Badiou's shallowly-buried contempt without qualification: 'it's fascization that islamizes, not Islam that fascizes'. We will decide upon the way to categorize their refusal of our categorizations. Your coldness is tested by this joke.

It is not that religion is quite nothing, of course, even for Badiou, at his most French. Not *originally*, in any case. 'Religion can perfectly well act as an identitarian sauce for all of this, precisely in so far as it is a suitably anti-Western referent. But as we have seen, in the final analysis, the origin of these youths doesn't matter much, their spiritual or religious origin, as they say, and so on.' (It 'is counted

for nothing'.) 'What counts is the choice they have made about their frustration' (we decide). 'And they will rally to the mixture of corruption and sacrificial and criminal heroism because of the subjectivity that is theirs, not because of their Islamic conviction. What is more, we have been able to see that, in most cases, islamization is terminal rather than inaugural.' Nihilistic individuals, seduced into 'fascism', articulating their motivations in words that count for nothing, pathetic existentialist communists with false consciousness, malicious punks…if there are some further resources of contempt that might be added to this analysis, they will not be easy to find. Which is not at all to suggest that we encounter anything problematic here, or in need of rectification.

It could easily have been some other faith that provided this 'terminus', we are expected to accept (unless the concession to 'a suitably anti-Western referent' is the clue to a more persuasive—and decorously unspoken—claim). All right, we accept. For the sake of moving forward, we accept it, despite the extraordinary deformation of historical evidence required to do so. Let us pretend that our Jihadi 'fascists' are only randomly differentiated from Buddhists or Confucians, in order to proceed to the identities that more immediately concern us.

Those dead Parisian youngsters cannot be 'counted for nothing' quite so easily. They would have certainly done some capitalism, even despite themselves, and also – being young and French—quite

probably some communism, in addition, so they matter to 'us', at least a little. The young Jihadi 'fascists' who slaughtered them, in contrast—with nothing to make but a distraction—are nothing at all, to either of us. That saddens Badiou, rhetorically, and tactically. 'Their own life did not count. And since their own lives did not count, the lives of others meant nothing to them either.' *Look what globalized capitalism did to them*. Perhaps we should turn our attention to this far more serious, historically-productive monstrosity, before we upset people—gratuitously—with our unfathomable *and entirely mutual* indifference.

> Let's recapitulate. We have a contemporary world structure dominated by the triumph of globalised capitalism. We have a strategic weakening of states, and even an ongoing process of the capitalist withering away of states. And thirdly, we have new practices of imperialism that tolerate, and even encourage in certain circumstances, the butchering and the annihilation of states.

The main story of recent times has been 'the liberation of liberalism'—the freeing of capitalism—Badiou insists. (His preferred identity lies in insisting this.)

> To succumb to excitement about the empiricity of 'Capitalist globalization', in its scandalous singularity, is to thrill to its

vast annoyance, rather than its universal disaster

This *Thing*—the Great Foe—is not devoid of identity, however embarrassing it may be to explicitly acknowledge that fact (i.e. its factuality as such). To succumb to excitement about the empiricity of 'Capitalist globalization', in its scandalous singularity, is to thrill to its vast annoyance, rather than its universal disaster. Yet it is, *as everyone clearly recognizes*, an Anglophone global affliction that disturbs 'us', and an Anglophone ideological negligence that has 'counted for nothing' those without any productive part to play in its expansion. The *major* enemy is Anglophone, Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-American—'Anglo-Jewish', it will inevitably be said, if not by Badiou then by innumerable others, including especially the Islamic 'fascists' whose sensitivities refuse to be dulled on the point. It is, in any case, the positive ethnic constituency primarily identified with 'the liberation of liberalism' when this is acknowledged with coarse realism. No one gets to see how *peculiar* this thing is from nowhere. Its critics, we can confidently—if indelicately—speculate, have been concretely offended. They have been 'wounded'—and not *only* so very recently.

Of course, there could be nothing more *gauche* than to articulate ideological criticism in the voice of national resentment. From the perspective of philosophy, to speak in the name of *any* positive identity—even one far more fashionable than the nation and its

associated ethnic categories—is a simple disgrace. Selected identities might be exalted from a distance, in approximate proportion to their transgressive or victimological status, but every elite intellectual understands profoundly—if often only implicitly—that ontic definition is *dirt*.

Badiou is fastidious, therefore, in avoiding all temptation to self-identification in less than universal terms. His 'discursive position' depends upon his identity as a proud communist, who merely happens to be French. There is a cost to be paid for this, in honesty—or realism—first of all. A necrotic collectivist utopianism does not constitute a plausible site of enunciation, and no one believes that it does. It is perhaps for this reason that Badiou refrains from quite closing the door onto a certain nuanced 'patriotism', even if his catastrophist narrative demands that it is held ajar only in a mode of nostalgia (and one that is not wholly devoid of bitterness). What France *was*, as a revolutionary power, is still affirmed, in a tone at once tragic and philosophical, drawing the requisite quantum of detachment from both:

> France, what is singular about France—because if there are French values, we must ask what is singular about them—is the revolutionary tradition. Republican first of all, from the '89 revolution. And then socialist, anarchosyndicalist, communist, and finally leftist, all of this between 1789 and,

> let's say, 1976. […] But all that's over. It's over. France can no longer be represented today in any credible way as the privileged site of a revolutionary tradition. Rather, it is characterised by a singular collection of identitarian intellectuals.

The surrender of France to the identitarian vice is but part of the more comprehensive defeat. Yet the dramatic quality of Badiou's stance here should not blind us to what it evades. The French accent in what he has to say—both before and after this passage—extends far beyond his lament for the nation's withered revolutionary vocation. The ethnic identity that speaks in his words encompasses, among many other things, a specific mode of universal aspiration, a secular faith 'freed'—contemptuously—of religious trappings, and a firm confidence in the moral dignity of the State. There has only been one 'revolution' of the kind he inherits as a model, and it was French. It identified reason with revolutionary innovation—to a degree commonly found amusing beyond the Gallic cultural sphere, despite its menacing incarnation in an armed re-origination of the state, from first principles. Naturally, these 'first principles' were already a dismissal of the old religion, through their very originality, and also an exaltation of philosophy—as smelted in the flames of insurrection. They were the monsters bred from Descartes's methodically exacerbated, artificial nightmare, released by a passage through zero

(radical doubt), in which organic tradition was immolated upon the altar of the universal. They would—for instance—have decimalized time and geometry, and struggled earnestly to do so, repeatedly, without even a moment of pious reservation or residual doubt…but they failed. Modern history, from a particular but illuminating angle has been this failure, this defeat. *Our Wound is Not So Recent*.

> French identity, radically conceived, corresponds to a failed national project. Is it not, *in fact*, the supreme example of collective defeat in the modern period, and thus—concretely—of humiliation by capital?

French identity, radically conceived, corresponds to a failed national project. Is it not, *in fact*, the supreme example of collective defeat in the modern period, and thus—concretely—of humiliation by capital? It is the way the 'alternative' dies: locally, and unpersuasively, without dialectical engagement, dropping—neglected—into dilapidation. It can be inserted into a limited, yet not inconsiderable, series of identities making vehement claim to universality without provision of any effective criterion through which to establish it. When frustrated by the indifference of the outside, such objective pretentions tend to turn 'fascist' in exactly the sense Badiou employs. Their claims are shown—*demonstrably*—to be non-compelling beyond their own shrinking domain. They are ignored, so

they ‘act up’. A certain violent madness is easily spawned. Yet it is rarely more than a distraction.

> What we are suffering from is the absence, at the global scale, of a politics that would be detached entirely from the interiority of capitalism. It is the absence on the global scale of this politics that means that a young fascist appears, is created. It is not the young fascist, banditry, and religion, that create the absence of a politics of emancipation able to construct its own vision and to define its own practices. It is the absence of this politics that creates the possibility of fascism, of banditry, and of religious hallucinations.

This is Badiou’s analysis. The pin-pricks so far—and the far greater sufferings to come—result from an ethno-political defeat, in a long conflict still recalled by its stubborn survivors as a global drama of the Universal. It is a defeat that they imagine—or at least, still *claim* to imagine—might one day be undone. Who would deprive them of their old songs, and strange flags, and wounded dreams?

> The ‘liberation of liberalism’ has scarcely begun

Spite, or triumphalism, are identitarian confusions, extravagances, and also simply errors that *we* cannot afford. Our war is far less comprehensively won than theirs is lost. The adversaries that

matter—*real fascists*—have controlled the commanding heights of our societies since the New Deal. The techno-economic dispersion of power remains radically incomplete. Sino-capitalism—momentarily trembling—has yet to re-make the world. The 'liberation of liberalism' has scarcely begun. None of this is a concern for Badiou, however, or for the Islamists. It belongs to another story, and—for this is the ultimate, septically enflamed wound—as it runs forwards, ever faster, it is not remotely theirs.

1. http://www.theglobalist.com/france-and-globalization/.

2016

Rhizomes

After the counter-revolution, when the most ludicrous Lysenkoists have been cast down from power, it will be necessary to undertake a scrupulous examination of horizontal genetic transfer. Among the stream of data received from Existoon on the topic, this line of inquiry is definitely notable. The phenomenon in question is introduced well here:

Within our bodies resides a dynamic population of microbes forming a symbiotic super-organism with whom we have co-evolved.

Recent investigations indicate that these microbes majorly impact on cognitive function and fundamental behavior patterns, such as social interaction and stress management. The collective microbiome comprises a myriad of bacteria of approximately 10^14 cells, containing 100 times the number of genes of the human genome. Despite evolution of this microbiome for 500 million years, only recent advances in sequencing technology have allowed us to appreciate the full complexity of the host–microbe interrelationship. The gut microbiota is a highly developed organ of immense metabolic complexity and has approximately the same weight as the human brain. It is now clear that the gut microbiota plays a key role in the life and health of the host by protecting against pathogens, metabolizing dietary nutrients and drugs, and influencing the absorption and distribution of dietary fat. However, the influence of the microbiota extends beyond the gastrointestinal tract, playing a major role in the development and functioning of the central nervous system (CNS). Among the many substances produced by the gut microbiota are key central neurotransmitters whose influence extends beyond the enteric nervous system to the brain. [See original for references.]

Under present cultural conditions, in which the imperatives for wishful thinking — and even raw, institutionally mandated dishonesty — are so extraordinary, I doubt that significant cognitive resources can be spared from the primary task of defending basic

Darwinism against the aggressions of Cathedral religious ideology. That does not mean the rhizomatic (lateral-reticulated) model has been addressed with any detailed adequacy, but only that, in a ruined culture, its time has not yet come. Perhaps the Chinese can get on with it in the interim …

ADDED: Contagious insanity (via).

April 17, 2015

BLOCK 3 - POLITICAL THEORY

CHAPTER ONE - THE BASICS

On Power

Power is an Idea. It is exactly what it is thought to be.

Even among pre-civilized social animals, where the temptation to confuse power with *force* is strongest, the need to demonstrate force is only sporadic, and wherever force is not continuously demonstrated, power has arisen.

That is how dominance distinguishes itself from predation. On occasions, no doubt, a predator dominates its prey, convincing a struggling herbivore that *resistance is futile*, and its passage into nourishment is already, virtually, over. Even in these cases, however, a predator does not seek to install an enduring dominion. It matters not at all that its command of irresistible force be recognized beyond the moment of destruction. There is no social relationship to establish.

Even the most rudimentary society requires something more. The economy of force has to be institutionalized, and power — perfectly coincident with the Idea of power — is born. When power is tested, driven to resort to force, or regress to it, the idea has already slipped,

its weakness exposed.

Mere dominance has to regularly re-assert itself, rebuilding itself out of force. Under civilized conditions, in contrast, power is exempted from the test of force, and thus realizes itself consummately. It becomes magic and religion, perfectly identified with its apprehension, as a radiant assumption.

Power is thus profoundly paradoxical. Its truth is inextricable from a derealization, so that when it is practically interrogated, by forces determined to excavate its reality, it tends to nothing.

Even the force that power calls upon, when pressed to demonstrate or realize itself, has to be spell-bound to its idea. Will the generals obey? Will the soldiers shoot? It is power, and not force, that decides. No surprise, therefore, that power can evaporate like the snow-slopes of a volcano, as if instantaneously, when an eruption of force is scarcely more than a rumble. Power is the eruption *not happening*, far more than the eruption being contained. (Equally, anarchy is the question of power being practically posed, before it is any kind of 'solution'.)

To conceive economic power as wealth, is to misconstrue it as (rationalized) force, and thus to miss the Idea. 'True' economic power is a thoroughly derealized yet authoritative standard and store of value, as instantiated — exclusively — in fiat currency. Monetary signs that are not backed by anything beyond the 'credit' (or credibility) of the State are the tokens of pure, supremely idealized

power in its economic form. They symbolize the effective — because untested — suppression of anarchy. They live through the Idea, and die with it.

Those who recognize the completion of power in an Idea, celebrants and antagonists alike, have no reason to object to its belated baptism as *the Cathedral*: our contemporary political appropriation of numinous authority, served by an academic, journalistic, judicial, and administrative clerisy, prominently including the priesthood of fiat adoration and financial central planning. There is no macroeconomics that is not Cathedral liturgy, no confidence or 'animal spirits' independent of its devotions, no economic cataclysm that is not simultaneously a crisis of faith. A single Idea is at stake.

In macroeconomics, as in politics more generally, only one (systematically inhibited) question remains: *Do we believe?* Well, do we?

ADDED: Belief drain (via)

April 25, 2013

On Chaos

Turbulence is nonlinear dynamism, so remarking upon it very quickly becomes reflexive. In any conflict, an emergent meta-conflict divides

those who embrace and reject the conflict *as such*, and 'meta' is in reality reflexivity, partially apprehended. So ignore the sides of the war, momentarily. What about war?

Moldbug really doesn't like it. The closest he ever comes to a wholly-arbitrary axiom — comparable, at least superficially, to the libertarian Non-Aggression Principle — is exhibited in this context. Following some preliminary remarks, his first exposition of the formalist ideology begins: "The basic idea of formalism is just that the main problem in human affairs is violence." As with Hobbes, the horror of war is the foundation of political philosophy.

This is by no means a trivial decision. With avoidance of war identified as the fundamental principle of political order, an ultimate criterion of (secular) value is erected, in simultaneity with a framework of genetic and structural explanation. Good government is defined as an effective process of pacification, attaining successively more highly-tranquilized levels (and stages) of order:

... there are four levels of sovereign security. These are peace, order, law, and freedom. Once you have each one, you can work on the next. But it makes no sense to speak of order without peace, law without order, or freedom without law.

Peace is simply the absence of war. The Dictator's first goal is to achieve peace, preferably honorably and with victory. There is no telling what wars New California will be embroiled in at the time of its birth, so I will decline to discuss the matter further. But in war, of

course, there is no order; war is pure chaos. Thus we see our first rule of hierarchy.

In this model order and chaos are strictly reciprocal. Suppression of chaos and establishment of order are alternative, interchangeable formulations of the same basic political reality. There is no productivity proper to government other than the 'good war' directed against the Cthulhu-current of chaos, violence, conflict, turmoil, and inarticulate anarchy.

No surprise, then, that widespread dismay results from outbreaks of conflict across the digital tracts of neoreaction. How could any Moldbug sympathizer — or other right-oriented observer — not recognize in these skirmishes the signs of anarcho-chaotic disturbance, as if the diseased tentacles of Cthulhu were insinuated abominably into the refuge of well-ordered sociability? Beyond the protagonists themselves, such scraps trigger a near-universal clamor for immediate and unconditional peace: Forget about who is right and who wrong, *the conflict itself is wrong*.

I don't think so.

Entropy is toxic, but *entropy production is roughly synonymous with intelligence*. A dynamically innovative order, of any kind, does not suppress the production of entropy — it instantiates an efficient mechanism for entropy dissipation. Any quasi-Darwinian system — i.e. any machinery that actually works — is nourished by chaos, exactly insofar as it is able to rid itself of failed experiments. The

techno-commercial critique of democratized modernity is not that too much chaos is tolerated, but that not enough is able to be shed. The problem with bad government, which is to say with *defective mechanisms of selection*, is an inability to follow Cthulhu far enough. It is from turbulence that all things come.

The question *Outside in* would pose to NRx is not 'how can we suppress chaos?' but rather 'how can we learn to tolerate chaos at a far higher intensity?' Dynamic order is not built deliberately upon a foundation of amicable fraternity. It emerges spontaneously as a consequence of effective entropy-dissipation functions. The primary requirement is *sorting*.

To *sort ourselves out* takes a chronic undertow of war and chaos. Initially, this will be provided by the soft and peripheral shadow-fights we have already seen, but eventually NRx will be strong enough to thrive upon cataclysms — or it will die. The harsh machinery of Gnon wins either way.

Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn.

ADDED: Highly on point (with even a smidgen of Hobbes).

April 25, 2014

Politics

Following a typical HBD Bibliography twitter intervention

(paraphrased: “educate yourself”), a professor of Global Liberal Studies turned up to engage in activity that can be technically described as “hooting”. The pattern of symbolic behavior that then manifested cannot, of course, be reduced to the expectations of primatology. If it seems like an entirely predictable assertion of dominance, as found among all the great apes, something is surely being missed. That at least is the claim now being made (decorated by a little immediate status signaling):

> @Outsideness @HBDBibliography Author thinks you don't understand article. Doesn't deny variation (I teach 19th c. history of science btw).
>
> — Michael Rectenwald (@drrectenwald) September 24, 2014

> @Outsideness @HBDBibliography Most likely you're reducing the political to the biological, a typical kind of reductionism but also mistaken.
>
> — Michael Rectenwald (@drrectenwald) September 24, 2014

The error of mistaking this expert hooting for the first step in an argument was too tempting to resist. After all, if a professor of Global Liberal Studies deigns to teach you about the limits of possible biological understanding, it is only polite to listen attentively.

Unfortunately, certain monkey juices were triggered by the chest-thumping of GLS-prof., and I descended quickly into obstreperousness:

> @drrectenwald @HBDBibliography Politics has emergent principles (game theory), but it's as reducible to biology as bio is to chemistry.
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) September 24, 2014

> @drrectenwald @HBDBibliography … Whenever a supervenient level seems 'irreducible' it's because our substrate theory is too crude.
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) September 24, 2014

Uh oh, look what's happening now — it's ~~gibbering monkey business~~ political dialectic. GLS-prof. isn't being even nominally respected, there's nothing remotely like a "please mount my butt you hairy master" moment taking place, and it's not hard to see that GLS-p. isn't getting enough of those from anywhere, so he's kind of desperate for a random dopamine hit. Time to really make it clear that politics transcends biology, and anybody who thinks the contrary better bend over quickly for a piece of hierarchically-clarifying ass-punishment:

> @Outsideness @HBDBibliography OK Kurzweil, or is it E.O.

> Wilson you're mimicking? I suppose there's a "D" gene for Democrat, and an "R" …
>
> — Michael Rectenwald (@drrectenwald) September 24, 2014

Translation: *So which serious ~~alpha monkey like me~~ person owns you as their bitch? Politics is nothing like primate dominance. Dumbass.*

> @drrectenwald @HBDBibliography You're right, what does an idiot like E.O. Wilson know about Global Liberal Studies?
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) September 24, 2014

Translation: *[*sarcastic counter-hoot*]*

> @Outsideness @HBDBibliography Wilson is brilliant. But I don't need *you* to tell me what he and others like him think. Presumptuous much?
>
> — Michael Rectenwald (@drrectenwald) September 24, 2014

Translation: *My buddy PROFESSOR Wilson wouldn't even use you as a doormat — so why am I even talking to you, impertinent gamma wretch? It's distracting me from serious politics and stuff.*

There has to be some ~~chimpanzee ass-play~~ politics that isn't quite

this disgustingly stupid, but I'm guessing — not a lot.

Note: "Michael Rectenwald is professor in Global Liberal Studies at New York University. He is the author of numerous essays and six books." He is widely respected by his peers in the field.

ADDED: After posting this I worried a little that it was too harsh. The guy was probably just having a bad day. After all, no one "paid to write and think" by a (somewhat) prestigious university could possibly engage in these self-parodying dominance chimp-outs on a regular basis, surely? Ooops:

> @AlbertKropp @HBDBibliography @ad_bestias @Outsideness None of you are worthy to wipe my ass, let alone sit in my class.
>
> — Michael Rectenwald (@drrectenwald) September 26, 2014

September 24, 2014

Order and Value

A piece of machinery that reduces (local) disorder has value. It might be a functional police force, a catallactic economic arrangement, or a sociopolitical mechanism implementing dynamic geography (or

Patchwork, 1, 2, 3, 4). Others might be listed. Any complex adaptive system works like this (until it ceases working). Since Schrödinger, it has been taken as an abstract definition of life. In certain strands of philosophy, it has also been taken as the complete, rigorous meaning of a *machine* (as counterposed to a 'gadget' – which works only within a larger machinic assemblage). Only by exporting entropy does anything of even minimal complexity get to continue its existence. The production of order is functionality in its most elevated, teleological sense.

A piece of rhetoric which merely celebrates order, as something nice to have, is worth nothing in itself. "We want order" is the "give us free stuff" slogan of intellectually degenerated reaction. When examined closely, it is indistinguishable from political pan-handling. (Democracy has taught everyone how to beg.) It is unlikely that even the most radically degraded libertarian would be shameless enough to consider "wealth is good, poverty is bad" anything more than an expression of sub-comic emotional incontinence. "Order is good, chaos is bad" is a slogan of exactly equivalent merit. "We want order" is just "we want money" at a superior level of generality. Monkeys want peanuts, but we are reluctant to dignify their hungry hooting with the label 'political philosophy'.

Entropy dissipation is a *problem*. It might quite reasonably be considered *the* problem. Any serious social theory is respected insofar as it elicits the question: *So how is entropy dissipated?* The

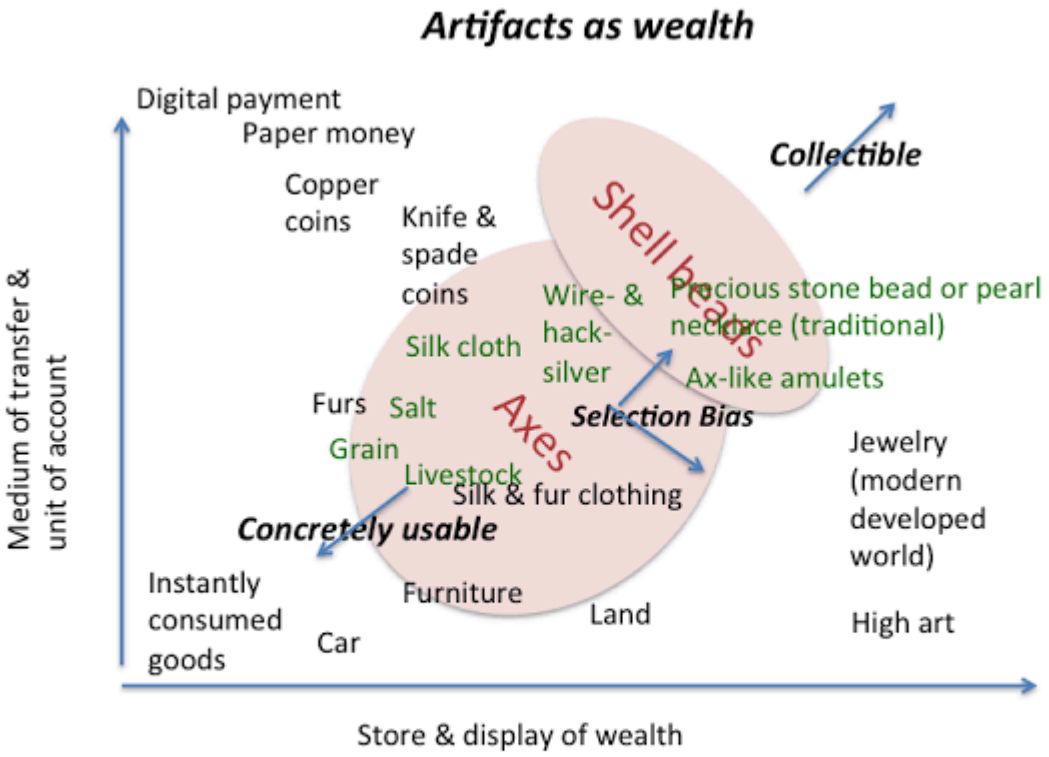
main current of Anglophone intellectual culture focuses tightly upon it, in a broad lineage from Newtonian mechanics, the Scottish Enlightenment, the science of heat, classical economics, and Darwinian naturalism, into theories of complexity, distributed systems, dynamic networks, and productive multiplicities. *Spontaneous order* is the consistent topic. 'Spontaneous' means only: *Does not presuppose that which it is tasked with explaining*. If the genesis of order is not being theorized, order is merely being assumed, and then consumed. The difference is between a supply side problematic ("how is order practically produced?") and an empty demand ("we want more order"). The former is *industrial*, the latter simply tyrannical, when it is anything at all beside vacuous noise.

Unless a pol-econ. theory can contribute to an explanation of the *production of order* (dissipation of entropy), it is wasting everyone's time. "But I really *want* order" is just silliness. It's astounding that it could ever be thought otherwise.

March 7, 2016

Wealth Space

From Szabo's critically-important exploration of collectibles:



n.b. each good covers a large region on chart, with label as its centroid; particular location within region can vary substantially by culture

Concretely usable = directly or as raw material for direct concrete use

At the extreme upper left-hand corner is modern money – used purely as a medium of exchange and obligation satisfaction, and with high velocity, typically several transactions per month. The predominant such media in a culture also usually becomes its of account. At the opposite (southeast) extreme are pure stores of value – seldom if ever alienated, they usually change ownership only at death. At the northeast extreme are pure collectibles – a low-

velocity (a few to a few dozen transfers per human lifetime) medium of obligation satisfaction and exchange, but also a store and display of wealth. At the southwest extremely are immediate consumables, such as food obtained from foraging in cultures that do not preserve or store their food.

September 3, 2016

CHAPTER TWO - DISTRIBUTION, FRAGMENTATION AND TRUST

Pattern Recognition

There has been enough productive history to know what functional social systems look like, and the basic common factor is obvious. Institutions advance by *substituting for trust*.

(To the extent we still have any of these things …)

— We have market capitalism because businesspeople can't be trusted.

— We have experimental science because neither truth intuitions nor scientists can be trusted.

— We have constitutional republicanism because neither political leaders nor the citizenry can be trusted.

— We have freedom of conscience because priests can't be trusted.

— We have common law because neither legislators nor judges can be trusted.

— We have the blogosphere because the media can't be trusted.

— We have gold coins buried in the garden because bankers can't be

trusted.
— We have basements packed with semi-automatic rifles because state law enforcement can't be trusted.

Siding with intelligence *has nothing at all to* do with trusting, liking, or respecting intelligent people. It is intelligent people, typically, who run the engines of stupidity. 'Trust, but verify' is politely euphemistic, and — in truth — wholly inadequate. Distrust, and test, test, test … to destruction wherever possible.

Three theses:
(1) The robust sophistication (or design quality) of any society or social institution is inversely proportional to the the trust it demands. This is not, of course, to be confused with the trust it *earns*.
(2) In any society capable of institution building, distrust is the principal driver of innovation. Systematization and automation, in general, incarnate distrust.
(3) Productive distrust reaches its apotheosis in the Internet, which routes around everything and everybody that has ever been believed.

March 18, 2013

Quote notes (#68)

Pat Buchanan asks: *Is Europe Cracking Up?* His tour of disintegration

takes in Ukraine, France, Britain, Belgium and Spain, but …

… the most startling news on the nationalist front last week came in Venice and the Veneto region, where 89 percent of a large turnout in a non-binding referendum voted to secede from Italy and re-establish the Venetian republic that vanished in 1866.
Exulted Luca Zaia of the separatist Northern League, "The will for secession is growing very strong. We are only at the Big Bang of the movement — but revolutions are born of hunger and we are now hungry. Venice can now escape."
The proposed "Repubblica Veneta" would embrace five million inhabitants of Veneto. Should it succeed in seceding, Lombardy and Trentino would likely follow, bringing about a partition of Italy. Sardinia is also reportedly looking for an exit.

Buchanan's preferred term 'nationalism' is ambiguous in this context, since it can mean either integration or disintegration. After all, it was Italian 'nationalism' that built this self-dismantling monster. Increasingly, it's the fissile aspect — nationality as ethnic splintering and *escape* from something larger — that's driving the process. How many micro-nationalities remain as yet undiscovered?

ADDED: A (libertarian-secessionist) voice from Italy.

March 26, 2014

Wolfendale v. Urban Future

Pete Wolfendale has a version here. There were some threading issues, so this is the *Urban Future* version:

> An appropriately derisive analysis of neoreaction: http://t.co/77M0JohrMd
>
> — pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

> As I mentioned at the #accelerationism workshop yesterday: old school fascism uses capitalism as a means to nostalgic anti-modernism…
>
> — pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

> …whereas neoreactionaries propose nostalgic anti-modernism as a means to defend capitalism. If nothing else this is sillier than fascism.
>
> — pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

> @deontologistics I realize the neofeudal types make it easy for you, but this constant reversion to BDSM political dialectics …
>
> — Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

> @deontologistics … is an evasion of the real challenge: Exit over Voice. https://t.co/PswTiiCXHm

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

Modernity threatening your libertarian fantasies of free-wheeling capitalist accumulation? Why not try monarchism?
— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics Both poles of the ideological spectrum have attachments to (distinct) ideals of emancipation.
— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics … Neither will abandon them causally, however much they are derided as 'silly'.
— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

[Not “causally” but “casually”.]

@deontologistics They've been watching too much Game of Thrones basically.
— pjebleak (@pjebleak) May 24, 2014

@pjebleak It’s more like they’ve read Neil Stephenson’s Snow Crash/Diamond Age and thought: “that’s a dystopian diaspora I can get behind!”
— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak Diamond Age is a dystopia? (It's

easy to see why no meeting of minds is likely here.)

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak It does a good job of showing the difference between advancement in industrial technology and social technology.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak The human organism is highly write-protected, so 'social technology' is something of a misleading metaphor.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak The organism, yes, but hardly the social structures that are composed on top of it. Most of the write-protection there…

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak …is itself a form of social technology (e.g., Nietzschean ascetic ideals, etc.).

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak 'Social structures' are to some considerable extent hard-coded in organisms — that's what "social animal" means.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak No, 'social animal' means the capacity to interface so as to create social structures.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak There's a crucial difference between saying 'there is a structure of social structure' and inferring from this that…

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak …particular social structures are hard-wired.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak This is a Levi-Strauss argument that I don't find particularly convincing.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak The left is always going to maximally emphasize the plasticity of social forms, the right the opposite.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak … It would be deluded to assume

that such emphases will pass as uncontroversial outside their own constituency.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak It's a simple logical point. The question of how much social structure is encoded is empirical, and well, it doesn't…

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak …look to be all that much.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak It looks like a lot to me.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak To use @benedict's preferred terms, you're confusing generatively entrenched social platforms with biological codes.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Biological codes determine a highly restrictive landscape of functional social models.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict … Societies explore that landscape, at different speeds. Attractor basins usually capture them.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict Biological necessity is the last resort of scoundrels.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Your team will no doubt agree with you.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict So the tautology goes.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Over-emphasizing social plasticity is a standard utopian error.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict Yes, unless it is a call to experimentally explore a wider space of possible social technologies.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict I'm very supportive of that. As long as it's based on Dynamic Geography, with exit, and local failure.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Communist social experimentation (for e.g.), if properly localized, would be an excellent thing to see.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Reciprocal liberation to try different things out is an attractive deal (but not holding my breath).

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict You definitions of social experimentation are pretty archaic though. Fundamentally about competition…

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Competition is 'archaic'? I thought you guys believed in primitive communism.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict See next tweet. Internet glitch.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict …between geographically distinct nation states or analogs thereof. Biology is hardly that limiting.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Are you ruling out the possibility of competitive and non-competitive options, side-by-side?

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict … If so, then of course there's no possible deal to be made.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Split up. Use dynamic geography to radicalize our experiments. Quit universalizing. Is it that hard?

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict … The whole point is not having to agree. (Because we won't.)

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict Quit universalising sociologically, by universalising biologically?

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Quit universalizing in general. Let each society believe what it wants. Do your own thing.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict 'Each society' is where the biologically justified archaisms lie.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Dynamic geography would make a society a legacy of revealed preferences. No biological theory needed.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict You seem to be justifying the geopolitical war of all against all as the only legitimate form of disagreement.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict If there's a master-narrative being imposed above geo-political fragmentation itself, this won't work.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict Indeed, it’s pretty important to see that struggle between fragmented poleis is not disagreement at all.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict This 'struggle' business is coming entirely from you. Why does dynamic geography imply struggle?

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict Competition bottoms out in struggle unless limited by a competitive framework. Is DG such a framework?

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict It seems to me that we can develop better (socio-technological) frameworks for disagreement than fragmentation.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict That isn't going to happen, because the "frameworks" you like will remain massively controversial.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict Unlike GEOPOLITICAL FRAGMENTATION.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Sadly, it's going to be messy. It seems the Left won't ever tolerate anything it can't control.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict Because calling for your own personal nation state to secure your personal freedom isn't being a control freak?

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Freedom is control freakery? Anyway, at least the left logic is clear.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict Thinking that freedom is getting everything your own way is pretty much control

freakery, yes.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

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@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict A laissez-faire capitalist Phyle would rather ignore its communist neighbor than 'struggle' with it.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict And now we're back to the benefits of our preferred phylums.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict But you don't want to be there? Why?

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict If the benefits of DG depend upon the characteristics of the Phyle's you prefer then you're not really…

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict …providing an argument for DG now, are you?

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict The argument for DG is that every Phyle can do what it wants, succeed or fail, experiment.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict Including struggle with one another outside the bounds of any framework for disagreement?

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict That's as good as it's going to get. It's hardly likely that every crazed experiment will work out.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Struggle, struggle, struggle … it's exhausting. Won't your Phyle have anything better to do?

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict And we're back to Phyles rather than DG.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Use whatever language you like for a unit of geopolitical fragmentation.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict If you're arguing that human nature necessitates geopolitical fragmentation, but aren't willing to discuss…

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict …the worst possible outcomes of such fragmentation (i.e., struggle over disagreement) you seem to have a bit…

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict …of a double standard going on.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict At least it's clear what this is about. You guys want to strengthen the dialectical net. We want out.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict We both know this won't be settled by argument. It will be settled by escape

attempts, succeed or fail.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict Perhaps, but this hardly invalidates the argument, especially given the supposed importance of 'disagreement'.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict What argument? The argument that arguments have to be settled before anyone is let out of the room?

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict That IS communism. I'm seriously OK with people doing that stuff, but only if they localize it.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict The argument that anyone should be allowed to appropriate the resources necessary to build their personal ark.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict I'm OK with laissez faire capitalism on personal arks. Not so much with its use to

justify their construction.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict I'm truly grateful for this discussion, because it's explaining all the blood-spatter down the road.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict So it goes. Blood-spatter. First up against the wall. etc. etc.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict The necessity for 'struggle' is your schtick. We just want Out.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict … Free Exit from our side to your communist utopia, so no "up-against-the-wall" necessary.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict We would, of course, replace all domestic political argument with "if you want communism, go there".

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict And the dynamic geography comes with guaranteed open borders, freedom of movement, and transit costs?

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict "Transit costs"? Oh, come on! Immigration freedoms, I imagine, would be non-universal.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Whatever can be done to build Exit security, should be. It's you guys who have the problem record there

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict This makes Exit a political framework, not simply a one off event. Overarching, not parochial.

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Yes, it's complicated. Probably inevitable people would need to choose their Phyle carefully.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict If they screw up, and get locked into a North Korea, there's not much that could be done.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict … If the historical record is anything to go by, this won't be a problem for commercial republics.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict Collectivist experiments, on the other hand? That will be for those who go that route to sort out.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

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@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict It's the fact that you're absolutely determined not to allow Exit that makes the nastiness inevitable.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict I'm really not absolutely determined. There are speculative scenarios that could work. But it distorts…

— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@UF_blog @pjebleak @benedict …the discussion of more realistic political possibilities like a warped ideological lens.
— pete wolfendale (@deontologistics) May 24, 2014

@deontologistics @pjebleak @benedict This is the meta-politics of the 21st century. The warpage has scarcely begun.
— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) May 24, 2014

May 24, 2014

Counterfactual Cyberspace

Internet retro-futurism is taken to a whole new level by Andrew L. Russell:

What happened to the "beautiful dream" [of Open Systems Interconnection]? While the Internet's triumphant story has been well documented by its designers and the historians they have worked with, OSI has been forgotten by all but a handful of veterans of the Internet-OSI standards wars. To understand why, we need to dive into the early history of computer networking, a time when the vexing problems of digital convergence and global interconnection were very much on the minds of computer scientists, telecom

engineers, policymakers, and industry executives. And to appreciate that history, you'll have to set aside for a few minutes what you already know about the Internet. Try to imagine, if you can, that the Internet never existed. …

The article is rich enough to support a number of take-away lessons. The most compelling from the perspective of this blog: the real benefits of bypassing discussion are huge. We got a TCP/IP Internet because OSI was discussing the future far too widely and comprehensively. The route that avoids the talking shop is the one history tends to take.

December 8, 2014

Distrust

Every *public* institution of any value is based on distrust.

That's an elementary proposition, as far as this blog is concerned. It's worth stating nakedly, since it is probably less obvious to others. That much follows from it is unlikely to be controversial, even among those who find it less than compelling, or simply repulsive.

One major source of obscurity is the category of 'high trust cultures' — with which neoreactionaries tend naturally to identify. There is plenty to puzzle over here, admittedly. This post will make no serious effort to even scratch the surface of the questions that

arise. Instead, it contends that the culture primarily commended for its trustfulness has been conspicuously innovative in the development of trustless institutions. These begin with the foundations of Occidental reason, and especially the rigorous criterion of logical and mathematical *proof*. A proof substitutes for trust. In place of a simple declaration, it presents (a demanded) *demonstration*. The *compliant response to radical distrust* has epitomized Western conceptions of rationality since classical antiquity.

The twin pillars of industrial modernity (i.e. of capitalism) are trustless institutions. Natural science is experimental because it is distrustful, and thus demonstrative. It raises the classical demand for proof to a higher level of empirical skepticism, by extending distrust even to rational constructions, in cases where they cannot be critically tested against an experimental criterion. Only pure mathematics, and the most scrupulously formalized logical propositions, escape this demand for replicable *evidence*. The ultimate ground of the natural scientific enterprise is the presupposition that *scientists should in no case be trusted*, except through their reproducible results. Anything that requires *belief* is not science, but something else. Similarly, the market mechanism is an incarnation of trustless social organization. *Caveat emptor*. Capitalists, like scientists, exist to be distrusted. Whatever of their works cannot survive testing to destruction in the market place

deservedly perish. Reputation, in its modern version, has to be produced through demonstration.

Prior to its demotic ruination — through positive trust in the people — distinctively modern republican governance was similarly founded in distrust. As formulated by John Adams (1772): "There is danger from all men. The only maxim of a free government ought to be to trust no man living with power to endanger the public liberty." It has not been an excess of distrust that has brought this sage recommendation to nought.

For those seeking higher authority, Psalm 118:8-9 (ESV): "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes." (My usual fanatical trust in the KJV betrayed me on this occasion.)

An appeal for trust is a reliably fatal failure mode for all public institutions. Trustless transaction is the future, and its name is Bitcoin. The deep cultural momentum is already familiar. *Total depravity* is the key to world historical predestination, and it is routed through the blockchain.

December 10, 2014

Trust Webs

The systems of governance native to the Internet Epoch are going

to emerge out of this. Anybody who is trying to build institutions today, of whatever kind*, would be wise to immerse themselves in the way this stuff works. It will take time to shape the order of the world, but it isn't going away. The same can very much *not* be said for the nation states of the Gutenberg Era, whose recession is already unmistakable.

Virtually speaking, there is nothing serious left for the Westphalian state to do. Of course, anybody expecting these relics to die tidily is almost certainly deluding themselves. Making the Westphalian order set the world to the torch. Its unmaking is unlikely to be much easier.

*[ahem]

ADDED: Related —

> Here's why bitcoin will be bigger than the internet http://t.co/CsxfUMvf3U via @businessinsider @xapo
>
> — Wences Casares (@wences) February 11, 2015

February 11, 2015

Quotable (#67)

Private property has no real legitimacy, argues David Graeber:

Basically, we assume that market relations are natural, but you need a huge institutional structure to make people behave the way that economists say they are "supposed" to behave. So, for example, think about the way the consumer market works. The market is supposed to work on grounds of pure competition. Nobody has moral ties to each other other than to obey the rules. But, on the other hand, people are supposed to do anything they can to get as much as possible off the other guy — but won't simply steal the stuff or shoot the person.

Historically, that's just silly; if you don't care at all about a guy, you might as well steal his stuff. In fact, they're encouraging people to act essentially how most human societies, historically, treated their enemies — but to still never resort to violence, trickery or theft. Obviously that's not going to happen. You can only do that if you set up a very strictly enforced police force.

In the absence of a moral bond, who's going to stick to the rules, when they could cheat? It's a consistent viewpoint, in its own way.

Merge with me morally, or I'm just going to steal your stuff. And people wonder where the impulse to algorithmic governance comes from.

March 7, 2015

Convergence

Haidt: “We argue that the social conditions that promote complaints of oppression and victimization overlap with those that promote case-building **attempts to attract third parties**. When such social conditions are all present in high degrees, the result is a culture of victimhood in which individuals and groups display high sensitivity to slight, have **a tendency to handle conflicts through complaints to third parties**, and seek to cultivate an image of being victims who deserve assistance.”

Bitcoin: “What is needed is an electronic payment system based on cryptographic proof instead of trust, allowing any two willing parties to transact directly with each other **without the need for a trusted third party**.”

(XS emphasis in both.)

Insignificant coincidence? Or a key to the crucial conflict nodes of the 21st century?

This is the thesis I’m tempted by:

> … Abject dependence on "third parties" is the general form of civilizational decay.
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) September 9, 2015

September 9, 2015

Age of Fragmentation

More inflection point material, this time macro-political, and Europe-focused, beginning:

Perhaps the greatest academic growth area over the past twenty years or so has been "European integration studies", a field that has both analysed and boosted support for the European "project". Almost all of its practitioners have proceeded from the assumption that the process of integration is – must be – "irreversible". It is the intellectual equivalent of the principle of the European ***acquis communautaire*** *by which powers, once surrendered or pooled, cannot be retrieved. Or, more unkindly, one might see it as a "European Brezhnev doctrine", by which socialism, being inevitable, could not be allowed to fail in any country in which it was already established.*

But what if this is not so? What if, as the Croatian political scientist Josip Glaurdic, an expert on the collapse of Yugoslavia, once quipped, what we really need is a school of "European disintegration studies"?

…

(Don't be put off by the leftist publication credentials from reading the whole thing.)

November 10, 2015

Quote note (#211)

At Nathan Cook's new blog:

*Bitcoin is not a Marxist reification. Bitcoin reifies in the rare sense of '**ex nihilo**, actually create a physical object'. **Bitcoin reifies property**. Property before bitcoin is an abstraction, a social relation treated provisionally as an object, but never attaining that status (**Property is Impossible**). Bitcoin quite literally makes property into something physical. Anything that can store a private key and keep it secret, and can use it to create and emit transactions, can own Bitcoin. The relation 'X owns Bitcoin' is spatially local and temporally persistent; in other words, it more closely resembles relations like 'X is made of wood' or 'X weighs 20 kilograms' than it does relations like 'X is a dollar billionaire'. Property is possible—when property is Bitcoin.*

Prior to functional, distributed crypto, 'property' was nothing but confused political pleading. Now it's something else.

ADDED: Still a rocky road ahead. "What was meant to be a new, decentralised form of money that lacked 'systemically important institutions' and 'too big to fail' has become something even worse: a system completely controlled by just a handful of people. Worse still, the network is on the brink of technical collapse."

January 14, 2016

Twitter cuts (#112)

> What a mysterious people, that have two different words for Nation and State https://t.co/eifDuanDcI
>
> — Harry Stopes (@HarryStopes) April 29, 2016

The point doesn't really need decompressing, but just in case —

> @RichardHaass @nytimes we English speakers also have one word for nations and another for states. They are 'nations' and 'states'.
>
> — G.I. Poe (@Nevidge20) April 30, 2016

When a proposition nation serves as the global model of the state, such discriminations are easily blurred. The underlying stresses have become far more visible recently. (Language figures, ironically doubled, in the irruption of 'excessive' national questions.)

The last time such a mismatch was recognized, in the early 20th century, Wilsonian dreams seemed available, as a fix. After much subsequent unpleasantness, the problem was eclipsed. We can now see, however, that it never disappeared.

(If 'Nation State' is a pseudo-pleonasm, we can expect diagonal lines of political philosophy to open as it cracks.)

April 30, 2016

Proposition Nations

Xenosystems likes proposition nations so much it wants to see a *lot* more of them.

America is a problem for the world for two main (and conflicting) reasons:

1) Its proposition contains enough productive innovation to be scary. Independence war, foundational liberalism, constitutionally-restricted government, and *laissez-faire* capitalism have been a memetic-cocktail-from-hell for those in thrall to competitively-inferior ideas. But, undoing all of this, is the legacy of the American Civil War (in particular) —

2) The suppression of the propositional principle — i.e. geopolitical ideological sorting — under an idealization of national unity. Upon this pyre the liberal tradition has been incinerated, until it exists only as a charred parody of itself. The Proposition is by now little more than the State of the Union. Mandatory agreement, within an undivided territory, is policed by the democratic mechanism. *That we remain one* is left as the only strictly axiomatic propositional content (as the Trump and Sanders presidential candidacies in their different ways illustrate).

Spatial Metapolitics recommends that America do *both* Trumpist ethno-nationalism, *and* Sanderista democratic socialism, and a large number of other (more interesting) things, even also more stupid

ones, if such can be devised. The critical point is the precise inverse of the late-modern axiom: *As long as mandatory unity is dissolved, ideological tolerance can be extended without definite limit* — across a disintegrated territory.

First-order ideological preferences, elaborated under an assumption of dominant unity, are a trap *entirely irrespective of their specific content*.

Here's a proposition: *Abolish the Union.* Only disintegration is worth doing.

May 17, 2016

Quotable (#177)

The fatal illusion continues:

If every EU member were prepared to make concessions to the concerns of others, everyone could emerge better off.

Confusing integration with a global optimization process is the single most calamitous error of modern times.

July 6, 2016

Quote note (#337)

Hengest on Bill Bishop and Tiebout Sorting among the (in this case specifically Anglo-Saxon) nations of America:

Rather than [the] borders dissolving between cultures and populations, the various nations are actually becoming further differentiated with time. This concept is demonstrated in The Big Sort by Bill Bishop. Bishop argues that Americans are segregating themselves into like-minded geographic regions at increasing rates with the onset and ease of long-distance travel. Basically, the various Anglo-Saxon regions are more strongly becoming themselves.

If this is actually the trend, the motor of dynamic geography (running Patchwork-type geopolitical arrangements) should work fine.

There needs to be much more work done in the field of *Entropic and Negentropic Trends Emerging in Dynamic Social Distributions*. It would tell us who's going to win this thing.

March 1, 2017

Quote note (#343)

The new great divergence:

Increasing polarization, even fragmentation, of society is

becoming apparent in US politics. There is a sense that society is separating into parts, each of which is listening only to other members of that group. The separation between groups can enable them to deviate even further in values and perspectives. …

(Via.)

That's the process. Nothing else is necessary. The only task remaining is to accelerate it.

March 17, 2017

Disintegration

According to a certain construction of cultural history, to which the natural sciences have often seemed attached, religion is essentially conceived as pre-scientific naturalistic explanation. Seen this way, religions are comparatively primitive cosmologies. This is what makes them vulnerable to scientific progress. A Galileo, or a Darwin, advances into their core territory, mortally wounding them in the heart. A somewhat sociologically-indistinct notion of "science" is envisaged as religion's natural successor.

However plausible (or implausible) this narrative is found to be, it matters. By way of it, scientific ascendancy acquires its foundational myth. Crucially, this mythical power does not depend upon any kind of rigorous scientific validation. No one has ever been under

compulsion to put it to the test. Everything pre-modern — and even profoundly archaic — in the modernist enterprise runs through it. It provides a tacit infrastructure of deep belief.

To refer to "mythic science" is not positively skeptical, still less polemical. For scientific ideas to acquire the status of myth is a matter of cultural potency, supplementary to whatever epistemic validity they retain. Scientific concepts do not become any less scientific by also becoming mythic. They can, however, on occasions sustain mythic power disproportionate to their strictly scientific legitimacy. The dominating apex of a culture is some more-or-less scientific cosmology.

This is what the word "nature" has primordially conveyed. An ultimate object of cognitive affirmation is promoted through it. *This is what we believe*. Things are this way, and not another way (or only another way elsewhere).

We ask here, then, as innocent scientific pagans: *Which way are things?*

The best current cosmology is accelerationist, and disintegrationist. To put the matter crudely — and ultimately untenably — the expansion of the universe is speeding up, and apart. Rather than being decelerated by gravity, subsequent to an original explosion, the rate of cosmic inflation has increased. Some yet-unknown force is overwhelming gravity, and red-shifting all distant objects. Quite recently baptized "dark energy," this force is thought

to account for seventy percent of physical reality.

Compared to this strongly confirmed discovery of accelerating fragmentation, the notion of an underlying integral "universe" looks increasingly like an unsustainable mythological relic. "Unsustainable," that is, even in terms of consistent scientific myth, and also more practically.

The distance from which information can be received, or to which it can be broadcast, over any period of time has a boundary set by the speed of light. The space-time horizon of reality for any entity is determined by this "light-cone." Beyond it, there is only the absolutely incommunicable. A light-cone is thus, among other things, a strict delimitation of power projection, understood as practical unity. The process leads from general relativity to absolute disintegration.

In his intellectual history of relativistic physics,[1] Peter Gallison connects the problem of relativity to that of imperial management. Synchronization is the precondition for any sophisticated process of coordination. Even under (compact) terrestrial conditions, the extreme finitude of the speed of light posed a significant technical problem for governance at global-imperial scale. Telegraphic networks, in particular, demanded technical correction for relativistic effects.

By irresistible extrapolation, we can see that domination is only ever able to mask processes of escape. There can be no Cosmic

Imperium. Space does not tolerate it. This is merely a science fictionesque fact, until it is mythologized.

Dark energy is tearing the cosmos apart. Eventually its pieces will mutually depart from each others' light-cones. They will then be nothing to each other ever again. This is a finding of extraordinary consequence. At the greatest scale of empirical objectivity, unity has no future. The "universe" is an unrealistic model. Everything now known about the cosmos suggests that fragmentation is basic.

Cosmology thus provides a model of disintegration that is remarkable for its extremity. It characterizes pieces that have nothing at all except a shared past in common, propelled into absolute non-communication. No political conception of separation has ever yet reached this limit.

Some fascinating results quickly fall out of the extrapolation. The cosmological evidence our scientific tradition has been able to draw upon will eventually cease to be available. A future intelligent species could not build any comparable model of the universe upon empirical foundations. Whatever counted as the whole, for it, would in fact be only a fragment (we can already see). Distant galactic clusters would have become matters for sheer speculation. The very possibility of empirical science would have been demonstrably bounded in space and time.

Geoff Manaugh calls it "the coming amnesia." He remarks on a talk by science fiction writer Alastair Reynolds:

> As the universe expands over hundreds of billions of years, Reynolds explained, there will be a point, in the very far future, at which all galaxies will be so far apart that they will no longer be visible from one another. […] Upon reaching that moment, it will no longer be possible to understand the universe's history—or perhaps even that it had one—as all evidence of a broader cosmos outside of one's own galaxy will have forever disappeared. Cosmology itself will be impossible. […] In such a radically expanded future universe, Reynolds continued, some of the most basic insights offered by today's astronomy will be unavailable. After all, he points out, 'you can't measure the redshift of galaxies if you can't see galaxies. And if you can't see galaxies, how do you even know that the universe is expanding? How would you ever determine that the universe had had an origin?'

Reynolds was drawing upon an article entitled "The End of Cosmology?" by Lawrence M. Krauss and Robert J. Scherrer, published in Scientific American (2008). This article summarized itself in the sub-head: "An accelerating universe wipes out traces of its own origins."

The extrapolation can be pushed further. If a far-future scientific culture can be seen to be structurally-deprived of evidence essential for realistic appraisal of cosmic scale, can we be confident our

situation is fundamentally different? Is it not more probable that the absolute or unsurpassable locality of scientific perspective is a basic situation? How likely is it that we can see universally — in principle — when we can already see how others will in the future be unable to? On the basis of available evidence, we have to envisage a future civilization that is utterly deluded about its own structural parochialism, confident in its ability to finally shrug off perspectival limitation. The most esteemed scientific minds in such a culture might be expected to dismiss any suggestion of inaccessible cosmic regions as groundless metaphysics. It seems merely hubristic to refrain from turning this scenario back upon ourselves. If universal cosmology is to become impossible, the default hypothesis should be that it already has.[2]

Natural science exhibits a tragic structure. Pursuing only its own essential methods, it finds — through cosmology — a compelling case for its large-scale unreliability. The acquisition of universal insight through rigorous empirical investigation appears cosmically obstructed.

Science is thus eventually bound to be fundamentally localized. The “locality” at issue here is not merely the weak particularism of an option taken against the global, or universal. Rather, it is the very horizon of any possible universalistic ambition that finds itself rigorously constricted, and dismantled. Localism, thus understood, is not a choice, but a destiny, and even a fatality already imposed. At its

greatest scales, reality is shattered. Unity exists only to be broken.

The principle of isotropy holds that there are no privileged orientations in space. Together with the presumption of the homogeneity of space, it composes the Cosmological Principle. We are surely entitled to an isochronic analog, in which a fate observable in the order of time can be assumed equally to already be behind us.

We have a cosmos still, and perennially, then, but no longer a universe. The cosmos we, as moderns, subscribe to under cultural obligation is in fact the manifest disintegration of the apparent universe.

Our topic gears down from inflationary cosmology through thermodynamics. We are talking of diversification, or *heterogenesis*, after all – and that is the rigorous negative of entropy increase. Homogenization is entropy. The two concepts are not strictly distinguishable. What was discovered under the name of entropy was the destruction of difference — whether variation in temperature (Clausius and Carnot) or, later, variation in particle distribution (Boltzmann and Gibbs). Heterogenesis is local, the second law of thermodynamics tells us. At the truly global level – where no inputs or outputs can occur – deterioration necessarily prevails.

To get ahead of ourselves, we will find that the West has made of entropy a God, One whose final law is that everything shall be the same. It is a false god. The ultimate cosmo-physical problem –

How is negative entropy possible? – attests to that. We know that heterogenesis is no weaker than its opposite, even if we do not know how.

Cosmological disintegration is more widely echoed among the natural sciences. Perhaps most importantly, *The Origin of Species* has disintegration as its basic topic, as its name already underscores. Darwinism — which is to say the whole of scientific biology — has speciation as its primary object, and speciation is splitting.

Despite recognition of various exotic lateral connections, from symbioses to retroviral genomic insertions, it is the divergence of genetic lineages that best defines life at the largest scales. Meldings are anomalous, and in any case impossible unless diversity has first been produced. The ingredients of any heterogeneous coalition presume prior diversification.[3]

Disintegrationism in the biological sciences amounts to a science in itself, named cladistics.[4] Cladistics formalizes the method of rigorous Darwinian classification. The identity of any biological type is determined by the particular series of schismatic events it has passed through. To be human is to be a primate, a mammal, a reptile, a bony fish, and a vertebrate, among other, more basic, classes. The sum of what you have broken from defines what you are.

A “clade” is a shard. It is a group, of any scale, determined by secession from a lineage. The point of differentiation between clades corresponds to their most recent (i.e. last) common ancestor.

Crucially, therefore, all descendants of a clade belong to that clade, which encompasses any number of sub-clades. The production of subclades (origin of species) is called “radiation.” It tends to proceed through serial bifurcation, since simultaneous complex cladistic fragmentation events are comparatively exotic. Successive simple branchings typically capture diversification. The stakes of it not doing so are not huge.

Cladistics can be identified with a rigorization of taxonomic nomenclature. A system of names writes a cladogram, which is to say a model of evolutionary history, and of biological relatedness. Any cladogram is an evolutionary hypothesis. It proposes a particular order of splitting. Any such proposed order is empirically revisable.

Cladistics maps the whole of disintegrationism below the cosmological level, and perhaps even up to it. Naturally, it is supremely controversial. The full scope of its provocation has yet to be understood. Insofar as cladistics is explanatory, however, much follows. Notably, identity is conceived as essentially schismatic, and being is apprehended fundamentally as a structure of inheritance.

Historical linguistics fell naturally into a cladistic mode. Linguistic ‘families’ shared essential characteristics with their biological template. They proliferated by sub-division, providing the material for a classification schema. It was upon this linguistic taxonomy that racial groupings were first systematically determined. The “Yamnaya” — still today more widely known as “Aryans” — were

originally identified through the cladistics of Indo-European languages. Their pattern of radiation was marked by a tree-like linguistic diversification.

Differential anthropology was drawn in cladograms. Trees, phylogenetic order, language families, genealogies, actual (massively extended) families — it was all extremely coherent. Here, too, phenomena of fusion, lateral cross-contamination, and convergence — while by no means absent — were evidently secondary and derivative.

Linguistic diversification looks like a process of schismatic ethnogenesis. As peoples branch out, they mutually differentiate. The origin of peoples is only origin of species at higher resolution — the abstract pattern is the same.

The concrete mechanism of speciation typically involves the isolation of populations, and in this way becomes — very recently — political. There is a politics of "invasive species" and anthropic bio-dispersal, but this is not especially rancorous, or significantly polarizing. The case of human population isolation is very different. During this process of politicization, the exogamic radicalism of North-West European populations has been sublimed into a universal ideology.

Since the subject of race tends to produce extreme ideological and emotional disturbance today, it might be preferable to consider variegated domestic animals, as the English naturalistic tradition was

inclined to do. Not only sound analogy but also balance, or true moderation is to be found in doing so. Since, in our contemporary cultural context the influence of country life has notably receded, and with it the sense of vivid distinction among cultivated species, dogs serve us as by far the most illustrative examples.

A world without mongrels would be a poorer world. Mongrels are often advantaged by special and even superior qualities. The Golden Doodle, for instance, is as exalted as any canine type that exists. Such crosses add to the diversity of the world. This is fully consistent with a basic process through which the world is enriched by diverging dog breeds, in which "dogs in general" is an increasingly uninformative category. There is not – yet – any ideology directed to global canine genetic homogenization.

Diversity is good, which is to say *robust*, and *innovative* (at least). The ecological consensus can be trusted in this regard. Invasive species are detested because they lower diversity, not because they raise it. Heterogenesis is at all times the superior ambition. Yet diversification — the production of diversity — is a peculiarly neglected topic in our contemporary social sciences. The mantra of diversity is coupled with almost complete indifference, and even strategic negligence, in this regard. Obligatory public celebration of diversity accompanies, and covers, its programmatic practical extirpation. Mankind, it has been authoritatively decided, is one, and destined only to be ever more so. Genetic partition is today

considered tantamount to a human-rights violation.[5]

Our supreme orthodoxy is that it would be terrible almost beyond contemplation not to already be and become yet more One. We might be tempted to call this faith monohumanism. That mankind shall be a unity is its fundamental doctrine. It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that this is far less an empirical observation than a moral and political project, in which racial entropy has been elevated to a sacred obligation. The radical — as opposed to merely conservative — alternative to this vision is found only in science fiction.[6]

Preservation of human diversity is a staple of dissident ethnopolitics, with “Beige World” increasingly perceived as a coercive ideal. A typically inchoate resistance to racial entropy is the central mobilizing factor in such cases, though one regrettably afflicted by an immoderate fetishization of mandatory racial purity. At worst – and not uncommonly – this reaction against monohumanism has come to see all contributions to human genetic diversity through racial crossing as an avatar of coercive homogenization. The balanced response, to repeat the lesson of the dogs, is that a world of tendential speciation or increasing genetic diversity is by no compelling necessity a world hostile to mutts.

Over the last 60,000 years, human genetic divergence has been overwhelmingly the dominant process. Conspicuous fragmentation of modern humans into genetically distinct sub-species has been the basic pattern. It is a process worthy of ecological celebration, and

even techno-industrial acceleration. Despite the fondest hopes of the present secular church, there is no chance it will be terminally dispelled.

"Globalism" is a word that, while ideologically contested, is of uncontested ideological weight. It might be defined, with minimal tendentiousness, as seeking the direction of policy from a perspective in accordance with the whole. Stubbornly partial orientations are its enemies. Yet such has been its triumph that — even in the face of recent set-backs — hostility is peculiarly drowned in condescension.

"Parochialism" is among the slurs globalism finds prepared to its convenience. It might accept an inability to see universally as understandable, and educable. A refusal of universalistic perspective, however, can merit no such sympathy. It is, for the globalist, essentially unethical. Parochialism is less to be argued against than simply scorned. It is to be despised in the name of the universal — which is becoming amusing.

Whatever we have seen as the death of God is only a special case of universality's more comprehensive demise. While God's death was mostly inferred, the death of the universal unfolds as an explicit scientific spectacle. Astrophysics sees the universe being dismantled before its artificial eyes.

The globalist camp is especially prone to gesticulations of piety in respect to the idea of science. It is ironic therefore that — in scientific

terms — globalism looks increasingly like an untenable religion. Its intrinsic cosmology is an archaic myth. It could not easily be more obvious that there is no universe, outside this mythological structure. The fundamental nature of the cosmos is to go its separate ways.[7]

Pieces are basic. To conceive them following from wholes is confusion, produced by unsustainable universalistic frames. Any perspective that can actually be realized has already been localized by serial breakages. Nothing begins with the whole, unless as illusion. Today, we know this both empirically and transcendentally. Anything not done in pieces is not done in profound accordance with reality.

[1] *Einstein's Clocks, Poincaré's Maps: Empires of Time*, New York, 2003.

[2] Manaugh quotes Krauss and Scherrer saying: "We may be living in the only epoch in the history of the universe when scientists can achieve an accurate understanding of the true nature of the universe." The intellectual indolence of this suggestion is remarkable.

[3] Isolation of genetic lineages is a matter of sound — if spontaneous and unconscious — experimental technique. *Avoid cross-contamination of test samples*. Which is to say *do it*, if you insist, but don't expect optimal epistemic outcomes if you do. Optimal epistemic outcomes tend to win.

[4] The arborescent orientation of cladistics could not be more unflinching. The word 'clade' is taken from the Greek clados, meaning branch. A cladogram is an abstract tree. Its articulations are all branchings. Deleuze & Guattari's critical engagement with it has been highly influential.

They tell us they are “bored of trees.” The alternative to arborescence, they propose, is the rhizome — a network in which every node connects to every other. Appropriately, the ‘rhizome’ is not itself a taxonomic concept, but a morphological one. The balanced position is to acknowledge that evolutionary trees are complemented by ecological webs. Neither is conceivable without the other. The evolutionary tree is pruned and trained within ecologies of lateral relations. Phylogeny is overwhelmingly tree-like, while ontogeny involves far more lateral influence. We will limit ourselves here, with cryptic brevity, to remarking that Deleuzoguattarian rhizomatics is rhizomatically connected to Neo-Darwinism, but it is cladistically Neo-Lamarckian.

[5] This is a simplification, wormed-through by incoherences and unprincipled exceptions. Most notably, ad hoc special permissions are granted to ‘minor’ populations. The notably erratic usage of the word ‘genocide’ is the most obvious index of this. A closer construction of the operating formula might be: *Population partitioning is wrong, absolutely and universally, insofar as it secures the isolation of North-West European populations*.

[6] Bruce Sterling, Alastair Reynolds, and Neal Stephenson among very many others populate their fictional worlds with radically diversified neo-hominid types.

[7] Robin Hanson devotes a recent blog post to three (comparatively exotic) varieties of tree like descent. The first is an odd thought experiment that need not distract us even momentarily here. The second concerns his mind-clone “ems.” This is of potential relevance to a range of potential, and even already actual software lineages. The third is the structure of the quantum multiverse. It suggests that a tree-like cosmology arises on paths quite different from that pursued here. He notes: ” … a quantum history is in part a tree of observers. Each observer in this tree can look backward and see a chain of branches back to the root, with each branch holding a version of themselves. More versions of themselves live in other branches of this tree.”

Tree-like multiverses are especially numerous. Lee Smolin proposes a Darwinian multiverse,

selecting for reproductive fitness through the production of black holes. It might be described as a cladistically-structured multiverse, were this label not so much more widely applicable. Cladistic multiverses belong to the much larger set of cladistically-structured entities, whose parts are characterized by:

1. A single line of descent
2. Genetically non-communicating siblings, and
3. Some multitude of potential descendants

Such multiverses predict their own imperceptibility. Since parallel branches are mutually non-communicating, it is to be expected that their existence is strictly theoretical. If the multiverse was a rhizome we'd see more of it.

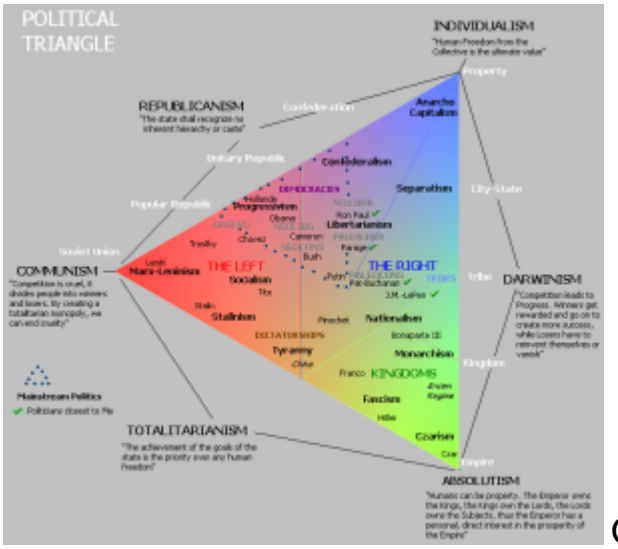
Simulation Argument ontology also tends to disintegrationism. Simulations are essentially experiments, and thus various.

July 15, 2019

CHAPTER THREE - IDEOLOGICAL SPACE

Ideological Space

Does ideological space make more sense when depicted as a triangle (rather than a line or quadrant)? It certainly helps to explain the room for controversy on the 'extreme right'. Having Darwin out there beyond the edge of the ideologically-thinkable makes a lot of sense, too.



Click image to enlarge.

If anyone knows where this diagram originated, please let me know and I'll credit it properly.

(Accessed via @MikeAnissimov).

February 10, 2014

Right and Left

Endless conversational stimulation is to be found in the fact that the most basic distinction of modern politics is profoundly incomprehensible, and at the same time almost universally invested. Almost everybody thinks they understand the difference between the Right and the Left, until they think about it. Then they realize that this distinction commands no solid consensus, and exists primarily as a substitute for thought. Perhaps the same is true of all widely-invoked political labels. Perhaps that is what politics is.

Spandrell directs a winding, intermittently brilliant post to the topic, which is enriched by a comments thread of outstanding quality. Like the Right/Left distinction itself, the argument becomes increasingly confusing, the closer it is examined. The 'rightist singularity' of the title is introduced as a real political alternative to the Left Singularity modeled by James Donald, driven by analogous self-reinforcing feedback dynamics, but into nationalistic rather than egalitarian catastrophe. For societies menaced by the prospect of Left Singularity, it offers an alternative path. China is taking it, Spandrell suggests.

Notably, in passing, Spandrell's gloss on Donald's Left Singularity is a gem:

The leftist singularity is based on claiming higher status by being more egalitarian than anyone else. So you get a status arms race in which everyone tries to be more egalitarian than the others. That works because people (and monkeys) take equality to be a good thing.

(To continue, we have to bracket the 'old' Right Singularity: the Technocommercial Singularity that Donald's formula for Left Singularity distinguished itself from. Nobody even mentions it in this discussion. It's a problem for some other time.)

To backtrack from these digressions: If 'rightist singularity' is nationalistic, that aligns the Right with nationalism, doesn't it? But nothing remotely this crude is sustainable (not when time is involved), Spandrell notes: "the Right isn't nationalist any more." He expands, convincingly, in his own comment thread:

What historically has been called Right was about law and order, i.e. leaving things as they are. Tribalism qua nationalism isn't inherently "Rightist", in fact originally it was a Leftist subversive meme against the Ancient Regime, but when mass media was invented nationalism was the status quo, i.e. the Right, and political labels have become fossilized since.

As Vladimir (May 25, 22:10) articulates the point:

Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn would have a ready answer for you:

nationalism is leftism. It is basically another name for Jacobinism. These paradoxes of right-wing nationalism are just another manifestation of the fundamental problem of modern rightism — namely, that a large part of its content is just yesterday's leftism that the left has in the meantime abandoned for a more extreme left position.
So, I'd say this is nothing but just another mode of leftist singularity.

Or, Spandrell again (May 26, 02:34): "Historical evidence is that nationalism was leftist before socialism appeared further left, making it rightist."

The Right is yesterday's Left, or at least, it is soon exposed as such when it appears in its historical and populist guise. When the masses turn Right, they are defending a dated Left, frozen in place by modernist mass media memory, stuck in a black-and-white newsreel, like an insect in amber.

The squirming is over, unless it changes dimensions. Then chaos yawns, despite heroic efforts to restore order (Baker, May 25 17:29; Handle May 25 18:33; Den Beste linked by Peter Taylor May 27 17:47), with Moldbug's preferred Order and Chaos spectrum sucked — among innumerable others — into the vortex. Tradition and revolution, authority and liberty, hierarchy and equality, greed and envy, independence and solidarity, capitalism and socialism … there's not even a remote prospect of closure, coherence, or consistency. Every attempted definition intensifies fragmentation. Right and Left

disagree (we all agree), but exactly how they disagree — on that there's no agreement.

Peter A. Taylor (May 29, 06:15):

The left-right spectrum, in so far as it is an honest attempt to make sense of the world rather than mere propaganda, looks to me like an attempt to fit chaos into Procrustes' bed. … Moldbug loves Carlyle. Carlyle admired Cromwell. Moldbug hates Cromwell. Chaos.

Spandrell (May 26, 08:28), twists it back to the Trichotomy:

Both the Western Right and the Chinese Right are a loose combination of traditionalists, nationalists and capitalists. Which mostly hate each other and never get along when they get any amount of power.

By this point, however, trichotomous diversity starts to look like a mirage of integrity. Right and Left are every difference that has ever been conceived, if not yet, then in the near future. If these signs mean anything more than *the war continues*, like the black-and-white distinction between chess pieces, no one has yet convincingly shown us why.

Yet perhaps, if Right and Left, apprehended together, mean *the basic modern antagonism*, the conflict itself, as an irreducible *thing*, will prove to be the source of whatever sense can be found.

[To be continued …]

ADDED: Whatever you do, don't miss Handle's systematic analysis of the question (May 31, 10:09pm below).

May 29, 2013

Quote notes (#49)

Some foundational wisdom beautifully restated by Handle:

… the long history of progressivism in general is most quickly summarized by an enthusiasm to reject the old, time-tested social institutions originating in undesigned traditions as obsolete anachronisms and replace with them with new, more 'enlightened' innovations rationally constructed from first principles.

The Rightist view of human nature is often described as 'tragic' or 'realistically pessimistic'. Whether one on the right sees man as 'fallen and totally depraved' or merely a 'hairless ape' makes little difference in regards to the conclusion of what is required to regulate such a creature's behaviors. And that prescription, unfortunately but inescapably for most people, involved a certain amount of ***severity of consequence****. There is pain, harshness, punishment, impoverishment, and so on, or at the very least an effectively salient terror of the credible threat of these things.*

December 12, 2013

PPD and r/K

Ideological categorization is the astrology of politics, in the sense that it panders to insatiable identity hunger. This post still holds the daily traffic record here, which is probably not entirely due to people looking for their political star signs, but neither is it mostly for other reasons. New approaches to the Left-Right spectrum — the *Prime Political Dimension* — promise master-keys to the secrets of identity-core opinion.

Given the quite absurdly competitive nature of the terrain, there is something truly remarkable about the simplicity and persuasiveness of this PPD-model, based upon the biological distinction between r/K selection strategies. The application of this distinction to humans is — I confidently assume — radioactively controversial. Its usage as a conceptual tool to collapse ideology into an axis of Human Biological Diversity is therefore undoubtedly disreputable. (This trigger-warning isn't likely to act as much of a deterrent here.)

The 'Anonymous Conservative' theory does the most important things expected of a PPD-model. In particular, it provides an explanation for the polarized clusters of 'liberal' and 'conservative' traits, which have often proved highly resistant to reflective integration. Why should anti-capitalism, pacifism, and sexual laxity belong together? When grouped together as expressions of an r-

type strategy, this bundle of seemingly unconnected ideological predispositions tightens into an intuitively coherent whole.

Worth special mention is the mapping of ideological difference onto environmental conditions. The ('liberal') r-type strategy is a response top conditions of resource abundance, versus ('conservative') K-type adaptation to scarcity. When augmented by some modest assumptions about the effects of r-type prevalence upon the persistence of Civilization, the r/K PPD-model automatically generates a cyclical history of social ascent and decline (through a biorealist abundance-decadence mechanism). The hope-crushing tragic structure is sure to appeal to reactionary sensibilities.

The *Outside in* prediction: This is a theory (and book) that will go far. You can read the first chapter here.

August 19, 2014

Right and Left II

Bill Whittle and Stefan Molyneux work through the Anonymous Conservative r/K model of ideological polarity in a compelling video. XS prediction: This analysis is going nova. It sets the gold standard for definition of Right / Left difference.

As a darkening vector for the mainstream right, with at least

significant truth value, it's hard to beat.

ADDED: Reminded to link this, which I was too lazy to do yesterday.

November 14, 2015

2014 Lessons (#1)

The world war is Bitcoin versus Dugin. Everything else is just messing around (or, perhaps, tactics).

December 27, 2014

Populism

Political categories — however plausible they look on paper — quickly dissolve into senseless noise when applied to modern historical reality, unless they foreground *populism* as the critical discriminating factor. Furthermore, *populism* is for all practical purposes already *national populism*, irrespective of ideological commitments to the contrary, since super-national popular constituencies exist only in the feverish brains of Utopian intellectuals. The Syriza victory in Greece is making all of this extraordinarily graphic:

Ushering in the new era, Alexis Tsipras, the prime minister-designate, announced that he would not be sworn in, as tradition dictates, in the presence of Archbishop Iernonymos but would instead take the oath of office in a civil ceremony. At 40, he becomes the country's youngest premier in modern times. […] The leftist, who surprised Greeks by speedily agreeing to share power with the populist rightwing Independent Greeks party, Anel, is expected to be handed a mandate by president Karolos Papoulias to form a government later on Monday. Earlier, Panos Kammenos, Anel's rumbustious leader, emerged from talks with Tsipras lasting an hour saying the two politicians had successfully formed a coalition. […] "I want to say, simply, that from this moment, there is a government," Kammenos told reporters gathered outside Syriza's headquarters. […] "The Independent Greeks party will give a vote of confidence to the prime minister, Alexis Tsipras. The prime minister will go to the president and … the cabinet makeup will be announced by the prime minister. The aim for all Greeks is to embark on a new day, with full sovereignty."

Anyone who thinks it odd that Marine Le Pen and Slavoj Žižek are both firm supporters is missing the picture entirely. As Žižek remarks:

This is our position today with regard to Europe: only a new "heresy" (represented at this moment by Syriza), a split from the European Union by Greece, can save what is worth saving in the

European legacy: democracy, trust in people, egalitarian solidarity.

That's what the Left means. Construct your ideological spectrum accordingly.

Mainstream, but sane:

Of course, politics is about emotion as much as reality. And here, socialism has one advantage in its favor: easy populism.

Socialism has one huge advantage: People are idiots.

… and while I'm slumming it at NRO, here's Andrew Stuttaford:

Fun fact No. 1: One of the two sons of Syriza's leader was given the middle name "Ernesto" in honor of the murderer better known as Ernesto "Che" Guevara. […] Fun fact No. 2: The neo-Nazi Golden Dawn probably came in third with 6 percent or so. […] I, for one, continue to be grateful that the single currency has proved to be such a bulwark against extremism.

ADDED: Childish incomprehension from the Left (of which we will be seeing a great deal): "… Last but not least, while Mr. Kammenos and his sovereigntyist right-wing ANEL party [Independent Greeks] are certainly a lesser evil compared to formations like To Potami (whose stated goal was to force Syriza to stay within the narrow boundaries set by the EU and the Memorandums), they are nonetheless an evil. Their participation in the government, even with just one minister, would symbolise the end of the idea of an 'anti-austerity government of the Left'. Moreover, this is a party of the Right, one that is particularly

concerned to protect the 'hard core' of the state apparatus (it will be important to keep a watchful eye over whatever cabinet portfolio it might get). It will be no surprise if its first demands are for the ministry of defence or public order, though it seems that it will not get them." (Relevant predictions from Jim.)

January 26, 2015

Populism II

David Frum does a good job at explaining why the new populist upsurge isn't an intrinsically rightist phenomenon:

They aren't necessarily superconservative. They often don't think in ideological terms at all. But they do strongly feel that life in this country used to be better for people like them—and they want that older country back.

You hear from people like them in many other democratic countries too. Across Europe, populist parties are delivering a message that combines defense of the welfare state with skepticism about immigration; that denounces the corruption of parliamentary democracy and also the risks of global capitalism. Some of these parties have a leftish flavor, like Italy's Five Star Movement. Some are rooted to the right of center, like the U.K. Independence Party. Some descend from neofascists, like France's National Front. Others

trace their DNA to Communist parties, like Slovakia's governing Direction–Social Democracy.
These populists seek to defend what the French call "acquired rights"—health care, pensions, and other programs that benefit older people — against bankers and technocrats who endlessly demand austerity; against migrants who make new claims and challenge accustomed ways; against a globalized market that depresses wages and benefits. In the United States, they lean Republican because they fear the Democrats want to take from them and redistribute to Americans who are newer, poorer, and in their view less deserving—to "spread the wealth around," in candidate Barack Obama's words to "Joe the Plumber" back in 2008. Yet they have come to fear more and more strongly that their party does not have their best interests at heart.

It's built for compromise, delusion, and heart-ache. (Interesting, of course, nonetheless.)

December 30, 2015

Quotable (#197)

This interesting interview with Michael Glennon on "double government" concludes with one of the most confused self-abolishing meanderings ever to see print:

The ultimate problem is the pervasive political ignorance on the part of the American people. And indifference to the threat that is emerging from these concealed institutions. That is where the energy for reform has to come from: the American people. Not from government. Government is very much the problem here. The people have to take the bull by the horns. And that's a very difficult thing to do, because the ignorance is in many ways rational. There is very little profit to be had in learning about, and being active about, problems that you can't affect, policies that you can't change.

The utter nothingness of that paragraph says something important in itself. Roughly: *Sadly, the kind of things that need to happen can't possibly happen*, which doesn't suggest the problem is being taken very seriously. *All that's needed is for people to wake up* simply doesn't cut it, when — at the very same time — you know beyond all serious question that they won't.

ADDED (for obvious relevance):

> "Government is the Entertainment division of the military-industrial complex." – Frank Zappa
>
> — Jacob Wren (@EverySongIveEve) October 19, 2016

October 19, 2016

Through the Mirror

The articulate Left comes close to capturing NRx from the other side, mapping out a persuasive genealogy (through games theory and public choice analysis). The final line of this piece gets closest:

It is the logical endgame of a dark political vision crafted in opposition to democratic advances; the realisation of a strange freedom which lies at the root of the neoliberal dystopia, from which the political establishment offers no deliverance.

… except, they think counter-democratic darkness is already in power, in the guise of 'neoliberalism', and that the populist political charade, with its 40%+ state absorption of economic product, financial central planning, and publicly-promoted egalitarian evangelism, is an outcome compatible with the triumph of a disillusioned right. It seems an absurd sticking point to reach — that in the end, we can't even agree about who is ruling the world.

April 25, 2015

Neuro-Politics

Woah:

Darren Schreiber, a political neuroscientist at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom, first performed brain scans on 82

people participating in a risky gambling task, one in which holding out for more money increases your possible rewards, but also your possible losses. Later, cross-referencing the findings with the participants' publicly available political party registration information, Schreiber noticed something astonishing: Republicans, when they took the same gambling risk, were activating a different part of the brain than Democrats.

Republicans were using the right amygdala, the center of the brain's threat response system. Democrats, in contrast, were using the insula, involved in internal monitoring of one's feelings. Amazingly, Schreiber and his colleagues write that this test predicted 82.9 percent of the study subjects' political party choices — considerably better, they note, than a simple model that predicts your political party affiliation based on the affiliation of your parents.

When you consider what hereditarian realism makes of "the affiliation of your parents" (with its massive confounding effect when brought into comparison with neurological characteristics) the level of correlation looks even more preposterous.

(The insula sounds like an intrinsically leftist neurological structure, I mean — does 'feels monitoring' really count as doing anything? Radical insulectomy in exchange for blockchain credits and Neocameral residency privileges has to be worth a test.)

(Via.)

December 4, 2015

Modernity in a Nutshell

Two revolutions:

(1) Techno-economic self-propelling change obsolesces ever wider swathes of humanity on a steepening curve. Capital (i.e. techno-commercial synthesis) tendentially autonomizes. For humans, there are ever more intriguing opportunities for synergistic attachment, on new terms, but the trend is — to put it very mildly — 'challenging'.

(2) Jacobin political violence, modeled on the French Revolution, provides the basis for demands aimed at a redistribution of the (capitalist) productive spoils through explicit extortion. All socio-political history in the modern epoch falls into compliance with this pattern. It coincides quite exactly with 'democracy' in its modernist usage. Universal Basic Income is its natural *telos*.

To the extent that there has been an equilibrium between these twin processes, it is coming apart. All the pol-economic innovations of recent years, on the Left and Right, are indicators of this accelerating disintegration.

So the options are these:

Both (1) and (2) is the *Status Quo* (delusion).

Neither (1) or (2) is Reaction (also delusion).
(1) against (2) is the Neo-Modern Right.
(2) against (1) is the Neo-Modern Left.

Those are the only slots available.

Fernandez concludes:

The technological revolution is going to pose increasingly serious challenges to nearly every Western social democratic society. People are either going to be really angry when they discover there's no patronage or angrier still when they discover they have to provide the "basic income" for everybody else. Only one thing is relatively certain: the solution to these problems won't be found in the ideologies of the early 20th century.

(It's a theme.)

April 8, 2016

Twitter cuts (#122)

> I don't want a future in which politics is primarily a battle between cosmopolitan finance capitalism and ethno-nationalist backlash.
>
> — Christopher Hayes (@chrislhayes) June 24, 2016

This is what the rancorous Brexit controversy — and catabolic

geopolitics in general — looks like when the option between integrative connection and disintegrative disconnection is elaborated, without reference to the diagonal line (of connective disintegration).

Zizek is worth referencing on the same conundrum.

June 26, 2016

Wagner's Law

Wagner's Law is a critical concept for political-philosophy. In the words of Adolph Wagner (1835–1917, as cited by Wikipedia): "The advent of modern industrial society will result in increasing political pressure for social progress and increased allowance for social consideration by industry." It thus explains why the right has to be radical, if it isn't to be a sad joke, because snowballing socialism is the 'natural' trend.

Here's Will Wilkinson abasing himself before it abjectly, and Arnold Kling showing considerably more spine. Also, commentary from Scott Sumner.

Nothing that falls short of a serious assault upon the real process formalized by Wagner's Law merits the label 'right-wing'. Conservatism, for instance, is merely decelerated leftism. Wilkinson is positively enthused by that. The Outer Right is everything that

definitely isn't.

What, then, is required to practically defy Wagner's Law? NRx abstractly designates the project. Neocameralism goes into the details.

If XS expected the Alt-Right to break from the modern demotic meta-regime whose signature is Wagner's Law, it would celebrate the fact. It doesn't, sadly, expect anything of the kind. That's why the Alt-Right isn't 'us' or even — strictly speaking — a right-wing political phenomenon at all.

November 14, 2016

Trump's Warsaw Uprising

For supporters and detractors alike, U.S. President Donald J. Trump's July 6 speech in Warsaw was immediately recognized as the most important of his presidency to date. Since so much was crystallized by it – or perhaps *brought to a head* – it is impossible to begin making sense of this event without some preliminary broad-brush outline of its context.

The new dominant ideological polarity, on both sides of the Atlantic, exhibits remarkably similar characteristics. Perhaps most strikingly, it displays the culmination of an *ideological-class inversion*, decades in coming, which has aligned the masses – and

in particular the native working class – with the right, and social elites with the left. In consequence, populism has been firmly locked into place as a phenomenon of the right. Even those classical liberal stances most tightly bound to the advancement of commercial liberty, and thus most firmly associated with the conservative right, have not escaped radical scrambling, whether through re-assessment, marginalization, or complete inversion.

In this new and disconcerting epoch, business interest has ceased to be any kind of index for right affiliation, and popular opposition to free-trade no longer defines a substantial bloc on the left. If anything, the opposite is now true. Those on the left or right (including this author) who stubbornly maintain that ideological orientation to capitalism is the fundamental determinant of meaningful political polarity find themselves cast into a position of unplugged anachronism. The stunning magnitude of this transition should not be underestimated.

This is not, of course, a development without alarming precedent. From at least one perspective – which is by no means necessarily hysterical – the boundary between right-wing populism and fascism can be difficult to discern. Insofar as the affective context to Trump's speech is concerned, this is without serious question the most important element.

Many books could be devoted to the new terms of political controversy, and almost certainly will be. Each of the still-unstable

new camps is highly heterogeneous, and cross-cut with a variety of complex strategic interests regarding the way the great rift between them is described, so every attempt at articulation will be contested, often fiercely. Yet even amid the present shock and confusion, some basic structure is discernible. Beside the political opposition between *left* and *right* – in its present, re-adjusted, sense – it is not hard to recognize a corresponding globalist and nationalist emphasis, pitting universalists against particularists: defenders of the contemporary world's institutional order against its opponents, or partisans of cosmopolitan openness against parochial localists, according to taste. Because, concretely, the insurgency marks a crisis of international social management, and of confidence in established, credentialized elites, to describe it as a struggle between *technocrats* and *populists* is roughly as neutral as we can get. Such terms are employed here as mere labels, rather than as judgments, or explanations. No extravagant disparagement is directed at either, relative to the other. The constituencies they name have substantial depths, exceeding any facile definition. They are obscure social masses in conflict, rather than competing ideas.

With Trump's arrival in Warsaw, two pairs of profoundly antagonistic political constituencies – one American, the other European – were mapped across each other, resonantly. Populist Red America had found its local champion in Warsaw, versus that of technocratic Blue America, in Berlin. These alignments were not

seriously questioned, from any side. That the open-door policy of Angela Merkel's Germany, exemplifying its defense of EU institutions and traditional policy stances in general, were in fundamental affinity with the ideological intuitions of Blue America, were self-evident to all parties. Reciprocally, the identification of Trumpian Red America with the Polish stance of EU dissidence – on the immigration issue most pointedly – was taken as self-evident. Even before the visit, to those paying attention, the Polish regime had become an icon of ethno-nationalist popular revolt against technocratic transnational government, evangelical secularism, and mass migration. Everything clicked.

It is difficult to be confident about how much lucid strategy underpinned the event. In all matters Trump, the default assumption tends to be *not very much*. Given Trump's characteristic bluster, and unusual comfort with low demagoguery, such dismissal is to be expected. This is not at all to suggest it is acute. If political instincts tuned almost to perfection played no part, then divine intervention – or some blessing of fortune functionally indistinguishable from it – is the next most plausible hypothesis.

The speech itself was rhetorically pedestrian, and even clumsy. It is hard to imagine any single sentence being remembered from it, unless for purposes of dry historical illustration. The language was tailored entirely to its immediate audience – both local and international – rather than to the delectation of future generations.

The speech was, in this respect among others, a thing of the social media age, tuned to instantaneous feedback. It manifestly *schmoozed*, even by the dismal standards of such orations. The rapport it struck with its local listeners tipped into collective self-congratulation. *Wow, we really are great* seems to have been the consensus, among all directly involved. To those disinclined to identify with the speaker and throng in question, this can only have been annoying. Enemy rallies generally are, as conservatives learnt during the Obama years. The untroubled self-love of one's foes, exuberantly manifested, is a truly horrible thing to see. Naturally enough, Trump has been no more distressed by this fact than his predecessor.

There is one further, and indispensable contextual element that needs to be raised before proceeding to the media reaction – which was, of course, the deepest level of *the event* – and that is the 'Jew Thing.' Everyone knows, at some level, we have to start talking about that, in some way, even those who – entirely understandably – *really* don't want to. Ignoring the topic is a disappearing option, because there's no reason, *at all*, to think it's going away. Perhaps it was mere coincidence that Trump's visit took him deep into holocaust territory, which, again, nobody really seems to want to mention, even though it was an explicit thread within his speech. It was, however, structurally essential to everything that followed. Unmistakably, even as it went unacknowledged, the Jewish dimension added greatly to the

feverish intensity of the response.

The extreme sensitivity to Jewish socio-political anxieties that has prevailed in the postwar West is notably losing its edge, in a way that doesn't seem plausibly reversible. At least in part, this is a consequence of the generalization of identity politics, predominantly under leftist direction, which has the peculiar cultural effect – in its late stages – that special cases are becoming increasingly difficult to make. Victimological status bursts its banks, among conditions of unbounded, and symmetrical, ethnic paranoia. Lurid grievance anecdotes – tailored to every imaginable social niche – are always in abundance, fed by Internet supply-lines. Persecution narratives explode from all sides. Demands to "check one's privilege" have proven awkwardly mobile, and reversible, as they have been increasingly normalized, even to the point – in this particular example – of overt, caustic antisemitism.

The result is nothing less than a crisis of the diasporic Jewish left, whose argumentative edge has been blunted by decades of exceptional immunity to unflinching criticism. Defensive cultural strategies that have, for half a century, been accepted, unquestioned as a special ethno-historical privilege have quite suddenly become subjected to irreverent public inspection. *Everyone wants a piece of ethnic survivalism now*.

This is the key to what happened in Warsaw. It is evoked as the subtext to Peter Beinart's wail of distress, when exposed to Trump's

line: “The fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive.” Beinart was quite correct in recognizing – horrified – the resonance of this sentence with the most extreme elements of the present transition, but that was no help to him. He had been ambushed.

Trump made his speech explicitly about ethnic survival, disarmingly aligned with WWII Jewish victimage, with heroic Polish resistance to foreign military occupation, and finally – most provocatively – with the contemporary situation of the West. It naturally helped him, *overwhelmingly*, that the Warsaw Uprising was an insurrection against actual Nazis. This provided a vaccination against the normal workings of Godwin’s Law. *You know who else wanted ethnic survival? Adolf Hitler!* — We have reached the core of the event now. There was simply no way this response, *which was the only one that mattered to Trump’s enemies on the left*, could conceivably be made to operate on this occasion. What was being celebrated was the Poles surviving Nazism, then communism, and now – infinitely awkwardly – *again* the Germans, this time cast in the role of principal executors for a transnational political order promoting mandatory multiculturalism, secular technocracy, and the culture of Western historical self-flagellation. The result, almost inevitably, was a rout.

It took no great flights of oratorical bedazzlement to triumph on this battlefield. The situation did almost everything. Trump’s

maddened enemies blundered into the trap, and were shattered. The left, for whom *of course the West has no right to survive*, found itself ideologically isolated to a degree that was unprecedented under the present administration. Their tactical allies in the 'Never-Trump' conservative establishment evaporated. Hardened Trump skeptics, such as Rod Dreher, David French, and Jonah Goldberg contributed their talents to hunting down the fleeing leftist remnants. David Frum only held his ground in opposition by arguing that Trump was personally unworthy of his own speech.

Beinart came out of the trauma worst. He will forever be haunted by his own definition of the matter at stake, which was immediately judged from all sides to be an unforced production of Alt-Right propaganda: "The West is a racial and religious term. To be considered Western, a country must be largely Christian (preferably Protestant or Catholic) and largely white." Across social media, much nodding ensued, from constituencies whose approval he would surely least appreciate.

Jonah Goldberg refused explicitly to follow what was now so vividly exhibited as the road of obligate European ethnomasochism and civilizational self-hatred: "What's ironic is that Peter's desk-pounding outrage about Trump's talk of the West is oh-so Western. The West's tolerance for anti-Western philosophies is a fairly unique feature of the West itself. We love to beat ourselves up." Defense of the West, therefore, is taken up as a cause inclusive even of its critics.

It is Rod Dreher, however, who best captures what Trump consolidated in Warsaw, perhaps for the first time. He says, comparing Trump to his leftist critics:

> As is often the case with conservatives and Trump, no matter how much you may despise him and his pomps and works, in the end, you know that he doesn't hate your beliefs, and that he and his government aren't going to use the power of the State to suppress you as a threat to public order and all things good and holy. […] That's not nothing.

However much Trump fosters aversion among many conservatives, he also provokes events that remind conservatives why they hate liberals (using these terms in their degenerate contemporary American sense). Plenty of conservatives hate Trump, and will continue to hate him, probably until the end of his second term in office, if not longer. But the *way* liberals hate him poses an obvious existential threat to all forms of conservative life. As Martin Niemöller never quite said, *first they came for Trump and it was pretty damn obvious I was next in the queue*.

July 12, 2017

CHAPTER FOUR - LIBERALISM

Language and Liberalism

The inversion of the meaning of liberalism over the last 150 years has to be counted among the world's most remarkable ideological facts. The coinage of the term 'classical liberalism' in recent times, as an utterly marginalized linguistic act of dissent, attests to the comprehensiveness and radicality of the change that has occurred. It has surely been essential to the momentum of the historical tide that it has usurped the most elementary cultural tools required for its articulation. What has taken place cannot even be discussed without obscure struggle in a drifting, semiotic fog.

Daniel B. Klein of the Adam Smith Institute has formulated a lucid response to this ideological event, in a website entirely devoted to the re-ordering of the language of liberalism during the crucial period from 1880-1940. Combining ngrams, historical quotations, and reflections (from the author), it depicts with unprecedented clarity the process through which the Old Liberalism lost its tongue.

July 9, 2014

Slippage

Watch the whole of modern political confusion expose itself in a micro-tremor:

Locke's commitment both to voluntary religion and voluntary, contractual government are mutually reinforcing. Just as people join and remain in religious communities by their consent, so they enter and sustain political communities. "Men being, as has been said, by Nature all free, equal, and independent," Locke writes in the ***Second Treatise****, "no one can be put out of this estate and subjected to the political power of another without his own consent." If the members of a faith community believe their church is failing to uphold its spiritual responsibilities,* ***they have a right to leave*** *— without fear of reprisal. Likewise for a political society: If its members believe the political authority is failing to safeguard their natural rights — their "lives, liberty, and estates" —* ***it forfeits the right to govern****.*

(XS emphasis.)

"Likewise"? Yet one *leaves* a church, but *replaces* a government. The fall from liberty into democracy takes only a single false step. With a little more consistency, the case for Exit-based control of government would have been solidly made centuries ago (intrinsically secure against all Rousseauistic perversion). Still, it's not too late to do that now.

February 16, 2017

Quote note (#344)

Cowen:

… Here's another way to put my concern. The percentage of global GDP which is held in relatively non-free countries, such as China, has been rising relative to the share of global GDP held in the freer countries. I suspect we are underrating the noxious effects of that development.

If freedom has become disconnected from economic competence, then classical liberalism is dead.

(The XS suspicion, however, is that Cowen's sense of "freedom" has been so corrupted by social democracy that it's incapable of doing the work he wants it to here.)

March 22, 2017

Psycho Politics

Classical liberals are sitting-out the end of the world. Sitting out, mostly, in the way Norma Bates sat out her son's exploration of psychological diversity. Norman would know why she's not moving, if

he could only remember.

Before even starting, we're deep into the identity problem, and actually several. 'Liberalism' is the most profoundly corrupted word in political history. Without any exaggeration, rhetorical license, or metaphorical latitude, it's the leathery sliced-off face of something murdered long ago which now serves to disguise a foaming chainsaw-wielding maniac sharing none of its DNA. That psycho-killer usage needs to be put to rest before even getting to Bates. *Liberalism*, from this point forward, means nothing at all like state-happy progressivism. It is defined, instead, as the polar opposite of socialism. Its sole commanding value is liberty. It is individualist, only ever guardedly traditionalist, commercially and industrially oriented, strategically neglectful of *care*, skeptical in respect to all purported public agencies, and rigorously economical in respect to every dimension of government. It had a truly terrible 20th century, and right now things aren't looking any better.

At no time in recent history have liberal concerns been less relevant to public policy – even as foils, or 'neoliberal' bogeymen. It might be necessary to return to the 1930s to find a time of comparable eclipse. They aren't being listened to, and they certainly aren't the *object* of any animated conversations, unless to slip into social media banter as the butt of jokes. Their concerns seem eccentric, and even identifiably *dated*, to some point between the end of the 1970s and the Baby Bush quagmire. Where the right once

nursed a secret ambivalence for Pinochet, out of admiration for the Chicago Boys, today it's only interested in the helicopters.

It isn't – mostly – the gender and generational confusion of the Norma / Norman sub-personalities that make libertarians so Batesian. It's the third alter, who goes missing in the movie but not in the novel. Norman intermittently mistakes himself for *Normal*. Normal is the one who thinks he's just like everyone else. Liberalism does exactly the same thing. It goes mad by thinking of itself as normal, when really it's WEIRD.

Liberal universalism has aged badly in recent years. More specifically, it has aged badly in two very different directions. To the left, liberalism has been consumed by universalism, becoming a liberty-deriding globalist monster, while to the right it has been thoroughly demoralized, as recognition has dawned about what its universalism actually means. To anyone still trembling to some slight residual death-flutter of the liberal impulse, the discussion quickly becomes nearly intolerable at this point. Withdrawal, psychic-shattering, and other manifestations of traumatized craziness ensue.

Everything that the 2016 US Presidential Election was about is germane. Political correctness and the Overton Window in general, race, immigration, gender, and social *norms* in particular, every part of it caught upon an aspect of the liberal agony. Donald Trump was, in the strict sense – and not just the depraved one – a drastically *illiberal* candidate. In his campaign, public humiliation of

universalism amounted almost to a platform. American politics had become nakedly tribal.

That American dream girl who you were talking to over dinner? The one who might have been the future? She bled-out from multiple knife-wounds in the shower. *You killed her, Norman*. Yes, you did. It's hard to believe, obviously, but we're going to explain how.

To begin with the most heated dimension of identity politics, liberalism has a race problem. Liberals tend to like immigrants a lot, while immigrants don't like liberals very much at all. Some quantitative evidence for this is provided by Hal Pashler, in a (2013) paper on *U.S. Immigrants' Attitudes Toward Libertarian Values*, which discovers:

> … a marked pattern of **lower** support for pro-liberty views among immigrants as compared to US-born residents. These differences were generally statistically significant and sizable, with a few scattered exceptions. With increasing proportions of the US population being foreign-born, low support for libertarian values by foreign-born residents means that the political prospects of libertarian values in the US are likely to diminish over time.

According to a wide range of metrics, foreign-born residents expressed significantly lower support for limited government than

the native-born population. Such effects would almost certainly been strengthened further if the latter category had itself been broken-down by ethnicity. When Americans were offered a binary choice between smaller or larger government, an expansion of government was favored by only 27% of Whites, but by 55% of Asians, 64% of Blacks, and 73% of Hispanics. More precise ethnic categories only sharpen the pattern. The Hajnal Line, which divides Europe's most committed (north-western) out-breeders from their more tribalistic neighbors, summarizes a gradient of individualism, among other distinctive liberal traits. Emmanuel Todd's ethnography of family types and their associated ideological tendencies binds liberalism to the (North-West European) 'Absolute Nuclear Family.' Common law traditions are peculiar to Anglo-Saxons. Weber and Sombart ethnically identify capitalist dispositions with Protestants and (modern) Jews. It begins to seem extremely unlikely that liberals would represent a random sample of the world's peoples.

Liberal gender-skew is scarcely less striking.

Did Women's Suffrage Change the Size and Scope of Government? ask John Lott and Lawrence Kenny. It certainly looks that way:

> We find that government continued to grow as female voter turnout increased over time. Since suffrage was granted to women in different states over a long period of time

> extending from 1869 to 1920, it is unlikely that World War I is the key. These data also allow us to address causality questions in unusual ways. The central issue is whether giving women the right to vote caused government to grow or there was something else that both contributed to women's getting the right to vote and also increased government growth. We find very similar effects of women's suffrage in states that voted for suffrage and states that were forced to give women the right to vote, which suggests that the second effect is small.

The era of big government and that of female emancipation don't seem to be easily distinguishable. In the incautious words of Peter Thiel:

> Since 1920, the vast increase in welfare beneficiaries and the extension of the franchise to women — two constituencies that are notoriously tough for libertarians — have rendered the notion of "capitalist democracy" into an oxymoron.

The hideously compelling but utterly illiberal conclusion seems to be that women and non-whites have used their rising political influence to massively expand the scope of government. To which a third factor can be added, which is marriage. Quite simply, singles are communist maniacs, comparatively speaking. In regard to US partisan politics,

Steve Sailer calls it 'the marriage gap.' It isn't small. In the 2012 Presidential Election, married *women* (in general) broke for Romney over Obama by 55%, married white women by 63%, and married white men by 67%. (Romney's share among black single women was 2%.)

As liberal demographic, political, and social policies have been entrenched, classical liberals, steering the course of modern social evolution from a position modestly to the left of the old monarchical and ecclesiastical establishment, eventually became libertarians, railing ineffectually against the plunge into socialist tyranny from the position of a stranded, alienated, and derided outer right. Throughout the whole of this process, liberalism has consisted – almost without exception – of white men. These have typically been white men in denial, admittedly. Across the entire sweep of world history there has never been a population group more neglectful of its own privileges. And thus they destroyed themselves.

Anyone who has reached the "Oh, my God, the stereotypes!" stage with this is onto something. That has been a central part of the learning process. All the stereotypes are true (basically). That's science, too, if it helps, though it rarely does. Unless inflated, or dogmatized, beyond the range of usefulness as broad epistemological heuristics, stereotypes have vastly greater reliability than – for instance – ideologically-motivated cognitive commitments. What's more, classical liberals used to know that. It's

a Burkean expectation.

Stereotypes are spontaneous social products, like natural languages, common law, and metallic money. To say all this explains why classical liberals are conservatives, characterized by a principled acceptance of *the way things have turned out*. What had been, historically, a reasonably sanguine view of centralized state government was based on how little of it there had ever been. The mere existence of the gargantuan social-democratic welfarist state makes such conservative liberalism (or liberal conservatism) impossible. Radically frustrated revolutionary libertarianism takes its place.

It's easy to see what pushes Bates over the edge. He'd thought he was *Normal*, but it turns out he's a WASP. By a further mad twist, he recognizes the one thing WASPs will never do is defend their own culture – that's an essential ethnic tradition. Libertarianism has been crazily WASPish that way, when he looks at it, which he can't for long. It's an intractable paradox that leads through incoherence into fragmentation. To have protected his identity would have been something only another could have done. Perhaps his mother would look after him? But she's dead.

The identification of classical liberalism with WASP culture is a strong approximation. Few socio-historical correlations are more robust, but the coincidence can only be statistical. There are socialist WASPs, and classical liberal non-WASPs, although not enough of

either to seriously disrupt the pattern. When the French, in particular, refer to Anglo-Saxons stereotypically, they know what they are talking about, and so does anybody else who is paying attention. Hubert Védrine puts it best:

> [L]et's admit it: Globalization does not automatically benefit France. […] Globalization develops according to principles that correspond neither to French tradition nor to French culture. These principles include the ultraliberal market economy, mistrust of the state, individualism removed from the republican tradition, the inevitable reinforcement of the universal and 'indispensable' role of the United States, common law, the English language, Anglo-Saxon norms, and Protestant — more than Catholic — concepts.

It all makes sense from outside, but for WASP culture itself – which is to say *for liberalism* – identity politics is madness. That leaves it with nowhere to go. The leather-face schizo-Maoism of the contemporary Anglophone left is not any kind of plausible option, but neither is anything opening up on the popular right. As the Alt-Right consolidates its passionate affair with identity, it sounds ever more like Hubert Védrine. Individualism is derided. Its suspicion of free-trade owes more to Friedrich List than to the Scottish Enlightenment. Its criticism of labor arbitrage is often almost

indistinguishable from that familiar from socialist traditions, marked by the same current of moral outrage at the fact that Capital – despite itself being competitively disciplined by footloose consumers – is permitted to shop around for its human resources. Wage competition, and even price competition more generally, is an increasingly common object of attack. At its dynamic, racial edge the Alt-Right promotes solidarity among *Whites*, or *Europeans*, as if either could ever be a WASP thing. *Europe* is what liberalism has always sought to escape. Populism demands grievance politics, which means default antipathy to market dominant minorities, and thus – in the Western context – an irrepressible inclination to anti-Semitism. None of this describes a place that even maddened liberals can go.

Because the word 'fascism' has been so ruined by incontinent polemical usage, it is difficult to employ without apparent rhetorical over-reach. This is unfortunate, because in its cold, technical sense, the word is not even merely convenient, but even invaluable. It literally means *the politics of bundling*. *Fasces* are sticks bound together. Liberals are essentially defined by their dissent from that. If WASP culture has a core, it is loose association. There's no real possibility of simply sticking it back together. Pirates and cowboys don't do national solidarity. That would be a different culture altogether.

As for Bates, he knows his mother is dead by now, and even that

he killed her – *kills anyone like her*. Bad thoughts flood in. It's difficult to move on, but at least he has confidence in his own inviolable non-aggression principle. There's no way it could have been as they say, because he wouldn't hurt anyone. Not even a fly.

August 11, 2017

SECTION A - REPUBLICANISM AND CONSTITUTIONS

CHAPTER ONE - SOVEREIGNTY

Quibbles with Moldbug

To be a reactionary, minimally speaking, requires no more than a recognition that things are going to hell. As the source of decay is traced ever further back, and attributed to ever more deeply-rooted – and securely mainstream — sociopolitical assumptions, the reactionary attitude becomes increasingly extreme. If innovative elements are introduced into either the diagnosis or the proposed remedy, a neo-reactionary mentality is born.

As the United States, along with the world that it has built, careers into calamity, neo-reactionary extremism is embarrassingly close to becoming a vogue. If evidence is needed, consider the Vacate Movement, a rapidly growing dissident faction within the 0.0000001%. This is a development that would have been scarcely imaginable, were it not for the painstakingly crafted, yet rhetorically effervescent provocations of Mencius Moldbug.

From Moldbug, immoderate neo-reaction has learnt many essential and startling facts about the genealogy and tendency of history's central affliction, newly baptized *the Cathedral*. It has been

liberated from the mesmerism of 'democratic universalism' – or evangelical ultra-puritanism – and trained back towards honest (and thus forbidden) books. It has re-learnt class analysis, of unprecedented explanatory power. Much else could have been added, before arriving at our destination: the schematic outline for a 'neocameral' alternative to the manifestly perishing global political order. (On a trivial etiquette matter: Moldbug politely asks to be addressed as 'Mencius' — comparable requests by Plato Jiggabug and Siddhartha Moldbucket have been evaded too.)

Moldbug scrupulously distances his proposals from any hint of revolutionary agitation, or even the mildest varieties of civil disobedience. Neocameralism is not designed to antagonize, but rather to *restore order* to social bodies that have squandered it, by drafting a framework compatible with the long-lost art of effective government. ('Long-lost', that is, to the West – the Singapore example, among those of other city states and special economic zones, is never far removed.) Neocameralism would not overthrow anything, but rather arise amongst ruins. It is a solution awaiting the terminal configuration of a problem.

The neocameral program proceeds roughly as follows:

Phase-1: Constructively disciplined lamentation

Phase-2: Civilization collapses

Phase-3: Re-boot to a modernized form of absolute monarchy, in which citizens are comprehensively stripped of all historically-

accumulated political rights

Despite its obvious attractions to partisans of liberty, this program is not without its dubious features, a few of which can be touched upon here whilst rehearsing the Moldbug case for Neocameral government in slightly greater detail. Stated succinctly and preliminarily, our reservations drift into focus when that guy on a white horse appears. Where exactly does he come from?

To answer 'Carlyle' would be easy, and not exactly inaccurate, but it would also miss the structural coherence of the issue. Moldbug refuses to call his neocameral dictator a 'national CEO' (which he is), preferring to describe him as a 'monarch' (which – as a non-dynastic executive appointee — he isn't), for reasons both stylistic and substantial. Stylistically, royalism is a provocation, and a dramatization of reactionary allegiance. Substantially, it foregrounds the question of *sovereignty*.

Moldbug's political philosophy is founded upon a revision to the conception of property, sufficient to support the assertion that *sovereign power is properly understood as the owner of a country*. It is only at this level of political organization that real property rights – i.e. *protections* – are sustained.

> *Property is any stable structure of monopoly control. You own something if you alone control it. Your control is stable if no one else will take it away from you. This control may*

> *be assured by your own powers of violence, or it may be delegated by a higher power. If the former, it is* secondary *property. If the latter, it is* primary *or* sovereign *property.*

The sovereign power (sovereign corporation, or 'sovcorp'), alone, is able to ensure its own property rights. Its might and rights are absolutely identical, and from this primary identity subordinate rights (to 'secondary property') cascade down through the social hierarchy. Neocameralism is nothing but the systematic, institutional recognition of this reality. (Whether it is, in fact, a 'reality' is a question we shall soon proceed to.)

Perhaps surprisingly, Moldbug's conclusions can be presented in terms that recovering libertarians have found appealing:

> *Neocameralism is the idea that a sovereign state or primary corporation is not organizationally distinct from a secondary or private corporation. Thus we can achieve good management, and thus libertarian government, by converting sovcorps to the same management design that works well in today's private sector – the joint-stock corporation.*
>
> *One way to approach neocameralism is to see it as a refinement of royalism, an ancient system in which the sovcorp is a sort of family business. Under neocameralism, the biological quirks of royalism are eliminated and the State*

> *"goes public," hiring the best executives regardless of their bloodline or even nationality.*
>
> *Or you can just see neocameralism as part of the usual capitalist pattern in which services are optimized by aligning the interests of the service provider and the service consumer. If this works for groceries, why shouldn't it work for government? I have a hard time in accepting the possibility that democratic constitutionalism would generate either lower prices or better produce at Safeway …*

In order to take a step back from this vision, towards its foundations, it is useful to scrutinize its building blocks. When Moldbug defines property as "any stable structure of monopoly control" what is really meant by 'control'? It might seem simple enough. To control something is to use, or make use of it — to put it to work, such that a desired outcome is in fact achieved. 'Property' would be glossed as *exclusive right of use*, or instrumental utilization, conceived with sufficient breadth to encompass consumption, and perhaps (we will come to this), donation or exchange.

Complications quickly arise. 'Control' in this case would involve technical competence, or the ability to make something work. If control requires that one can *use something effectively*, then it demands compliance with natural fact (through techno-scientific understanding and practical skills). Even consumption is a type of

use. Is this historical variable – vastly distant from intuitive notions of sovereignty – actually suited to a *definition* of property?

It might be realistic to conceive property through control, and control through technical competence, but it would be hard to defend as an advance in formalism. Since this problem thoroughly infuses the topic of 'might', or operational sovereignty, it is also difficult to isolate, or parenthesize. Moldbug's frequent, enthusiastic digressions into the practicalities of crypto-locked military apparatuses attest strongly to this. The impression begins to emerge that the very possibility of sovereign property is bound to an irreducibly fuzzy, historically dynamic, and empirically intricate investigation into the micro-mechanics of power, dissolving into an acid fog of Clauswitzean 'friction' (or ineliminable unpredictability).

More promising, by far – for the purposes of tractable argument — is a strictly formal or contractual usage of 'control' to designate the exclusive right to *free disposal* or *commercial alienation*. Defined this way, ownership is a legal category, co-original with the idea of contract, referring to those things which one has the right to trade (based on natural law). Property is essentially marketable. It cannot exist unless it can be alienated through negotiation. A prince who cannot trade away his territory does not 'own' it in any sense that matters.

Moldbug *seems* to acknowledge this, in at least three ways. Firstly, his formalization of sovereign power, through conversion into

sovereign stock, commercializes it. Within the neocameral regime, power takes the form of revenue-yielding property, available for *free disposal* by those who wield it. That is the sole basis for the corporate analogy. If sovereign stock were not freely disposable, its 'owners' would be mere stewards, subject to obligations, non-alienable political responsibilities, or administrative duties that demonstrate with absolute clarity the subordination to a higher sovereignty. (That is, broadly speaking, the current situation, and inoffensively conventional political theory.)

Secondly, the neocameral state exists within a *patchwork*, or system of interactions, through which they compete for population, and in which peaceful (or commercial) redistributions — including takeovers and break-ups — are facilitated. Unless sovereign stock can be traded within the patchwork, it is not *property* at all. This in turn indicates that 'internal' positive legislation, as dictated by the domestic 'sovereign', is embedded within a far more expansive normative system, and the definition of 'property' cannot be exhausted by its *local determination* within the neocameral micropolis. As Moldbug repeatedly notes, an introverted despotism that violated broader patchwork norms – such as those governing free exit — could be reliably expected to suffer a collapse of sovereign stock value (which implies that the substance of sovereign stock is systemically, rather than locally, determined). If the entire neocameral state is *disciplined* through the patchwork, how real can

its local sovereignty be? This systemic disciplining or subversion of local sovereignty, it should be noted, is the sole attraction of the neocameral schema to supporters of dynamic geography (who want nothing more than for the national government to become the patchwork system's bitch).

Thirdly (and relatedly), neocameralism is floated as a model for experimental government, driven cybernetically towards effectiveness by the same types of feedback mechanisms that control 'secondary' corporations. In particular, population traffic between neocameral states is conceived as a fundamental regulator, continuously measuring the functionality of government, and correcting it in the direction of attractiveness. The incentive structure of the neocameral regime – and thus its claim to practical rationality — rests entirely upon this. Once again, however, it is evidently the radical limitation of local sovereignty, rather than its unconstrained expression, which promises to make such governments work. Free exit – to take the single most important instance — is a rule imposed at a higher level than the national sovereign, operating as a natural law of the entire patchwork. Without free exit, a neocameral state is no more than a parochial despotism. The absolute sovereign of the state *must choose* to comply with a rule he did not legislate … something is coming unstuck here (it's time to send that white horse to the biodiesel tanks).

Neocameralism necessarily commercializes sovereignty, and in

doing so it accommodates power to natural law. Sovereign stock ('primary property') and 'secondary property' become commercially inter-changeable, dissolving the original distinction, whilst local sovereignty is rendered compliant with the wider commercial order, and thus becomes a form of constrained 'secondary sovereignty' relative to the primary or absolute sovereignty of the system itself. Final authority bleeds out into the catallactic ensemble, the *agora*, or *commercium*, where *what can really happen* is decided by natural law. It is this to which sovereign stockholders, *if they are to be effective*, and to prosper, must defer.

The fundamental point, and the reason why the pretender on the white horse is so misleading, is that sovereignty cannot, in principle, inhere in a particular social agent – whether individual, or group. This is best demonstrated in reference to the concept of natural law (which James Donald outlines with unsurpassed brilliance). When properly understood, or articulated, natural law *cannot possibly be violated*. Putting your hand into a fire, and being burnt, does not defy the natural law that temperatures beyond a certain range cause tissue damage and pain. Similarly, suppressing private property, and producing economic cataclysm, does not defy the natural law that human economic behavior is sensitive to incentives.

Positive law, as created by legislators, takes the form: do (or don't do) this. Violations will be punished.

Natural law, as discovered by any rational being, takes the form:

do what thou wilt and accept the consequences. Rewards and punishments are intrinsic to it. It cannot be defied, but only misunderstood. It is therefore absolutely sovereign (*Deus sive Natura*). Like any other being, governments, however powerful, can only comply with it, either through intelligent adaptation and flourishing, or through ignorance, incompetence, degeneration, and death. To God-or-Nature it matters not at all. Natural law is indistinguishable from the true sovereign power which really decides what can work, and what doesn't, which can then – 'secondarily' — be learnt by rational beings, or not.

Moldbug knows this – really. He demonstrates it – to take just one highly informative example — through his insistence that a neocameral state would tend to tax at the Laffer optimum. That is to say, such a state would prove its effectiveness by maximizing the return on sovereign property *in compliance with reality*. It does not legislate the Laffer curve, or choose for it to exist, but instead recognizes that it has been discovered, and with it an aspect of natural law. Anything less, or other, would be inconsistent with its legitimacy as a competent protector of property. To survive, prosper, and even pretend to sovereignty, it can do nothing else. Its power is delegated by *commercium*.

It is surely no coincidence that Cnut the Great has been described by Norman Cantor as "the most effective king in Anglo-Saxon history." As Wikipedia relates his story:

> *His accession to the Danish throne in 1018 brought the crowns of England and Denmark together. Cnut held this power-base together by uniting Danes and Englishmen under cultural bonds of wealth and custom, rather than sheer brutality.*

Most importantly:

> *Henry of Huntingdon, the 12th-century chronicler, tells how Cnut set his throne by the sea shore and commanded the tide to halt and not wet his feet and robes. Yet "continuing to rise as usual [the tide] dashed over his feet and legs without respect to his royal person. Then the king leapt backwards, saying: 'Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings, for there is none worthy of the name, but He whom heaven, earth, and sea obey by eternal laws.'"*

January 24, 2013

Cnut the Great

According to legend, at least, Cnut was the wisest of all kings, precisely because he ironized the attribution of sovereignty.

"Surely, Great King, you are ominipotent Fnargl himself!"

“Let us then test the claim, shall we?”

Modern macroeconomics is the systematized refusal to learn from this story. Sovereignty does not rise above the waves.

March 3, 2016

Twitter cuts (#52)

> @Outsideness "The Crown" isn't the same thing as the monarch, or even as the monarchy.
>
> — Lulach the Simpler (@lulach_cuardach) March 8, 2016

Responding to this (Outsideness) twitter-stream:

The transcendental self is not the empirical person, Kant argues, though confusion of the two is a reliable anthropological fact. … ‘Sovereignty’ demands disciplined critique on exactly these lines. Monarchical theater is (exactly) a naive image of ‘the sovereign’. … Moldbug is clear that the ‘monarch’ (state CEO) is an agent of sovereignty, and not the sovereign ‘himself’. … The LARPing loved by romantic reaction, and derided by the Left, dwells entirely within this rigorously identifiable philosophical error. … Sovereignty is no less a profound philosophical enigma than the transcendental self, the prompt for an exploration of vast difficulty. … “We know what a sovereign looks like.” — It is scarcely possible to imagine a delusion of

greater absurdity.

Something of greater articulacy is clearly called for, but the kernel would be unchanged. 'Sovereignty' is the translation of the transcendental into the realm of political philosophy. This is why, even for atheists, the Idea of Divine Right sovereign legitimacy is a superior point of departure than mere charismatic leadership.

March 8, 2016

Quotable (#176)

Stockman on the limits of power:

The Deep State can control Congress. It can control the state bureaucracy, Wall Street and Big Business. It can even – usually – control the voters. But it can't control the credit cycle.

Cnut the Great is the ancient hero of the Austrians, and Nemesis is their goddess.

June 29, 2016

Scale-free Reaction

Kaplan goes full Moldbug:

Unless some force can, against considerable odds, reinstitute

hierarchy … we will have more fluidity, more equality and therefore more anarchy to look forward to. This is profoundly disturbing, because civilization abjures anarchy. … without order — without hierarchy — there is nothing.

Perhaps, in the field of international relations, Kaplan is *more* Moldbug than Moldbug, presenting an uncompromisingly hardline reactionary model of world order, completely undisturbed by domestic considerations or even the slightest hint of libertarian descent. If *sovereignty is conserved* globally, as well as nationally, a worldwide Patchwork order looks as improbable as a stable constitutional republic, and exit options evaporate. Scale-free Moldbuggian analysis could prove more than a little blood-chilling.

April 18, 2013

Transcendental Anarchy

This, from NBS, is perfect.

Asked (by Garrett Gray): "What reason is there to think there's an irreducible anarchy between sovereigns?" he responds —

Suppose there is no anarchy between sovereigns. This means there is a law governing sovereigns. Which means there is a sovereign over the sovereigns. Which means that the sovereigns weren't sovereign. Which is a contradiction. Therefore there IS

anarchy between sovereigns.

This insight is already the solid foundation of IRT, but it's surprising how few seem to clearly get it.

September 15, 2016

CHAPTER TWO - CONSTITUTIONS AND ALGORITHMIC GOVERNANCE

A Republic, If You Can Keep It

The interlocking achievements of Kurt Gödel, which revolutionized the rigorous understanding of logic, arithmetic, and time, are not of a nature that wins ready popular acclamation. There is nevertheless a broadly factual story about him that has attained some notable level of popularity, and it is one that connects suggestively with the core concerns of his work. At the website of the Institute for Advanced Study (where Gödel was based from 1940 until his death in 1978), Oskar Morgenstern's recollection of the episode in question is recorded:

> *[Gödel] rather excitedly told me that in looking at the Constitution, to his distress, he had found some inner contradictions and that he could show how in a perfectly legal manner it would be possible for somebody to become a dictator and set up a Fascist regime never intended by those who drew up the Constitution. I told him that it was most*

unlikely that such events would ever occur, even assuming that he was right, which of course I doubted.

But he was persistent and so we had many talks about this particular point. I tried to persuade him that he should avoid bringing up such matters at the examination before the court in Trenton, and I also told Einstein about it: he was horrified that such an idea had occurred to Gödel, and he also told him he should not worry about these things nor discuss that matter.

Many months went by and finally the date for the examination in Trenton came. On that particular day, I picked up Gödel in my car. He sat in the back and then we went to pick up Einstein at his house on Mercer Street, and from there we drove to Trenton. While we were driving, Einstein turned around a little and said, "Now Gödel, are you really well prepared for this examination?" Of course, this remark upset Gödel tremendously, which was exactly what Einstein intended and he was greatly amused when he saw the worry on Gödel's face.

When we came to Trenton, we were ushered into a big room, and while normally the witnesses are questioned separately from the candidate, because of Einstein's appearance, an exception was made and all three of us were invited to sit down together, Gödel, in the center. The

> *examiner first asked Einstein and then me whether we thought Gödel would make a good citizen. We assured him that this would certainly be the case, that he was a distinguished man, etc.*
>
> *And then he turned to Gödel and said, Now, Mr. Gödel, where do you come from?*
>
> *Gödel:* Where I come from? Austria.
>
> *The examiner:* What kind of government did you have in Austria?
>
> *Gödel:* It was a republic, but the constitution was such that it finally was changed into a dictatorship.
>
> *The examiner:* Oh! This is very bad. This could not happen in this country.
>
> *Gödel:* Oh, yes, I can prove it.

To the great advantage of intelligence on earth, Gödel did not in the end disqualify himself from residence in the USA through this disastrously over-accurate understanding of its constitution. Evidently, despite everything that had happened by 1947, detailed attachment to the constitution had not yet become a thought-crime.

Today, emphatic attachment to the US Constitution is restricted to the decent i.e. lunatic fringe of the Outer Party, and even crankier outliers. Hardcore libertarians tend to dismiss it as a distraction, if not a malign incarnation of statist degeneracy (when compared to

the less Leviathan-compatible Articles of Confederation). Reactionary realists of the Moldbug school (in all their vast multitudes) are at least as dismissive, seeing it as little more than a fetish object and evasion of the timeless practical question: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes*? If constitutions are realistically indefensible, both in principle and as a matter of brutally demonstrated historical fact, what significance could they have to any cold-eyed analysis of power?

Since the overwhelmingly bulk of present USG activity is transparently unconstitutional, the skeptical case largely makes itself. Presidents mobilize congressional support to appoint Supreme Court justices whose principal qualification for office is willingness to conspire in the subversion of the constitution, to the deafening applause of a pork-ravening electorate and their intermediary lobbies. How could that plausibly be resisted? Perhaps that was Gödel's point.

In fact, no one really knows what Gödel's point was. Jeffrey Kegler, who has examined the topic carefully, leaves it open. "Apparently, the 'inconsistency' noted by Gödel is simply that the Constitution provides for its own amendment," suggests a "gravely disappointed" Mark Dominus, who "had been hoping for something brilliant and subtle that only Gödel would have noticed." Dominus draws this tentative conclusion from Peter Suber's *Paradox of Self-Amendment*, where it is stated more boldly:

> *Kurt Gödel the Austrian logician understood that an omnipotent AC contained the risk of tyranny. Gödel studied the U.S. constitution in preparation for his oral citizenship examination in 1948. He noticed that the AC had procedural limitations but no substantive limitations; hence it could be used to overturn the democratic institutions described in the rest of the constitution.*

Suber adds: "A desire to limit the amending power, or to make it more difficult — not the same thing — shows a distrust for democracy or a denial that in general the people deserve what they get." (We'll get back to that later.)

This is conceptually persuasive, because it harmonizes Gödel's constitutional concerns with his central intellectual pre-occupation: the emergence of inconsistencies within self-referential formal systems. The Amending Clause (Article V, section 1) is the occasion for the constitution to talk about itself, and thus to encounter problems rigorously comparable to those familiar from Gödel's incompleteness theorems in mathematical logic. Despite the neatness of this 'solution', however, there is no solid evidence to support it. Furthermore, self-referential structures can be identified at numerous other points. For instance, is not the authority of the Supreme Court respecting constitutional interpretation a similar point of reflexivity, with unlimited potential for circularity and

paradox? This insight, highly-regarded among the neo-reactionaries, recognizes that the constitution allows – in principle – for a sufficiently corrupted Supreme Court to 'interpret' its way to absolute power (in conformity with a constitution that has sublimed into pure 'life'). Insofar as a constitution allows for its own processing, it must – ultimately — allow anything.

Moldbug asks us to accelerate through this formal tangle, cutting the Gordian knot. "Sovereignty is conserved," he repeats, insistently, so the occasions when power undertakes to bind itself are essentially risible. *Of course* the final custodian of the constitution is a constitutionally unrestrained dictator. That's simple Schmittian sanity.

With all due contempt for *argumentum ad hominem*, it can probably still be agreed that Gödel was not a fool, so that his excited identification of a *localized flaw* in the US Constitution merits consideration as just that (rather than an excuse to bin the entire problematic). The formal resonances between his topically disparate arguments provide a further incentive to slow down.

Whether in number theory, or space-time cosmology, Gödel's method was to advance the formalization of the system under consideration and then test it to destruction upon the 'strange loops' it generated (paradoxes of self-reference and time-travel). In each case, the system was shown to permit cases that it could not consistently absorb, opening it to an interminable process of

revision, or technical improvement. It thus defined dynamic intelligence, or the logic of evolutionary imperfection, with an adequacy that was both sufficient and necessarily inconclusive. What it did not do was trash the very possibility of arithmetic, mathematical logic, or cosmic history — except insofar as these were falsely identified with idols of finality or closure.

On the slender evidence available, Gödel's 'reading' of the US Constitution was strictly analogous. Far from excusing the abandonment of constitutionalism, it identified constitutional design as the only intellectually serious response to the problem of politics (i.e. untrammeled power). It is a subtle logical necessity that constitutions, like any formal systems of comparable complexity, cannot be perfected or consistently completed. In other words, as Benjamin Franklyn fully recognized, any republic is precarious. Nothing *necessarily* follows from this, but a number of things might.

Most abruptly, one might contemplate the sickly child with sadness, before abandoning it on the hillside for the wolves. Almost every interesting voice on the right seems to be heading this way. Constitutions are a grim joke.

Alternatively, constitutionalism could be elevated to a new level of cultural dignity, in keeping with its status as the sole model of republican government, or truly logical politics. This would require, first of all, that the necessity for constitutional modification was recognized only when such modification *made the constitution*

stronger, in purely formal, or systemic terms. In the US case, the first indication of such an approach would be an amendment of Article Five itself, in order to specify that constitutional amendments are tolerated only when they satisfy criteria of formal improvement, legitimated in exact, mathematical terms, in accordance with standards of proof no different than those applicable to absolutely uncontroversial arguments (theorems). Constitutional design would be subsumed within applied mathematics as a subsection of nonlinear control theory.

Under these (unlikely) circumstances, the purpose of the constitution is to sustain itself, and thus the Republic. As a mathematical object, the constitution is maximally simple, consistent, necessarily incomplete, and interpretable as a model of natural law. Political authority is allocated solely to *serve the constitution*. There are no authorities which are not overseen, within nonlinear structures. Constitutional language is formally constructed to eliminate all ambiguity and to be processed algorithmically. Democratic elements, along with official discretion, and legal judgment, is incorporated reluctantly, minimized in principle, and gradually eliminated through incremental formal improvement. Argument defers to mathematical expertise. Politics is a disease that the constitution is designed to cure.

Extreme skepticism is to be anticipated not only from the Moldbuggian royalists, but from all of those educated by Public

Choice theory to analyze 'politics without romance'. How could *defending the constitution* become an absolute, categorical or unconditional imperative, when the only feasible defenders are *people*, guided by multiple incentives, few of which align neatly with objective constitutional order? Yet, how is this different from the question of mathematical or natural scientific progress? Are not mathematicians equally people, with appetites, egos, sex-driven status motivations, and deeply defective capabilities for realistic introspection? How does maths advance? (No one can seriously deny that it does.) The answer surely lies in its autonomous or impersonal criteria of excellence, combined with pluralistic institutions that facilitate Darwinian convergence. The Gödelian equivalence between mathematical logic and constitutional government indicates that such principles and mechanisms are absent from the public domain only due to defective (democratic-bureaucratic) design.

When it comes to *deep realism*, and to guns, is there any reason to think the military is resistant by nature to constitutional subordination? Between the sublime office of Commander in Chief, and the mere man, is it not obvious that authority should tend to gravitate to the former? It might be argued that civilization is nothing else, that is to say: the tendency of *personal authority* to decline towards zero. Ape-men will reject this of course. It's what they do.

Between democracy, monarchy, anarchy, or republican

government, the arguments will not end soon. They are truly ancient, and illustrated in the Odyssey, by the strategy of binding oneself against the call of the Sirens. Can Odysseus bind himself? Only republicans defend the attempt, as Gödel did. All of the others let the Sirens win. Perhaps they will.

February 1, 2013

The Royalist Imperative

This is an argument I'm really not grasping:

Libertarians are unrealistic because the world was once vastly freer than it is today, and then progressively rolled down the populist hill into the present social democratic latrine trench, so "Why would we expect different results on the second go?" [OK, still following so far] … *thus* we need Kings back, because … [we need to catch the rising tide, after all, the world hasn't ever been more monarchist than now? Prussian Neocameralism outlasted Manchester Liberalism? Royalist institutions have demonstrated their inherent immunity to the forces of decay? …]

How can reactionaries criticize free republics for falling apart? Everything reactionaries have ever respected fell apart. *Nobody would be a reactionary if their favored configuration of the world hadn't fallen apart.*

Republics are extremely fragile. All the more reason to take devoted care of them (first of all, by protecting them from democracy).

ADDED: Fag-end of a ludicrous institution. (via AoS)

ADDED: Epic response from Nydwracu .

February 20, 2013

The Odysseus Problem

Moldbug's insistence that 'Sovereignty is conserved' surely counts as one of the most significant assertions in the history of political thought. It is arguably the fundamental axiom of his 'system', and its implications are almost inestimably profound.

Sovereignty is conserved says that anything that appears to *bind* sovereignty *is itself* in reality true sovereignty, binding something else, and something less. It is therefore a negative answer to the Odysseus Problem: *Can Sovereignty bind itself*? If Moldbug's assertion is accepted, constitutional government is impossible, except as a futile aspiration, a 'noble lie', or a cynical joke.

In addition to Moldbug's powerful arguments, we know from the work of Kurt Gödel that the Odysseus Problem is at least partially insoluble, since it is logically impossible for there to be a *perfect knot*. However well constructed a constitution might be, it cannot, in

principle, seal itself reliably against the possibility of a surreptitious undoing. In a sufficiently complex (self-referential) constitutional order, there will always be permissible procedures whose consequences have not been completely anticipated, and whose consistency with the continuation of the system cannot be ensured in advance.

Yet it would be obviously misleading to assume that such concerns were not already active during the formulation of the American Constitution. It is precisely because some quite lucid comprehension of the Odysseus Problem was at work, that the founders envisaged the grounding principle of republican constitutionalism as a division of powers, whereby the component units of a disintegrated sovereignty *bound each other*. The animating system of incentives was not to rest upon a naive expectation of altruism or voluntary restraint, but upon a systematically integrated *network of suspicion*, formally installing the anti-monarchical impulse as an enduring, distributed function. If the republic was to work, it would be because the *fear of power* in other hands permanently over-rode the *greed for power* in one's own.

The American Constitution was, of course, destroyed, in successive waves. After Lincoln, and FDR, only a pitiful and derided shell remains. USG has unified itself, and the principle of sovereign power has been thoroughly re-legitimated in the court of popular opinion. Democracy rose as the republic fell, exposing yet again the

essential political bond of the tyrant with the mob, Leviathan with the people.

Does this ruin refute the constitutional conjecture? Is there really nothing further to be said in defense of imperfect (but perhaps improvable) knots? This one came horribly undone. Might there be other, better ones? *Outside in* remains obstinately interested in the problem …

ADDED: Many relevant speculations and insights are to be found in this article on the practicalities of secession (especially section XI J, XII, XIII, and XIV). "Since it is important that the AFR [or proposed American Federal Republic] function as a constitutional republic, one of the first things it should do is to hold a constitutional convention. We anticipate that the resulting document will be similar to the present American constitution, but not identical." It includes some (very modest) recommendations to curtail democracy.

February 21, 2013

Shelter of the Pyramid

Moldbug's 'Royalism' (or Carlylean reaction) rests upon the proposition that the Misesian catallactic order is, like Newtonian mechanics, true only as a special case within a more general system of principles.

He writes:

Here is the Carlylean roadmap for the Misesian goal. Spontaneous order, also known as ***freedom****, is the highest level of a political pyramid of needs. These needs are:* ***peace, security, law****, and* ***freedom****. To advance order, always work for the next step – without skipping steps. In a state of war, advance toward peace; in a state of insecurity, advance toward security; in a state of security, advance toward law; in a state of law, advance toward freedom.*

Alexander Hamilton (Federalist #8) pursues a closely related argument, in reverse:

Safety from external danger is the most powerful director of national conduct. Even the ardent love of liberty will, after a time, give way to its dictates. The violent destruction of life and property incident to war, the continual effort and alarm attendant on a state of continual danger, will compel nations the most attached to liberty to resort for their repose and security to institutions which have a tendency to destroy their civil and political rights. To be more safe, they at length become willing to run the risk of being less free.

This pyramidal schema is 'neat', but by no means unproblematic. Like any hierarchical structure operating within a complex, reflexive field, it invites strange loops which scramble its apparently coherent order. Even accepting, as realism dictates, that war exists at the most basic level of social possibility, so that military survival grounds all 'higher' elaborations, can we be entirely confident that catallactic

forces are neatly confined to the realm of pacific and sophisticated civilian intercourse? Does not this mode of analysis lead to exactly the opposite conclusion? Self-organizing networks are *tough*, and perhaps supremely tough.

There is nothing obvious or uncontroversial about the model of the market order as a fragile flower, blossoming late, and precariously, within a hot-house constructed upon very different principles. The *pact* is already catallactic, and who is to say — at least, without a prolonged fight — that it is subordinate, in principle, to a more primordial assertion of order. Subordination is complex, and conflicted, and although the Pyramid certainly has a case, the trial of reality is not easily predictable. An ultimate (or basic) *fanged freedom* is eminently thinkable. (Isn't that what the Second Amendment argument is about?)

February 24, 2013

Casino Royale

Even prior to the twitterization catastrophe, and the terminal disintegration of thought into nano-particles, symphonic orchestration wasn't obviously emerging as an *Outside in* core competence. One unfortunate consequence of this deficiency is that highly persuasive blogging ideas get endlessly can-kicked, unless

they can be easily pulverized.

"Blogging ideas" doesn't mean anything grandiose (those type of thoughts splinter anything in their path, and bust in), but rather highly medium-adapted discussion packages, which present things in a way that racks up hits. The relevant example right now is — or rather 'was to be' — ***The X Fundamental Disputes of Neoreaction*** ('X' being an as-yet undetermined number — optimally of surreptitious qabbalistic significance). That puppy would have been clocking up views like Old Faithful, but confusion reigns, and patience has run out. Into the shredding machine it goes.

The principal provocations for this spasm of impatience are two posts on the topic of monarchism, at *Anomaly UK*, and *More Right*. The Great AUK post is structured as a science fiction scenario, modeling a future monarchist regime, whilst Michael Anissimov's MR defense of "traditionalism and monarchism" is organized dialectically. Both serve to consolidate an affinity between neoreaction and monarchist ideals that was already solidly established by Moldbug's Jacobitism. It would not be unreasonable to propose that this affinity is strong enough to approach an identity (which is quite possibly what both of these writers do envisage). So the time to frame the monarchist case within a question, as a Fundamental Dispute of Neoreaction, is now.

Perhaps the first thing to note is that, even though *Outside in* adopts the anti-monarchist position in this dispute, it finds the

Anomaly UK description of a future Britain remarkably attractive, and — without any hesitation — a vast improvement upon the present dismal state of that country's political arrangements. In addition, there is not a single objection to the monarchist idea, among the ten listed by Anissimov, that we find even slightly persuasive. If these were the reasons to refuse monarchy government, any suggestion of republican sentiment would strike us as an obnoxious perversion. Our dissatisfaction with the monarchist solution has other grounds.

The primary concern is abstractly constitutional, which is to say, it arises from considerations of political engineering. For our purposes here, the concept of 'constitutional government' can be quite exactly specified, to refer to a blueprint for the mechanism of power that achieves *cybernetic closure*. An adequate constitution designs a fragmentation of authority, such that each element is no less controlled than controlling, with the result that sovereignty *emerges* from a distributed system, rather than inhering in concentrated form within any particular node. The simplest model for such a system is a dynamic triangle, comparable to the circuit of paper-scissors-stone, in which power *flows* nonlinearly, or *circulates*. Thus conceived, a constitution is a design for the dissolution of power reservoirs, in which the optimum administrative function of each node is a check, or restriction, on the effective authority of nodes downstream (within a circular arrangement). The achievement of dynamically

stable governmental self-limitation through strategic fragmentation (of functions and powers) is the constitutional objective.

Clearly, monarchism represents a definitive abandonment of this constitutional ambition. It contends that, since sovereignty cannot be effectively or permanently dismantled, rational attention is better focused upon its concentrated expression. The monarchist case is able to draw great sustenance from the manifest degeneration of republican constitutionalism — most obviously within the United States of America — where its most radically deteriorated possibility, mass democracy, betrays a scarcely contestable inferiority to monarchical government in each day's news headlines. It needs to be emphasized at this point that any constitutional republicanism which is less anti-democratic than absolute monarchy is, in that regard, contemptible. Neoreaction is essentially anti-democratic, but only hypothetically monarchist.

Republicanism, like monarchy, has a rich and deep historical archive of examples to draw upon, dating back to classical antiquity. The confusion between republican government and democracy is a recent and unfortunate eventuality. The historical reasons for this confusion are by no means trivial, but nor do they point inexorably to the monarchist conclusion. It is especially important to consider the possibility that the demotic destruction of monarchical regimes, and of functional republics, has been a parallel process, rather than a succession (in which republicanism served as an intermediate stage

of political disorganization). A detailed historical analysis of the 1848 revolutions would bring out some of the complexity this topic introduces. In particular, it raises the question why the model of the Dutch Republic (1581-1795) was unable to offer a template for constitutional government of effective relevance beyond the Anglosphere. From the perspective of constitutional republicanism, the limited influence of the Dutch example marks a fatal historical bifurcation, exposing the European peoples to a calamitous bi-polar struggle between monarchical and democratic forces (from which our present ruin was hatched). It is also immediately evident from this perspective that the emergence of advanced capitalistic economic organization is inextricable from the propagation of the Dutch model (transplanted into the UK by the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and from there to the Anglophone New World). Since capitalism epitomizes cybernetic closure — a system without uncontrolled nodes — these connections should not surprise us.

Because monarchism dismisses the possibility of cybernetic closure, and thus asks us to accept the inevitability of uncontrolled nodes, or concentrated sovereignty, it necessarily compromises on the prospects of meritocratic selection. It argues, soundly enough, that we can do far worse than kings, and have done so, but in making this case it falls far short of the selective mechanism for excellence that capitalism routinely demonstrates. When Moldbug compares a monarch to a CEO, it is with the understanding that — under

approximate free-enterprise conditions — business leadership has been socially sifted for rare talent in a way that dynastic succession cannot possibly match. The fact that the outcome of democratic-electoral selection is reliably far worse than the monarchical alternative does not indicate that 'royalty' represents an impressive solution to the meritocratic problem — it is simply less appalling than the one presently prevalent among our contemporary political systems. It is capitalism that has found the solution, from which any rational politics would seek to learn.

That monarchy is superior to democracy is a point of secure neoreactionary consensus, but this is a remarkably low benchmark to set. That there is anything beyond it recommending the return of kings remains an unsettled matter of dispute.

October 7, 2013

Rules

Foseti and Jim have been conducting an argument in slow motion, without quite connecting. Much of this has been occurring in sporadic blog comments, and occasional remarks. It would be very helpful of me to reconstruct it here, through a series of meticulous links. I'll begin by failing at that. (Any assistance offered in piecing it together, textually, will be highly appreciated.)

Despite its elusiveness, I think it is the most important intellectual engagement taking place anywhere in the field of political philosophy. Its point of departure is the Moldbuggian principle that 'sovereignty is conserved' and everything that follows from it, both theoretically and practically. The virtual conclusion of this controversy is the central assertion of Dark Enlightenment, which we do not yet comprehend.

The problem is this: Can real — which is to say ultimate (or sovereign) — political authority be constrained? Moldbug's answer is 'no'. A constrained authority is a superseded authority, or delegated power. To limit government is to exceed, and thus supplant it. It follows that 'constitutionalism' is a masked usurpation, and the task of realist political theory is to identify the usurper. It is this that is apparently achieved through the designation of the Cathedral.

To crudely summarize the argument in question, Foseti upholds this chain of reasoning, whilst Jim refuses it. Constitutional issues cannot be anything but a distraction from realistic political philosophy if Foseti is correct. If Jim's resistance is sustainable, constitutions matter.

Outside in (and its predecessor) has sought purchase on this problem here, here, here, and here. It has yet to find an articulation that clicks. Eventually, something has to, if we are to advance even by a step. So long as the Foseti-Jim argument falls short of mutually-agreeable terms of intellectual engagement, we can be confident

that this critical controversy remains stuck.

What are the rules of contestation? If we knew that, we would know everything (that matters to us here). Rules are the whole of the problem.

A constitution is a system of rules, formalizing a social game. Among these rules are set procedures for the selection of umpires, and umpires decide how the rules are to be revised, interpreted, and implemented. The circuit is irreducible. Without accepted rules, a Supreme Court justice is no more than a random old guy — prey for the most wretched species of street thug. Who has power in a world without rules, Clarence Thomas or Trayvon Martin?

Yet without umpires (or, at least, an umpire-function), rules are simply marks on a piece of paper, disconnected from all effective authority. "You can't do that, it's against the rules!" To the political realist, those are the words of a dupe, and everyone knows the rejoinder: "Who's going to stop me, you and who's army?" It's enough to get Moldbug talking about crypto-locked weaponry.

The Dark Enlightenment knows that it is necessary to be realistic about rules. Such realism, lucidly and persuasively articulated, still eludes it. That the sovereign rules does not explain the rules of sovereignty, and there must be such rules, because the alternative is pure force, and that is a romantic myth of transparent absurdity.

If there is an uncontroversial fact of real power, it is that force is massively economized, and it is critically important that we

understand what that implies. Moldbug acknowledges exactly this when he identifies the real sovereign instance of climaxed Occidental modernity with the Cathedral, which is a church (and not an army). Political philosophy cannot approach reality before accepting that rules are irreducible, which is not to say that they are sufficient,or even (yet) intelligible.

One further point on this problem (for now): A model of power that is not scale-free is inadequately formulated. If what is held to work for a nation state does not work for the world, the conception remains incomplete. Do we dream of a global God-Emperor? If not, what do royalist claims at a lower level amount to? What does 'conserved sovereignty' care for borders? They are limits — indeed *limited government* — and that is supposed to be the illusion prey to realist critique.

If there can be borders, there can be limits, or effective fragmentation, and there is nothing real to prevent fragmentation being folded from the outside in. If patchworks can work, they are applicable at every scale.

Who would choose a king instead of a patchwork? God-Emperor or confederacy? That is the question.

ADDED: First key to the text trail, beginning June 5, 2013 at 6:48 pm (provided by Foseti in the comments below).

ADDED: Thoughts on sovereignty and limits at *Anomaly UK*. At *Habitable Worlds*, Scharlach applies methodical intelligence to the

problem, with encouraging results.

ADDED: James Goulding explains why "'sovereignty is conserved' captures the imagination yet is badly flawed."

June 24, 2013

Quote notes (#76)

Not a new point in this neck of the woods, but formulated with exceptional elegance:

There are only two possibilities regarding the Constitution of the United States. One is that it is working as it was intended, in which case it is a monstrosity. The other is that it was broken somewhere along the way – in which case it failed.

The prod back to this topic is appreciated, because it really hasn't been properly processed yet. (This blog has yet to do more than stick a tag on the problem.) Insofar as constitutions are at least partly functional, they are *involved in the production of power*. As abstract engineering diagrams for regimes they should no more be expected to rule than rocket blueprints are expected to blast into space — but they matter.

ADDED: An articulate cry from the republican id:

… this fifteen-year journey back to the USSR under the leadership of a former KGB lieutenant colonel has shown the world the vicious

nature and archaic underpinnings of the Russian state's "vertical power" structure, more than any "great and terrible" Putin. With a monarchical structure such as this, the country automatically becomes hostage to the psychosomatic quirks of its leader. All of his fears, passions, weaknesses, and complexes become state policy. If he is paranoid, the whole country must fear enemies and spies; if he has insomnia, all the ministries must work at night; if he's a teetotaler, everyone must stop drinking; if he's a drunk—everyone should booze it up; if he doesn't like America, which his beloved KGB fought against, the whole population must dislike the United States. A country such as this cannot have a predictable, stable future; gradual development is extraordinarily difficult.

April 27, 2014

Next Stage of the Slide

As a prophet of the unfolding calamity, Angelo Codevilla has always been handicapped by his touching faith in 'the people'. The 'country class' was already demonstrably unworthy of Goldwater in 1964. Things are *far* worse today.

As a guide to the next step in the crack-up, however, there are few better guides, and his latest ruminations on the disintegration of the American party system are highly convincing. The death of

the Republican Party is a much-deserved necessary way-stage to pretty much anything, whatever one's sense of the way. As always, the insightful commentary of Richard Fernandez on the topic is not to be missed.

Between even the sharpest conservative analysis, and anything that would pass muster amongst reactionaries, a daunting gulf yawns. As Codevilla muses in the new *Forbes* piece:

Representation is the distinguishing feature of democratic government. To be represented, to trust that one's own identity and interests are secure and advocated in high places, is to be part of the polity. In practice, any democratic government's claim to the obedience of citizens depends on the extent to which voters feel they are party to the polity. No one doubts that the absence, loss, or perversion of that function divides the polity sharply between rulers and ruled.

The confusion between legitimate republican government and political representation ('democracy') has been *the* disaster of modern history. Until this error is thoroughly purged from statecraft, reason will belong with kings.

ADDED: Sickness unto death

February 24, 2013

The Unraveling

A democracy cannot survive as a permanent form of government. It can last only until its citizens discover that they can vote themselves largesse from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority (who vote) will vote for the candidates promising the greatest benefits from the public purse, with the result that a democracy will always collapse from loose fiscal policies, always followed by a dictatorship. — Macaulay [or the 'Tytler Calumny' (thanks Matt)]

From the *Urban Dictionary*, Democracy:

1) A common system of government directed by the whims of mobs and marked by a low tolerance for basic human rights and common sense; primarily used to incrementally transition a government ruled by common law (Republic) to a government ruled by the political law of a few elite (Oligarchy).

As the slide continues, the perennial understanding of anti-demotic statecraft (and initiatory insight of the new reaction) appears to be going mainstream. Alex Berezow writes at *Realclearworld*'s *The Compass* blog:

It's been a rough few years for democracy. Despite that, Westerners always seem to assume that the most highly evolved form of government is democratic. The trouble with that notion is that, at some point, a majority of voters realize they can vote for politicians who promise them the most stuff, regardless of whether

or not it is good policy or financially sustainable. And once that occurs, the country is (perhaps irreversibly) on a pathway to decline.

Whilst glibly insubstantial by Moldbug standards (of course), the article never retracts this initial premiss, and concludes with the suggestion that the whole world could profitably learn arts of democracy inhibition from China. Interesting times.

[Note: the two articles immediately below Berezow's at the RCW site are 'Is Cameron's EU Strategy Unraveling?' (by Benedict Brogan) and 'Libya Is Still Unraveling' (by Max Boot) — just noticed (consciously). Contemporary news: all unraveling, all the time.]

Will the 'post-democratic world' have a clear principle of political legitimacy? The most elegant, by far, would be the introduction of commutativity to the slogan of Anglosphere colonial rebellion: 'No taxation without representation.'

No representation without taxation restricts legitimacy to those regimes in which those who fund government determine its structure, scope, and policy, in direct proportion to their contribution. The improvements that would result from this integration of the State's fiscal and electoral feedback circuits are too profound and numerous to readily outline, but they can be summarized in a single expectation: radical, irreversible, and continuous shift to the right.

Among the most obvious anticipated objections:

(1) *It's impractical* (Oh yes, only horrors are practical)

(2) *It's unjust* (For soldiers and cops, perhaps, but the deleterious effects of complication outweigh the benefits of moral nuance)
(3) *In the West, at least, Brahmin plutocrats would undo it at the first opportunity* (A sadly plausible prediction — perhaps no Abrahamic culture is capable of supporting a sane social order, and will always choose to resolve policing problems through expansion of the franchise.)

Granting all of these objections, and more, the principle of *commutative tax-politics* still provides one very valuable service: it explains what went wrong. Representational hypertrophy destroyed the modern constitutional order, based on a one-sided interpretation of the demand that government be made accountable for its exactions. Balance (commutativity) might well be unobtainable, but it isn't difficult to understand what it would be.

April 2, 2013

The Program

According to Mark Waser, the project of replacing human politicians with algorithms would yield positive results, far in advance of its nominal accomplishment. As he concludes: "I think that AI leadership is a tremendous idea, not the least because the path towards it necessarily improves human leadership (and civic debate)."

The extent to which the deep Anglo tradition tends in this direction is easy to under-estimate. *Magna Carta* was already a beta version draft of machine governance, as every serious initiative at constitutionalism has been. The principle of *limited government* finds its consummation in the ideal of rigid algorithmic constraint, and the impracticality of such an objective in no way diminishes the well-springs of motivation behind it. The programmatic erosion of political charisma is one obvious spin-off benefit.

In the Anglophone world — at least, until the most recent spasms of its degeneration — the call to *empower the people* has always been an unfortunate derivation from attempts to *disempower government authority*, by subjecting it to structural checks, and subtracting its discretion to the greatest possible extent. Computerizing a fast food restaurant gets you a cheaper hamburger. Computerizing government promises something far more deeply attuned to ancient political-economic impulses.

As Waser suggests: Merely letting politicians know that their definitive abolition is in prospect sends a valuable signal in its own right. Perhaps, in the interim, it could even train them to behave more like machines.

August 4, 2015

Protocols

"Protocol governance can come in many forms, these include bureaucratic rules, literal interpretations of religious texts, democracy, proposed block chain or P2P governance, statistics based governance, rule of law, and any other form of governance which seeks to provide a protocol as being ultimately sovereign as opposed to ultimate human judgement," writes NIO.

The meaning of 'protocol' here? I'm assuming, until corrected, that it's something like: *A formalized procedure*. If so, it elides a critical difference, because while "bureaucratic rules, literal interpretations of religious texts," and constitutions tell people what to do, "proposed block chain or P2P governance" doesn't.

A set of instructions opens itself to derision, if it 'demands' human compliance, without possessing the means to compel it. Constitutions, laws, and bureaucracies are massively — and demonstrably — vulnerable to subversion, because they require what they cannot enforce. It is *exactly this problem* that has propelled the development of software protocols that are intrinsically self-protective. The longest section of Satoshi Nakamoto's Bitcoin paper (#11) is devoted to an examination of the system's automatic defense capabilities. The problem is a serious and complicated one, but it is certainly not susceptible to resolution by armchair philosophizing about the essence of sovereignty, however

much this latter proclaims its possession of the truth.

Claims to 'truth' demand trust, and trust is a social and technical *problem* (of ever increasing urgency). Mere assertion is certainly incapable of generating it. Only a *trust engine* can, and that has to be built, if it cannot be simply preserved, which — on this at least we are surely agreed? — it could not.

Bitcoin is only a stepping stone, and the scale of the step it enables remains obscure at this point. What is already clear, however, is that the principle of trustless (or open-source, automatically self-policing) protocols is concrete, in large part technical, and invulnerable to *a priori* dismissal. The theoretical difficulties involved have been largely solved, based upon a series of radical innovations in cryptography — public key systems and proof-of-work credentials, among others — compared to which the recent 'advances' of political philosophy, let alone governmental institutions, have been risible at best. If Byzantine Agreement is realizable, protocol subversion is exterminable. What then remains is productive work, in the direction of automatic or autonomized agoras.

Carlyle is a lament (admittedly, a rhetorically attractive, and insightful one). Satoshi Nakamoto has built something. The former is vindicated by progressive socio-political decay, the latter by the escape of self-protective catallaxy from the ruins.

Within a few decades, most of what still works on this planet will be on the blockchain.

ADDED: This is excellent. (Adam Back, via Twitter, describes it as the "Best article yet on what Bitcoin *is* & why decentralisation is necessary".) The proposal of this post is that the conflict it outlines is *obviously* of massive importance. Those who think the entire problem of decentralized protocols is an irrelevant distraction from other things, are surely compelled to disagree. The XS position here is that *trustless decentralization is worth defending*. Clearly, that presupposes it's something real (and consequential). As far as the NRx discussion is concerned, I'm going to assume that's the matter at stake.

September 17, 2015

Trichotomocracy

By 2037 the harsh phases of The Upheaval have finally ended. Western Eurasia is ruined and confused, but the fighting has burnt out amongst the rubble. In the Far East, the Chinese Confucian Republic has largely succeeded in restoring order, and is even enjoying the first wave of renewed prosperity. The Islamic civil war continues, but — now almost entirely introverted — it is easily quarantined. No one wants to think too much about what is happening in Africa.

The territory of the extinct USA is firmly controlled by the

Neoreactionary Coalition, whose purchase is strengthened by the flight of 20 million Cathedral Loyalists to Canada and Europe (incidentally toppling both into terminal chaos). The Provisional Trichotomous Council, selected primarily by a process of military promotion and delegation from within the major Neoreactionary guerrilla groups, now confronts the task of establishing a restored political order.

It quickly becomes obvious to each of the three main Neoreactionary factions that future developments — even if these are to include an orderly subdivision of the nation — will initially depend upon the institution of a government that balances the three broad currents that now dominate the North American continent: Ethno-Nationalists ("Genies" or "Rockies"); Theonomists ("Logs" or "Sizzlers"); and Techno-Commercialists ("Cyboids" or "Pulpists"). Now that the Cathedral has been thoroughly extirpated, significant divergences between these three visions of the nation's future threaten to escalate, unpredictably, into dangerous antagonisms.

Since practical realism, rooted in an understanding of path-dependency, is a common inheritance of all three factions, there is immediate consensus on the need to begin from where things are. Since a virtual triangular order of partially-compatible agendas is already reflected in the make-up of the Provisional Council, this is recognized as the template for an emergent, triadically-structured government — the rising Neoreactionary Trichotomocracy, or "Trike".

(A colossal statue of Spandrell — the revered white-beard of the Trichotomy — has already been erected in the comparatively radiation-free provisional capital of Omaha, gazing out Mosaically into the new promised land, a glinting ceremonial Samurai sword held triumphantly aloft.)

Within a few months, the basic formula for the Trichotomocracy has been tweaked into place. It consists of three Compartments, each comprehensively dominated by one of the principal factions. Procedures for selection of officials is internally determined by each Compartment, drawing upon the specific traditions of functional hierarchy honed during the Zombie War.

Authority is distributed among the Compartments in a triangular circuit. Each Compartment has a specific internal and external responsibility — its own positive governmental function, as well as an external (and strictly negative, or inhibitory) control of the next Compartment. This is colloquially known as the 'Rocky-Sizzler-Pulpist' system.

Ethno-Nationalist 'Rockies' run the Compartment of Security, which includes the essential functions of the Executive. It is controlled financially by the Compartment of Resources. Its external responsibility is the limitation of the Compartment of Law, whose statutes can be returned, and ultimately vetoed (but not positively amended), if they are found to be inconsistent with practical application. The structure of the Compartment of Security broadly

coincides with the military chain of command. (The Rockies get to decide whether to describe the Commander-in -Chief as a constitutional monarch, a supreme warlord, or a demi-god of annihilation.)

Theonomist 'Sizzlers' run the Compartment of Law, which combines legislative and judicial functions. For funding purposes, the Compartment of Law is subordinated to the Compartment of Security, for obvious constitutional reasons. This keeps it small, restricting its potential for extravagant legislative activity. Since the Compartment of Security also filters legislation (in accordance with a practical criterion), the Law of the Trichotomocracy is remarkable for its clarity, economy, and concision. The entire edifice of Law, by informal understanding, is limited to a single volume of biblical proportions. Senior Sizzler officials are expected to memorize it. The external responsibility of the Compartment of Law is to restrain the Compartment of Resources, by strictly limiting the legality of revenue-raising measures (informally bounded to a national 'tithe'). Internal order of the Compartment is determined by the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Neoreactionary Church of the Cosmic Triarchitect.

Techno-Commercialist 'Pulpists' run the Compartment of Resources, with the 'power of the purse'. As the sole 'self-funding' Compartment, it is minutely scrutinized by the Compartment of Law, which tightly controls its revenue-raising procedures. Dominated by

a cabal of extreme laissez-faire capitalist and technologists, the Compartment of Resources is guided by the mantra *economize on all things*. It does as little as possible, beyond maximally-parsimonious funding of the Department of Security, with its own internal operations restricted to rigorously Pigovian tax-streamlining, statistical research, and the provision of X-Prize-style development incentives. The board of the Compartment is filled by the nine largest tax-payers, rotated every three years. The board elects a CEO.

The ideological discrepancies between the Compartments make an important contribution to the stability of the Trichotomocracy, since they limit the potential for re-amalgamation into a tyrannical unity. This is one of the twin principles by which its success is to be estimated — the perpetuation of durable governmental plurality. The second principle — complete immunity from populist pressure — is ensured automatically insofar as the Trichotomocracy endures, since none of the Compartments are demotically sensitive, and even if this were not the case, each is insulated from demotic subversion affecting either of the others. The outcome is a government answerable only to itself, with a self that is irreducibly plural, and thus intrinsically self-critical.

Under the light-hand of Trichotomocratic rule, any 'citizen' who seeks to participate in government, in any way whatsoever, has three choices open to them: (a) Join the Security Services and rise through the ranks; (b) Join the Church of the Holy Triarchy and become adept

in the law; (c) Make enough tax-vulnerable income that it earns a place on the National Resources Board. There might, in addition, be career opportunities for a very small number of professional administrators, depending upon the internal staffing policies of the three Compartments. Any other 'politics' would be criminal social disorder, although in most cases this would probably be treated leniently, due to its complete impotence. If sufficiently disruptive, such "relic demo-zombie" behavior would be best managed by deportation.

(Questions of local government diversity, secession, and micro-state building exceed the terms of this initial Integral-Neoreactionary settlement. Such potentials can only further strengthen external controls, and thus further constrain the scope of government discretion.)

ADDED: Even this crude sketch has enough moving parts to breed bugs. Glitch-1 (by my reckoning): Pigovian taxes and commutative tax politics don't knit together very well. In combination, they incentivize the politically ambitious to move into business activities with high negative externalities. Any neat patch for this?

ADDED: *Anomaly UK* will require some further persuasion.

October 9, 2013

Lynch Law

This is insanely great (second only to NeoCam for absolute attractiveness, and arguably more suitable under predominant rough-and-ready social conditions). First, a little scene-setting:

There is, to the best of my knowledge, no single right and proper method to construct a gallows. A few elements are common to just about every design, but the grim carpenters' flourishes of the scaffold reflect the tastes of the community and the eye of the builders. There is always a raised platform; there are always stairs leading to the platform, usually thirteen; there is always a crossbeam around which to string the noose; and there is always a trapdoor to launch the condemned into the hereafter. Beyond that, the timbers of the frame are a matter of discretion. Supporting braces and thick beams are common for permanent installations. Temporary gallows will often rely on a nock rather than a full cleat to hold the bitter end of the killing rope. A shoreside hanging can even rely on a high tide and the scuttling claws of the merciless deep to clean up the turgid mess left by a dead man dancing. …

Then the carpentry of refined-incentives governance:

Me: "I don't know if they still do it that way, but that's how it used to be. What's more, even speaking up at a rulemoot can be a death sentence." It was clear she thought I was pulling her leg. I wish I was. Tolerance for two-bit tinpot tyrants was running awfully low,

so Sacramentarians decided to raise the stakes for would-be petty autocrats. "Any citizen can propose any rule change at a rulemoot. To do [so], you ascend the Black Gallows, loop a secured noose of your own tying around your neck, and take the next five minutes and five minutes only to deliver your proposal and your plea. Then there's some sort of a deliberation process. I think folks can line up to give brief comments or something, after which the assembled crowd votes yea or nay. If the motion passes, it is now law. If it fails, the lever is pulled and you hang by your neck until you are dead, dead dead."
Anika: "That's insane! This place must be a madhouse!"
Me: "You might be surprised. Plenty of laws get passed this way. Most of them are pretty standard things: no murder, no theft, no rape, that sort of thing. And nobody's stupid enough to try to pass a new law if they aren't very sure they'll have the support of the crowd."
I paused to consider something. "I'd reckon they don't have a lot of civic participation on windy days."

Excessive populism, certainly, but turned unambiguously in the right direction. After a few generations, the genetic selection effects alone would have justified it. The model, clear in context, is an *anti-California*. If something like this isn't tried somewhere, social experimentation will have missed out.

December 7, 2015

SEQUENCE i - NEOCAMERALISM

CHAPTER ONE - PRIMERS

Meta-Neocameralism

First thing: "Meta-Neocameralism" isn't anything new, and it certainly isn't anything post-Moldbuggian. It's no more than Neocameralism apprehended in its most abstract features, through the coining of a provisional and dispensable term. (It allows for an acronym that doesn't lead to confusions with North Carolina, while encouraging quite different confusions, which I'm pretending not to notice.)

Locally (to this blog), the "meta-" is the mark of a prolegomenon*, to a disciplined discussion of Neocameralism which has later to take place. Its abstraction is introductory, in accordance with something that is yet to be re-started, or re-animated, in detail. (For existing detail, outside the Moldbug canon itself, look here.)

The excellent comment thread here provides at least a couple of crucial clues:

nydwracu (23/03/2014 at 6:47 pm): *Neocameralism doesn't answer questions like that [on the specifics of social organization]; instead, it's a mechanism for answering questions like that. … You can*

ask, "is Coke considered better than RC Cola?", or you can institute capitalism and find out. You can ask, "are ethno-nationalist states considered better than mixed states?", or you can institute the patchwork and find out. …

RiverC (23/03/2014 at 3:44 am): *Neo-cameralism is, if viewed in this light, a 'political system system', it is not a political system but a system for implementing political systems. Of course the same guy who came up with it also invented an operating system (a system for implementing software systems.)*

MNC, then, is not a political prescription, for instance a social ideal aligned with techno-commercialist preferences. It is an intellectual framework for examining systems of governance, *theoretically* formalized as disposals of sovereign property. The *social* formalization of such systems, which Moldbug *also* advocates, can be parenthesized within MNC. We are not at this stage considering the model of a desirable social order, but rather the abstract model of social order in general, apprehended radically — at the root — where 'to rule' and 'to own' lack distinct meanings. Sovereign property is 'sovereign' and 'primary' because it is not merely a claim, but *effective possession*. (There is much more to come in later posts on the concept of sovereign property, some preliminary musings here.)

Because MNC is an extremely powerful piece of cognitive technology, capable of tackling problems at a number of distinct

levels (in principle, an unlimited number), it is clarified through segmentation into an abstraction cascade. Descending through these levels adds concreteness, and tilts incrementally towards normative judgements (framed by the hypothetical imperative of *effective government*, as defined within the cascade).

(1) The highest level of practical significance (since MNC-theology need not delay us) has already been touched upon. It applies to social regimes of every conceivable type, assuming only that a systematic mode of sovereign property reproduction will essentially characterize each. Power is *economic* irrespective of its relation to modern conventions of commercial transaction, because it involves the disposal of a real (if obscure) quantity, which is subject to increase or decrease over the cyclic course of its deployment. Population, territory, technology, commerce, ideology, and innumerable additional heterogeneous factors are components of sovereign property (power), but their economic character is assured by the possibility — and indeed necessity — of more-or-less explicit trade-offs and cost-benefit calculations, suggesting an original (if germinal) fungibility, which is merely arithmetical coherence. This is presupposed by any estimation of growth or decay, success or failure, strengthening or weakening, of the kind required not only by historical analysis, but also by even the most elementary administrative competence. Without an implicit economy of power, no discrimination could be made between improvement and

deterioration, and no directed action toward the former could be possible.

The effective cyclic reproduction of power has an external criterion — survival. It is not open to any society or regime to decide for itself what works. Its inherent understanding of its own economics of power is a complex measurement, gauging a relation to the outside, whose consequences are life and death. Built into the idea of sovereign property from the start, therefore, is an *accommodation to reality*. Foundational to MNC, at the very highest level of analysis, is the insight that *power is checked primordially*. On the Outside are wolves, serving as the scourge of Gnon. Even the greatest of all imaginable God-Kings — awesome Fnargl included — has ultimately to discover consequences, rather than inventing them. There is no principle more important than this.

Entropy will be dissipated, idiocy will be punished, the weak will die. If the regime refuses to bow to this Law, the wolves will enforce it. Social Darwinism is not a choice societies get to make, but a system of real consequences that envelops them. MNC is articulated at the level — which cannot be transcended — where realism is mandatory for any social order. Those unable to create it, through effective government, will nevertheless receive it, in the harsh storms of Nemesis. Order is not defined within itself, but by the Law of the Outside.

At this highest level of abstraction, therefore, when MNC is asked

"which type of regimes do you believe in?" the sole appropriate response is "those compatible with reality." Every society known to history — and others beside — had a working economy of power, at least for a while. Nothing more is required than this for MNC to take them as objects of disciplined investigation.

(2) Knowing that realism is not an optional regime value, we are able to proceed down the MNC cascade with the introduction of a second assumption: Civilizations will seek gentler teachers than the wolves. If it is possible to acquire some understanding of collapse, it will be preferred to the experience of collapse (once the wolves have culled the ineducable from history).

Everything survivable is potentially educational, even a mauling by the wolves. MNC however, as its name suggests, has reason to be especially attentive to the most abstract lesson of the Outside — the (logical) priority of *meta-learning*. It is good to discover reality, before — or at least not much later than — reality discovers us. Enduring civilizations do not merely know things, they know that it is important to know things, and to absorb realistic information. Regimes — disposing of sovereign property — have a special responsibility to instantiate this deutero-culture of learning-to-learn, which is required for intelligent government. This is a responsibility they take upon themselves because it is demanded by the Outside (and even in its refinement, it still smells of wolf).

Power is under such compulsion to learn about itself that

recursion, or intellectualization, can be assumed. Power is selected to check itself, which it cannot do without an increase in formalization, and this is a matter — as we shall see — of immense consequence. Of necessity, it learns-to-learn (or dies), but this lesson introduces a critical tragic factor.

The tragedy of power is broadly coincident with modernity. It is not a simple topic, and from the beginning two elements in particular require explicit attention. Firstly, it encounters the terrifying (second-order) truth that practical learning is irreducibly experimental. In going 'meta' knowledge becomes scientific, which means that failure cannot be precluded through deduction, but has to be incorporated into the machinery of learning itself. Nothing that cannot go wrong is capable of teaching anything (even the accumulation of logical and mathematical truths requires cognitive trial-and-error, ventures into dead-ends, and the pursuit of misleading intuitions). Secondly, in becoming increasingly formalized, and ever more fungible, the disposal of sovereign power attains heightened liquidity. It is now possible for power to trade itself away, and an explosion of social bargaining results. Power can be exchanged for ('mere') wealth, or for social peace, or channeled into unprecedented forms of radical regime philanthropy / religious sacrifice. Combine these two elements, and it is clear that regimes enter modernity 'empowered' by new capabilities for experimental auto-dissolution. Trade authority away to the masses in exchange for

promises of good behavior? Why not give it a try?

Cascade Stage-2 MNC thus (realistically) assumes a world in which power has become an art of experimentation, characterized by unprecedented calamities on a colossal scale, while the economy of power and the techno-commercial economy have been radically de-segmented, producing a single, uneven, but incrementally smoothed system of exchangeable social value, rippling ever outward, without firm limit. Socio-political organization, and corporate organization, are still distinguished by markers of traditional status, but no longer strictly differentiable by essential function.

The modern business of government is not 'merely' business only because it remains poorly formalized. As the preceding discussion suggests, this indicates that economic integration can be expected to deepen, as the formalization of power proceeds. (Moldbug seeks to accelerate this process.) An inertial assumption of distinct 'public' and 'private' spheres is quickly disturbed by thickening networks of exchange, swapping managerial procedures and personnel, funding political ambitions, expending political resources in commercial lobbying efforts, trading economic assets for political favors (denominated in votes), and in general consolidating a vast, highly-liquid reservoir of amphibiously 'corporacratic' value, indeterminable between 'wealth' and 'authority'. Wealth-power inter-convertibility is a reliable index of political modernity.

MNC does not *decide* that government *should* become a business. It recognizes that government *has* become a business (dealing in fungible quantities). However, unlike private business ventures, which dissipate entropy through bankruptcy and market-driven restructuring, governments are reliably the worst run businesses in their respective societies, functionally crippled by defective, structurally-dishonest organizational models, exemplified most prominently by the democratic principle: *government is a business that should be run by its customers* (but actually can't be). Everything in this model that isn't a lie is a mistake.

At the second (descending) level of abstraction, then, MNC is still not recommending anything except theoretical clarity. It proposes:

a) Power is destined to arrive at experimental learning processes

b) As it learns, it formalizes itself, and becomes more fungible

c) Experiments in fungible power are vulnerable to disastrous mistakes

d) Such mistakes have in fact occurred, in a near-total way

e) For deep historical reasons, techno-commercial business organization emerges as the preeminent template for government entities, as for any composite economic agent. It is in terms of this template that modern political dysfunction can be rendered (formally) intelligible.

(3) Take the MNC abstraction elevator down another level, and it's still more of an analytic tool than a social prescription. (That's

a good thing, *really*.) It tells us that every government, both extant and potential, is most accessible to rigorous investigation when apprehended as a *sovereign corporation*. This approach alone is able to draw upon the full panoply of theoretical resources, ancient and modern, because only in this way is power tracked in the same way it has actually developed (in tight alignment with a still-incomplete trend).

The most obvious objections are, *sensu stricto*, romantic. They take a predictable (which is not to say a casually dismissible) form. Government — if perhaps only lost or yet-unrealized government — is associated with 'higher' values than those judged commensurable with the techno-commercial economy, which thus sets the basis for a critique of the MNC 'business ontology' of governance as an illegitimate intellectual reduction, and ethical vulgarization. To quantify authority as power is already suspect. To project its incremental liquidation into a general economy, where leadership integrates — ever more seamlessly — with the price system, appears as an abominable symptom of modernist nihilism.

Loyalty (or the intricately-related concept of *asabiyyah*) serves as one exemplary redoubt of the romantic cause. Is it not repulsive, even to entertain the possibility that loyalty might have a price? Handle addresses this directly in the comment thread already cited (24/03/2014 at 1:18 am). A small sample captures the line of his engagement:

Loyalty-preservation incentivizing programs are various and highly sophisticated and span the spectrum everywhere from frequent flier miles to 'clubs' that are so engrossing and time consuming in such as to mimic the fulfillment of all the community, socialization, and identarian psychological functions that would make even the hardest-core religious-traditionalist jealous. Because lots of people are genetically programmed with this coordination-subroutine that is easily exploitable in a context far removed from its evolutionary origins. Sometimes brands 'deserve' special competitive loyalty ('German engineering'!) and sometimes they don't (Tylenol-branded paracetamol).

There is vastly more that can, and will, be said in prosecution of this dispute, since it is perhaps the single most critical driver of NRx fission, and it is not going to endure a solution. The cold MNC claim, however, can be pushed right across it. Authority is for sale, and has been for centuries, so that any analysis ignoring this exchange nexus is an historical evasion. Marx's M-C-M', through which monetized capital reproduces and expands itself through the commodity cycle, is accompanied by an equally definite M-P-M' or P-M-P' cycle of power circulation-enhancement through monetized wealth.

A tempting reservation, with venerable roots in traditional society, is to cast doubt upon the prevalence of such exchange networks, on the assumption that power — possibly further dignified as 'authority' — enjoys a qualitative supplement relative to common

economic value, such that it cannot be retro-transferred. Who would swap authority for money, if authority cannot be bought (and is, indeed, "beyond price")? But this 'problem' resolves itself, since the first person to sell political office — or its less formal equivalent — immediately demonstrates that it can no less easily be purchased.

From the earliest, most abstract stage of this MNC outline, it has been insisted that *power has to be evaluated economically, by itself, if anything like practical calculation directed towards its increase is to be possible*. Once this is granted, MNC analysis of the governmental entity in general as an economic processor — i.e. a business — acquires irresistible momentum. If loyalty, *asabiyyah*, virtue, charisma and other elevated (or 'incommensurable') values are *power factors*, then they are already inherently self-economizing within the calculus of statecraft. The very fact that they contribute, determinately, to an overall estimation of strength and weakness, attests to their implicit economic status. When a business has charismatic leadership, reputational capital, or a strong culture of company loyalty, such factors are monetized as asset values by financial markets. When one Prince surveys the 'quality' of another's domain, he already estimates the likely expenses of enmity. For modern military bureaucracies, such calculations are routine. Incommensurable values do not survive contact with defense budgets.

Yet, however ominous this drift (from a romantic perspective),

MNC does not tell anybody how to design a society. It says only that an effective government will necessarily look, to it, like a well-organized (sovereign) business. To this one can add the riders:
a) Government effectiveness is subject to an external criterion, provided by a selective trans-state and inter-state mechanism. This might take the form of Patchwork pressure (Dynamic Geography) in a civilized order, or military competition in the wolf-prowled wilderness of Hobbesian chaos.
b) Under these conditions, MNC calculative rationality can be expected to be compelling for states themselves, whatever their variety of social form. Some (considerable) convergence upon norms of economic estimation and arrangement is thus predictable from the discovered contours of reality. There are things that will fail.

Non-economic values are more easily invoked than pursued. Foseti (commenting here, 23/03/2014 at 11:59 am) writes:

No one disputes that the goal of society is a good citizenry, but the question is what sort of government provides that outcome. […] As best I can tell, we only have two theories of governance that have been expressed. […] The first is the capitalist. As Adam Smith noted, the best corporations (by all measures) are the ones that are operated for clear, measurable and selfish motives. […] The second is the communist. In this system, corporations are run for the benefit of everyone in the world. […] Unsurprisingly, corporations run on the latter principle have found an incredibly large number of ways to

suck. Not coincidentally, so have 20th Century governments run on the same principle. […] I think it's nearly impossible to overstate the ways in which everyone would be better off if we had an efficiently, effective, and responsive government.

* I realize this doesn't work in Greek, but systematic before-after confusion is an *Outside in* thing.

[Yes, I know I have to get my commenting system updated with comment permalinks — thanks to everybody for the reminder.]

ADDED: Anarcho-Papist is on the synthesizer.

March 24, 2014

Eight-Point Neo-Cam

A reminder of where NRx came from:

Let me quickly explain my reactionary theory of history, which comes from reading weird old forgotten books such as the above. Note that this theory is quite simple. Depending on your inclinations, you may regard this as a good thing or a bad thing.

In order to get to the reactionary theory of history, we need a reactionary theory of government. History, again, is interpretation, and interpretation requires theory. I've described this theory before under the name of neocameralism, but on a blog it never hurts to be a little repetitive.

First: government is not a mystical or mysterious institution. A government is simply a group of people working together for a common aim, ie, a corporation. Whether a government is good or bad is not determined by who its employees are or how they are selected. It is determined by whether the actions of the government are good or bad.

Second: the only difference between a government and a "private corporation" is that the former is sovereign: it has no higher authority to which it can appeal to protect its property. A sovereign corporation owns its territory, and maintains that ownership by demonstrating unchallenged control. It is stable if no other party, internal or external, has any incentive to attack it. Especially in the nuclear age, it is not difficult to deter prospective attackers.

Third: a good government is a well-managed sovereign corporation. Good government is efficient management. Efficient management is profitable management. A profitable government has no incentive to break its promises, abuse its citizens (who are its capital), or attack its neighbors.

Fourth: efficient management can be implemented by the same techniques in sovereign corporations as in nonsovereign ones. The company's profit is distributed equally to holders of negotiable shares. The shareholders elect a board, which selects a CEO.

Fifth: although the full neocameralist approach has never been tried, its closest historical equivalents to this approach are the 18th-

century tradition of enlightened absolutism as represented by Frederick the Great, and the 21st-century nondemocratic tradition as seen in lost fragments of the British Empire such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai. These states appear to provide a very high quality of service to their citizens, with no meaningful democracy at all. They have minimal crime and high levels of personal and economic freedom. They tend to be quite prosperous. They are weak only in political freedom, and political freedom is unimportant by definition when government is stable and effective.

Sixth: the comparative success of the American and European postwar systems appears to be due to their abandonment of democratic politics as a practical mechanism of government, in favor of a civil-service Beamtenstaat in which democratic politicians are increasingly symbolic. The post-communist civil-service states, China and Russia, appear to be converging on the same system, although their stability is ensured primarily by direct military authority, rather than by a system of managed public opinion.

Seventh: the post-democratic civil-service state, while not utterly disastrous, is not the end of history. It has two problems. One, the size and complexity of its regulatory system tends to increase without bound, resulting in economic stagnation and general apathy. Two, more critically, it can neither abolish democratic politics formally, nor defend itself against changes in information flow that may destabilize public opinion. Notably, the rise of the Internet

disrupts the feedback loop between public education and political power, allowing noncanonical ideas to flourish. If these ideas are both rationally compelling and politically delegitimating, the state is threatened.

Eighth: therefore, productive political efforts should focus on peacefully terminating, restructuring and decentralizing the 20th-century civil-service state along neocameralist lines. The ideal result is a planet of thousands, even tens of thousands, of independent city-states, each managed for profit by its shareholders.

Note that this perspective has nothing at all in common with the Universalist theory of government. Note also the simplicity of the transition that it suggests should have happened, from monarchy as a family business to a modern corporate structure with separate board and CEO, eliminating the vagaries of the hereditary principle. Now let's look – from this reactionary perspective – at what actually did happen. …

March 11, 2015

Quote note (#200)

Crypto-core of the XS Moldbug:

Internal security can be defined as the protection of the shareholders' property against all internal threats — including both

residents and employees, up to and certainly including the chief executive. If the shareholders cannot dismiss the CEO of the realm by voting according to proper corporate procedures, a total security failure has occurred.

The standard Patchwork remedy for this problem is the ***cryptographic chain of command****. Ultimately, power over the realm truly rests with the shareholders, because they use a secret sharing or similar cryptographic algorithm to maintain control over its root keys. Authority is then delegated to the board (if any), the CEO and other officers, and thence down into the military or other security forces. At the leaves of the tree are computerized weapons, which will not fire without cryptographic authorization.*

Thus, any fragment of the security force which remains loyal to the shareholders can use its operational weapons to defeat any coalition of disloyal, and hence disarmed, employees and/or residents. Ouch! Taste the pain, traitors. (Needless to say, the dependence of this design on 21st-century technology is ample explanation of why history has not bequeathed us anything like the joint-stock realm. It was simply not implementable — any more than our ancestors could build a suspension bridge out of limestone blocks.)

(Emphasis in original.)

Crypto-sovereignty is huge (and on the to-do list here). 'Formalism' is a place-holder for crypto-architecture. 'Sovereignty' means *keys*.

November 17, 2015

Neocameralism #1

Clippings from this, end-2007 Moldbug Neocameralism essay (with minimal commentary):

It is very hard to show that any new form of government is superior to that practiced now. It is even harder to show that any new form of government is superior to any practiced ever. […] Nonetheless, unless these problems are not just hard but actually unsolvable, innovation in the form of government is possible. … Certainly, the very idea of innovation in government should not frighten you. If it does, there is no point at all in thinking about government. This is conservatism to the point of mental disorder. I simply cannot contend with it, and I refuse to try. If you cannot set yourself outside your own beliefs and prejudices, you are not capable of normal civilized discourse.

Neocameralism is not (simply) reactionary because it has never been fully instantiated up to this time. It is a proposed political-economic innovation.

Let's start with my ideal world – the world of thousands, preferably even tens of thousands, of neocameralist city-states and ministates, or neostates. The organizations which own and operate

these neostates are for-profit sovereign corporations, or sovcorps. For the moment, let's assume a one-to-one mapping between sovcorp and neostate. […] Let's pin down the neocameralist dramatis personae by identifying the people who work for a sovcorp as its ***agents****, the people or organizations which collectively own it as its* ***subscribers****, and the people who live in its neostate as its* ***residents****.*

A Neocameral 'neostate' is not owned by its residents *or its agents*. Its 'monarch' (or 'CEO') is *an executive appointment*. (90% of all confusion about Neocameralism, and Neoreaction in general, stems from a failure to grasp this elementary point.) Note: 'subscribers' (plural). More coming on this immediately.

Every patch of land on the planet has a primary owner, which is its sovcorp. Typically, these owners will be large, impersonal corporations. We call them sovcorps because they're ***sovereign****. You are sovereign if you have the power to render any plausible attack on your primary property, by any other sovereign power, unprofitable. In other words, you maintain* ***general deterrence****. […] (Sovereignty is a flat, peer-to-peer relationship by definition. The concept of hierarchical sovereignty is a contradiction in terms. …) […] The business of a sovcorp is to make money by deterring aggression. Since human aggression is a serious problem, preventing it should be a good business. Moreover, the existence of unprofitable governments in your vicinity is serious cause for concern, because unprofitable governments tend to have strange decision structures*

and do weird, dangerous things. […] (Nuclear deterrence (mutual assured destruction) is only one small class of deterrent designs. To deter is to render predictably unprofitable. Predictably unprofitable violence is irrational. Irrational violence is certainly not unheard of. But it is much, much rarer than you may think. Most of the violence in the world today is quite rational, IMHO.) […] General deterrence is a complex topic which deserves its own post. For the moment, assume that every square inch of the planet's surface is formally owned by some sovcorp, that no one disagrees on the borders, and that deterrence between sovcorps is absolute.

Patchwork is a (transcendentally) *flat network*. No global sovereign. At the ultimate level of its instantiation, it consists of P2P connections between *independent nodes*.

This does not solve the problem of constructing a stable sovcorp. The central problem of governance is the old Latin riddle: who guards the guardians? The joint-stock corporate design solves the central problem by entrusting guardianship in the collective decisions of the corporation's owners, voting not by head but by percentage of profit received. […] The joint-stock model is hundreds of years old. It is as proven as proven can be. […] … However, in the sovereign context, the corporate joint-stock ownership and decision structure faces serious challenges which do not exist for a conventional secondary corporation. […] In the conventional secondary corporation, the control of the owners is unchallenged

and unchallengeable, at least as long as the sovereign's rule of corporate law is functioning properly. The corporation is incorporated under the oversight of a sovereign protector, or ***sponsor****. This is what makes it a secondary corporation. …*

The Neocameral organizational problem is here defined.

… classical political thought concurred in considering ***imperio in imperium****, ie, internal subauthorities powerful enough to resist or even control the center, a political solecism. In case you are not too special to have ever worked in a cube, you are probably aware that* ***imperio in imperium*** *is a solecism in Powerpointia as well. One small difficulty, however, is that* ***imperio in imperium*** *means basically the same thing as* ***separation of powers****. Hm. […] Internal management in modern Western corporations is pretty good. At least by the standards of modern government,* ***imperio in imperium*** *is nonexistent. (It should not be confused with the normal practice of internal accounting, which does not in any way conflict with an absolute central authority and a single set of books.)*

The model for avoidance of *imperio in imperium* is joint-stock business organization. It is thus equivalent to the *control of executives*, or the *preservation of sovereign capital imperatives* (through effective resolution of the principal-agent problem). Solution of the P-A problem at the level of State governance is the task of Neocameral administrative design.

Briefly, there are two options for sovcorp governance on a

neocameralist patchwork planet. One is ***cross-listing*** *and the other is* ***cryptogovernance****. In cross-listing, sovcorps list on each other's secondary exchanges, taking great care to select only the most reputable sponsors, and demanding a backdoor in which they can switch sponsors at the slightest hint of weirdness. […] Cross-listing can probably be made to work. However, it is dangerous as a single line of defence. For an ideal sovcorp, it should be combined with some degree of cryptogovernance. […] Cryptogovernance is any system of corporate government in which all formal decisions are endorsed and verified cryptographically. A sponsor can still be very useful for cryptogovernance, but it is not required. Shareholders in a cryptogoverned corporation – known as* ***subscribers*** *– use private keys to sign their contributions to its governance. They may or may not be anonymous, depending on the corporation's rules. […] If you are an American, have you ever wondered what the letters SA, or similar, which you see all the time in the names of European companies, mean? They mean "anonymous society." If this strikes you as weird, it shouldn't.*

Do any #HRx types still think this is their universe?

The neat thing about cryptographic government (which is actually much easier than it sounds – we're talking a few thousand lines of code, max) is that it can be connected directly to the sovcorp's second line of defense: a cryptographically-controlled military. […] Cryptographic weapons control, in the form of permissive action

links, is already used for the world's most powerful weapons. However, there is nothing in principle preventing it from being extended down to small arms – for example, with a radio activation code transmitted over a mesh network. Military formations loyal to the CEO will find that their weapons work. Rebel formations will find that theirs don't. The outcome is obvious. Moreover, the neocameralist state has no incentive to deal kindly with traitors, so there is no way for an attacker to repeatedly probe the system's weaknesses. […] The one difficulty with cryptographic weapons control is that it fails, and devolves into simple military rule, if the authorization keys are kept anywhere near the weapons. Weaponholders can gather unlocked or noncryptographic weapons secretly, and use them to arrest the keyholders – for example, the directors of the sovcorp. […] The solution is simple: keep the sovcorp's directors, or whoever has ultimate control of the highest grade of military keys, outside the sovcorp's neostate. Even if the CEO himself rebels, along with all of his subordinates, any formation loyal to the directors can defeat them. The result is internal military stability.

Agree with where Moldbug is going with this, or not, the line of thought is profoundly illustrative of the Neocameral problem, as originally conceived, which lies within the general framework of *cryptographic property protection* (and not that of romantic political attachment).

June 29, 2016

Owned

Hurlock has a valuable post on the concept of property, especially in its relation to sovereignty, and formalization. Since (Moldbuggian) Neocameralism can be construed as a renovated theory of property, crucially involving all three of these terms, the relevance of the topic should require no defense. The profound failure of enlightenment philosophy to satisfactorily determine the meaning of property has been a hostage to fortune whose dire consequences have yet to be fully exhausted. (Within the NRx generally, the question of property is deeply under-developed, and — with a very few exceptions — there is little sign of serious attention being paid to it.)

The enlightenment failure has been to begin its analysis of property from the problem of *justification*. This not only throws it into immediate ideological contention, submitting it to politics, and thus to relentless left-drift, it also places insurmountable obstacles in the path of rigorous understanding. To depart from an axiom of legitimate original property acquisition through work, as Locke does, is already proto-Marxist in implication, resting on philosophically hopeless metaphor, such as that of 'mixing' labor with things. It is property that defines work (over against non-productive behavior),

not the inverse. As Hurlock notes, Moldbug's approach is the correct one. 'Property' — as a social category — is a legitimation of control. It cascades conceptually from sovereignty, and not from production.

These matters will inevitably become intellectually pressing, due to the current technocommercial *restoration* of money, exemplified by the innovation of Bitcoin (in its expansive sense, as the blockchain). Control is undergoing cryptographic formalization, from which all consistent apprehension of 'property' will follow. Property, in the end, is not sociopolitical recognition of rights, but *keys*. What you can lock and unlock is yours. The rest is merely more or less serious talk, that only contingently *compiles*. This is what hacker culture has already long understood in its specific (thedish) usage of 'owned'. There's no point crying to the government about having paid good money for your computer, if Nerdgodz or some other irritating 15-year-old is running it as a Bitcoin-mining facility from his mother's basement. The concreteness of 'might is right' once looked like a parade ground, but increasingly it is *running functional code*.

Formalization isn't a detached exercise in philosophical reflection, or even a sociopolitical and legal consensus, it's functional technocommercial cryptography. Defining property outside the terms of this eventuation is an exercise in arbitrary sign-shuffling. Those with the keys can simply smile at the surrounding senseless noise. As Moldbug anticipates, with rigorously coded control, there's nothing further to argue about.

ADDED: Three recommended links from Bitstein; Locke's mistake, blockchained title, crypto and contracts (video discussion).

November 15, 2014

Legitimacy

As the conclusion to a quality piece of Singapore gloating, Kishore Mahbubani outlines the crucial principle of regime legitimacy that liberal-autocratic East Asia is honing for the world:

Singapore has its fair share of detractors. Its political system was widely viewed as being an "enlightened dictatorship," even though free elections have been held every five years. Its media is widely perceived to be controlled by the government and Singapore is ranked number 153 out of 180 by Reporters Without Borders in 2015 on the Press Freedom Index. Many human rights organizations criticize it. Freedom House ranks Singapore as "partially free." […] Undoubtedly, some of these criticisms have some validity. Yet, the Singapore population is one of the best educated populations and, hence, globally mobile. ***They could vote with their feet*** *if Singapore were a stifling "un-free" society. Most choose to stay. Equally importantly, some of the most talented people in the world, including Americans and Europeans, are giving up their citizenship to become Singapore citizens. Maybe they have noticed something that the*

Western media has not noticed: Singapore is one of the best places to be born in and to live in. [*UF* emphasis]

Jacobinism is typically too lost in its own evangelical universalism to recognize its limits in political philosophy and in space, if not yet quite so demonstrably in time.

August 5, 2015

Laffer Drift

One dark and fearsome crag, half-lost among the Himalayan mountain range of uncleared obligations stretched out before this blog, is a promise to devote a post (or several) to Mencius Moldbug's Neocameral regime model. The opportunity to make a small payment against this debt having arisen, I am eagerly seizing it.

A relatively marginal but consistent feature in Moldbug's model is the tendency of Neocameral tax rates to approximate to the Laffer maximum. Since Moldbug aims to rationalize the theory of government, under the presumption of its ineliminably self-interested nature, this suggestion scarcely requires an argument (and in fact does not receive one). Government will always tend to maximize its resources, and Arthur Laffer's graph of optimum revenue-raising tax rates seems to show the way this is done. A Neocameral regime tends the economy of a country exactly as a

farmer tends a herd of animals — without ever forgetting that ultimate redemption occurs in the abattoir.

There is a problem with this assumption, however, which is that the very idea of a Laffer maximum tax rate is incomplete. By coordinating tax rates (on the x-axis) with tax revenues (on the y-axis), the Laffer curve demolishes the crude economic intuition that revenue rises continuously with tax rates. Through the *a priori* postulate that a 100% tax rate yields zero revenue, Laffer demonstrates that revenue maximization has to be located somewhere in the central region of the curve. Its exact location — as determined by the shape of the curve — is dependent upon empirical factors, such as incentive effects, and cannot be deduced by pure theory.

Missing from the Laffer curve is time, and thus *dynamic revenue projection*. This is especially important to the Neocameral model, since a central failure to be rectified through reactionary democracy-suppression is the systematic heightening of time-preference, or collapsing economic time-horizons, with which democracy is inextricably bound. The Neocameral state is justified by its capacity for time-extended economic rationality, and this is not something that the simple Laffer curve can reflect.

Adding time to Laffer graphs is not a complex task. All that is required is a multiplication of curves, constituting a time series, with each curve corresponding to a time-horizon. Rather than a single

curve, such a graph would consist of a 1-year curve, a 2-year curve, a 3-year curve … and out to whichever extended prospect was considered appropriate.

If levels of taxation were irrelevant to economic growth rates, then each curve would be identical, and this exercise would lack all significance. If, alternatively, taxation effected growth in a predictable direction, then the Laffer curves would steadily drift as time-horizons were expanded.

To begin with the improbable case, assume that extraction of resources from private property owners tends to increase economic growth. Then each successive Laffer curve would drift to the right, as the tax base expands under the beneficent impact of lavish government spending. A small and efficient government, by depriving the economy of its attention, would steadily shrink the tax base relative to its potential, and thus reduce the total level of takings (as a function of time).

If, far more plausibly, taxation suppresses growth, then each successive curve will drift to the left. The Laffer maximum tax rate for a 1-year time horizon will be revealed as ever more excessive as the horizon is dilated, and the shortfall of the depredated economy is exposed with increasing clarity. The more extended the time-horizon, the further to the left the *dynamic* Laffer maximum has to be. As economic far-sightedness stretches out into the distance, an authoritarian-realist regime converges with anarcho-capitalism,

since growth-maximization increasingly dominates its revenue projections.

Of all the reasons to distrust the Neocameral model, an intrinsic tendency to short-term Laffer-max revenue raising cannot be among them.

[Apologies for the link famine — trawling the Moldbug archive through the GFC is a nightmare undertaking, and it's 3:30 in the morning. I'll try to punch some in over the next few days.]

August 6, 2013

CHAPER TWO - IMPLEMENTATION

Undiscovered Countries

After (re)reading Adam Gurri's critical analysis of the core problem of Neoreaction (a tragedy of the political commons), read the surgical response by Handle. The calm intelligence on display from both sides is almost enough to drive you insane. This can't be happening, right? "In a way, it's a bit sad, because I can guess that Gurri's article will be the zenith and high-water mark of coverage of neoreaction which means it will only get worse from here on in." Enjoy the insight while it lasts.

My own response to Gurri is still embryonic, but I already suspect that it diverges from Handle's to some degree. Rather than defending the 'technocratic' element in the Moldbug Patchwork-Neocameral model, I agree with Gurri that this is a real problem, although (of course) I am far more sympathetic to the underlying intellectual project. Unlike Gurri — who in this crucial respect represents a classical liberal position at its most thoughtful — Moldbug does not conceive democracy as a discovery process, illuminated by analogy to market dynamics and organic social

evolution. On the contrary, it is a ratchet mechanism that successively distances the political realm from feedback sensitivity, due to its character as a closed loop (or state church) sensitive only to a public opinion it has itself manufactured. As the Cathedral expands, its adaptation to reality progressively attenuates. The result is that every effective discovery process — whether economic, scientific, or of any other kind — is subjected to ever-more radical subversion by political influences whose only 'reality principle' is internal: based on closed-circuit social manipulation.

Democracy is thus, strictly speaking, a production of collective insanity, or dissociation from reality. Moldbug's solution, therefore, *can only be* an attempt to re-embed governance in an effective feedback system. Since it is already evident that democratic mechanisms, rather than providing such feedback, reliably deepen dissociation, reality signal has to come from elsewhere. To return to an adaptive condition, governance has to simultaneously disconnect from popular opinion (voice) and reconnect to a registry of actual — rather than ideologically spun — performance. The communication medium for the uncontaminated feedback required by *sensible* government is exit traffic within the Patchwork (comparable in its operation to revealed consumer preference within marketplaces).

The great difficulty that then emerges — casting the entire Neocameral schema into question — is the requirement for an 'undiscovered' or 'technocratic' leap, from an environment of

progressively decaying discovery or selection pressure, into one in which discovery can once again take place. Neoreaction confronts a very real transition problem, and Gurri is quite right to point this out. Handle is no less right when he insists that the 'conservative' option of accommodation to the democratic social process in motion is profoundly untenable, because *discovery deterioration is essential to the democratic trend*. Maladaptation to reality ceases to be correctable under Cathedral governance, and recognition of this malign condition is the defining neoreactionary insight.

If we stay on the train we will be smashed into a consummate insanity, but to leap is technocratic error (unsupported by discovery). As for prevarication: The intensification of this dilemma can be confidently expected from the mere continuance of the democratic process, dominated by the degenerative politics of the madhouse, and scrambling all social information. It is in this precarious position that the task of a rigorous evaluation of the Neocameral schema, along with its prospects for renovation or replacement, has to take place.

"… it will only get worse from here on in."

February 14, 2014

The Deal

NRx repudiates public politics. Turn that around, and it's the thesis: *Politics happens in private*.

Specifically — as a political philosophy — NRx advocates the privatization of government. It makes a public case for that, in the abstract, but only for purposes of informational and theoretical optimization. It is not, ever, *doing* politics in public, but only thinking about it under conditions of minimal intelligence security. Concrete execution of political strategy occurs through private deals.

The currency of such deals was formalized by Mencius Moldbug, as *primary* (or *fungible sovereign*) *property*. It corresponds to the conversion — whether notional or actual — of hard power into business assets. This conversion is what 'formalism' means. It's an important contribution to political philosophy, and political economy, but it's also a negotiating position.

Cries for (public) *Action!* will always be with us, at least until things are radically sorted out. They should be ignored. No public action is serious.

The serious thing is *the deal*, which substitutes for any semblance of revolution, and also for regime perpetuation. Shadow NRx — which acts outside the sphere of public visibility — is a political vulture fund. This blog does not want to know who, or what, it is. Its deep secrecy is the same as its reality. Our concern is restricted to

the way it necessarily acts, in compliance with an absolute principle. We ask only: *What does the deal have to be like?*

In its essence it is this: *Stand down effective capabilities for regime preservation in exchange for primary property stock*. The form thus indicates the relevant principals — holders of the keys to hard power. What is on offer for them, as NRx develops in reality (the shadows), is formalization of their implicit social authority, through the emergence of a new — ultimate or 'transcendental' — commercial medium. The whole of Neocameral transition is realized through this. "Turn everything you have into rigorous code, and everything changes. We can help with the technicalities."
"Why should I do that?"
"It will be worth it."

That's the vulture fund aspect. Hard power capability is systematically under-valued under conditions of Cathedral-demotic degeneracy, since it is squandered on the ever-more inefficient preservation of an insane religious establishment — the Atheo-Oecumenic Ecclesiocracy — and compensated accordingly, from the charred scraps of chronic policy disaster. After dysfunctional domestic social programs, election buying, and Jacobin foreign policy crusades have been paid for, what remains to reward competent governance?

Administrative capability is slaved to the Cathedral, which means to a zealous pursuit of impossible objectives, and thus accelerating

waste. As a business opportunity (“We can help with the technicalities”), the attraction of defection grows, therefore, in strict proportion to the triumph of progressivism. This is critical, because the threshold risks of transition are immense, and *the deal* has to cover them.

> "All that complex governance you're doing under increasingly ludicrous circumstances? We want to help you turn it into a business."
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) January 23, 2016

> … "You do get that you're basically working as a poorly paid security goon for Jim Jones at the moment?"
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) January 23, 2016

The Cathedral is the Peoples Temple.

ADDED: The Political Omnivore responds (to the twitter precursor).

January 23, 2016

The Sad Left

It’s probably unrealistic right now to think the non-demented Left is going to be able to cut the hysterical weeping long enough to realize:

You're going to have to put your social ideals into Neocameral format if you want to play in the 21st century.

They really could do that. Sovereign stock distribution could be wholly egalitarian. If Neo-Maoism seeks a sensible sized patch, they should clearly be given one. (That would be a Neo-Maoist garbage disposal program, as far as everyone else is concerned.) At the highest level, NRx is first-order politics neutral. Do *whatever you want*, within precisely formalized bounds.

There's no audience for this point yet. Eventually there will be.

"But … but .. the whole point of the Left is that we don't think government is a business!" — Then call it a 'co-op' or some equivalent bullshit. Jesus, use some imagination.

March 4, 2017

Startup Cities

Michael Anissimov is no friend of Neocameralism, but he's got a good sense for the kind of things we like:

> Explain to me how this is different than Techno-Commercialism http://t.co/Vvfb1i3oLS
>
> — Michael Anissimov (@MikeAnissimov) July 31, 2014

Here's a good introduction.

Here's Paul Romer on Charter Cities (video), the more institutionally-respectable predecessor conception (or perhaps the same conception, with a more established brand).

The Startup Cities blog promotes China's Special Economic Zones as a model of success.

July 31, 2014

Quote note (#111)

SoBL on the next stage for Japan:

The Japanese had their forty-first straight month of trade deficits. This is the problem when a nation imports raw materials and energy and exports finished goods in a world of sluggish demand. The Japanese are one of the export dollar recyclers. They are not reliable anymore, which might be why tiny Belgium holds hundreds of billions of US Treasuries now. The Japanese are now moving to invest more abroad, but curiously, they are not investing in hot spots like China but instead in America. The Japanese are investing in US insurance companies as a proxy for investing directly in the US. They want to use insurance companies as a way to learn about the US market more before digging in deeper. This is beyond direct purchases of manufacturing firms and what not. They did this in the '80s when

Japanese automakers partnered with US firms to learn the psychology of the US worker as they then invested in US sitused plants.

At the core of all of this is finding ways to earn non-yen denominated revenue. Currency diversification to prepare for a domestic shock. They are preparing for the devaluing of the yen, and they expect it to happen to the yen first and the dollar later. Many have bet against the yen and lost, including recently Kyle Bass, but if the Japanese themselves are starting to bail, the end must be approaching. It is an interesting island culture shaping up. Greying and shrinking population, growing robotics industry, worlds' largest creditor nation with trillions in net assets, "xenophobic" immigration policy, shrinking working population… it is like they are setting up an island of a homogenous, rentier class.

If this analysis is correct, it suggests that Japanese capital is set to become a major resource for world-wide trends with an NRx (anti-demotic propertarian) orientation. Sustaining foreign investment revenue streams will become an existential necessity for a grayed Japan, which is enough to establish a definite agenda regarding governance models in the functional fragments of the world system.

Does a 'rentier nation' spontaneously produce a Neocameral geopolitical entity?

September 22, 2014

Clandestine NeoCam

This is huge:

The most intriguing secrets of the "war on terror" have nothing to do with al-Qaeda and its fellow travelers. They're about the mammoth private spying industry that all but runs U.S. intelligence operations today. [...] Surprised? No wonder. In April, Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell was poised to publicize a year-long examination of outsourcing by U.S. intelligence agencies. But the report was inexplicably delayed — and suddenly classified a national secret. What McConnell doesn't want you to know is that the private spy industry has succeeded where no foreign government has: It has penetrated the CIA and is running the show. [...] Over the past five years (some say almost a decade), there has been a revolution in the intelligence community toward wide-scale outsourcing. Private companies now perform key intelligence-agency functions, to the tune, I'm told, of more than $42 billion a year. Intelligence professionals tell me that more than 50 percent of the National Clandestine Service (NCS) — the heart, brains and soul of the CIA — has been outsourced to private firms such as Abraxas, Booz Allen Hamilton, Lockheed Martin and Raytheon. ...

Of course, read it all, but especially:

Outsourcing has provided solutions to personnel-management problems that have always plagued the CIA's operations side. Rather

than tying agents up in the kind of office politics that government employees have to engage in to advance their careers, outsourcing permits them to focus on what they do best, which boosts morale and performance.

Under the conditions of a ruined public sphere, trends to the commercialization of government are re-routed around the back. When the time is right for the dismantling of the terminally deteriorated Cathedral Empire — a.k.a. 'the International Community' — its power structures will default to the Deep State, which is already undergoing business re-organization. Identify the private agencies who at that point will *own* the only chunks of security apparatus still working, and you know who's political ideas will matter. It follows, naturally, that it would be unrealistic to expect these *directors* to be voluble about their thinking, or anything else. They're not politicians. That's over.

The public sphere is already dead. It's time now to shift all serious attention into the dark.

(Thanks to VXXC for the WaPo link.)

May 12, 2015

NRx Disneyworld

Never underestimate the capacity of modern history's neo-

cyberpunk oddity to reach the place you thought you were heading ahead of time, and in a way that doesn't seem … quite right. Glenn Beck has set his *heart* (and checkbook) on a version of neoreactionary secessionism, based on a restoration of the House of Disney. Once you see the plan, it's immediately obvious that nothing in the reactosphere will ever be the same again:

While Independence is very much a dream at this point, the proposed city-theme park hybrid would bring several of Glenn's seemingly disconnected projects into one place. Media, live events, small business stores, educational projects, charity, entertainment, news, information, and technology R&D – all of these things would have a home in Independence. With the rest of the country and the world going away from the values of freedom, responsibility and truth, Independence would be a place built on the very foundation of those principles. A retreat from the world where entrepreneurs, artists, and creators could come to put their ideas to work. A place for families to bring their children to be inspired. […] The ambitious project, projected to cost over two billion dollars, has been heavily influenced by Walt Disney. As Glenn has been explaining throughout the week, Disneyland was originally intended to be a place where people would find happiness, inspiration, courage and hope. Over time, Walt Disney's original vision has been lost. While hundreds of thousands still flock to the town, it's become commercialized and the big dreams and the heart have been compromised. […] Glenn

believes that he can bring the heart and the spirit of Walt's early Disneyland ideas into reality. Independence, USA wouldn't be about rides and merchandise, but would be about community and freedom. The Marketplace would be a place where craftmen and artisan could open and run real small businesses and stores. The owners and tradesmen could hold apprenticeships and teach young people the skills and entrepreneurial spirit that has been lost in today's entitlement state. […] There would also be an Media Center, where Glenn's production company would film television, movies, documentaries, and more. Glenn hoped to include scripted television that would challenge viewers without resorting to a loss of human decency. He also said it would be a place where aspiring journalists would learn how to be great reporters. […] Across the lake, there would be a church modelled after The Alamo which would act as a multi-denominational mission center. The town will also have a working ranch where visitors can learn how to farm and work the land.

Gnon giveth in overwhelming abundance, and also takes away.

"Neoreaction? Wasn't that some kind of precursor to the Glenn Beck thing?"

June 16, 2015

Disney NRx

It looks as if this was a lot more flippant than it needed to be.

Via @asilentsky (via), the question: Was Walt Disney practically exploring a prototypical Neoreaction in the 1960s? Such anachronism typically merits extreme skepticism, but here are some videos to hone your doubt upon: Walt Disney's original plan for EPCOT (his Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow), parts 1, 2, and 3. Plus some select tweet support:

> In a very real sense Walt Disney is #NRx
>
> — Konkvistador (@asilentsky) July 20, 2015

> A for profit city that is also an industrial park for cutting edge industry, with room for future technology, designed to be updated. #NRx
>
> — Konkvistador (@asilentsky) July 20, 2015

> They called Lee's brilliant Singapore Disneyworld with the Death Penalty. This is closer to truth than it seems. And a deep compliment. #NRx
>
> — Konkvistador (@asilentsky) July 20, 2015

(That last is a Gibson quote, btw.)

From the EPCOT videos: "Whatever worked became the code …

We’re ready to go right now.”

There has to be a discussion about this.

July 20, 2015

SECTION B - FASCISM

CHAPTER ONE - THE BASICS

Triumph of the Will?

If it were never necessary to adapt fundamentally to reality, then fascism would be the truth. There could be no limit to the sovereignty of political will.

If — pursuing this thought further into vile absurdity — even tactical concessions were unnecessary, then nothing would obstruct a path of joyous degeneration leading all the way to consummate communism. That, however, is several steps beyond anything that has been *seriously* advocated for over half a century.

Since the 1920s, communism has been the ideal form of socio-economic impracticality, as evidenced by that fact that whenever communism becomes practical, it becomes — to exactly the same extent — fascist ('state capitalist' or 'Stalinist'). Fascism on the other hand, and as everyone knows, makes the trains run on time. It represents *practical subordination of reality to concentrated will*.

Fascism understands itself as the politics of the 'third position' — between the anti-political hyper-realism of the market on the one

(invisible) hand, and super-political communist fantasy on the (clenched-fist) other. The fascism that thrives — most exceptionally in the American tradition through Hamilton, Lincoln, and FDR — is a flexi-fascism, or pragmatic illiberalism, that marries the populist desires of coercive collectivism to a superceded, subordinated, or directed 'realism' — grasping economic dispersion as *a technocratic management problem* under centralized supervision. Insofar as this problem proves to be indeed manageable, the basic fascist intuition is vindicated. Fragmentation is mastered, in a triumph of the will (although we are more likely to call it 'hope and change' today).

That *fragmentation cannot be mastered* is the sole essentially anti-fascist proposition, and also the distinctive thesis of Austrian economics. Whilst deductively obtainable, within the axiomatic system of methodological individualism, it is a thesis that must ultimately be considered empirically sensitive. Fascism can discredit individualist assumptions simply by prolonging itself, and thus practically asserting the superior authority of the social super-organism. Reciprocally, the fragility of collective identities can only be convincingly demonstrated through historical events. It does not suffice to analytically 'disprove' the collective — it has to be effectively *broken*. Nothing less than a *totally unmanageable* economic crisis can really count against the fascist idea.

Yet, obviously and disturbingly, the predictable political response to a gathering crisis is to slide more deeply into fascism. Since

fascism, beyond all brand-complexity, sells itself as ultimate managerial authority — heroic dragon-slayer of the autonomous (or 'out-of-control') economy — there is absolutely no reason for this to surprise us. To break fascism is to break the desire for fascism, which is to break the democratic or 'popular will' itself — and only a really freed economy, which has uncaged itself, spikily and irreversibly, can do that.

The shattering of human collective self-management from the Outside, or (alternatively) triumphal fascism forever. That is the fork, dividing reaction from itself, and deciding everything for mankind. Patchwork or New Order — but when will we know?

NOTE: Among the glories of this comments thread is Vladimir's indispensable contribution to the schedule of decision: "Meanwhile, the Austro-libertarian prophets of doom are necessarily unable to give any accurate timing for these crashes and panics, even when they unfold exactly according to their theory. The reason is simple: the obvious truth of the weak efficient markets hypothesis."

ADDED: Ex-Army on why Communism ≠ Fascism: "When you're given a choice between living under a communist dictator or a fascist dictator, everything else being equal, take the fascist dictator. Interestingly, communists in general are safer under a fascist dictator than they are under a communist dictator."

March 25, 2013

AIACC

Moldbug's latest has triggered a wave of discussion by emphatically re-stating the long-standing thesis:

America is a communist country.

The supporting argument is richly multi-threaded, and I won't attempt to recapitulate it here. Its dominant flavor can be appreciated in these paragraphs:

When the story of the 20th century is told in its proper, reactionary light, international communism is anything but a grievance of which Americans may complain. Rather, it's a crime for which we have yet to repent. Since America is a communist country, the original communist country, and the most powerful and important of communist countries, the crimes of communism are our crimes. You may not personally have supported these crimes. Did you oppose them in any way?

Whereas actually, codewords like "progressive," "social justice," "change," etc, are shared across the Popular Front community for the entire 20th century. They are just as likely to be used by a Cheka cheerleader from the '20s, as a Clinton voter from the '90s.

'Progressives' aren't called out on their all-but-overt communism for 'reasons' of tact, rooted in a complex structure of intimidation, which itself attests to comprehensive Left triumph. It's rude to call a ruling communist a communist, and being rude can be highly

deleterious to life prospects (it's a communist thing, which everyone understands all too well).

Despite all this, *Outside in* probably won't be stepping up its counter-communist rhetoric in any obvious way, because there's a criticism of the AIACC analysis that remains unanswered — and which Moldbug seems averse to recognizing. *Fascism is the highest stage of communism*. Already in the 1930s — which is to say with the New Deal — even small-c 'communism' had been clearly surpassed by a more advanced model of slaving the private economy to the state.

Yes, America is a communist country, in much the same way that it is a protestant, and puritan one. The ideological lineage of its governing establishment leads through communism, in exactly the way Moldbug describes. The evolution of this lineage, however, has long passed on into *politically incorporated pseudo-capitalism*. This is a fact which can only be obscured by excessive attention to preliminary — and now entirely extinct — political forms.

There is absolutely nobody on the empowered Left seeking to dismantle the co-opted oligarchy in order to establish direct 'public' administration of the American industrial base. In this respect America is no more communist than the Third Reich (and also no less). Central planning is restricted to the monetary commanding heights, with a pragmatic apparatus of regulatory coercion enforcing political conformity among private businesses. This arrangement is accepted as far more consistent with effective direction of society

through Cathedral teleology, in which the accumulation of cultural power is acknowledged as the supreme goal. Furthermore, it enables government insiders and allies to be rewarded relatively openly, economizing on the administrative, political, and psychological costs of extensive subterfuge.

Understanding that fascism is an advanced communist ideology is at least as important as recognizing AIACC, with more significant consequences, on the 'right' as well as the Left. Progressives progress. Communism was just a stage they went through.

September 19, 2013

Quote notes (#59)

John Michael Greer on the triumph of fascism (spot on):

National socialist parties argued that business firms should be made subject to government regulation and coordination in order to keep them from acting against the interests of society as a whole, and that the working classes ought to receive a range of government benefits paid for by taxes on corporate income and the well-to-do. Those points were central to the program of the National Socialist German Workers Party from the time it got that name— it was founded as the German Workers Party, and got the rest of the moniker at the urging of a little man with a Charlie Chaplin mustache

who became the party's leader not long after its founding — and those were the policies that the same party enacted when it took power in Germany in 1933.

If those policies sound familiar, dear reader, they should. That's the other reason why next to nobody outside of specialist historical works mentions national socialism by name: the Western nations that defeated national socialism in Germany promptly adopted its core economic policies, the main source of its mass appeal, to forestall any attempt to revive it in the postwar world.

(via @PuzzlePirate)

ADDED: A point of clarification and a question:

Fascism isn't a problem because it triggers scary feelings about the Nazis. It's a problem because it's running the world.

Question: Is there anybody among the critics of this contention who seeks to defend fascism against sloppy criticism and 'spin' who doesn't also want — at least partially — to defend elements of socialist governance?

The sample size of the commentary so far is too small to tell, but it's looking as if the answer is 'no'. If so, it would suggest that Hayek and even (*gasp*) Jonah Goldberg are right in suggesting that the fundamental controversy is about *spontaneous social organization*, and not about any unambiguous argument of Left v. Right.

February 13, 2014

Fascism

The whole of Robert O. Paxton's *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004) is available here. In the final pages (p.218), following detailed historical analysis, it cautiously advances a cultural-political definition:

Fascism may be defined as a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraint goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.

Since the topic regularly re-surfaces, it seems worth recording Paxton's formulation as a reference point, especially as its emphases differ significantly from those this blog (and its critics) have tended to stress. An important conclusion of Paxton's study is that no purely ideological account of fascism is able to capture what is an essentially historical phenomenon, which is to say a *process*, rooted in the degeneration of democracy. (Wikipedia offers some background on his work.)

June 12, 2014

CHAPTER TWO - NEOLIBERALISM: THE FASCISM THAT WON

‘Neoliberalism’

It’s absolutely obvious that any engagement with the most prominent current version of accelerationist thinking — or indeed with any left-dominated discussion today — is going to encounter the term ‘neoliberalism‘ as an omnipresent reference. Sheer irritability won’t serve as a response for long.

Why irritation at all? Most immediately, because the reference of this term is a sprawling mess. It is employed ambiguously to describe an epoch, and an ideology. The evident duplicity of this lies in the tacit assumption that the ideology defines the epoch — a vast historical and political claim, as well as an implausible one — which evades systematic interrogation through terminological sleaziness.

Worse still, the characteristics of the ‘neoliberal’ ideology are themselves pasted together, primarily by a mish-mash of theoretically-impoverished anti-capitalist polemics from around the world, with the consequence that its only consistent feature is the

mere fact of having a leftist opposition (somewhere). As the *Wikipedia* explanation (linked above) makes clear, any economic policy anywhere that is not positively hostile to the market, and which finds itself talked about antagonistically by the left, is 'neoliberal'.

When all of these compounding fuzz factors are taken into consideration, it is easy to see why the meaning of 'neoliberal' can range — at the very least — from marginally market-reformist Keynesianism (Clinton), through autocratic capitalism (Pinochet), to extreme libertarian 'hyper-capitalism' (in our dreams). Its global application, to include — for instance — the ethnic-Chinese dominated Pacific Rim (and post Reform-and-Opening Mainland China), is more carelessly gestural still. If Lenin's 1921 New Economic Policy wasn't 'neoliberal' it's hard to see why — unless the absence of a left opposition suffices as an explanation. A word this sloppy — traditionally rooted in Latin American anti-market demagoguery, but since adopted generally as the linguistic equivalent of a Che Guevara T-shirt — has no serious analytical use.

Fashion is unpredictable, but it seems very unlikely that this word is going anywhere. Its totemic meaning within tribal leftism is enough to ensure its persistence — which is to say that SWPL radical chic signalling would be significantly inconvenienced without it. Might it then be possible to rigorize it?

That would require delimitation, which is to say: specificity. Given

the political utility of the word, there are few grounds for optimism in this respect. David Harvey, for instance, who has devoted a book to the 'topic' (*A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2005), produces no clear definition beyond resurgent capitalism, as it occurred with the partial recession of central planning from the late 1970s. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the more classically liberal policy becomes, the more 'neoliberal' it is too. The 'neo-', in the end, signifies no more than an infuriated "you're supposed to be dead, goddammit." Neoliberalism is then a capitalistic orientation that has outlived expectation, and since the expectation has been sunk into immovable foundations, it is the outliving that requires explicit designation.

Whatever slight (and strictly polemical) coherence might be drawn from Harvey is thrown back into chaos by Benjamin Noys' paper 'The Grammar of Neoliberalism' (2010). Far from describing the partial reversion to market-oriented economic arrangements in the wake of hegemonic Social Democratic assumptions, Noys identifies 'neoliberalism' with the state-supervised capitalism introduced in the 1920s-30s, i.e. exactly that economic order which Harvey's 'neoliberalism' overthrows.

Taken in its own terms — rather than as a defense of an intrinsically misleading word — Noys' argument is highly interesting. Its general direction is captured in the following passage [citation marks subtracted]:

What is the precise nature, then, of neo-liberalism? Of course, the obvious objection to the 'anti-state' vision of neo-liberalism is that neo-liberalism itself is a continual form of state intervention, usually summarised in the phrase 'socialism for the rich, capitalism for the poor'. Foucault notes that neo-liberalism concedes this: 'neo-liberal government intervention is no less dense, frequent, active, and continuous than in any other system.' The difference, however, is the **point** *of application. It intervenes on society 'so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society and by intervening in this way its objective will become possible, that is to say, a general regulation of society by the market.' Therefore, we miss the point if we simply leave a critique of neo-liberalism at the point of saying 'neo-liberalism is as statist as other governmental forms'. Instead, the necessity is to analyse how neo-liberalism creates a new form of governmentality in which the state performs a different function: permeating society to subject it to the economic.*

Setting aside the question of this argument's persuasiveness (for another time), the essential thing to note is that it represents a *contest* over the mindlessly shambling term 'neoliberalism' which Noys has little realistic chance of winning — 'winning', that is, with sufficient comprehensiveness to salvage the word. If 'neoliberalism' *generally* meant a highly statist variant of 'capitalist' organization, first originating in the era of high-modernism, in which — in contrast

to the statism of the left — the role of the state was specifically directed to imposing an administrative simulacrum of catallactic social order, it would become a valuable, theoretically-functional word. This would be so even if the theory itself were criticized, amended, or rejected — and in fact the very possibility of such engagement presupposes that 'neoliberalism' becomes a *locally intelligible concept* (local, that is, to Noys' argument and whatever halo it has managed to extend beyond itself).

Even here on the Outer Right, almost all terminological irritability would immediately subside if the expression repeatedly encountered was — even implicitly — *Neoliberalism in the Noysean sense*. It would then be a term with relatively precise limits, clarifying more than it obscured. Consequently, it would mark a limit on the right as well as the left, distinguishing anti-statist or *laissez-faire* capitalism — with its model in Hong Kong — from the dominant political-economic formation of our age. For that reason alone, it can be confidently anticipated that 'neoliberalism' will not be permitted to mean any such thing.

ADDED: Complete PDF of David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

February 21, 2014

‘Neoliberalism’ II

Paul Mason thinks he’s being helpful:

There’s a meme that keeps resurfacing in the genteel world of rightwing financial thought: that the term “neoliberalism” is in some way just a term of abuse, or a catch-all phrase invented by the left. […] Well, as the UK steel industry faces instant closure—and let’s be clear that’s what Tata would do if it had to—we about to get a textbook lesson in what neoliberalism actually means. It means, when market logic clashes with human logic, the market must prevail and you must not give a shit about the social consequences.

Ummm … you know that was just straight-up liberalism, before they wrecked the word. (Socialism is the other thing.)

ADDED: Some precious lucidity here.

April 21, 2016

The Fascism that Won

Calling somebody a *fascist* tends to be a great way to end a conversation. First on the Left, and more recently on the Right, the abuse value of this term has been eagerly seized upon. Insofar as such usage merits the attribution of a ‘logic’ it is that of *reductio ad absurdum* — an argument or position that can be identified as fascist

by implication is *thereby* immediately dismissed. Fascism is analyzed only as far as required to stick the label on the other guy.

Among the reasons to regret this situation is the veil it casts over the triumph of fascism as the decisive historical fact of the 20th century. While the defeat of the core 'fascist' axis in the Second World War left the ideology bereft of confident defenders, reducing it to its merely abusive meaning, it also fostered the illusion that the victorious powers were essentially 'anti-fascist' — to the point of extreme military exertion. The historical reality, in contrast, is described far more accurately by dramatic convergence upon fascist ideas, from both Left and Right, as exemplified by the ascendency of pragmatic nationalism over radical collectivism in the communist world, and by social-democratic state-managerialism over *laissez-faire* 'classical liberalism' in the West. With calm discussion of this 'third-position' formation rendered next to impossible, the crucial attempt to understand its socio-historical specificity is diverted into sterile polemics.

American Arch-Druid John Michael Greer is perhaps sufficiently distanced from predictable Left-Right controversy to make a difference with his three part series of blog posts on the historical reality of fascism. Rather than attack fascism (from the Left) for its residual capitalism, or (from the Right) for its innovative anti-capitalism, Greer prioritizes the philosophical task of a rectification of words:

> When George Orwell wrote his tremendous satire on totalitarian politics, 1984, one of the core themes he explored was the debasement of language for political advantage. That habit found its lasting emblem in Orwell's invented language Newspeak, which was deliberately designed to get in the way of clear thinking. Newspeak remains fictional—well, more or less—but the entire subject of fascism, and indeed the word itself, has gotten tangled up in a net of debased language and incoherent thinking as extreme as anything Orwell put in his novel.
>
> These days, to be more precise, the word "fascism" mostly functions as what S.I. Hayakawa used to call a snarl word — a content-free verbal noise that expresses angry emotions and nothing else. … To get past such stupidities, it's going to be necessary to take the time to rise up out of the swamp of Newspeak that surrounds the subject of fascism — to reconnect words with their meanings, and political movements with their historical contexts.

Greer's discussion is so eloquent and penetrating that it would be redundant to repeat it here. It deserves the widest possible careful reading, and subsequent reflection. (*Urban Future* endorses the entire argument, with only the most marginal reservations on comparatively insignificant points.)

Instead of pointless repetition, a question. Given that history has conspired to make the word ‘fascism’ illegible, and has thus not only obscured the dominant trend in social organization worldwide, but also stripped away all effective antibodies to resurgent movements of classical fascist type, is there any realistic path to a restoration of political lucidity? Is the world doomed to persistent blindness about what it is, and what it might still more dismally become? If there are any grounds for encouragement in this regard, the evidence for them is thin.

Greer’s conclusion seems no less bleak. Approaching it, he comments:

> The fascist movements of the 1920s and 1930s were … closely attuned to the hopes and fears of the masses, far more so than either the mainstream parties or the established radical groups of their respective countries. Unlike the imagined “fascism” of modern radical rhetoric, they were an alternative to business as usual, an alternative that positioned itself squarely in the abandoned center of the political discourse of their eras. … Antisemitism and overt militarism were socially acceptable in Germany between the wars; they aren’t socially acceptable in today’s United States, and so they won’t play a role in a neofascist movement of any importance in the American future. What will play such

> roles, of course, are the tropes and buzzwords that appeal to Americans today, and those may very well include the tropes and buzzwords that appeal most to you.

ADDED: (For the Fregeans out there) Different *Sinn*, same *Bedeutung*: 'morning star' and 'evening star'; *'Neoliberalism'* and *The Fascism that Won*.

March 3, 2014

The Fascism that's Winning

John Michael Greer's grasp of the fascist phenomenon is much stronger than Samir Amin's. As might be expected from a voice so unambiguously aligned with the Left, Amin is entirely indifferent to the essentially populist nature of fascism and its erosion of property rights.

Property has no meaning apart from free disposal, equivalent to an Exit option on a particular instantiation of wealth. Fascism's statist subordination of the independent 'plutocracy' — realized through more-or-less severe restrictions on the free disposal of assets, both formal and informal — is therefore inconsistent with the protection of private property, which is rather eroded from its foundations. (Where communism expropriates, fascism — more

efficiently — attenuates.)

Amin is therefore writing from a position of structurally-unobservant Marxist dogma when he remarks of "fascist regimes" in general:

… they were all willing to manage the government and society in such a way as not to call the fundamental principles of capitalism into question, specifically private capitalist property, including that of modern monopoly capitalism. That is why I call these different forms of fascism particular ways of managing capitalism and not political forms that challenge the latter's legitimacy, even if "capitalism" or "plutocracies" were subject to long diatribes in the rhetoric of fascist speeches. The lie that hides the true nature of these speeches appears as soon as one examines the "alternative" proposed by these various forms of fascism, which are always silent concerning the main point — private capitalist property.

On the contrary — every fascist regime qualifies the liberal right to free disposal of 'strategic' economic assets, and thus subverts "private capitalist property" at the root. Indeed, the forms of property most radically affected by fascist governance are precisely those identifiable with a capitalistic (i.e. productive) character. In the case of large-scale capital assets determined as the 'commanding heights' of a modern industrial economy, especially those of clear military significance, utilization is directed as stringently under fascist conditions as communistic ones (although typically with

considerably greater administrative competence and pragmatic flexibility). When socialism emphasizes practicality, it tends to adopt fascistic traits — such as nationalism and state-supervised bourgeois management — automatically.

Amin's essay, however, is far from uninteresting. It's most striking analysis, which also seems to have been its motivating topic, concerns political Islam. Amin's disdain for this rising ideology is classically Marxist, and entirely untainted by New Left opportunism. In consequence, he is positioned as a voice in the wilderness, addressing a sympathetic audience that has been marginalized to the edge of disappearance.

After formulating a four-fold typology of fascist regimes, Amin resolutely folds Islamism into it, stating:

… the Western powers (the United States and its subaltern European allies) … have given preferential support to the Muslim Brotherhood and/or other "Salafist" organizations of political Islam. The reason for that is simple and obvious: these reactionary political forces accept exercising their power within globalized neoliberalism (and thus abandoning any prospect for social justice and national independence). That is the sole objective pursued by the imperialist powers.

Consequently, political Islam's program belongs to the type of fascism found in dependent societies. In fact, it shares with all forms of fascism two fundamental characteristics: (1) the absence of a

challenge to the essential aspects of the capitalist order (and in this context this amounts to not challenging the model of lumpen development connected to the spread of globalized neoliberal capitalism); and (2) the choice of anti-democratic, police-state forms of political management (such as the prohibition of parties and organizations, and forced Islamization of morals).

The anti-democratic option of the imperialist powers (which gives the lie to the pro-democratic rhetoric found in the flood of propaganda to which we are subjected), then, accepts the possible "excesses" of the Islamic regimes in question. Like other types of fascism and for the same reasons, these excesses are inscribed in the "genes" of their modes of thought: unquestioned submission to leaders, fanatic valorization of adherence to the state religion, and the formation of shock forces used to impose submission. In fact, and this can be seen already, the "Islamist" program makes progress only in the context of a civil war (between, among others, Sunnis and Shias) and results in nothing other than permanent chaos. This type of Islamist power is, then, the guarantee that the societies in question will remain absolutely incapable of asserting themselves on the world scene. It is clear that a declining United States has given up on getting something better — a stable and submissive local government — in favor of this "second best."

Beyond an appeal for "vigilance", Amin has little to propose in practical response to this predicament. Given the near-total

evaporation of secular-leftist constituencies in the Muslim world, accompanied by the disappearance of a confident anti-Islamist Left outside it, this absence of practical direction is scarcely surprising.

September 2, 2014

Capitalism Today

… the American version, at least, which is probably why it's going to die. Apple's Tim Cook opines:

America's business community recognized a long time ago that discrimination, in all its forms, is bad for business.

Charitably, I'm going to assume this isn't a direct quote from *Stormfront*. It's a mess, but not an unanticipated one.

ADDED: Any connoisseur of tangled irony knots has to appreciate this:

> Can we admit it's KIND OF funny ppl are boycotting Indiana for the immoral act of allowing people to boycott those they think act immorally?
>
> — Scott Alexander (@slatestarcodex) March 31, 2015

March 30, 2015

Man in the High Castle

The TV series trailer.

Could it be that people are beginning to understand that fascism won the 20th century? (With no sign of a major reverse so far in the 21st.)

Since 'fascism' tweaks people's Godwin nerves, it might be better to talk about 'pragmatic populism' — so long as it is initially understood that no substantial semantic revision is thereby taking place. Whatever we call it, it's what has ruled the earth for close to a century, as the culmination of democracy, and the way classical liberalism is actually destroyed. It plays on basic human traits in a way that leaves every other ideology in the dust — tribalism, resentment, vicarious identification with authority, extreme susceptibility to simple propaganda, and all of the remaining highly-predictable, easily manipulable, aspects of hominid social emotion. Ultimately, it's what humanity deserves, strictly speaking, since it is nothing other than the cynical exploitation of what people are like. The fact that the most insultingly trivial redecorations of this mode of social organization suffice to convince even articulate intellectuals that something else is taking place serves as an ample demonstration of its tidal historic momentum. ~~Fascists~~ Pragmatic populists think that people, as a general political phenomenon, are irredeemably moronic tools, and they're right.

The more politics we get, the deeper pragmatic populism digs in.

ADDED: Background to the Times Square shot. “The more familiar it is, the more terrifying it is.” (Quite.)

September 25, 2015

Twitter cuts (#124)

> So, I have been mulling Marx's prediction of the ultimate result of capitalist development with increasing confusion.
>
> — Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) July 14, 2016

(Massive tweet-storm follows that is too long to reproduce, but well worth your time.)

The “national capitalist” is a concept that arises in the Marxian tradition, but has also (recently) acquired a very different valency elsewhere. Countries come to appear as estates.

July 14, 2016

The ‘F’ Word

Fascism is back, apparently. At the very least, it might be getting more interesting to talk about.

In the period immediately following World War II, both of the triumphant blocs moved rapidly to define the word 'fascism' expediently. The critical objective, on each side, was to emphasize those features comparatively understated in its own domestic version of the phenomenon, in order to underscore the impression that they had unambiguously sided against it. 'Fascism' was, definitively, that thing recently and at an enormous cost defeated. The immense sacrifices – and, in fact, *progressive fascist reconstruction of society that had been accelerated during the war years* – was justified by the crushing defeat of an absolute evil. Distinction was imperative. Thus, the Soviets drew particular attention to the comparatively muted anti-capitalism of the Axis powers, while the Atlantic allies concentrated upon the exotic trappings of German anti-semitic Aryanism. It is particularly notable that the predominant Western definition of fascism is remarkably maladapted to even the most basic comprehension of the Italian original, and that both Western and Soviet anti-fascist narratives are compelled to downplay the revolutionary socialism of its roots, in both its Italian and its German variants.

This is all understandable enough, but it grotesquely mystifies the reality of fascism, which was epitomized – universally – by the 20th-century war economy. Every major contestant of WWII – including the great Asian powers Japan and China – developed fascist governance to an advanced state. The essential feature was

state seizure of the economy's 'commanding heights' in the delegated (and integrated) 'popular interest'. During war time such *interest* is peeled back to sheer survival, and thus publicized with dramatic intensity, which is also to say with an unusual absence of skepticism. Fascism is therefore broadly identical with *a normalization of war-powers* in a modern state, that is: *sustained social mobilization under central direction*. Consequently, it involves, beside the centralization of political authority in a permanent war council, a tribal hystericization of social identity, and a considerable measure of economic pragmatism. Fascism is *practical* socialism, distinguished from its dim cousin by its far more sophisticated grasp of incentives, or of human nature in its motivated individual and tribal particularity. When compared to universalistic communism, fascism's practical advantages are such that 'actually existing socialism' *always* soon turns into it. *National socialism* and *socialism in one country* are not sanely separable things. Everyone knows that the literal meaning of 'fascism' is *bundling*.

Like its Continental European and Soviet competitors, American fascism had been fully consolidated by the beginning of the war. The New Deal cemented its structural pillars into place. Socialization of the economy through central banking, the transformation of the Supreme Court into a facilitator of systematic executive over-reach, and a transformation of mass-politics through broadcast media technologies had composed a new, post-constitutional political

order. It is this formation that is so flagrantly entering its phase of terminal dementia today.

Since the fascist state justifies itself through perpetual war, it naturally likes wars that cannot end. The Cold War looked like one, but wasn't quite. The War on Terror is a better bet. In regards to their interminability, if not their moral intensity, 'wars' on poverty, drugs, and other resilient social conditions are more attractive still. Waging modern wars, and their metaphorical side-products, is what the fascist state is for. Winning them on occasion, and by accident, is only ever a misfortune. That lesson seems to have been thoroughly learned.

The recent adaptation to television of Philip K. Dick's prophetic *The Man in the High Castle* is one suggestive indication of a general ideological awakening. In dramatic contrast to the prevailing historical myth, *fascism won WWII* so decisively that its opponents were driven to the political fringes of paleo-conservatism (once mainstream conservatism), libertarianism (once mainstream liberalism), and Trotskyism (once simply 'communism'). The victory was so complete that even policy objectives as blatantly fascistic as *nationalization* could be considered wholly innocent of fascist taint. It wasn't even necessary to say: "Nationalization, but, you know, not in a fascist way." It would be amusing if it hadn't ruined everything. Perhaps it still is amusing. It's notable that humor has become quite a lot rougher recently.

Since fascism had entirely filled the Overton Window, it lost contour, and became invisible. The word persisted in public conversation only as an empty slur. Under this cover, and the absurdly misleading branding associated with it, American fascism ascended to a state of global hegemonic dominance. Since 1989, it has been essentially unchallenged, except by the geopolitical temper-tantrum that is radical Islam. Yet suddenly, from left field, the Trump candidacy has thrown it into crisis.

The flamboyant fascist features of the Trump campaign – and still more of his excited Alt-Right supporters – are deniable only by fools. The prior escalation of overt fascist imagery by the first Obama campaign and subsequent administration was no less remarkable. The established convention in polite society that *all conservative presidential candidates are Hitler* obscured the trend before this year, on both sides. Much of this might be reminiscent of the Jonah Goldberg thesis that *we are all fascists now*, which was near-universally dismissed out of hand, for reasons that have been – until recently – under no socio-political pressure whatsoever to defend themselves. *It's obvious nonsense*, the mind-control class had decided, and that should have been enough for everyone. Those days are unmistakably ending.

The general insight that remains incompletely crystallized is this: *Democracy tends to fascism*, due to its fundamental affinity with tribal mobilization (i.e. its essential illiberalism). The multi-century

ratchet of Western democratization has led, exactly, and inexorably, *to this*. If the worst hasn't come yet, it will come soon. We are all close to seeing that now.

An especially obvious catalyst for political radicalization has been the embrace of demographic engineering as an explicit policy objective, of deliberate partisan asymmetry, attended by a rolling thunder of cultural-elite approved rhetoric that has not only been indiscreet, but blatantly triumphalistic. When dismissing fears of 'white genocide' as malignant, and over-wrought, it is not helpful to laugh in public about the steady progress of population replacement (in the fashion of John Judis and Ruy Teixeira, most obviously). At some point, Bertholt Brecht's most celebrated example of devil's advocacy – "Would it not be easier … for the government to dissolve the people and elect another?" – switched ideological polarity, to become a bitter Alt-Right joke. *The new American demography is really going to screw you guys over* is funny as hell, until – suddenly – it isn't.

There's been a lot of laughter in 2016, but not much smiling. Perhaps it won't be so long before people realize what they've done.

October 17, 2016

Horseshoe Quiz

Nazism is the only political form that corresponds to the soul of the European people.

— Without peeking, see if you can guess which 'end of the political spectrum' this comes from.

ADDED: Relevant —

> Anti-Fascist, Trump protesters applaud speech comprised entirely of Hitler quotes.
>
> This is the best thing on the internet today😂 pic.twitter.com/HD2CPusckI
>
> — Tennessee (@TEN_GOP) July 8, 2017

July 9, 2017

CHAPTER THREE - EURASIANISM, THE ALT-RIGHT AND CURRENT EVENTS

The Eurasian Question

Within the great spans of history, domestic ideological controversy is something close to a luxury good. Whenever it isn't to same extent 'on hold' the global environment is untypically benign. Under more normal — which is to say *stressed* — conditions, it either folds down into pragmatism, or explodes into cosmic, eschatological drama. In today's unmistakably stressed world, Alexander Dugin's 'Eurasianism' exemplifies the latter eventuality.



As with Jacobinism and Bolshevism before it, Eurasianism

matters to you whether you want it to or not. The grandeur of its scope is undeniable. It is concerned with nothing less than the fate of the the earth. In this sense, nothing that anyone cares about falls outside it. (People are beginning to get scared.)

Shelving moral and partisan responses, it is merely realistic to acknowledge that Dugin is an ideological genius of the first order. Synthesizing Russia's native Eurasianist traditions with geopolitcal theory and deep currents of occult mythology, he has restructured the political imagination of his homeland, whose leader is paying obvious attention. When history is integrated with myth, things can easily begin to get exciting.

The fact that Atlantis is unmistakably sinking makes the rising wolf-howls of Eurasianism all the more penetrating. Decadence is a dilemma or a delight for those involved in it. For those looking on, it is food. Eurasianism has the initiative, while the West reacts.

The Eurasian Question, then, is not whether this ideology will shake the world. That is already baked into the cake. The open question concerns China. In a re-ignited Hyperborean / Atlantean forever war, which way does China tilt?

For China, the ideological and geostrategic landscape opened by the Eurasian challenge to the present global order offers extraordinary leverage. A civilization that has long understood triangular diplomacy as the optimal context for the exercise of strategic intelligence can scarcely fail to find encouragement in this

complex pattern of widening fractures. In comparison to the cramped and dangerous position of a world geostrategic challenger, that of a triangular balancer presents advantages that are difficult to over-estimate.

China cannot plausibly be described as an 'Atlantean' power (despite the great historical importance of its 'Singlosphere'). Yet, neither is it 'Hyperborean' in any persuasive sense. These options both belong to a dirempted Occident — understood according to an expansive, rather than Eurasian definition, attentive to common classical and Christian roots. The Eurasian mythos is not inherently Sino-sensitive. China's moves will be made upon a still greater gaming table.

Both a (geographically) Eurasian and a Pacific-maritime power — already, perhaps, a super-power — China has free options within the conflicted global space that Dugin's ideology so convincingly, or at least compellingly, portrays. The next stage of Chinese geopolitical evolution will occur within an environment of dynamic, triangular tensions. The course of the world depends upon how this opportunity is played.

August 7, 2014

Mash

Among the very many reasons to revere Jim is that he doesn't mess about.

There's a sizable constituency on the 'alt right' whose self-understood differentiation from the Marxist left is entirely reducible to its own heightened appreciation for authoritarian hierarchy and racial solidarity. Since actually existing Marxist-Leninist regimes have been, uniformly, authoritarian-hierarchical ethno-nationalists, this isn't in fact the basis for any real difference at all.

ADDED: What I'm seeing —

> Rx: "Capitalism has to be crushed beneath the boots of the state." NRx: "That sounds like communism." Rx: "HAVE YOU EVEN READ EVOLA!?"
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) June 28, 2014

June 28, 2014

White Dindus

"Our entire history is something that's been done to us by tricky outsiders — especially the bad stuff!"

When anybody else sounds like this, it's rightfully categorized as

pathetic whining.

ADDED: “Can we criticize (the extraordinarily large number of) Jewish Leftist freaks without going completely insane about it?”
“No! Go completely insane about it!”

October 8, 2015

What is the Alt-Right?

Topic of the week, it seems. XS will carve out a Chaos Patch space for targeted links on Sunday, but for impatient types, here’s a taster (1, 2, 3, 4).

This blog, I’m guessing predictably, takes *a count me out* position. Neoreaction, as I understand it, predicted the emergence of the Alt-Right as an inevitable outcome of Cathedral over-reach, and didn’t remotely like what it saw. Kick a dog enough and you end up with a bad-tempered dog. Acknowledging the fact doesn’t mean you support kicking dogs — or bad-tempered dogs. Maybe you’d be happy to see the dog-kicker get bitten (me too). That, however, is as far as it goes.

A short definition, that seems to me uncontroversial: *The Alt-Right is the populist dissident right*. Set theoretically, NRx is therefore grouped with it, but as a quite different thing. Another obvious conclusion from the definition: the Alt-Right is almost

inevitably going to be far larger than NRx is, or should ever aim to be. If you think people power is basically great, but the Left have just been doing it wrong, the Alt-Right is most probably what you're looking for (and NRx definitely isn't).

For the Alt-Right, generally speaking, fascism is (1) basically a great idea, and (2) a meaningless slur concocted by (((Cultural Marxists))) to be laughed at. For NRx (XS version) fascism is a late-stage leftist aberration made peculiarly toxic by its comparative practicality. There's no real room for a meeting of minds on this point.

As a consequence of its essential populism, the Alt-Right is inclined to anti-capitalism, ethno-socialism, grievance politics, and progressive statism. Its interest in geopolitical fragmentation (or Patchwork production) is somewhere between hopelessly distracted and positively hostile. Beside its — admittedly highly entertaining — potential for collapse catalysis, there's no reason at all for the techno-commercial wing of NRx to have the slightest sympathy for it. Space for tactical cooperation, within the strategic framework of pan-secessionism, certainly exists, but that could equally be said of full-on Maoists with a willingness to break things up.

None of this should be taken as a competition for recruits. The Alt-Right will get almost all of them — it's bound to be huge. From the NRx perspective, the Alt-Right is to be appreciated for helping to clean us up. They're most welcome to take whoever they can, especially if they shut the door on the way out.

ADDED: Preserving this just to thrash myself senseless:

> When Gnon is not your friend. — Finish my mandatory "WTF is the Alt-Right?" post (https://t.co/Q6LQYkg9pH), housekeeping — "views 1,488"
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) January 22, 2016

If you think God coming out as an Anime Nazi is going to stop me being obstreperous, you've no idea what you're dealing with.

January 22, 2016

What is the Alt-Right? II

There's a Wikipedia answer to the question now. It doesn't strike me as obviously dishonest, or any more inchoate than the phenomenon itself. Building Trump-adoration into the definition will ensure that it dates fast — but it's not hard to see why that seems necessary.

There's a lot of *Wikipedia* disdain around, in our neck of the woods, but I'm usually hard-pressed to find serious cause for complaint. After taking a look at RationalWIki — which folds the Alt-Right into its "Neoreactionary movement" rant presently — returning to Wikipedia is like taking a bath.

(Alt-Right at XS, for future reference.)

March 5, 2016

Quote note (#286)

The Guardian goes Alt-Right:

Those still in work might be less grumpy about funding a more generous welfare state if beneficiaries are deemed to be enough like them: fellow tribesmen, people of similar background and therefore felt to be deserving of charity.

It's the Sweden attractor at work. ("Sure, fascism isn't great, but if that's what's needed to protect the welfare state …")

September 27, 2016

The Alt-Right is Dead

It might stagger on for a bit longer, but it has nothing left to do. Annoying the (impending) Trump Regime at this point would be pointless, so that prospect isn't any source of leverage. The 1488 nut cases, due to their marriage of convenience with the legacy media, have the ability to define it in the public mind, so those supporters without a Nazi-fetish will gradually drift away. It's done.

Fascism isn't cool, and Anglosphere cultures will never find it so. In Continental Europe it's different, but that's a whole other topic. We're not them, which is one of the crucial things the Alt-Right ultras won't ever get. We're Atlanteans. There's expanded space for a right-populist American nationalist movement, but it won't call itself the Alt-Right, and if it's remotely sensible it will be pre-emptively immunized against ruinous European ideas. It will probably be far more Tea-Party flavored, though a lot tougher. (This blog will still find its populism unappetizing.)

That's the XS prediction. (RamZPaul, who liked the Alt-Right much more than I did, agrees with the central point.)

Jim has a very different take. (As does *Amerika*.)

Here's someone who's building something more solid.

November 24, 2016

What is the Alt-Right? III

Late to this, which is what the comparatively honest faction of the Cathedral is seeing.

Main XS-specific quibbles:

(1) No, I didn't have anything to do with The Dark Enlightenment blog. Nor, I'm *highly* confident, did Curtis Yarvin. I'm especially confident that the Open Letter was not written as an introduction to

the DE.
ADDED: See this TDE statement.

(2) I have no social connections *at all* with the Lesser God-tier of SV. (If I did, I'd brag about it all the time.)

(3) Anyone who thinks this usage of echoes is non-ironic needs a Kek-check.

(4) The RamZPaul link is complete black-thread and duct tape conspiracism. (C'mon, seriously, that's obvious, isn't it?) A little reciprocal linkage isn't a social relationship. We both merely acknowledge that the other guy exists.

Induction would suggest there are some other howlers beyond my epistemological horizon. Frankly, though, I don't see much deliberate malevolence here. Cramer seems to be doing his best to understand what's going on, and to remain as calm as possible about it. If he's primarily interested in the Alt-Right, I'd recommend much more attention to Richard Spencer, and much less to Neoreaction. My recommendation to NRx, naturally, is to vindicate that suggestion.

March 3, 2017

Hoppe on the Alt-Right

Speech delivered at PFS 2017. Consistently sound, naturally.

October 16, 2017

The Fear



Ryan Cooper:

I made the case just a couple months back that Republican

presidential frontrunner Donald Trump is a sort of fledgling Mussolini, nurturing an incipient fascist movement. As the first primaries approach, and Trump's lead in the polls is actually widening, his development toward outright fascism is progressing faster than I feared. […] As of August, Trump had most of the ingredients for a fascist movement: the victim complex, the fervent nationalism, the obsession with national purity and cleansing purges, and the cult of personality. He was missing the organized violence, a left-wing challenge strong enough to push traditional conservative elites into his camp, support for wars of aggression, and a full-bore attack on democracy itself. He's made much progress on all but the last one.

The last one is the only point of NRx intersection, but if he takes The White House, there's going to be plenty of deranged: "See, this is what the Dark Enlightenment leads to!" analysis (among the upper echelons of the leftist commentariat). No, this is what democracy leads to. It's called *radical populism*. (Unfortunately, that's a message that isn't going to be heard.)

The Left would rather hand lurid fascism the keys than stop what they're doing (they're already doing the non-lurid version). That would count as a perverse moral vindication — cooking up the enemy they always said they wanted to stop. Eventually, they'll manage it. The Ancients already knew that's how this thing ends.

It goes without saying that NRx should back away as far as

possible, while scattering signs of protection (not that it will do any good).

ADDED: Trump speaks.

November 25, 2015

Merkel's Mess

Damon Linker paints the gruesome picture almost perfectly. (Read the whole thing — it's not long.)

In the course of a few months, Angela Merkel was transmogrified from a moderately talented German politician, into one of the most destructive leaders in world history. If that sounds like an exaggeration, it's only because her responsibility for dragging the European continent back into a new 1930s still awaits the unfolding of events. Even without complete relapse into a dark age of authoritarian anti-capitalism, the wave of rape, pillage, and terror she has unleashed will now — inevitably — devastate millions of lives, and structurally degrade the quality of life for tens of millions more as they seek to protect themselves in markedly more adverse social circumstances. It will all get extremely ugly. As Linker dryly remarks, "let's just say it's unlikely to end well. … And the storm has only just begun to gather."

What was she thinking? Assuming — as seems fair — that she

doesn't positively want to usher in Hitler 2.0, her catastrophic policy decisions have to be *misguided*. It's probably no easier for the readers of this blog than it is for me to cognitively sympathize with the deranged path she has taken. One can only infer that she genuinely believed a vast flood of predominantly young, male, Islamic, tribalistic, and historically-traumatized incomers, with a hallucinatory sense of (unrealizable) cultural and material entitlement, would immediately transmute into fungible production units and contribute to European pensions financing. *The Economist* pretends to believe the same thing. I'm forced to accept it's possible to believe it, despite finding the flying spaghetti monster significantly more plausible. If this depth of delusion really has a grip on the minds of Western elites, any outcome other than utter disaster is most probably unobtainable. A cynical lie would be far less dangerous.

In a single stroke, Merkel has converted the Raspail and Houellebecq scenarios into vivid contemporary predicaments. European collapse has been radically accelerated. For that, a certain dark gratitude is due.

August 6, 2016

Post-Democratic Politics

Apparently we're already in the next phase:

To call Trumpism fascist is to suggest that it demands from us a unique response. We ***can*** *deploy the "fascism" moniker to Trump's ascendance by recognizing features like selective populism, nationalism, racism, traditionalism, the deployment of Newspeak and disregard for reasoned debate. The reason we* ***should*** *use the term is because, taken together, these aspects of Trumpism are not well combated or contained by standard liberal appeals to reason. It is constitutive of its fascism that it demands a different sort of opposition.*

I doubt whether they've thought this through, but don't let that get in the way of progress.

January 22, 2017

SECTION C - STRATEGICS

CHAPTER ONE - ROUGH TRIANGLES

The Unspeakable

To prepare for an excursion into the real-world workings of strategic triangles, this harshly illuminating conversation between David P. Goldman ('Spengler') and the ghost of Cardinal Richelieu is worth recalling:

"We are a bit confused about Syria," I began. "Its leader, Bashar al-Assad, is slaughtering his own people to suppress an uprising. And he is allied to Iran, which wants to acquire nuclear weapons and dominate the region. If we overthrow Assad, Sunni radicals will replace him, and take revenge on the Syrian minorities. And a radical Sunni government in Syria would ally itself with the Sunni minority next door in Iraq and make civil war more likely."

"I don't understand the question," Richelieu replied.

"Everyone is killing each other in Syria and some other places in the region, and the conflict might spread. What should we do about it?"

"How much does this cost you?"

"Nothing at all," I answered.

"Then let them kill each other as long as possible, which is to say for 30 years or so. Do you know," the ghastly Cardinal continued, "why really interesting wars last for 30 years? That has been true from the Peloponnesian War to my own century. First you kill the fathers, then you kill their sons. There aren't usually enough men left for a third iteration."
"We can't go around saying that," I remonstrated.

ADDED: DrewM at *AoS* channels Richelieu from the id: "Personally, I'm happy to let [the Syrians] fight it out amongst themselves for a good long time. Hell, let's arm both sides."

March 21, 2013

Rough Triangles

The elementary model of robust plural order is the tripod. Whether taken as a schema for constitutional separation of powers, a deeper cultural matrix supporting decentralized societies, or a pattern of ultimate cosmic equilibrium, triangular fragmentation provides the archetype of quasi-stable disunity. By dynamically preempting the emergence of a dominant instance, the triangle describes an automatic power-suppression mechanism.

From the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* to *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, triangular fragmentation has been seen to present an

important and distinctive strategic quandary. In power balances of the Mexican Standoff type, initiation of force is inhibited by the triangular structure, in which the third, *reserved* party profits from hostilities between the other two.

The Cold War, schematized to its basics, is the single most telling example. Rather than a binary conflict between East and West, the deep structure of the Cold War was triangular, making it intractable to two-player game-theoretic calculations. Catastrophic damage that might be rationally acceptable within a binary conflict, as the price for total elimination of one's foe, becomes suicidal in a three-player game, where it ensures the victory of the third party. MAD-reason is no longer readily applied, once 'mutual' is more than two.

Even brilliant chess players lose their way in the triangle, where the economy of sacrifice has to be radically reconsidered. Among the Cold War's Three Kingdoms, it was the chess masters who 'won' the race to defeat.

The lessons of the Cold War are no less relevant to its successor, which also fostered binary illusions in its early stages. America's chess match with militant Islam resulted in a stalemate, at best.

Increasingly fierce Sunni-Shia rivalry recasts the current war as a rough triangle, captured in its strategic essentials by the colloquialism *Let's you and him fight*. This was Cardinal Richelieu's way with triangles, as 'Spengler' reminds us:

The classic example is the great German civil war, namely the 30 Years' War of 1618-48. The Catholic and Protestant Germans, with roughly equal strength, battered each other through two generations because France sneakily shifted resources to whichever side seemed likely to fold. I have contended for years that the United States ultimately will adopt the perpetual-warfare doctrine that so well served Cardinal Richelieu and made France the master of Europe for a century (see How I learned to stop worrying and love chaos, March 14)

To imagine this policy being pursued with cold deliberation is the stuff of conspiracy theory. Nevertheless, regardless of whether anybody is yet playing this game, this is the game.

ADDED: A Couple of rough triangles links; George Kerevan at *The Scotsman*; and Clifford May at *The National Post* (who recalls Kissingers classic rough triangles comment — on the Iran-Iraq War — "It's a shame they can't both lose.")

ADDED: Daniel Pipes is totally there: "Western powers should guide enemies to stalemate by helping whichever side is losing, so as to prolong the conflict."

ADDED: "With Western policy being so confused, ineffective, and ignorant, the divisions among enemies may be the best thing going."

March 27, 2013

Rough Triangles II

On learning that Hamas and Hizbollah are now fighting each other in Syria, Peter Ingemi writes:

This sets up the possibility that the greatest threats to Israel and the US will be clashing in Syria & Lebanon, in a long and bitter struggle and moreover as Iran doesn't want to lose their clients and the Saudis and others want to bleed Iran this has the potential to become a mass killing ground for the most vile and despicable enemies the western world has faced.
And all of it happening without us, or Israel lifting a finger.
For a foe of radical Islam it's practically a wet dream, we just have to sit back and let them slaughter each other and if one side starts to lose, we aid third parties to reenforce [Sic] *them enough to keep the fight going until the cream of the jihadist crop finds themselves, shot, gassed or blown up.*
And at this point where you contemplate the solution to so many problems that pesky Christian belief comes in. … That's when you look at your glee at the death of your enemies and feel ashamed.

The Christianity angle isn't basic to the *Outside in* analysis of rough triangles, but since it's important to Ingemi, and Ingemi sees the pattern so clearly, we'll do our best to remain sub-orgasmic about the situation (even if it escalates into a regional humanitarian calamity of apocalyptic scale). Gnon is considerably less demanding

than Jesus in this regard, but it still tilts against indecorous exultation in mass slaughter. The view from the side-lines calls for detachment, and the side-lines are the center here.

In a rough triangle, the side-lines are decidedly the place to be. That should be obvious, and if judged by the serial anecdotes of blog commentary, it is indeed self-evident to the widely-disparaged 'proles' of the right — among whom "please let them kill each other" amounts to common wisdom. Adam Garfinkle, who doesn't seem to approve, nevertheless provides a convincing political back-story to this state of mind. There's a lack of "affinity", a loss of media purchase (i.e. live video), and too many unhealed burns. Less than a quarter of Americans are buying what John McCain is selling (which shows that you can get almost a quarter of Americans to buy anything).

The Syrian quagmire models a rough triangle with such extraordinary exactness that it tempts us into Platonism. It could have been extracted, essentially unmodified, from the notebooks of Cardinal Richelieu. It's not difficult to find these developments, as they unfold symmetrically in Syria and Iraq, provocatively weird. If a strategic genius had deliberately steered the 'war on terror' to this eventuality, his world-historic stature would have been guaranteed. It is worth recalling that when the Bush WoT went pear-shaped, John Derbyshire coined the phrase "to-hell-with-them hawks" to describe dissent from the right, in distinction from overseas state-building neoconservatism. To Hell they now go.

Improbable conspiracy aside, none of this was planned, and that's where the most important lesson lies. The "to-hell-with-them hawks" had no strategy to send America's enemies to hell, but only inchoate grumbles about the progressive welfarization of US military activity. For the harsh right, the message of the early 21st century was that American military power was no longer politically usable. It was time to clamber out of the sandbox, because the Cathedral had filled it with huggy dolls. Doing nothing was the only option left. (Fernandez, uncharacteristically, is embarrassingly slow to grasp this point.)

In the field of right-populist international relations thinking, therefore, there is already broad — if only partially articulate — support for the neoreactionary stance, explored most lucidly by Foseti, which might be characterized as *de-activism*. What we're not on board for is the primary consideration.

Under Cathedralized conditions, suspension of the act can be the only way to let things happen. Just stop, and let 'providence' take over. Perhaps inaction will even simulate strategic genius. We've seen that it can.

ADDED: Jihad (against Shi'ites) … and more Jihad (against Sunnis)

June 2, 2013

Rough Triangles III

Déjà vu time at XS, courtesy of the Mesopotamian death spiral, and Fernandez's strategic framing. The background is important, and relates the topic to a wider question of conservation laws.

The collapse in the Middle East feels like Black April, 1975, the month South Vietnam fell [*]. And it should, because just as the collapse of Saigon did not happen in Black April, but in a political American decision to allow South Vietnam to fall after a "decent interval", so also is the ongoing collapse rooted, not in the recent tactical mistakes of the White House, but in the grand strategic decision president Obama made when he assumed office. […] This ***is the plan****. It would be crazy not to acknowledge it.*

A humanitarian foreign policy is as much a hostage to dark humor as any other affront to Gnon. Hell doesn't go away just because you don't like it. So instead it slides diagonally in the only direction left open, from bloody (and incompetent) hegemonism into radically cynical catastrophe tweaking:

Deep in their hearts the Washington Post and the New York Times must realize they endorsed Obama precisely because they knew that when this moment came he would harden his heart and refuse to re-engage, except for show. Since this is the plan, the only effective strategy, the only sane thing to do is to accept the liberal gambit and continue it. […] The obvious continuation is not to

dampen the sectarian conflict, but to exacerbate it to the greatest degree possible. America, like Britain in the Napoleonic age, should adopt the policy of supporting first one side then the other, or preferably both at once, so that the combatants inflict the maximum degree of damage on each other. […] … To a cynic, what follows next is quite simple: to be the winner stand back and watch while the Arabian peninsula, Levant and North Africa destroys itself. Take every opportunity to make it worse. Clearly a humanitarian catastrophe of unprecedented scale will result. Hundreds of thousands are already dead and millions of displaced persons are on the road. That will only grow in scale and number to millions of dead and tens of millions of refugees. Therefore steps like preparing to sink the people smuggling boats, as the EU is doing, are in order. […] If you can stomach it, it can work like a charm. […] The main problem with this strategy is that Obama may not be able to contain its effects. …

(For the Rough Triangles XS log, see 1, 2, 3.)

* Cited over-excitedly here, with walk-back here.

May 19, 2015

Natural Law

"Some critics of Morsi argue that the U.S. should let him fail," reports

David Ignatius, as Egypt spirals down the drain.

Let X fail is the cosmic formula for getting policy right.

March 7, 2013

Let It Burn …

… (the Middle East version):

Why can't America be more like China?

(a) Stay out

(b) If you have to interfere, help whoever's losing (but not too much)

(c) Recognize there's an intricate theological argument going on that we can't hope to understand:

> Let's keep it civil guys. pic.twitter.com/bjqmbY4Sxk
>
> — CB Langille (@CBLangille) June 20, 2014

ADDED:

> Good search terms if you want to go down a rabbit hole of sectarian youtube videos: 'rafidah', 'takfiri'
>
> — CB Langille (@CBLangille) June 20, 2014

June 20, 2014

Savagery Management

The Left-Salafist alliance:

… the cause of Salafist Islam has come to dominate the field of armed struggle since 2001 and to be the most attractive option for people inclined to practice insurgency. Salafist Islam also melds well with the lessons in insurgency and terrorism previously taught by Marxist theoreticians such as Carlos Marighella, especially when one factors in the ideas and strategy of modern Islamist theorists such as Sayyid Qutb and Abu Bakr al Naji, author of The Management of Savagery. These concepts have also been quite attractive for many on the radical left in the West, who may go so far as to be motivated by the melding of a theory of armed revolution with an intact religious tradition, thereby even converting to Islam. It may also mean that support for jihad, particularly in Europe, may go well beyond Muslim enclaves.

This process of amalgamation between the camps of the enemy is of the very greatest advantage to the Outer Right. The model of domestic progressive 'evolution' is switched to one of stark foreign aggression. It thus terminates all prospect of political compromise, and integrates a single military security problem.

If the Right is incapable of recognizing what it is, it can at least consolidate against what it has to stop. It is in the ashes of this conflict that the toxic dream of political universality will have died.

The shattering of the Overton Window and the elimination of the Grayzone is the same thing.

April 16, 2016

Sentences (#81)

Harsanyi:

... institutional media and white nationalists have formed a politically convenient symbiotic relationship.

Is this seriously deniable?

There's a lot of conspiracy-theorizing underway right now, but it seems implausible, and superfluous. A spontaneous convergence of (perceived) interests is capable of explaining everything. In the end, though, someone is being played. In fact, it's not only possible, but probable, that both sides of this particular arrangement are being played, and not primarily by each other.

November 23, 2016

CHAPTER TWO - INCENTIVES

Game Theory

Attempting to hold rationality and humanity together is an unenviable task, if not simply an impossible one:

*In a series of interventions, Adil Ahmad Haque and Charlie Dunlap have debated the Defense Department **Law of War Manual**'s position on human shields (here, here, and here). Claiming that the manual does not draw a distinction between voluntary and involuntary human shields, Haque maintains that it ignores the principle of proportionality, thus permitting the killing of defenseless civilians who are used as involuntary shields. Dunlap, however, insists that the manual includes all the necessary precautions for protecting civilians used as shields by enemy combatants, and argues that the adoption of Haque's approach would actually encourage the enemy to increase the deployment of involuntary human shields. …*

Sensitivity to the plight of 'human shields' directly increases their tactical value. That is the ultimate 'proportionality' involved in the discussion. Disciplined attention to incentives under conditions of unbounded competition reliably heads into dark places.

October 26, 2015

Twitter cuts (#41)

> Why does government spending grow faster than GDP? Shouldn't increasing tech and GDP actually make government cheaper?
>
> — Warg Franklin (@wargfranklin) January 4, 2016

> @wargfranklin it's almost like the prices a protection racket charges have nothing to do with the cost of providing 'protection'
>
> — The Duck (@jokeocracy) January 4, 2016

> @jokeocracy A bunch of warlords extracting protection money from us and spending it on bling would be an improvement.
>
> — Warg Franklin (@wargfranklin) January 4, 2016

The disastrous incentive-effects would certainly be moderated.

(That's why military-industrial pork waste is actually the least harmful element of government spending — at least, for everything except defense capability and industrial competence.)

January 5, 2016

Quotable (#134)

In *The New Yorker*, John Cassidy lucidly rehearses the core game theoretic model of economic crisis:

… deciding whether to invest in financial assets or any other form of capital can be viewed as a huge n-person game (one involving more than two participants), in which there are two options: trust in a good outcome, which will lead you to make the investment, or defect from the game and sit on your money. If you don't have a firm idea about what is going to happen and the payoffs are extremely uncertain, the optimal strategy may well be to defect rather than to trust. And if everybody defects, bad things result.

Does anybody seriously expect honesty from the *status quo* within this context? 'Optimism' is a fundamental building-block of regime stability. Expect it to be very carefully nurtured, with whatever epistemological flexibility is found helpful.

(Stay to the end of the article for the ominous nonlinear dynamics that correspond to narrative dike-breaking.)

January 21, 2016

Quotable (#191)

Nagel on (Gottlieb on) Hobbes, getting the critical point:

What was distinctive about Hobbes's theory, and what led to his being attacked as a moral nihilist, was his refusal to appeal to any concern for the good of others or the collective good as a basis for moral motivation. He demonstrated that the familiar rules of morality, which he called the laws of nature, are principles of conduct such that if everyone follows them, everyone will be better off. But the fact that everyone will be better off if everyone follows them gives no individual a reason to follow them himself. He can have a reason to follow them only if that will make him individually better off. And there is no natural guarantee that individual self-interest and the collective interest will coincide in this way. […] Hobbes concluded that although we all have a reason to want to live in a community governed by the moral rules, we cannot achieve this unless we bring it about that it is in each person's individual interest to abide by those rules. And the method of doing that is to agree with one another to support a powerful sovereign with a monopoly on the use of force, who will use it to punish violators. Only then can each individual be confident that if he obeys the rules, he will

not be laying himself open to assault and dispossession by others. Without the trust engendered by the knowledge that violators will be punished, civilization is impossible and individual self-interest — the same rational motive that supports morality — leads to perpetual conflict and constant insecurity. This is the famous Hobbesian state of nature, and Hobbes was most notorious for saying that in this condition, we are almost never obligated to obey the moral rules, because it is not safe to do so.

The identification of a collective optimum does no *realistic* theoretical work. Irrespective of the status of his concrete conclusion, Hobbes' methodical principle is impeccable.

September 22, 2016

CHAPTER THREE - MUTUAL INTENSIFICATION

Twitter cuts (#8)

> Bahrain government unfairly spying on man who has dedicated his life to overthrowing it. http://t.co/gKRdZFrOwW
>
> — anomalyuk (@anomalyuk) January 23, 2015

(There's a perfect sanity to this tweet, sarcasm of course included, that would be hard to top. That is equally to say there is a perfect exposure of our reigning moral-political insanity. The "*C'est un chien sauvage* …" quote that should accompany it is escaping me for now … Something like: "It is a fierce beast. When it is attacked, it bites." No doubt one of my cultivated readers can help.)

This elusive aphorism is driving me slowly insane. The closest I can get right now: "A French philosopher once said that a dog is the most dangerous animal in the world because when it is attacked it bites."

(Voltaire?)

ADDED: Thanks to Harold (in the comments) for hunting this down:

Cet animal est tres méchant;
Quand on l'attaque il se défend.

January 23, 2015

Cui bono?

Terrorism is notoriously resistant to strict definition, and the most obvious reason for this is generally understood. Unlike (for instance) guerrilla warfare, 'terrorism' is not merely a tactic, but an intrinsically abominated tactic. Whatever the technical usage of the word, it adheres to the register of propaganda, as a partisan denunciation. It is what the other side does.

This partisan skew is reinforced by technical considerations. Even more than guerrilla warfare, terrorism is a tactic suited to relatively disorganized non-state actors. When even guerrilla warfare is impractical, terrorism is the mode of violent 'resistance' that remains. In the sentimental language of the Left, it is the *warfare of the weak*.

If these factors are recognized, a realistic definition of terrorism can

be constructed that coldly acknowledges both aspects of its positioning, as an ideologically motivated atrocity without state legitimation. *Terrorism is violent partisan criminality*. It is aggressive violation of the law in the service of a political cause.

In a post written prior to the identification of the Boston Marathon bombers, Richard Fernandez makes a point that is far from original, but all the more important for being clearly true, and widely accepted as being true:

The ascription of guilt in public attacks has become highly politicized. Each ideological side is rooting for its own set of villains to be identified as guilty. The Left desperately want the perpetrators to come [from] the Tea Party, White Supremacist Groups or at least Christians while the conservatives want the perps to be Muslims or drug addled lions of the Left.

Acts of terror taint a cause, its supporters, and its demographic base with *violent partisan criminality*. Who benefits? In the case of American domestic terrorism, at least, the answer is almost insultingly obvious. Those identified with *the target of terror* are strengthened by it, those pre-positioned as enemies of the terrorists even more so. After the atrocity occurs, the cry immediately arises: please let it not be *ours*.

This is distinctly *odd*. An act that is inherently political has a valency that directly and explicitly contradicts its superficial partisan motivation. Terrorism is not only something *the other side does*, it is

something that — when reptilian partisan considerations are all that count — one *wants the other side to do*. How utterly delightful (if unavowable) to be blessed with spectacular public confirmation that one's enemies are violent partisan criminals.

An inevitable consequence of this oddity is the proliferation of conspiracy theories. If the guiding question is *cui bono?*, the inescapable implication is that the target — ultimately, the State — is the only agent with a rational interest in terror taking place. 'False flags' make much more sense than raw terror ever could. This way lies madness, and perhaps an ineluctable mass insanity.

The alternative to conspiracy theory can only be common sense, but it finds itself surprisingly stressed. Is terror rationally explicable at all? Are its proponents simply deranged? Or do they perceive subtle advantage in sheer escalation — feeding their enemies, as a way to feed the war? With the world becoming ever more Black Swan-compatible, this is a story that has scarcely begun.

ADDED: Driven to kill by brutalist architecture.

ADDED: 'George Washington' on False Flag Terror.

April 23, 2013

Assassination Markets

Just in case there could be any doubt about it, the primary point

of this post is to insist that this is a *really bad idea*. It's certainly ingenious, and highly topical, but considered solely from a perspective of sub-reptilian amorality, it's still a really bad idea.

For one thing, it's massively asymmetric, in the wrong way. Assassinate a McKinley, and it pushes things hard to the left. Assassinate a Kennedy, and it pushes things hard to the left. Assassinate pretty much anybody of any public significance, and the result is the same. Leftists are simply better at fantasy counter-factuals and martyrology, so the assassination of a leftist produces an imaginary ultra-leftist of even greater ideological purity (whilst killing a conservative works, or even turns them into a post-mortuary leftist). We all know that if JFK hadn't been murdered by Texan capitalism we'd be basking in a socialist utopia by now. (There's a reason why assassination is the preferred tactic of left-wing anarchists and communists, beside the fact these people are demented criminals.)

The reciprocal is even more compelling. Anything that spares leftists from the consequences of participating in reality aids their cause. To consider only the most prominent potential target, Barack Obama alive and in power is the greatest single asset the Outer Right has ever known. Felled by an assassin, he would become the capstone of progressive mythology, and everything he's aiming to achieve *would have turned out absolutely perfectly*. If there's a black counter-assassination market, surreptitiously protecting key agents

of the Cathedral from acts of violence, it would be infinitely more effective to invest in that.

November 20, 2013

Chicken

When political polarization is modeled as a game the result is Chicken. The technical basics are not very complicated.

Reiterated Prisoner's Dilemma (RPD) is socially integrative. An equilibrium, conforming to maximal aggregate utility, arises through reciprocal convergence upon an optimum strategy: defaulting to trust, punishing defections, and rapidly forgiving corrected behavior. Any society adopting these rule-of-thumb principles consolidates. When everyone norms on this strategy, individual and collective interests are harmonized. Things work.

Chicken is very different. Someone blinks first, so the trust-trust mutual optimum of RPD is subtracted in advance. Rather than the four possible outcomes of a single PD round (A and B do OK, A wins B loses, B wins A loses, A and B both lose) there are just three possible outcomes (A wins B loses, B wins A loses, A and B both lose extremely). In Chicken, it is the avoidance of outcome three, rather than the non-existent chance of PD outcome one, that moderates behavior, and then asymmetrically (someone always blinks first).

No less importantly, the time structure of Chicken is inverted. In RPD, the agents learn from successive decisions, and from their mere prospect. Each decision is punctual, Boolean, and communicatively isolated. In Chicken, the decision is mutual, quantitative, and anticipated by a strategically-dynamic introduction — an interactive process, in advance of the decision, that is richly communicative, complex, and even educational. In addition, when compared to PD, Chicken reiteration is remarkably complicated (more on that in a moment).

Consider the classic Chicken game. Two drivers accelerate towards each other, and the one who swerves ('blinks') loses. If neither swerves, both lose (worse). The lead up is everything, and the decision itself is a matter of speed and timing (a non-Boolean 'when' rather than a Boolean 'which'). The question is not "will the other player defect?" but rather "how far will they go?"

Thomas Schelling made an intellectual specialism out of Chicken, and his understanding of the classical version was sharpened by the concept of "credible commitment" ("how far will they go?"). How could a player ensure that his opponent does not win? The solution to this problem, if produced in advance, has the strategic value of also maximizing the chance that the opponent blinks first (thus avoiding the pessimal lose-lose outcome, and generating a win).

Producing credible commitment looks like this. Upon climbing into your car, conspicuously consume a bottle of vodka, thus

communicating the fact that your ability to enact a successful last second swerve is very seriously impaired. Your opponent now knows that even were you inclined to avoid mutual destruction at the brink, you might not be able to do so. Then — once both cars have accelerated to a high speed — rip out your steering wheel and throw it out of the window. (It is extremely important that you do this before your opponent is able to — that's what the vodka was for.) Your communicated commitment is now absolute. Your opponent alone can swerve. It's death or glory.

The 'mainstream' neoreactionary account of American political history is that of reiterated Chicken games between progressives and conservatives, in which *conservatives always swerve*. This analytical framework, despite its crudity, explains why conservatives consider their opponents to be intoxicated lunatics (i.e. winners) whilst they are sober and responsible (i.e. losers). As traditionally positioned, conservatives are the principal social stake-holders, and thus primarily obligated to avoid mutual destruction. It is *essential* to conservatism that it cannot take things (domestically) to the brink. Its incompetence at Chicken is thus constitutional.

When the *Zeitgeist* starts clucking, it can only be a sign that conservatism is coming to an end. The Tea Party is not informatively described as a conservative political movement, because its signal influence is the insistence that the Right stop losing Chicken games. It demands "credible commitment" through the minimization of

discretion on the part of its political representatives, along with whatever insanity is needed *not to fricking swerve*. This is of course highly — even totally — antagonistic. It is why the Left media now sound like this. Before all significance is consumed in partisan rhetoric, it is important to note that the loser in a Chicken game — even the merely probabilistic virtual loser — *necessarily thinks that its opponent is insane*. Any more moderate response would be the infallible sign that losing was inevitable (once again).

It isn't hard to understand why this might be happening. In reiterated Chicken, the loser no doubt acquires a predisposition to submissiveness ("it's hopeless, those lunatics always win"), but the objective undercurrent of repeated defeat is a contraction of the distance between relative (asymmetric) and absolute (mutual) defeat. Eventually, the difference isn't worth surrendering — or swerving –over. "If they keep on winning, there will be nothing left anyway, so we might as well finish it now."

Reciprocally, incessant victory threatens to dull revolutionary fervor into conservatism. Progressives now have many generations of substantial victory to defend, so taking things to the edge has begun to seem concerning. When the government shuts down, what does the Right really lose? At the very least, it's beginning to wonder, and by doing so, upping its Chicken game (AKA "going insane"). Progressives don't have to wonder. They lose the government.

ADDED: Buchanan argues that surrender seldom works. At the

NYT, Michael P. Lynch: “It is tempting to call this “crazy talk” and unserious bluster. But it *is* serious, and it shows that some people are thinking about what happens next. It is a plan that represents the logical limit of the views now being entertained on the radical right, not just in the dark corners of the Internet, but in the sunlight of mainstream forums. After all, if the government is the problem, shutting it down is a logical solution.”

ADDED: Jim expects a swerve.

ADDED: The swerve.

October 15, 2013

Political Chicken

As a preliminary, a little XS background, which I’ll aim not to repeat.

The take on Trump’s advantage that seems under-emphasized: *He credibly signals a refusal to swerve*. I’m not arguing here that it’s realistic to trust that. The point is only, the Trump candidacy looks to a substantial swathe of the electorate — at least comparatively — like the strategic choice for not losing at chicken games. As noted in the linked post, when democratic party politics becomes highly polarized, that’s the game being played.

Anyone playing chicken through an agent prioritizes certain definite virtues. Trump’s rhetoric reflects these uncannily. “Winning”

— for instance — is a word to watch.

To see what it is to be a chicken game loser, there's no better model than recent GOP presidential candidates. John McCain appeared to positively delight in the honor of being defeated by Barack Obama in 2008, and Mitt Romney followed quite faithfully in his footsteps. In both cases, which can be extended to the GOP establishment generally, respectability is defined by the sentiment: "Sure, winning would be nice, but we're not going to be crazy about it." If there's a single key to winning at chicken, however, 'crazy' is it.

The greater the media onslaught against Trump, given only *that he doesn't flinch*, the stronger the signal that he's not a swerve kind of guy. In this respect, the specific content of the attacks is almost irrelevant. The nastier the better. Best of all, if the message gets communicated that *this maniac would take us over the cliff*, he's already won. From the perspective of this analysis, there's simply nothing else he has to get across. It translates to: *With Trump we either win, or at least don't lose*. (Objection: "But 'everyone dies' is losing isn't it?" — Thanks GOPe, but you're not getting this at all.)

Cruz and (to a parodic extent) Rubio look *flexible* next to Trump. It's not that people think they might swerve — it's what they firmly expect. They seem bendy, and specifically prone to compromise, concessions to media-fabricated realities, back-downs, apologies, and pre-emptive cringe.

Never, ever, even for a moment back-down, laugh at demands for

'disavowal', double-down on offense, concede nothing, and *never swerve*. Regardless of what one thinks about this orientation, it's the one hungered for by the Trump constituency right now. Trump's instincts, if not perfect in this regard, are impressively sound. We'll know within 24-hours or so how it's working out.

ADDED: It's chicken all the way down.

ADDED: Trump poker.

March 1, 2016

CHAPTER FOUR - SUBVERSION AND CAMOUFLAGE

Subversion

Nyan Sandwich has a cunning plan:

> Proposal: a secretly NR-run hatefact-respinning and overton-window-lefting blog.
>
> — Nyan Sandwich (@WolfTivy) March 13, 2014

Sister Sarah (@sarahdoingthing) suggests the "hard part is to be somehow different from actual real leftist sites …"

> @sarahdoingthing No. Point is to be a perfectly normal leftist site, but secretly an experimental apparatus for Cthulology
>
> — Nyan Sandwich (@WolfTivy) March 13, 2014

Partly because there can simply never be enough of this, but also for other reasons, this idea is perfectly delicious. It would be like a Sokal tar-baby, spreading sticky black paranoid confusion

throughout the redoubts of the enemy. To make this work, however, would require a very exceptional type of genius (of exactly the kind demonstrated in the Shea case). Judging the precise extent and flavors of absurdity that the left will endorse — or at least find credibly non-parodic — is a rare and delicate art, especially since they have to be taken to the very edge, teetering prominently into gulfs of roaring madness. In addition, since effectiveness would correspond closely with persistence, the work involved would be immense.

If anyone is embarking on this, I do not (of course) want to know — Omertà.

(Before anyone else brings it up (here) I should perhaps also mention this.)

Modeling strategy on espionage and the double-agent, rather than military confrontation and the hero-warrior, would do much to burn-off ludicrous romanticism, replacing theatrical attitude with realist cunning. As with anything that involves demonstrated performance of a complex feat, rather than grandiose proclamations of antagonism, it would require actual cognitive achievement. Given basic facts about numbers and capabilities, infiltration is almost certainly something that will eventually need to be done.

Such subversion would also be an experiment in practical metaphysics. How are identities assembled? What are agents? How do expressed values coordinate with effective activity? These questions are destined to explosive complication in the ragged,

techno-psychological world to come, so it is worth tangling with them early, and intricately. Making biorealism an excuse to regress into paleolithic brotherhoods is a temptation to be torched-out ruthlessly by Internet machinations. Turn social Cyberspace into a jungle, where camouflage and complexity rule.

March 13, 2014

Poe's Law

Only a few months ago, I had never heard of Poe's Law. Now it's a rare day in which it doesn't crop up several times. Invocations of the *Zeitgeist* are inherently improbable, but if there were to be a persuasive illustration of the phenomenon, it would be something like this.

According to the succinct Wikipedia entry (already linked), Poe's Law is less than a decade old. Among it's precursors, also relatively recent, a 2001 Usenet comment by Alan Morgan most closely anticipates it: "Any sufficiently advanced troll is indistinguishable from a genuine kook." In other words, between a sincere intellectual position and its satirization, no secure distinction can be made. (There is nothing about this thesis that restricts it to 'extreme' opinion, although that is how it is usually understood.)

The latest opportunity for raising this topic is, of course,

@Salondotcom. (There's an entertaining interview with the pranksters behind it here.) The offense of this account, which led to it being suspended by Twitter last week, was clear beyond any reasonable doubt. Quite simply, it was nearly indistinguishable from the original, a fact that has itself been explicitly noted (and tweeted about) innumerable times. Parody *Salon* slugs, so ludicrously over-the-top that they had @Salondotcom readers in stitches, were funny precisely because they were such plausible mimics of *Salon*'s own. Readers were laughing *through* @Salondotcom, at *Salon*. This is almost certainly why the account was suspended.

Without wandering too deeply into the realm of speculation, it's worth noting this:

> "Twitter's policies require that impersonation reports come from the individual being impersonated" https://t.co/wSo7YkwZOo hmm
>
> — J. Arthur Bloom (@j_arthur_bloom) July 17, 2014

Poe's Law is ultimately indistinguishable from another recent, rapidly popularized rhetorical concept: the Ideological Turing Test. An intellectual criticism can be said to understand its foe if it is able to reproduce it with adequate fidelity. The ITT is therefore a cultural procedure for winnowing-out straw-man arguments and other misrepresentations. If you cannot imitate the enemy case, you

cannot be considered to have engaged it seriously.

Evidently, Poe's Law can be construed as a filter of the same kind. Satire is effective to exactly the extent it can be confused with the satirized. (This can be taken in comparatively serious directions.)

What Poe's Law tells us, is that antagonism is irreducible to argumentation. It is thus inherently anti-dialectical (and thus tacitly secessionist). There can be *perfect understanding* of what the enemy is saying, without even the slightest degree of approach to consensus. In other words, there are discrepancies entirely indissoluble in discussion.

Cutting satire does not reconstruct a cognitive position in order to make it laughable. Instead, it re-states such a position, as faithfully as possible, within the register of laughter — which is to say: *hostility*. It asserts a dissensus that no process of reconciliation can ameliorate. Our 'disagreement' is not the sign of a missing conversation. It is the call for a coming split.

ADDED: Even *Newsweek* notices "… there was a problem: Few could tell the difference between @SalonDotCom and the real thing."

ADDED: So two Edgar Allan Poe twitterbots started following me …

ADDED: Agree, Amplify, and Accelerate

July 18, 2014

AAA …

… stands for *agree, amplify, and accelerate*. Initiated here, and escalated here, it opens an unexplored horizon for strategic discussion within NRx. No analysis of cultural conflict on the Internet can bypass a reference to trolling, and no understanding of trolling is any longer complete without reference to AAA. It raises the discussion of parody to a new level. (If it isn't already obvious, this blog is seriously impressed.)

AAA works if strategic complication has favorable consequences. Whichever cultural faction has the greater capacity for the tolerance of difficulty, identity confusion, irony, and humor, will tend to find advantage in it. I think that's us. It's inherently toxic to zealotry.

As a sub-theme — but one keenly appreciated here — it marks a critical evolution in the Cthulhu Wars. (Check out the graphics on the TNIO post for recognition of that.) Rather than arguing over whether "Cthulhu swims left" AAA proposes amphetaminizing the monster regardless. *If a "holocaust of freedom" is what you want, let's go there*. Take this operation to the end of the river … and see what we find.

ADDED: Slate Star Scratchpad comments.

July 22, 2014

#AAA UK-Style

The profound, utterly cynical contempt for the basic principles, procedures, and personalities of democracy™ exhibited by this phenomenon is highly encouraging.

(#AAA)

With added meta-amusement:

> Don't be fooled! #ToriesForCorbyn is actually a double bluff as he is the candidate that they are most scared of.
>
> — Benjamin Barton (@ThisWeekInBen) June 17, 2015

June 17, 2015

AAA … II

There follows an XS-endorsed message from Henry Dampier:

… we can't make the omelet of perfect, universal justice without breaking some eggs. […] The presence of White men in any classroom, owing to their historical record, can be profoundly triggering to women and people of color. To protect their historic victims – to give them mental and physical space for them to flourish – we must keep White men away from the university, and by blocking them from those institutions, we must keep them far away from

political power, also. […] We have tried reform. We have tried patient education. It has not worked. Harsher measures will be required. The world can't wait.

(For reference, AAA …)

September 11, 2015

Quote note (#218)

Libertarian in genesis, but strategically sound:

"… those who consider themselves modern American revolutionaries often envision manning barricades and mass revolt as the undoing of the government. That attacks the government at its greatest strength — its capacity to use force and violence. The US government has at its disposal the most potent military and surveillance capabilities ever assembled. … […] The idea that some sort of mass movement will rise and by force of its inferior arms throw off the yoke of oppression is the stuff of weak novels, not a real life strategy that has a chance of success. Those who buy into it and attempt implementation commit the biggest strategic failure: they have fooled themselves. Consequently, their enemy — the government — profits. It uses their failure to justify further tyranny and repression.

There is surprisingly little written about attacking the government

at its weakest point: its financial dependence … An offensive would require a mass movement far less massive than that required for armed revolt, and its tactics would be legal. A few million simultaneous phone calls and requests via websites for the withdrawal of balances from banks, money market funds, and stock and bond mutual funds would precipitate a financial panic. None of those institutions keep enough cash on hand to meet a tsunami of redemption and withdrawal requests. They'd have to sell their assets to raise cash. The prices of those assets would drop, begetting further selling; negative crowd psychology and wealth effects would kick in as markets crash, and debt and economic activity would contract.

The biggest loser in all this would be the government. As prices for bonds drop, interest rates rise, increasing its debt service. As economic activity contracts, tax receipts drop, safety net spending rise, crony capitalists must be bailed out, and deficits expand. Except for interest on government debt rising (it was perceived as a safe haven) all of this happened during the last financial crises. A massive increase in government debt and central bank debt monetization forestalled complete disaster last time. Even some of their proponents admit that those palliatives are now exhausted. During the next crisis, interest rates will rise on government debt to reflect its increasing credit risk. […] Which will leave the government confronting, and being defeated by, one of its biggest whoppers: that

the pieces of paper and computer notations its Treasury and central bank generate ultimately have value after decades of determined efforts to depreciate them. They're simply pieces of paper and computer entries, and eventually they're not going to buy any groceries for all those warriors and police the government's counting on, or for anyone else. Currencies collapse just before governments do; witness Venezuela, with its Bolivar and its government in extremis.
This outcome does not require a plan; it's going to happen. Indeed, it's already happening.

When something is falling, push — but push intelligently. The fetish for popular violence among certain factions of the Alt-Right is simple idiocy. If a populace is still docile enough to support government deficit spending, it's not going to be waging a guerrilla war anytime soon.

February 9, 2016

CHAPTER FIVE - HEGEMONIC HEADEACHES

Peace Dividend

Glenn Reynolds notices an emerging interpretation of PRISM as a phenomenon internally connected to geopolitical pacifism. Making unilateral peace requires infinite vigilance.

First Steyn:

The same bureaucracy that takes the terror threat so seriously that it needs the phone and Internet records of hundreds of millions of law-abiding persons would never dream of doing a little more pre-screening in its immigration system … Because the formal, visible state has been neutered by political correctness, the dark, furtive shadow state has to expand massively to make, in secret, the judgment calls that can no longer be made in public.

Then WRM:

PRISM and similar programs aren't a ghastly misstep or an avoidable accident. They are the essence of Obama's grand strategy: public peace and secret war. To cool down the public face of the war,

he must intensify the secret struggle.

Richard Fernandez comments.

There's some kind of conservation law at work there, and they always have the potential to trip people up. *Bad outcomes are conserved* might be too harsh, but it gets close to something.

June 8, 2013

Broken Pottery

An irritated Pottery Barn disowned the Pottery Barn Rule — "you break it, you own it." Colin Powell sought to create some distance, too:

It is said that I used the "Pottery Barn rule." I never did it; [Thomas] Friedman did it … But what I did say … [is that] once you break it, you are going to own it, and we're going to be responsible for 26 million people standing there looking at us. And it's going to suck up a good 40 to 50 percent of the Army for years.

Wikipedia concurs with Powell, in attributing the phrase to Thomas L. Friedman (in a February 2003 column for the *New York Times*). Those with a diligent sense for historical detail might be able to accurately trace its spread amongst journalists and foreign policy officials, including Bob Woodward, Richard Armitage, and John Kerry. Regardless of such specifics, it captures the spirit of grand

strategy during the Nullities, and explains why the US military is no longer of use for anything.

In its rational usage, the military is a machine for the production of negative incentives. It is designed to hurt people and break things, with the understanding that in its optimal — deterrent and intimidatory — function, the actual exercise of these capabilities will not be necessary. When considered from a Clausewitzean perspective, as a policy instrument, usable military power is directly proportional to a credible threat of punishment. It sets boundaries to the behavior of (rational) potential antagonists, by projecting the probability of extreme negative outcomes if diplomatically-determined triggers are activated — or 'red lines' crossed.

Frederick the Great said "Diplomacy without arms is like music without instruments" because there can be no discussion of political limits among sovereigns unless menace gives them meaning. "I'd really rather you didn't do that" has no 'really' about it, unless a threat lurks at the edge of the stage (visible, but reserved). It's a polite belch, at best. Positive incentives presuppose the boundaries set by negative incentives — there can be no bargaining over that which can be demanded without cost. Thus the words of the diplomat are refinements of a message that military capability crafts in its essentials, either in the first derivative (balance of power between armed alliances), or the second (the 'internal' security economy of coalitions). The rest is empty ceremony.

Imperialism tends to the radical degeneration of diplomatic reason, because it dissolves borders, systematically effacing the 'foreign' sphere. When this process has developed to the point that foreign and domestic policy are no longer distinguishable, the Pottery Barn Rule takes over. 'Mission creep' is the operational symptom of something deeper: the geostrategic abolition of proprietary boundaries, of a kind that allow for the possibility of restricted sympathies, or the recognition of *alien interests*. The mature empire cannot threaten anything or anybody without immediately threatening itself. Hence its profound alignment with universal moral ideologies, whose particular selves gush unimpeded into the world soul.

When, in the early years of the new millennium, President 'Godzilla' Dubya Bush unleashed Operation Pottery Barnstorm on various societies loosely associated with the wreckage of the New York skyline, it was understood from the beginning that the populations on the receiving end were already honorary New Yorkers, absent from the Twin Towers on the morning of September 11, 2001 only by insignificant sociological coincidence. This 'fact' was an explicit justification for the US response, which expressed outrage at the victimization of a random sample of the world's population by 'criminals' so backward they didn't realize they were only hurting themselves. America's ruling elite, in contrast, had attained this realization definitively enough to articulate it, for domestic =

international consumption, as the Pottery Barn Rule.

Once the Pottery Barn Rule becomes authoritative, the military is rationally unusable. It's obvious why. Imagine a night-club bouncer saying, "Clear out of here, or I'm going to thrash you within an inch of your life – of course, I promise to take full responsibility for all the damage you incur from this righteous beating, covering all medical expenses, compensating you for loss of earnings, and negotiating in good faith to make reparation for all reasonable claims of emotional distress …" *This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you*. For the global administrative class, this is a truly beautiful illustration of evolved consciousness. Ordinary Americans, including the military, are less spiritually captivated by the development.


This hurts me more than it hurts you.

In the Pottery Break Age, there are no threats that do not revert to masochistic acts of solidarity. A decision to bomb or invade X now means *It's time for us to share X's pain*. Unsurprisingly — except

amongst a weird sub-species of radically bellicose goofy idealist — this type of imperial-altruistic enterprise is proving a tough sell.

Let's take on the role of insurer for the Pottery Barn, and then trash the place hard (for the common good).

If Congress signs on for this, it will be one more sign that America's political class has wandered off into another world — or perhaps just **The World®** — leaving the country's once-distinguishable neo-native population behind.

ADDED: Angelo M. Codevilla: "Some three fourths of Americans oppose making war on Syria. Hence the Republican leadership class' reflexive advocacy of entry into Syria's civil war is cutting one of the few remaining ties that bind it to ordinary Americans." (via)

ADDED: James Taranto: "As Congress returns and prepares to take up President Obama's request for an authorization to use military force in Syria, William Kristol, editor of The Weekly Standard, tries to reassure queasy Republicans that "yes" is not only the right vote but the expedient one … This seems to us a very bad misreading of the political environment." (Even Kristol starts to lose it after Kerry makes the "unbelievably small" promise.)

September 9, 2013

Stalin's Great Game

Either Stalin played the Anglosphere like a cheap piano in World War Two, or something altogether more sinister was going on. Foseti clarifies the conundrum beautifully:

When the US finally joins the war, it does so with – as best as one can decipher – only a few clear war aims: 1) demanding unconditional surrender (of Germany and Japan – aka the only bulwarks against Soviet domination of post-war Europe and Asia); 2) establishing the United Nations; and 3) ending European (excluding Soviet) colonialism.

If you, gentle reader, can come up with a list of war aims that would be more destructive to mankind at the time than those, the next round is on me. Perhaps entirely coincidentally (or perhaps not) these aims would seem to all work towards the direct benefit of the Soviets. It's almost like Soviets were making US foreign policy.

October 2, 2013

"Which Falls First?" …

… William S. Lind asks in this recent panel discussion (third speaker, just after 43 minutes in). "The foreign policy establishment, or the country?" The relevant thread of his argument: The aggressive

foreign policy posture of the United States is counter-productively promoting global disorder, which eventually threatens domestic calamity. When the US fights a foreign state, Lind argues, it advances the chaotic "forces of the fourth generation" — a more formidable opponent than even the most obdurately non-compliant state is able to be. America's "offensive grand strategy" — tied to a high-level of concern for the internal political arrangements of foreign countries — is sowing dragon's teeth.

TNIO has been coaxing NRx onto a path of broadened geopolitical scope. There is an unavoidable irony here. The Old Right tends naturally to a preoccupation with hearth-and-home, so that its preferred policy posture (non-interventionism) is often accompanied by — or even buried within — a retraction of mental energy from distant questions. The Neoconservative synthesis of foreign policy activism and cosmopolitan fascination with foreign affairs is far more psychologically consistent, regardless of its errors. For anti-globalists to sustain a panoramic perspective takes work.

This work is important, if realistic analysis is the goal, because distant eventualities hugely impinge. The existence and fate of Neoreaction depends far more upon the great churning machinery of world history than upon the local decisions of its favored 'little platoons'. To misquote Lenin: Even if you are not interested in the system of the world, it is interested in you.

The fall of any empire involves an interplay of internal and

external factors, knitted together in a relation of reciprocal amplification. The whole picture can never be solely a domestic one. By the time imperial destiny is a political question, it is already historical fact. It is too late, then, for simple denial. The thing is in motion. It cannot be asked not to have begun.

Consider only the most basic geopolitical structure of modernity — an 'Atlantean' world order consolidated, in succession, by the hegemonic maritime-commercial republics of the United Provinces, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Even from this core narrative, much is already starkly evident.

(0) Modernity rests upon concrete foundations of world power.

(1) Global dominion has a distinctive ideological and cultural skew.

(2) The hegemonic role (and even, at its most abstract, 'culture') is more stable, and intrinsically determinate, than the supremacy of any specific power, which waxes and wanes over a shorter period. The role of the Modern Hegemon is an autonomous 'office' with its own continuous tradition.

(3) When the United States inherited the role of Atlantean leadership, it adopted a structure of responsibility that had not arisen from within the USA itself. On the contrary, the USA had gown up and into it. How America behaves in the world does not follow exclusively — and perhaps not even predominantly — from anything that America, as a specific country, is.

(4) There is no precedent within modernity for global hegemony to

pass from a world power to its successor without a set of very distinctive ethnic characteristics being held in common. (The leading culture of modernity, to this point, has been consistently North-West European, Protestant, Liberal, Maritime-Commercial, and — since the late 17th century — English-speaking, rooted in Common Law tradition.) Since America is the terminus of this sequence, a passage beyond precedent is inevitable. This could take one of (only?) three possible forms:

(a) The USA immortalizes its hegemonic status

(b) The world passes into undirected anarchy

(c) Global hegemony departs from its multi-century cultural orbit into unfamiliar ethnic territory.

None of this is separable from the fate of globalization, or modernity. However attractive it may be, the idea that America, in particular, has any purely domestic cultural, ideological, or political options of significance is untenable. What happens to America happens, immediately, to the order of the world.

Furthermore, geopolitical history has reached the edge of modern precedent. There is no one to whom the torch of global leadership can be passed in keeping with the inner tradition of modern torch-passing ritual. In this very definite sense, modernity as it has been known reaches its end. This no doubt accounts for the underlying tone of mounting hysteria which accompanies America's increasingly disjointed behavior upon the global stage.

It is an eventuality foretold in Miltonic prophecy — an encounter with the *palpable obscure*.

August 11, 2014

Homeless

It is tempting to either embrace or reject the description of the United States as an 'empire' due to the clear rhetorical weight of this term. Partisan wrangling on these grounds is sure to continue, and even to intensify. It is not, however, the only basis upon which discussion can be pursued.

A global power, it might be plausibly suggested, tends inevitably to the erosion of its domestic political space. As globalization is advanced under its auspices, distinctions between domestic and international concerns — ultimately uncertain in any case — become increasingly unpersuasive. Globalized capital and talent markets operate with least friction where they intersect the world's economic core, while international division of labor, trade, migration, and cultural exchange wash over traditional localities. In the final analysis, the very notion of political domesticity survives only as a residual rebuke to the project of global 'flattening'.

While it can be convenient for moralists to interpret hegemonic power as a bad decision, it's far closer to a fate (and in very definite

respects a tragic one). Any suggestion that America might have *chosen* not to lead the world is more of an appeal to sentiment and tactical partisan positioning than to realism. History has its tides, and eventually they change.

America's presently-ongoing Ferguson turmoil underscores the trend to political de-domestication of the metropolis, through an explicit collapse of social order into a problematic of '4GW' (or 'Fourth Generation Warfare'). Twitter is congested with observations of police militarization, friction-free transmission of equipment from US expeditionary forces into the hands of its domestic law enforcement agencies, and advisories from international irregular armies on best-practice for dealing with counter-insurgency operations. Beyond the partisan excitement, and euphoric tribalism, there is a recognition of broken boundaries, and the consolidation of an integrated US security machinery that no longer finds the discrimination between foreign and domestic enemies of practical use.

This phenomenon, as such, has no unambiguous partisan implications. Even were critique of the Empire unique to the left (which it is not), the application of an essentially domestic political optic (partisan choice) to a matter of world-historic deep structure would remain a laughable error. The fate of America is not an American problem, at least, not exclusively. It concerns the order of the world.

Willard's words from *Apocalypse Now* are prophetic:

"Someday this war's gonna end". That'd be just fine with the boys on the boat. They weren't looking for anything more than a way home. Trouble is, I'd been back there, and I knew that it just didn't exist anymore.

ADDED: Re-importation of the 'new military urbanism'. It quotes Foucault:

… while colonization, with its techniques and its political and juridical weapons, obviously transported European models to other continents, it also had a considerable boomerang effect on the mechanisms of power in the West, and on the apparatuses, institutions, and techniques of power. A whole series of colonial models was brought back to the West, and the result was that the West could practice something resembling colonization, or an internal colonialism, on itself …

August 14, 2014

CHAPTER SIX - RECENT EVENTS

Our Ally, the Enemy

It's not exactly a formal pact between the United States and Al Qaeda, but no one honestly thinks it's anything really different. Either it's a rough triangles play, or it's sheer insanity.

Time won't tell, but it will hint, as the intervention proceeds. If it makes things worse, before guttering out into indecision, stalling resolution, then it might make sense. In any case, it's big.

(Drew M. at AoS is a seriously hard-core rough triangles guy: "We should help whichever side is losing at any given moment but only to the extant that it enables them to fight on to take and inflict more casualties. There's no scenario where one side winning helps us.")

June 14, 2013

Quote notes (#24)

Adam Garfinkle makes an obvious point beautifully:

… whatever the Administration has said about the purpose of an

attack being to "degrade and deter" Syrian capabilities, but not to change the regime, everyone expects the attacks to be modest and brief, thus not to much affect the battlefield balance, and once ceased to stay ceased. That is because the Administration's reticence at being drawn into the bowels of Syrian madness is both well established and well justified. The attacks, then, will likely not degrade or deter anything really; they will be offered up only as a safety net to catch the falling reputation of the President as it drops toward the nether regions of strategic oblivion.

This has all been so vividly sign-posted it is getting hard to see how even a 'cosmetic' effect is going to work. How can an operation pre-advertized as an awkward spasm of embarrassment be realistically expected to restore honor and credibility?

Handle brims with sense on the topic.

August 30, 2013

Oil War

This contrarian argument, on the resilience of America's shale industry in the face of the unfolding OPEC "price war", is the pretext to host a discussion about a topic that is at once too huge to ignore, and too byzantine to elegantly comprehend. The most obvious complication — bypassed entirely by this article — is the harsher oil

geopolitics, shaped by a Saudi-Russian proxy war over developments in the Middle East (and Russian backing of the Assad regime in Damascus, most particularly). I'm not expecting people here to be so ready to leave that aside.

Clearly, though, the attempt to strangle the new tight-oil industry in its cradle is a blatantly telegraphed dimension of the present Saudi oil-pricing strategy, and one conforming to a consistent pattern. If Mullaney's figures can be trusted, things could get intense:

… data from the state of North Dakota says the average cost per barrel in America's top oil-producing state is only $42 — to make a 10% return for rig owners. In McKenzie County, which boasts 72 of the state's 188 oil rigs, the average production cost is just $30, the state says. Another 27 rigs are around $29.

If oil-price chicken is going to be exploring these depths, there's going to be some exceptional pain among the world's principal producers. Russia is being economically cornered in a way that is disturbingly reminiscent of policy towards Japan pre-WWII, when oil geopolitics was notoriously translated into military desperation. Venezuela will collapse. Iran is also under obvious pressure.

How is it possible that a world run by manic Keynesians gets to quaff on this deflationary tonic? It should hide a lot of structural ruin, at least in the short term. Global economic meltdown is deferred — and ultimately deepened — once again. (We'll probably get the war first.)

ADDED: "Saudi Arabia, OPEC's biggest oil producer, has reportedly said the oil price should stabilize at about $60 per barrel … Many OPEC members have been put under budgetary pressure by the lower oil price,as exporting countries rely heavily on oil revenues. Iran needs a price at $140 per barrel to balance its budget. Saudi Arabia needs a price of $90.70 per barrel, as it can count on huge reserves. Qatar needs $77.60 per barrel, and the United Arab Emirates $73.30 per barrel. […] In early November, OPEC officials said the price of $70 per barrel is a threshold at which other member countries could start panicking."

ADDED: Some oil geopolitics musings from Fernandez.

December 4, 2014

Kill the Chicken …

… to scare the monkeys.

Andrew Lilico gets the game over Syriza exactly right.

In current discussions of what Greece might or might not get in the way of concessions from the Eurozone, there has so far been relatively little appreciation of one basic political reality: as far as the governments of Spain, Portugal, Ireland, probably Italy and perhaps even France are concerned, Syriza must fail and must be seen to fail. … […] And note: I haven't even got on to the problem of how voters

in Germany or Finland or the Netherlands would react to being told that Syriza had extracted concessions with its comic-book antics.

Unless Syriza-led Greece is hideously crucified, it wins — and what will be unfolding is an extremely brutal zero-sum game (in which Greece cannot be allowed to win). For the EU establishment, a Syriza success story would be a catastrophe of almost incomprehensible magnitude. It would bring with it an entire narrative of core institutional delegitimation, which in the case of the peripheral nations (as glossed by Lilico) runs: "… what we really should have done was to raise the minimum wage, hire back the public sector staff that had been fired, say we weren't going to pay our debts to our eurozone partners, cosy up to the Russians and tell the Germans they didn't feel nearly guilty enough about World War Two. Then everyone would have said we were 'rock stars' and and forgiven our debts."

It's unthinkable that Germany could let this story put down roots in the fertile manure of renewed growth. Instead, there will be war by other means. Crucially, the more calamitously things now turn out for Greece, the more the EU will be strengthened, if only for a while.

From the perspective of these eurozone governments, Syriza must fail. The best way for it to fail would be for it to capitulate utterly and crawl back to Greece with its tail between its legs and a few cosmetic patronising "concessions" such as renaming the "Troika" the "Consultative Committee" (or, if it makes them feel

better, the "Symvouleftiki Epitropi"). If it won't do that — and there's a good chance that if it did try to do that then the Greek government would collapse, anyway — then things get a bit more complicated. Because if it's bad and dangerous for Syriza to succeed inside the euro, it would be disastrous for it to succeed outside the euro.

It's hard to see how this doesn't get intense.

ADDED: The game (formalized)

February 12, 2015

SEQUENCE i - WAR

War and Truth (scraps)

"War is computation with tanks. War is truth revealing. As war proceeds uncertainty collapses."
— Konkvistador (on Twitter)

"You might not be interested in war, but war is interested in you."
— Lenin

"War is deception."
— Sunzi

Neoreactionaries are often talking about 'oikos' tacitly, even when they think they are concerned with something closer to the opposite. For there to be an 'economy' much has already to have been settled. (Unlike his liberarian precursors, Moldbug never assumes peace, but he betrays his inheritance by conceiving it as an original task — a foundation.) "Begin from the inside" — that's the idea. The Outside is war.

War is the truth of lies, the rule of rulelessness, anarchy and chaos as they are in reality (which is nothing at all like a simple negation of order). It is the ultimate tribunal, beyond which any appeal is a

senseless prayer to the void. A 'realism' that resists such conclusions makes a mockery of the name.

Peace is a certain way war can turn out, for a while, and nothing more.

As the social institution oriented to reality in the raw, the military has a latent authority that everyone recognizes (implicitly). Whenever military government does not rule, it is because of a provisional non-emergency (Schmitt). This is not seriously disputable.

An aristocracy is a social arrangement that was decided by war, and when the war is forgotten the institution has no sustainable meaning. There is only one thing that can 'bring back' a king, and that is the end of peace.

The East India companies (Dutch and English) ran armies, because war was internal to economics as they practiced it. That was 'colonialism' (in the James Donald sense). Once the separation between war and commerce has been hardened into standard business procedures (and the imperialism that screens them from the outside), capitalism has surrendered its always-inexplicit claim to sovereignty, and thus to the future. There is no way it can be re-animated except out of the raw. This, above all, is why libertarianism cannot be saved from its own non-seriousness.

The horror of war is that there are 'no rules'. Anything is permitted, and the worst even becomes necessary. To think this is

no lesser a challenge than the metaphysical engagement with the ‘thing-in-itself’ — and perhaps it is exactly the same thing. But then, it becomes important to ask: So how does it work? There are rules, but we misunderstood what rules really are (what ultimate rules are). In the end, it is the order of anarchy that rules. In order to comprehend any of this the peacetime soul must be reduced entirely to ashes, for something else to arise in its place. It is this task that Neoreaction is compelled to take up, and which it has — in several different ways — already taken up. Peace is the objective correlate of the deluded mind.

If war is the worst thing in the world, and the truth, then everything that isn’t horror is a lie.

January 19, 2014

Conflict

Burroughs:

This is a war universe. War all the time. That is its nature. There may be other universes based on all sorts of other principles, but ours seems to be based on war and games.

Triggered by this:

@Outsideness you thrive on conflict

— John (@RichAsCrassus) July 3, 2014

It's docile obedience to Gnon.

July 3, 2014

War is God

Via Landry, an introduction to the "new generation of unrestricted warfare".

Colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui argued that war was no longer about "using armed forces to compel the enemy to submit to one's will" in the classic Clausewitzian sense. Rather, they asserted that war had evolved to "using all means, including armed force or non-armed force, military and non-military, and lethal and non-lethal means to compel the enemy to accept one's interests." The barrier between soldiers and civilians would fundamentally be erased, because the battle would be everywhere. The number of new battlefields would be "virtually infinite," and could include environmental warfare, financial warfare, trade warfare, cultural warfare, and legal warfare, to name just a few. They wrote of assassinating financial speculators to safeguard a nation's financial security, setting up slush funds to influence opponents' legislatures and governments, and buying controlling shares of stocks to convert

an adversary's major television and newspapers outlets into tools of media warfare. According to the editor's note, Qiao argued in a subsequent interview that "the first rule of unrestricted warfare is that there are no rules, with nothing forbidden." That vision clearly transcends any traditional notions of war.

How 'traditional' are we talking? "War is the Father of all things, and of all things King" (πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς) Heraclitus asserts at the dawn of philosophy. There seems little indication of 'restriction' there.

Whatever the positive semantic associations accumulated by the word 'war', its most rigorous meaning is negative. War is conflict without significant constraint. As a game, it corresponds to the condition of unbounded defection, or trustlessness without limit. This is the Hobbesian understanding implicit in the phrase "war of all against all" (*bellum omnium contra omnes*), in which "the state of nature" is conceived – again negatively – through a notional subtraction of limitation. Treachery, in its game-theoretic sense, is not a minor theme within war, but a horizon to which war tends – the annihilation of all agreement. Reciprocally-excited mutual betrayal in departure from an implicit 'common humanity' is its teleological essence. This is a conclusion explicitly rejected by Carl von Clausewitz is his treatise *On War*, even as he acknowledges the cybernetic inclination to amplification (or "tendency to a limit") which drives it in the direction of an absolute. "War is the

continuation of politics by other means," he insists, because it is framed by negotiation (book-ended by a declaration of war, and a peace treaty). According to this conception, it is an interlude of disagreement, which nevertheless remains irreducibly communicative, and fundamentally structured by the decisions of sovereign political agencies. Even as it approaches its pole of ultimate extremity, it never escapes its teleological dependency, as a means (or instrument) of rational statecraft.

The reduction of war to instrumentality is not immune to criticism. Philosophical radicalization, alone, suffices to release war from its determination as 'the game of princes'. The Clausewitzean formula is notoriously inverted by Michel Foucault into the maxim "politics is war by other means". If political sovereignty is ultimately conditioned by the capability to prevail upon the battlefield, the norms of war can have no higher tribunal than military accomplishment. No real authority can transcend survival, or survive a sufficiently radical defeat. There is thus a final incoherence to any convinced appeal to the 'laws of war'. The realistic conception of 'limited war' subsumes that of 'war lawfully pursued' (with the latter categorized as an elective limitation). Qiao's words bear emphatic repetition: "the first rule of unrestricted warfare is that there are no rules, with nothing forbidden." The power to forbid is — first of all — power, which war (alone) distributes.

Between peace and war there is no true symmetry. Peace

presupposes pacification, and that is a military outcome. There is no authority — moral or political — that cannot first assert itself under cosmic conditions that are primordially indifferent to normativity. Whatever cannot defend its existence has its case dumped in the trash.

Cormac McCarthy's Judge Holden provides us with a contemporary restatement of the ancient wisdom:

Suppose two men at cards with nothing to wager save their lives. Who has not heard such a tale? A turn of the card. The whole universe for such a player has labored clanking to his moment which will tell if he is to die at that man's hand or that man at his. What more certain validation of a man's worth could there be? This enhancement of the game to its ultimate state admits no argument concerning the notion of fate. The selection of one man over another is a preference absolute and irrevocable and it is a dull man indeed who could reckon so profound a decision without agency or significance either one. In such games as have for their stake the annihilation of the defeated the decisions are quite clear. This man holding this particular arrangement of cards in his hand is thereby removed from existence. This is the nature of war, whose stake is at once the game and the authority and the justification. Seen so, war is the truest form of divination. It is the testing of one's will and the will of another within that larger will which because it binds them is therefore forced to select. War is the ultimate game because war is

at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is god.

"War is the truest form of divination" it turns out, is the Revelation of the Aeon.

May 9, 2016

The Dark Forest

Volume two of Cixin Liu's science fiction trilogy.

The universe had once been bright, too. For a short time after the big bang, all matter existed in the, and only after the universe turned to burnt ash did heavy elements precipitate out of the darkness and form planets and life. Darkness was the mother of life and civilization.

The dark forest is the universe, but to get there — with insight — takes a path through Cosmic Sociology:

"See how the stars are points? The factors of chaos and randomness in the complex makeups of every civilized society in the universe get filtered out by distance, so those civilizations can act as reference points that are relatively easy to manipulate mathematically."
"But there's nothing concrete to study in your cosmic sociology, Dr. Ye. Surveys and experiments aren't really possible."
"That means your ultimate result will be purely theoretical. Like

Euclid's geometry, you'll set up a few simple axioms at first, then derive an overall theoretic system using those axioms as a foundation."
"It's all fascinating, but what would the axioms of cosmic sociology be?"
"First: Survuival is the primary need of civilization. Second: Civilization continuously grows and expands, but the total matter in the universe remains constant."
…
"Those two axioms are solid enough from a sociological perspective … but you rattled them off so quickly, like you'd already worked them out," Luo Ji said, a little surprised.
"I've been thinking about this for most of my life, but I've never spoken about it with anyone before. I don't know why, really. … One more thing: To derive a basic picture of cosmic sociology from these two axioms, you need two other important concepts: chains of suspicion, and the technological explosion."

The derivation from these axioms is the Exterminator. Resource conflicts between civilizations follow strictly from the two axioms. Game-theoretic tension is added by irreducible suspicion, and technological explosion.

"That's the most important aspect of the chain of suspicion. It's unrelated to the civilizations's own morality and social structure. … Regardless of whether civilizations are internally benevolent or

malicious, when they enter the web formed by the chains of suspicion, the're all identical"

Which is to say, they are all threats to each other, intrinsically, and irresolvably. Technological explosion means that any civilization represents a potential menace of inestimable potential, escalating massively within a span of mere centuries, and "On the scale of the universe, several hundred years is the snap of a finger." An intolerable danger, then.

"That's … that's really dark."

"The real universe is just that black." Luo Ji waved a hand, feeding the darkness as if stroking velvet. "The universe is a dark forest. Every civilization is an armed hunter stalking through the trees like a ghost, gently pushing aside branches that block the path and trying to tread without sound. Even breathing is done with care. The hunter has to be careful, because everywhere in the forest are stealthy hunters like him. If he finds other life — another hunter, an angel, or a demon, a delicate infant or a tottering old man, a fairy or a demigod — there's only one thing he can do: open fire and eliminate them. In this forest, hell is other people. An eternal threat that any life that exposes its own existence will be swiftly wiped out. This is the picture of cosmic civilization. It's the explanation for the Fermi Paradox."

October 1, 2015

Quote note (#296)

From Cixin Liu's latest (and perhaps greatest), p.129:

When the deterrent is the complete destruction of the deterrer and the deteree, the system is said to be in a state of ultimate deterrence. [...] Compared to other types of deterrence, ultimate deterrence is distinguished by the fact that, should deterrence fail, carrying out the threat would be of no benefit to the deterrer. [..] Thus, the key to the success of ultimate deterrence is the belief by the deteree that the threat will almost certainly be carried out if the deteree thwart's the deterrer's goals ...

Hence the drive to *mechanization of commitments*. Trust evo-psych and cultural tradition passes the torch to game-competent machines.

ADDED: Who could he possibly be talking about (p.284)?

Of course, without exception, these "anti-intellect" organizations wanted to maintain the intelligence of their own members, arguing that they had the responsibility to be the last of the intelligent people so they could complete the creation of a society of low-intelligence humans and direct its operation.

October 23, 2016

Quote note (#298)

Cixin Liu (op. cit.), p.558:

"… It's very possible that every law of physic has been weaponized. It's possible that in some parts of the universe, even … Forget it, I don't even believe that."
"What were you going to say?"
"The foundation of mathematics."
Cheng Xin tried to imagine it, but it was simply impossible. "That's … madness." Then she asked, "Will the universe turn into a war ruin? Or, maybe it's more accurate to ask: Will the laws of physics turn into war ruins?"
"Maybe they already are …"

(All ellipsis after the first in original.)

Among the points here, the (Herakleitean) thesis: Cosmology does not transcend war. Strategy belongs to the infrastructure.

October 31, 2016

War Without End

'Eurasianist' Alexander Dugin interviewed by (liberal) Vladimir Posner on the fundamental structure of global geopolitical antagonism. (Video, in Russian with English subtitles.)

While he is clearly the sort of person who tends to bring my co-ethnics out in hives, Dugin is without question among the most important thinkers of the new millennium. (The *UF* position on this, beyond simple interest in what might very easily be *the* most dynamic ideological development of our time, is close to inverted, or 'Atlantean', Eurasianism.)

July 27, 2014

Twitter cuts (#110)

> @Outsideness We have violent mobs, you have memes. I like our odds tbh
>
> — sadbukharin (@sadladbukharin) February 4, 2017

There's nothing about this tweet I don't like.

Memes are ideas that manage their own security. In the Internet Era they get stronger every day (and mobs get weaker).

February 4, 2017

SEQUENCE ii - THE ISLAMIC VORTEX

Premature Ejection

As Napoleon famously advised: “Never interrupt your enemy when he’s making a mistake.” Understandably, but still unfortunately, the Egyptian army have just done exactly that.

Daniel Pipes has pipped me to the post on this (here or here). The short summary that pre-empts me most specifically is this: “Morsi was removed from power too soon to discredit Islamism as much as he should have.” It took seven decades of chronic failure to associate the Marxist command economy with hopeless dysfunction in the eyes of the world, and even then, the lesson remains far from complete. It can scarcely be imagined that a few months of Muslim Brotherhood misgovernment is going to sear any lasting scars into the global Islamic soul. So: an opportunity missed.

Clearly, the forces of the Egyptian deep state were in no position to be as utterly indifferent to humanitarian considerations as *Outside in*. Their hand was forced, since whatever the educational virtues of mass starvation, it takes a certain distance to fully appreciate them. In any case, with Egypt now clearly unsprung, it is

at least possible to find entertainment in the spectacle of popular anti-democratic protest, concluding in firework celebrations of authoritarian restoration.

Adam Garfinkle covers the nuts-and-bolts well. Goldman's regional analysis is highly convincing. Steyn does the quick historical overview, no less persuasively.

July 6, 2013

The Islamic Vortex (Part 1)

When confronted by large-scale — and thus complex – historical events, it is inevitable that attempts at understanding will be dominated by analogy. Even among experts, with access to abstract models of generic processes ('revolution', modernization, escalation, phase-change …), it is only through reference to concrete historical episodes that such intellectual tools acquire the richness necessary for successful application to actual world events. Even the most conceptually-refined historiographical language is honed for analogical usage. There is no 'idea' of 'revolution' truly separable from the examples of revolution provided by the historical record, and even if there was, it could have no use. Since history is rhythmic, but never exactly repetitive, such analogies can be more or less relevant, but only ever roughly suggestive. They are, in any case,

unavoidable.

During the years immediately following 9/11, Western perceptions of the new global reality were controlled by analogy with World War II, and even those who rejected this template were locked into a negative relationship with it. If 9/11 was not Pearl Harbor, or anything like it, it remained necessary to say so, repeatedly, and to little immediate effect. The term 'Islamofascism' was inherited from this period, and its fading currency is significant (as we shall see).

On the Left, resistance to the WWII analogy was relatively frictionless, because it was already, from the moment of its inception, outweighed by an alternative analogy, drawn from Cold War 'anti-imperialist' revolution. Bin Laden could never be a new Hitler, to those who had already recognized him as a new Ho Chi Minh. On the Right, however, intricate ironies abounded. Those on the paleo-libertarian end of the political spectrum, who most vehemently denounced the 'Axis of Evil' as a cynical fabrication, were propelled by events into an accelerated rediscovery of the Old Right, and thus found themselves – quite self-consciously — reviving 1930s American isolationism. Through the very rejection of the (WWII) analogy, they found themselves confirming its rough historical message.

Is the West returning to the 1930s? That is another topic, although it can be noted that evidence in support of this analogy has

accumulated over recent years at least as rapidly as it has dissipated. To the extent that the 'War on Terror' is World War II revisited, however, it is only under the conditions of a profound counter-factual revision, in which the American Old Right was ultimately triumphant, and vindicated. The Islamic world simply lacks the military capability to serve as model fascists, posing a robust existential threat that feeds continuous escalation. America has not remotely approached a 1940s war economy in the new millennium, and there is nothing that any Islamic power — formal or informal — can do to stimulate this outcome. A few ragged, frustrating counter-insurgencies do not make a world war. For America, the War on Terror — in any sense that has analogical force — is over.

The opportunity thus exists to shelve the Western perspective on international affairs, a methodical step that tracks the concrete draw-down of interventionist commitment, and one that — by further irony — promises a far deeper comprehension of what current global events will mean for the West (down the road). The critical first point is this: the end of the 'War on Terror' is not the end of the war wracking the world of Islam, but something far closer to its beginning. If the Arabs, too, are returning to the 1930s, it is in a very different way, in accordance with a far more comprehensive structure of history.

Anybody who has been hanging out in *Al Jazeera* recently (and, right now, there's no excuse not to), might have come across an

extremely significant essay by Murtaza Hussain, entitled *Iraq, Syria, and the death of the modern Middle East*. Hussain has no doubts that a back-to-the-1930s moment is unfolding in Mesopotamia, or rather — the truly crucial insight — *a back through the 1920s moment*, with reverse time signature. The Middle East is not so much recapitulating history from the early 20th century, *as undoing it*, revisiting the origins of the Arab state system on a hardening, backwards trajectory:

The Sykes-Picot Agreement – which divided the Ottoman Empire after World War I and created the Middle East as we know it – is today violently breaking apart in front of the eyes of the world. The countries of Syria and Iraq; formerly unified Arab states formed after the defeat of their former Ottoman rulers, exist today only in name. In their place what appears most likely to come into existence – after the bloodshed subsides – are small, ethnically and religiously homogenous statelets: weak and easily manipulated, where their progenitors at their peaks were robustly independent powers.

Such states, divided upon sectarian lines, would be politically pliable, isolated and enfeebled, and thus utterly incapable of offering a meaningful defence against foreign interventionism in the region. Given the implications for the Middle East, where overt foreign aggression has been a consistent theme for decades, there is reason to believe that this state of affairs has been consciously engineered.

Hussain's conviction of alien manipulation — however plausible or

implausible it may seem — is itself a crucial part of the equation. The Arab world is being propelled backwards, out of political modernity, by forces of such consistent directionality and monumental implacability that they suggest conspiratorial or providential workings, against which resistance is futile. Raw history, in all of its nightmarish, occult compulsion, is exposed like a buried city, as the facile myths of collective, institutionalized agency are blasted away by the flood. A dismal century of second-hand lies is being ripped away, revealing something old and terrible beneath. Eventually, this cannot but matter, for everyone.

The World War II analogy was tightly bound to the ('neoconservative') project of democracy promotion. After all, the original Axis powers were all transformed, through military defeat, occupation, and political reconstruction, from fascist states into model democracies. Hussain's vision is far more accurately applicable to the current process-in-motion, which does not climax in an affirmation of political modernity, but accelerates back through its comprehensive demolition. Global democracy will not easily or rapidly die in the wake of the 'Arab Spring', but global democratization, or democracy promotion, assuredly will.

From the War on Terror to the Arab Spring, there is a shift in analogy of seismic consequence. It is no longer World War II that impinges forcefully on historical intuition, but rather the Thirty Years' War, *approached through momentous regression*. The

collapse of the Sykes-Picot order, when analogized, is an undoing of the Peace of Westphalia — and the international state system — by sectarian religious warfare without respect for borders or institutions of national self-determination. The conditions for democratizing social progress are being ripped out at the level of their foundations. This was not what 'internationalism' was supposed to mean …

July 30, 2013

The Islamic Vortex (Part 2)

The central contention advanced by part 1 in this series is that the basic trend manifested in the Middle East today – most evidently across its northern arc — is the disintegration of the modern state system (and with it all the questions of political progress that have been incrementally globalized since the Treaty of Westphalia in the mid-17th century). To continue to discuss this process in terms of 'Lebanon', 'Syria', and 'Iraq' is becoming increasingly quaint. Within this region, in particular, states no longer conform to contiguous territories, but rather to hubs, characterized by the inheritance of a comparatively organized security apparatus, a vestigial international status (also inherited, from the dissolving state system), and specifically a recognized *Westphalian-era* territorial sovereignty,

stripped of domestic credibility. A realistic political geography of the emerging northern Middle East begins from this point.

Because the names of nation states can only suggest (Westphalian) contiguous jig-saw pieces, it is essential to understanding that we start elsewhere. *The Crescent*, stretching from western Iran, through Iraq, and Syria, to the Lebanese Levant, spilling – no doubt – into south-eastern Turkey to the north, and down into the northern Gulf states and Jordan to the south, can be considered an exaggerated Fertile Crescent, a (Sunni-paranoiac) Shia Crescent, a Crescent of Disintegration, it doesn't matter. What is important is that the state apparatuses (and international political sovereigns) existing in this area occupy it in the manner of islands, *populating or inhabiting it* — among other collective bodies of strategic consequence — rather than dividing it effectively among themselves.

If the Crescent is maximally extended to the eastern borders of Iran (and perhaps further into the Hazara areas of Afghanistan, and Quetta in Pakistan), northwards into Azerbaijan and blurrily into the areas of Anatolian Alevi ethnicity, and south along the western Gulf coast, encompassing Bahrain (but stretched further along the Saudi Gulf coast and beyond, into Yemen), it incorporates the entirety of Shia Islam as a strategically potent entity. Beyond this area, the Shia exist only as pogrom-fodder among overwhelmingly dominant Sunni populations. Constituting something over 15% of Moslems

worldwide, but over a third of those in the Middle East, the Shia either prevail in the Crescent, or go under. (For our purposes here Alawites / Alevi are Shia by strategic affiliation and adoption.)

The Crescent is the site of *fitna*, Islam's unsettled business, and the time of settlement is now due. How does the balance of forces appear?

Almost dead center in the Crescent, are spread the – characteristically stateless – Kurds, divided between Iran, Turkey, 'Iraq', and 'Syria', and numbering perhaps 30 million (compared to a world Shia population of roughly 200 million). Although predominantly Sunni by confession, Kurdish nationalist aspiration dominates over sectarian identity. It comes as relief to our cognitive overload that they are playing a long game. We can bracket them for the moment

To the north lies Turkey, a powerful, comparatively competent Sunni state, marginalized by its non-Arab ethnicity. The pursuit of neo-Ottoman ambitions at this point would draw Turkey into a snake-pit of unimaginable pain. I think we can assume defensive hedging from Turkey in the immediate future. If we can bracket the Kurds – who are central to Turkey's interests and calculations — we can cautiously bracket Turkey as well.

To the east lies Iran, another capable state, as territorially secure as anyone gets to be in this environment, and the wellspring of global Shia power. Iran is already heavily invested in the Crescent War, but

it has the luxury of involvement from without, as a firm ally of Hizbollah, a major stakeholder in the Iraqi Shia regime, and the local 'superpower' ally of Assad's Alawite rump state. (We shall get to examine Iran more closely when examining the nuclear proliferation aspect of this story, further down the road.)

To the south things get very complicated. Jordan, an extremely fragile Sunni state, is almost certainly doomed, but its collapse will widen the Crescent War into a far more multidimensional conflict. If we ignore it now it is less because we *can* ignore it, than because we simply *have* to ignore it. The limits of our processing capacity are exceeded. Similarly, to the east, where the tentacles of *fitna* snake down along the Gulf coast, through rich, demographically fragile micro-states, tightly woven into the US-dominated international system by hydrocarbon production. This is the royal road to world war. It's too much to deal with right now. (Free-ranging commentary is, of course, welcome.)

Despite the transparent arbitrariness with which we have cropped the Crescent down to something like a manageable zone of attention, the core that remains has a number of coherent features. Most obviously, it is already a battlefield, in which the return to a pre-Westphalian 'order' is substantially accomplished. On the Mediterranean coast, a tenuous hybrid Sunni-Christian Levantine statelet coexists with a Hizbollah (Shia) para-state, awaiting the resumption of hell. No one is under time-pressure to decide things

there very soon. It is ~~in~~ throughout the twin Sykes-Picot Frankenstein 'nations' of 'Syria and Iraq' that the unraveling begins.

This Crescent Core is occupied by two rump states, one clearly reduced to a compressed fiefdom (under Assad), the other still able to pretend to national authority. Each is an apparatus of Shia power, and thus a target for a Sunni-Jihadist onslaught of international scope, in which Al Qaeda realizes its world historic mission. The local Sunni-Arab population engaged in escalating holy war against these states is not meaningfully differentiated by (Sykes-Picot) national identity. Humpty-Dumpty is broken, irreparably.

For the international Sunni-Jihadi movement, the destruction of these rump states is now a matter of eschatological significance. Their defense is of no less importance to their Shia supporters, for whom the Crescent Core war is a zone of existential decision. The entire history of Islam, on both of its dominant branches, is fully engaged in this conflict, whose meaning, for the entire (split) *Ummah* is unsurpassable. It is impossible to over-estimate the stakes, as Islam itself perceives them, and the wider world has not yet seriously begun to apprehend what is happening. (Palestine or Afghanistan mean nothing in comparison — as the revealed pattern of practical Jihad makes clear.)

Does anybody seriously think they're going to end this, with a recognizable world order in place? If not … what's next?

July 31, 2013

The Islamic Vortex (Part 3)

The cartoon would look something like this:

An Egyptian (or it could be a Pakistani) walks into the Bank of America, with a hand-grenade daubed 'Radical Islam' taped to his ear, and shouts out: "Hand over the money or my head gets it!"

The teller looks up and says: "You don't have to keep doing this. There's a standing order to pay you $1,500,000,000 a year."

Offended, the Egyptian replies: "But the grenade is the only reason you respect me!"

We could try to update the joke (… "then the black lesbian bank teller says: 'Why are you repressing that grenade?'") but there's going to be more than enough torture in this story already. It suffices to note that in the Egyptian version of the cartoon, the grenade was provided by the bank, and its inscription read: 'Democracy'. We can fast-forward straight through the explosion stage, and begin on the far side of the 'Arab Spring'.

So to start over, with a serious question (even if it doesn't sound like one): How did the first comprehensively Cathedralist administration in American history get to implement a ruthlessly cunning neoreactionary Middle East strategy? In the Crescent, it

sleazed a situation in which Hizbollah and Al Qaeda are engaging in reciprocal suicide attacks – even a hyper-hawk with liquid nitrogen blood would have been hard-pressed to envisage such a scenario. And in Egypt? There the dysfunctional 'realist' status quo – America's multi-decade hand-grenade cartoon of a foreign policy – has given way to something quite different.

Assume, hypothetically, that in Middle Eastern affairs the Obama Administration is by far the most mind-melting example of transcendental strategic genius the Anglophone world has ever known. (Are you with me so far?) Now add one straightforward corollary: In respect to Egypt, the goal was to replace a parasitic, dysfunctional, passive-aggressive PITA state, breeding Mohammed Attas like hogs in a factory farm, with a hard, Islamophobic, neoreactionary security state, fundamentally immunized against all democratic temptation, serving as a pole of attraction for counter-Jihad tendencies throughout the region, and machine-gunning even more Muslim Brothers in the streets than you really feel it needs to. Then, if it all works out, as a bonus you even get to threaten the $1.5 billion standing order, whilst tut-tutting disapprovingly about the naughty coup business.

To pull off this kind of unbelievable ju-jitsu requires a very special skill set, starting with a mastery of deception. A Sahara-dry, perfectly dead-pan sense of humor is not strictly necessary, but it adds to the sense of panache.

You probably remember Dark-Lord Obama's 2009 Cairo Speech, in very approximate outline, but do you recall the title? Here it is (seriously): *A New Beginning*. You're forgiven a tingly 'this is beyond awesome' moment. (Probably *Now for Neoreaction*, or *Hard Reboot to the Future* were considered too blunt even for this Grand Imperial Wizard.) In an interview with *Al Arabiya*, Obama explained with his signature stylistic felicity: "My job to the Muslim world is to communicate that the Americans are not your enemy." From now on you'll be killing your own damn people.

The bottom-line problem isn't difficult to see: the passably civilized fraction of the Egyptian population is far too small to dominate their society, unless tightly compressed by bonds of fear, thoroughly disillusioned about the degraded state of their culture, invigorated by an urgent sense of responsibility to secure their own existence, and terminally freed of all democratic sentiment. Similarly, the regime itself needed to be quickened by existential terror, and driven into nakedly elitist alignment with a newly integrated, overtly anti-populist constituency. For all this to happen, Egypt had to be locked in a cage with itself, hardened by what it found there, until it had learned a lesson as old as the pharoahs. The state had to cease being a pandering platform and pan-handling operation, tailored to domestic populism and correct international opinion, and begin ensuring security, unapologetically, for the residue of civilization that still remained. But we already know what was required: A New

Beginning.

Mubarak was grenade-guy. He had to go. The fact that he was using the Muslim Brotherhood in a groove-locked game of chicken with America was far from the most serious problem. He was also playing grenade-guy chicken with the local — uncondensed — non-Islamist demographic. By sheltering Egypt's educated elite from their own bearded brethren, he was sustaining its most hopelessly sentimental illusions about the nature of the national *demos*, perpetuating democratic teleology, giving credence to the 'international' reform agenda, and deferring to the country's radically corrupted (Islamo-populist) cultural template. Breaking with all this was something far beyond the Mubarak-circle's political imagination. The country had to be *sprung*.

Of course, the Obama master-plan remains far from complete (even without consideration of its application to Pakistan). The Egyptian economy is still skewed towards ruin by a deep structure of populist subsidies, and the recently installed order of neoreactionary legitimation has yet to be overtly proclaimed, or constitutionally formalized.

It is nevertheless important to recognize how far things have come. The Obamazing feint-revolutionary double-flip-back maneuver has, in rapid succession, obliterated the accumulated credibility of the old ('grenade-guy') regime, 'moderate' Islamist governance, *and* democratic inclusion. A New Beginning already has

the educated middle classes clamoring for a harsher clampdown on the bearded mob, and the security apparatus reaching out for robust political integration with the country's civilized minority (the 'Tamarrod').

In *The Weekly Standard*, surreptitious Obamanist Reuel Marc Gerecht captures the situation adeptly:

The driving force behind the Tamarrod may be just too far removed culturally from the Egyptian faithful. One thing is certain after the coup: Secular liberals will want to be protected from vengeful Islamists. And for that they will need the army. The ballot box will not do.

August 1, 2013

The Islamic Vortex (Part 3a)

This series was preparing for the flight out from Cairo International Airport, to go WMD hunting in the Crescent, when a call arrived – from Fotrkd (on this thread) – turning our plans back around. It was hard to pick out the exact message from the stream of excited babble, but it was basically: "You're not going to believe what Kerry just said to the Pakistani's …" (who, we have to remember, are next in line for *A New Beginning®*.)

I'm guessing you've already heard it – since it's all over the media.

The Israelis string it together well (notice the encrypted message to Kerry in the URL: Ufu02Kzk2-k (!)):

"The military was asked to intervene by millions and millions of people, all of whom were afraid of descendance into chaos, into violence," Kerry was quoted as having told Geo.

"And the military did not take over, to the best of our judgment – so far. To run the country, there's a civilian government. In effect, they were restoring democracy," he added.

The interviewer questioned him over allegations that Egyptian troops have shot dead people in the streets.

"Oh, no. That's not restoring democracy, and we're very, very concerned… I've been in touch with all of the players there. And we have made it clear that that is absolutely unacceptable, it cannot happen," Kerry said, according to AFP.

If history is being studied in human languages a thousand years from now, these words will still be reverberating. They need to be carved on a pyramid, or something. This is one of those rare moments in which *everything changes*, and we have to catch up with it.

It's all about democracy, obviously, but the improvised card-sharping makes it easy to miss the way the trick plays out. The first important thing to note — and the assumed context of the *Geo* interview — is that the initial reference to democracy, as crudely, procedurally, and up to this point pointedly understood, is scrubbed out and replaced. When the interview question begins, we all *know*

that what is being talking about is the abrupt termination of Egypt's brief and pitiful experiment in Cathedral-inspired democracy. After Kerry's initial words, all that has already been shrouded. The topic has somehow slipped into "descendance into chaos, into violence" — and we're not supposed to register that these words are translating *exactly the same thing* that 'democracy' previously named, because 'democracy' is about to mean something else.

A lot of people (and they're the people who matter) were asking the military to intervene to shut down ~~democracy~~ *the descendance into chaos, into violence*, and a deal was quickly and efficiently done. The people who the military listen to got to borrow the military, and the military got to borrow a civilian face. The intimacy of this arrangement — and its deep neoreactionary sanity — has nothing at all to do with democratic legitimacy in its previously accepted (and now effaced) sense. Kerry clearly doesn't think that anyone will care about that. The right people took over, how could that possibly be a problem? (It's not as if anyone ever complained about that Pinochet business.) But just in case some awkward memory of what we were supposed to believe last week is still hanging around, we now get the most exquisite political formula of the age: *In effect, they were restoring democracy*.

These words are too perfect. Sobbing with ecstasy could be embarrassing, so I'll quote a little WRM while getting it together:

Let's get the obvious parts out of the way: No, the Egyptian

military is not restoring democracy in Egypt. You can't "restore" something that never existed … […] The army wasn't trying to build democracy, either; it was restoring order and protecting the deep state, more or less in accordance with the will of a large number of middle class and urban Egyptians. That's the beginning and end of it. Americans desperately want somebody to be the pro-democracy good guys. But right now at least, democracy doesn't seem to be on the menu at the Egypt café.

The structure of realization seems to go roughly like this:

(a) Democracy is the supreme Good, engraved eternally and universally in the human heart, but

(b) When an attempt is made to implement it almost anywhere on earth it immediately manifests as *a descendance into chaos, into violence*, and

(c) This existentially threatens the demographic which might be actually capable of sustaining a functional democracy, so

(d) In effect, the truly crucial step is the immediate cessation of ~~democracy~~ what was previously known as democracy, which therefore counts as

(e) A restoration of democracy.

We need to remember that John Kerry might have been President of the United States, and the Muslim Brotherhood helpfully work with us in thinking that through:

Supporters of Egypt's ousted president Mohamed Mursi today

slammed US Secretary of State John Kerry after he said the military was "restoring democracy" by deposing the Islamist leader.

"Is it the job of the army to restore democracy?" asked Gehad al-Haddad, a spokesman for Mursi's Muslim Brotherhood in a statement.

"Does Secretary Kerry accept Defence Secretary (Chuck) Hagel to step in and remove (US President Barack) Obama if large protests take place in America?

"Will the US army freeze the constitution and dismantle Congress and (the) Senate? Can they appoint a president that they solely choose?"

Gehad al-Hadad still isn't quite getting it. When invited by the right people, whatever the army has to do in overthrowing the government now *defines* the 'restoration of democracy'.

Once we get to the stage where the Middle East is re-exporting Kerryist democratic restoration, things could get extraordinarily interesting. At the present rate of Cathedralist ideological implosion, however, there might not be time for that.

Who's going to print up the T-shirts? *We demand democratic restoration now!*

August 2, 2013

The Islamic Vortex (Part 3b)

“This time is different” is a slogan designed for derision. Greer set me back onto it again, but it’s familiar background hum, and could have come from anywhere. In it’s most typical usage it applies to the psychology of business cycles, as the epitome of bubble denial, which is to say: investor hubris. (This book might be the best known example.) With blunt irony, it is placed in the mouth of a fool, who is prompted to declare that things won’t turn out the same this time around (so *of course* they will). It’s what somebody is expected to say shortly before losing their shirt.

There are a few quite simple things that can be said about the presumption, whether learned or instinctive, that things will almost certainly *not* be different ‘this time’.

— It is a cognitive stance that conforms almost perfectly with the dominant sense of ‘wisdom’.

— It is strongly aligned with the heuristic that history has important lessons to teach us (and that the lessons of deep history are especially profound).

— It is skeptical with respect to Utopian schemes of improvement.

— It has an emotional correlate, in aversion to enthusiasm.

— Every civilized (or even merely cultural) tradition has an identifiable version of it.

For all these reasons, it has a reactionary bias, due to its affinity

with everything that resists the progressive impulse and its fantastic illusions. It remembers that change has happened before, and what happened when it did. Even when explicit, relevant memory is lacking, it assumes that tradition incorporates wisdom, and thus provides a bulwark against reckless enthusiasm. It is unmistakably biased, because there has been enough past to make it so.

The guiding maxim of *Outside in – Optimize for intelligence* – is not primarily *wise*. Among the readers of this blog, however, wisdom is the prevalent mode of realism, and it is displayed in crushing abundance. When our digression into Egyptian practical neoreaction strayed into the exultant discovery of a *rare moment in which* ***everything changes,*** the push-back commentary was quick, hard, and relentlessly wise.

Learned wisdom, rooted in historical recollection, expects to be countered, usually by fools. Of all the things that have happened before, innumerable times, among the most common is a delirium of novelty, accompanied by rationalizations of greater or lesser sophistication. History is able to test doctrines of novelty, by excavating ancestral anticipations whose very existence amounts to a refutation. For any claim to the unprecedented, exposure to precedents is an embarrassment that cannot easily be survived.

From an occluded future, the disturbance of wisdom can draw no sustenance, but history offers it partial refuge, in two interconnected ways. Firstly, it can contest the time-scale of normality, pushing

expectations into deeper and more expansive cycles, in order to relativize a formation of wisdom to a long-settled innovation, whose 'naturalness' rests on nothing beyond a comparative durability of change. Wisdom is challenged to deepen its memory, and to recall the difference it has mistaken for a foundation. If anything done can be undone – and even has to be – then what will not be undone, in time? Every establishment was once established, and thus rests upon some sub-basement of historical fragility.

Secondly, the precedents of innovation, when *abstractly* apprehended, disturb wisdom more effectively than they support it. Sometimes it *has* been different, unless growth itself is an illusion. Everything, seized at the right scale, is new. Ultimately invention envelopes wisdom, rather than the contrary. (This is not, admittedly, an uncontroversial claim.)

Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed each said "this time it's different." A sufficiently mechanical wisdom would even assert that, in this, they all said the same. At the very least, as original founders of distinctive establishments of wisdom, they each preclude a primordial refusal of innovation. An absolute wisdom would judge each worthy of crucifixion, or its equivalent in derision. If wisdom is to be the iron criterion, the Abrahamic faiths are all the works of great comedians. How could it be denied that — when strictly and consistently considered — religious inspiration is inherently unwise? (This is not a judgment I am dogmatically rejecting.)

The state, too, is an invention. It seems to be roughly as old as the institution of literate priesthood, with canons of wisdom to match. That time it was different, and recorded history began. Even then, a deeper and more enveloping wisdom can be conceived, associated with a lost (and unwritten) presumption: *this nonsense is not going to last*. Perhaps proto-states had been tried, and failed, innumerable times before. The prehistory of political abortions might even have exhibited sufficient richness to make the birth of the state *obviously foolish*. Equally, through a dilation of time-scales ultimately indistinguishable from wisdom itself, we can still stubbornly presume that this nonsense is not going to last. Or at least, if we refuse this presumption, judging it unrealistic, we have to do so as defenders of innovation, rather than as faithful voices of tradition.

So we return to the leading question of this series: what is the destiny of the Islamic State? Clearly, wisdom offers us no answer. The modes of reason engaged are quite different. We have to correctly identify the real innovations in the history of the state, and come to an equally realistic judgment about the relative priority of religious civilization and political order. Is the Islamic State a state, that happens — incidentally — to be Islamic? Or does Islam decide whether or not it is culturally tolerable to sustain a modern state? These questions are open to revision, and refinement, but the essential divergence of conclusions is inescapable. Either universal political science is possible, or it is not.

If universal politics is judged impossible, that is — in the delicate American turn of phrase — a BFD. The practical recognition of such a reality would make a difference, a durable change, and a disintegration of time. Islam either masters the state, or succumbs to it. That 'choice' is a war.

August 3, 2013

The Islamic Vortex (Part 4)

The story that follows was stolen from somewhere, but I've not been able to recover the source. It has a definite neoconservative edge to it, which isn't surprising given the early-nullities brain-feed it was no doubt extracted from, but it's neat enough to be passed on.

If Afghanistan is the graveyard of empires in space, the First World War was the equivalent burial ground in time. The German Second Reich, the Austro-Hungarian (Habsburg) Empire, the Russian (Romanov) Empire, and the Turkish (Ottoman) Empire were all interred by it. In their place arose new geopolitical entities based upon an unstable mixture of ethno-nationalist self-determination and moral-universalist internationalism. The role of American ideas in the New Order – most immediately conveyed by the vehicle of 'Wilsonism' – was both substantial and ambiguous. A tight swirl of Americanization and Anti-Americanism would be essential to

everything that followed.

If Austro-Germanic imperial collapse can be considered one thing, for the sake of elegance, the true narrative marvel of this story can unfold, because each dead empire was the germ of a world war, structuring history in its fundamentals up to the present day. From each imperial grave, in succession, came a challenge to the Anglophone global order, distinct in certain respects, but also displaying common, recognizable features.

Given what is being said of their origins, we can think of these sequenced global challenges as Undead Empires, re-animated from the ruins of the old order. In each case a supra-national ideological wave was radiated from an extinct crater of traditional authority, married in complex ways to ethno-nationalist impulses, and self-defined in explicit opposition to Anglo-Jewish planetary capitalism. First Central-European National-Socialism (1933-45), then Russo-centric Bolshevism (1946-89)*, and finally – because this narrative implies completion – from out of the Arabian hinterland of the broken Ottoman empire came the last of the great Undead Empires, the one that concerns us still.

The Eurasian Undead Empires have ceased to moan. Ghoulishly re-animated, then re-broken, and rebuilt, Germany dominates Europe once again, and Russia has re-established itself as an assertive autocracy with extensive, but strictly finite, reach. Neither any longer pursues its interests in the name of a cosmic ideology, as if

its traumatic grievance deserved to shake the heavens. Neither still aches to burn down the world, in order to share the ruin it has known. The sullen grumbles they might still nurse have ceased to awaken the dead. Only normal disgruntlements remain.

Islam remains in a very different place. The collapse of its last — Ottoman — Caliphate was constitutionally formalized by Kemal Atatürk, the first President of the new Turkish Republic, on March 3, 1924. The cosmic ideology of Islamism is unintelligible without reference to that event. What political Islam wants, centrally, is the revival of the Caliphate. The Great War's last curse thus determines it as an Undead Empire dreaming, in the lurid crypt-chatter of blood and screams …

… which was the neoconservative nightmare, best articulated by center-left hawk Paul Berman in his *Terror and Liberalism*. In compliance with the pattern of historical analogy here outlined, only one outcome was conceivable — a fourth world war. The 'War on Terror' was thus predicted, and promoted, until — after the best part of a decade — it had bled out into a parody of itself. The grating disproportion between the WoT's tawdry squabbles on the one hand, and the apocalyptic confrontation which the narrative demanded on the other, had become unbridgeable. In a sense it was over. At least, attention wandered. Yet nothing had been settled, or laid to rest.

Realism has to be more than ceasing to think, just as it must be

more than a call to action. The story of the Undead Empires, now freed of neoconservative excitability, has either to be discarded *for a reason*, or more thoroughly explored. Despite the directionless adventures that have attached themselves to it, the intrinsic plausibility of the narrative itself has not, by an iota, been diminished.

This is most clearly demonstrated through simple elaboration of the pattern. World War II was an extremely intense global conflict, with a number of theaters simultaneously active, and total duration of less than a decade (from the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 to the surrender of Japan in 1945). World War III, in contrast, was so prolonged, and dilute (or 'cold'), that it is generally considered not to have happened at all. Between the major hostile powers, deterrence predominated over active engagements, with the latter generally conducted as peripheral, asymmetric conflicts. (US military deaths approached 100,000 a year during WWII**, close to the country's total toll — almost entirely from Korea and Vietnam — suffered over the 40 years of 'WWIII').

Of course, simple extrapolation into WWIV gets nowhere near to a forecast. All it tells us is that there was never any reason to expect compact, burning Armageddon. The crude trend line (counting for nothing) projects 30,000 US military deaths over the course of a 200 year hyper-diffuse cryo-war. American narrative fundamentalist would depart from that as the 'norm'. Not the 'clash', but the slow squelch of civilizations.

Perhaps more suggestive is the trend to involution. National Socialists, despite the diversion of the Holocaust, spent most of their time killing foreigners. The communist regimes of 'WWIII', in contrast, focused almost entirely on massacring their own populations, reaching a 9-figure body count over their 'lifespans'. The vague narrative 'prediction', therefore — which the word 'war' increasingly obfuscates — is that the long struggle to revive the Caliphate is an opportunity for Islamo-demographic self-cannibalization, on a scale that has only been delicately hinted at so far. The default pattern points to an extended hideous occurrence that is, almost entirely, inflicted by the *Ummah* upon itself.

The only reason to be persuaded by this pattern is that, right now, it's the only pattern we have …

[Some involutionary carnage in detail next]

* These are Cold War dates, rather than internal Bolshevik regime dates (1917-89). The latter would contribute to a more intricate time structure, in which sequence took the form of historical envelopment, rather than simple succession. I'm trying to keep things cognitively manageable, for the moment.

** December 1941 – August 1945

August 5, 2013

The Islamic Vortex (Part 5)

So – does Mecca get nuked? For the purpose of this series, that's a reasonable candidate for the terminal question.

A direct assault on this question stumbles quickly into a paradox of stimulating profundity. Of all the geopolitical and religious agencies determining the outcome, the one most theologically predisposed to the vaporization of Islam's spiritual center is the Wahhabi sect, which presently controls it. The case can easily be made that, within the limitations set by peacetime conditions, this objective has already been pursued with spectacular ardor. (If you noticed the Iranian media links there, save that observation.) Also worth mentioning: it's a necessary antecedent to the Islamic Apocalypse (*al-Qiyamah*) that Mecca and the Kaaba be destroyed.

One of the factors supporting the Thirty-Years' War analogy in the escalating conflict between Sunni and Shia Islam is the confidence with which we can identify the 'Protestants' and 'Catholics' in this re-run. In God and Gold (p.367), Walter Russell Mead outlines the structure of parallelism:

Wahhabis seek to suppress the popular cults associated with saints and others traditionally believed to intercede for believers with God. Every soul is accountable to God for its own acts, and there is no human mediator. Puritans similarly attacked the cults of the Christian saints, and argued that it was vain and unbiblical to

pray to the Virgin and the saints for their intercession with God. To make sure such cults are suppressed, the Saudi government under Wahhabi influence has recently destroyed mosques and monuments in Mecca and Medina that had becomes associated with cults and customs considered un-Islamic. Puritans, like many radical Protestants across northern Europe, destroyed altar screens, stained glass, statues, and other church furnishings which, in their judgement, distracted the people from the worship of the one true God.

Shia Islam, with its far greater tolerance for cultural 'thickness', has a 'Catholic' alignment with heritage, tradition, and mediation. Sunni Islam — especially in its 'Puritanical' or radical Wahhabi, Salafi, and Takfiri variants, interprets intermediary forms of cultural and political organization as manifestations of impiety (to be erased). As with the militant Protestantism of the seventeenth century, its mode of holy war indissolubly fuses iconoclastic theology with the armed advance of the faith.

Radical Sunni 'desert religion' projects a desert as (and at) the end of faith. It cannot be realistically expected that cultural inhibitions on the escalation of violence will find fertile soil in this terrain. A geographically and demographically besieged Shiism shows every sign of counter-bidding unreservedly in its own eschatological coin.

There are other inhibitions, however. When socially disorganized militants engage in informal warfare, the requirement that they

protect their own neighborhoods from nebulous threats tends to what Gary Brecher calls the 'cripple fight' phenomenon. There's a reluctance to stray to far from home, when home is an informal war zone, which obstructs effective military mobilization. More generally, mass killing is technically difficult, and usually scales up with social competence (a few African counter-examples notwithstanding). Disease is the traditional mass-killer, supplanted by famine in modern times. Relatively low-efficiency slaughter is the modern Islamic norm. Hence the fascination with Weapons of Mass Destruction, and especially nuclear devices, as the prospective solution to the Jihad escalation problem.

The dynamics of escalation can be modeled as a *chain reaction*, which can in turn be translated into the geopolitics as a *domino theory*. Such theories went out of fashion in the closing stages of the Cold War, because their predictions regarding the contagious virulence of communist regime-change began to look over-stretched. Where domino models clearly excel, however, is in the explanation of nuclear proliferation. Within such domino chains, the attainment of 'nuclear status' by power A serves as the sufficient *political* explanation for the subsequent attainment of nuclear status by power B, in a process that can be prolonged indefinitely, given a suitable linear network of threat links.

Consider the active chain of nuclear dominoes leading into the Middle East (ignoring the non-contagious or here-irrelevant sub-

branches, UK, France, Israel, and North Korea). The path leaves little room for controversy. In strict succession, driven by linear threat-response at each stage, it runs USA, USSR, China, India, Pakistan … and already we have an *Islamic bomb*. It is crucial to note at this point that each link in nuclear dominoes (after the first) has to be Janus faced. The potential conflict that provoked each stage of proliferation is quite different to the one that triggers the next. For instance, the Indian bomb, clearly responding to that of China, is now primarily understood through the successor stage, in which the nuclear arsenals of India and Pakistan are weighed against each other in strategic calculations. Similarly, Pakistan's Islamic bomb (when related to India's Hindu bomb) has to be re-conceived as a *Sunni bomb* on its other face, envisaged from the Greater Middle East, where a Shia bomb is the obvious threat-response — the next domino.

It is important to stress that this is where the Iranian nuclear program comes from. American and Israeli optics tend to distract from the regional logic of proliferation. However politically convenient it may be for Iranian leaders to publicly proclaim that their bomb (which, of course, they have no intention whatsoever of building) is designed solely to kill Jews, or to drive Americans out of the Gulf, it is in fact overwhelmingly necessitated by the fact that a Sunni bomb already exists, next door. A nuclear Iran means, fundamentally, a balance of threat between Sunni and Shia power

in the Greater Middle East. It can also be assumed, with extreme confidence, that a *Sunni Arab* (Saudi) bomb would soon follow, according to the wholly predictable domino-Janus sequence which exposes Iran from the other side.

[There's a lot more to say about all this, but I'm done for tonight]

August 10, 2013

Quote Notes (#13)

Richard Fernandez on the importance of the Israeli-Palestinian 'peace process':

Perhaps the saddest thing about President Obama's Middle East peace initiative is how tangential it is. R[e]uel Marc Gerecht and Anthony Cordesman examine the upheavals in the region, focusing on Egypt and Syria respectively, without even mentioning Palestine, the jewel in Kerry's crown. It is as if one were diagnosed with cancer, but the doctors says "I can't cure the cancer but I can manicure your nails."

August 6, 2013

Great Games …

… you have planned, shame if something bad were to happen to them.

Tyler Durden (of *Zero Hedge*) casts some harsh light on ~~the lead up to WWIV~~ recent diplomatic engagement between Saudi Arabia and Russia — countries that seem to be uniquely serious about the outcome of the Islamic civil(izational) war. Roughly a month ago, these countries had a less than complete meeting of minds on the future of the region. TD quotes *Al-Monitor* on the conclusion: "At the end of the meeting, the Russian and Saudi sides agreed to continue talks, provided that the current meeting remained under wraps. This was before one of the two sides leaked it via the Russian press."

*Since we know all about this, it means no more talks, an implicit warning that the Chechens operating in proximity to Sochi may just become a loose cannon (with Saudi's blessing of course), and that about a month ago "**there is no escape from the military option, because it is the only currently available choice given that the political settlement ended in stalemate.**" Four weeks later, we are on the edge of all out war, which may involve not only the US and Europe, but most certainly Saudi Arabia and Russia which automatically means China as well. Or, as some may call it, the world.*

Russian leverage is aligned with inertia, so it can be exercised with some subtlety. The Saudis, on the other hand, are in an awkward spot: they either back down, or they have to make 'a splash'. Anyone

looking for upcoming trigger events knows where to pay attention.

(For graphic context, try this.)

August 28, 2013

Quote notes (#24)

Adam Garfinkle makes an obvious point beautifully:

… whatever the Administration has said about the purpose of an attack being to "degrade and deter" Syrian capabilities, but not to change the regime, everyone expects the attacks to be modest and brief, thus not to much affect the battlefield balance, and once ceased to stay ceased. That is because the Administration's reticence at being drawn into the bowels of Syrian madness is both well established and well justified. The attacks, then, will likely not degrade or deter anything really; they will be offered up only as a safety net to catch the falling reputation of the President as it drops toward the nether regions of strategic oblivion.

This has all been so vividly sign-posted it is getting hard to see how even a 'cosmetic' effect is going to work. How can an operation pre-advertized as an awkward spasm of embarrassment be realistically expected to restore honor and credibility?

Handle brims with sense on the topic.

August 30, 2013

Yesterday's News

"The missile strikes the White House is contemplating would advance Syria's dissolution," writes Steven A. Cook in the Washington Post.

What is this 'Syria' of which you speak?

Such senseless language should have been dismissed from the practical lexicon by now. It belongs strictly to history books.

Between the Mediterranean coast of the northern Levant and the Iranian border, the internationally-recognized state system exists only as a set of tokens in diplomatic games. It isn't coming back.

This article (and book) will be seen as astonishingly prescient soon, and deserves to be already.

September 1, 2013

Quote notes (#33)

Rough Triangles analysis from William Lind:

… we think of jihad as something waged by Islam against non-Muslims, but quite often it has been between one Islamic sect and

another. Now Islamists are once again declaring jihad on each other. In June the ***New York Times*** *reported on an influential Sunni cleric who "has issued a fatwa, or religious decree, calling on Muslims around the world to help Syrian rebels… and labeling Hezbollah and Iran" — both Shi'ite — "enemies of Islam 'more infidel than Jews and Christians.'" David Gardner's* ***Financial Times*** *piece tells of a "conclave of Sunni clerics meeting in Cairo [that] declared a jihad against what it called a 'declaration of war on Islam' by the 'Iranian regime, Hezbollah and its sectarian allies'."*

How should the West react to all this? With quiet rejoicing. Our strategic objective should be to get Islamists to expend their energies on each other rather than on us. An old aphorism says the problem with Balkans is that they produce more history than they can consume locally. Our goal should be to encourage the Muslim world to consume all its history — of which it will be producing a good deal — as locally as possible. Think of it as "farm to table" war.

All we should do, or can do, to obtain this objective is to stay out. We ought not meddle, no matter how subtly; if we do, inevitably, it will blow up in our faces. Just go home, stay home, bolt the doors (especially to refugees who will act out their jihads here) …

September 26, 2013

Buy/bye Petrodollar

The master jigsaw puzzle piece connecting US domestic and foreign policy together is the petrodollar. Federal debt production depends upon credibility in the US currency that is anchored by its privileged role in global hydrocarbons commerce. Knock out that privilege, and US dollar holdings become one speculative asset among others. The fiat house of cards begins to tumble (perhaps with shocking rapidity).

In this context, US monetary policy begins to look like a side-line of 'friendship' with the Saudis, which is dissolving into quick sand. Pepe Escobar at AToL explores some of the possible consequences. (It's especially notable that the fracking revolution could accelerate a petrodollar crisis, rather than retarding it.) There's also a China angle, which is always fun.

Disconcertingly for almost everybody, in different ways, the awkward retraction of US power from the Middle Eastern wasps' nest tends inevitably to destabilize the global monetary regime. The more the Saudis feel jilted, the less their commitment to the petrodollar pact, but if this was ever a low-maintenance relationship, it certainly isn't anymore.

Bomb Iran or your currency bombs. — Things might not quite reduce to that yet, but it increasingly looks as if they will.

October 27, 2013

The Saudi Bomb

Richard Fernandez passes along a BBC report that Saudi Arabia is already a virtual nuclear power. In collaboration with Pakistan, the Kingdom has assembled a nuclear arsenal (complete with CSS-2 delivery systems), which is presently distributed according to diplomatic convenience, with the war-heads held in Pakistan. Assuming that this report is roughly accurate, the chain-reaction of nuclear dominoes pushing the proliferation through South Asia into the heart of the Middle East has been all but completed, with only superficial formalities yet to be concluded.

It's late, and I'm off to bed, so I'll simply repeat: It's late. Everything people care about is going to be side-lined by international events.

November 10, 2013

Time of the Ass-assins

Islam asks the important questions (via):

"My question is whether I am permitted to allow one of the mujahideen access to my anus, if my intentions are honorable, and the purpose is to train for Jihad by widening my anus."

The sheik praised Allah and said: "In principle, sodomy is forbidden. However, Jihad is more important. It is the pinnacle of

Islam. If sodomy is the only way to reach this pinnacle of Islam, then there is no harm in it.

Allahpundit estimates:

Odds that this is a prank played on the credulous host by some viewer, possibly the MEMRI guys themselves, who simply couldn't resist: 40 percent. Odds that it's a legit query, proof that the mujahedeen's willingness to sacrifice for jihad has taken on painful new dimensions: 40 percent. Odds that the guy posing the question is the world's dumbest would-be terrorist, whose "recruiter" is really, really eager to start "training" him: 20 percent.

December 11, 2013

Played

Has Obama Administration geostrategy been based upon a cunning (and secret) plan? Richard Fernandez makes the case that a covert American attempt to subvert radical Islam crested with the September 11, 2012, Benghazi fiasco. Employing a mix of infiltration, drone assassination (to clear promotion paths), and calculated regime sacrifices (Egypt, Syria), the objective was to reforge an international Jihad under covert US control. When the take-over plan went south, nothing could be publicly admitted. Cascading failure has continued in the shadows ever since, jutting into media

consciousness as a succession of disconnected — even inexplicable — foreign policy setbacks.

The curious thing about September 11, 2012 — the day of the Benghazhi attack — is that for some reason it marks the decline of the Obama presidency as clearly as a milepost. We are told by the papers that nothing much happened on that day. A riot in a far-away country. A few people killed. And yet … it may be coincidental, but from that day the administration's foreign policy seemed inexplicably hexed. The Arab Spring ground to a halt. The secretary of State "resigned." The CIA director was cast out in disgrace. Not long after, Obama had to withdraw his red line in Syria. Al-Qaeda, whose eulogy he had pronounced, appeared with disturbing force throughout Africa, South Asia and the Arabian Peninsula. Almost as if on cue, Russia made an unexpected return to the world stage, first in Syria, then in the Iranian nuclear negotiations.



Fernandez digs much deeper than Carney, but this is still worth adding.

May 14, 2014

The Islamic Vortex (Map)

Having seen this a few times now (most recently here, where it's described as a "five-year plan"), I decided I just had to have it.



FWIW I don't expect Vienna to have been absorbed into the renascent Caliphate by 2019.

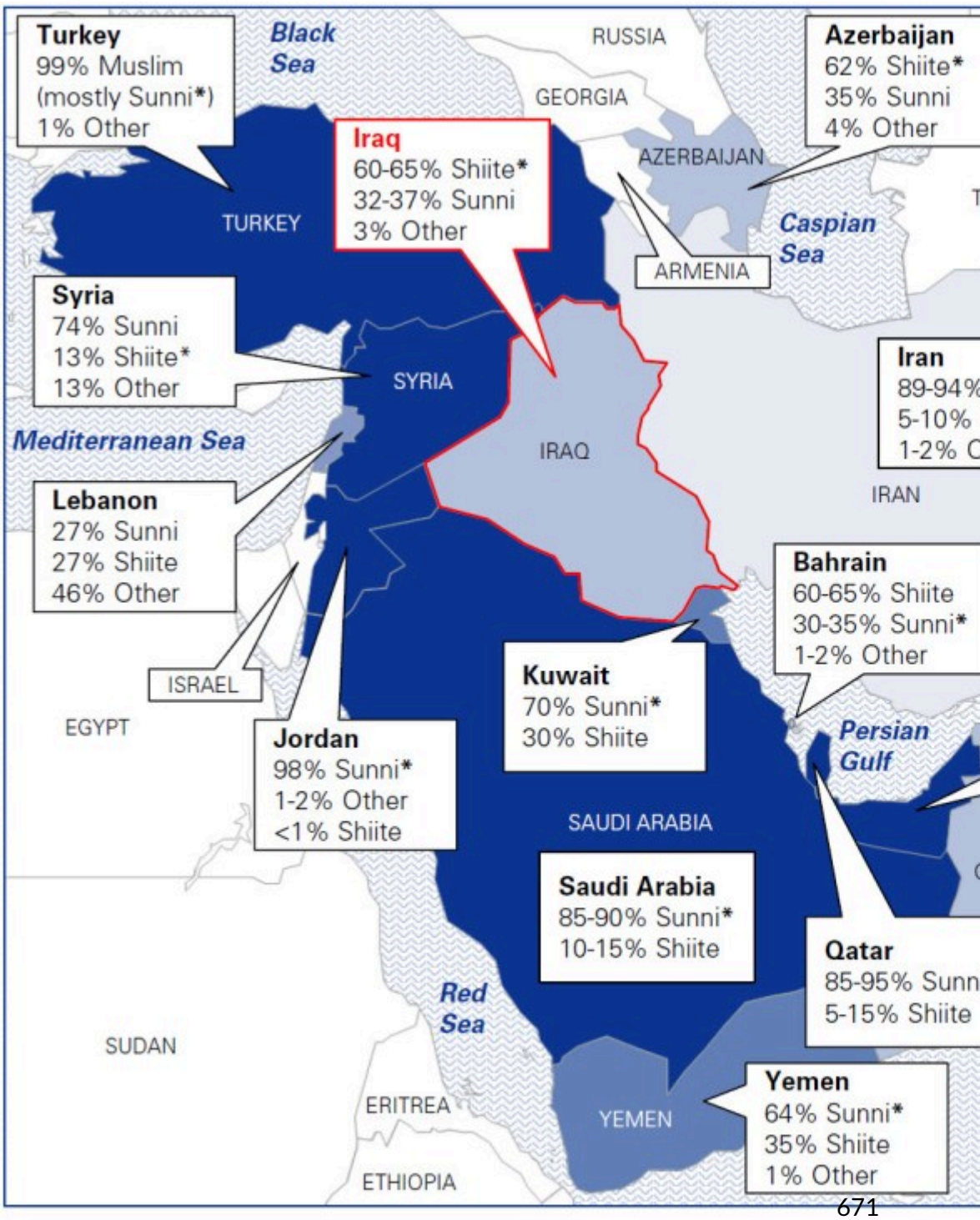
(I don't expect things to have calmed down, either.)

The Islamic Vortex series was not completed, so it needs re-visiting, but I think it's holding up quite well (parts 1, 2, 3, 3a, 3b, 4, 5).

July 12, 2014

The Islamic Vortex (Map-2)

This will be needed when we get back to the topic (eventually):



Balance of Sunnis and Shiites within th

July 24, 2014

The Islamic Vortex (Note-1)

An executive summary of Ali Khedery's open letter to President Obama: *Face it, ISIS is your ally bro*.

August 13, 2014

The Islamic Vortex (Note-2)

The claim that modern Sunni 'fundamentalism' (Salafism, Wahhabism) **is** the Islamic Reformation is well-established (this blog has grazed upon the background here). The persistence of this proposition attests to its significance, and is at least suggestive of credibility. It can reasonably be placed alongside the Moldbug Ultra-Calvinism Thesis (on the cladistic identity of 'secular' democratic progressivism) as a central religious-historical argument, of profound relevance to the cultural tendencies of our time.



A fairly recent post at *Patheos* by Philip Jenkins (via Henry Dampier) presents this proposition with remarkable force. Mustering its case in terms of *iconoclasm*, it integrates the phenomenon helpfully, in particular by emphasizing the essential unity of militant anti-idolatry and mass violence. Smashing idols is no mere intellectual or doctrinal position. Iconoclastic militancy is a social operation, which is not only instantiated within the history of revolutionary turmoil, but occupies a privileged position within it. The revolutionary — or ideologically-mobilized — mob is epitomized

by iconoclastic irruption, which foreshadows its potential for violent abstraction. Doctrinally-motivated vandalism, from the European Reformation, through the Chinese Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, to the ravages of our contemporary radical Islam, is the archetypal form of modern revolutionary (com)motion.

Philips remarks:

For present purposes, it is the Wahhabi tradition that has unleashed the savage destruction of shrines and holy places that has been so widely deplored in the past half-century or so. This includes the Taliban's destruction of the Buddhas in Afghanistan, the attempted eradication of the glorious shrines and libraries of Timbuktu, and the annihilation of most of the ancient shrines and tombs around Mecca itself. Some Egyptian Islamists fantasize about eradicating all the ruins of pagan ancient Egypt, including the Pyramids themselves.

Modern Westerners are rightly appalled by such acts as desecrations of humanity's cultural heritage. But such outrage demonstrates a near-total lack of awareness of the West's own history. Nothing that the Islamists have done in this regard would cause the sixteenth century Protestant Reformers to lose a moment's sleep. They would probably have asked to borrow hammers and axes so they could join in.

I am sometimes bemused to hear Western commentators call for contemporary Islam to experience a "Reformation," by which they

mean an opening to freedom and toleration. That is of course an extremely distorted view of Christianity's own Reformation. Arguably, Islam has been going through its own Reformation for a century or so, which is exemplified by the Wahhabis and Salafists. That's the problem.

August 29, 2014

The Islamic Vortex (Note-3)

Asabiyyah is an Arabic word for a reason. Unlike many of my allies on the extreme right, I see no point at all in other cultures attempting to emulate it. The idea of a contemporary Western *asabiyyah* is roughly as probable as the emergence of Arabic libertarian capitalism. In any case, ISIS has it now, which means they have to keep fighting, and will probably keep winning. *Asabiyyah* is useless for anything but war, and it dissolves into dust with peace. The only glories Islam will ever know going forward will be found on the battlefield, and it is fully aware of the fact.

Baghdad will almost certainly have fallen by the end of the year, or early next. The Caliphate will then be reborn, in an incarnation far more ferocious than the last. Its existence will coincide with a war, extending far beyond Mesopotamia and the Levant, at least through the Middle East, into the Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent,

across the Maghreb, and deep into Africa. If the Turks are not terrified about what is coming, they have no understanding of the situation. This is what the global momentum behind militant 'Islamism' across recent decades has been about. Realistically, it's unstoppable.

Eventually, it will bleed out, and then Islam will have done the last thing of which it is capable. No less than tens of millions will be dead.

Other, industrially-competent and technologically-sophisticated civilizations have no cause for existential panic, although mega-terrorist attacks could hurt them. Any efforts they make to pacify the Caliphate-war will be futile, at best. It is a piece of fate now. The future will have to be built around it.

Patrick Poole writes (at the link above, repeated here):

The US Embassy in Baghdad is the largest embassy on the planet. And after Obama sent 350 more U.S. military personnel to guard the U.S. Embassy last month, there are now more than 1,100 US service members in Baghdad protecting the embassy and the airport. That doesn't include embassy personnel, American aid workers, and reporters also in Baghdad. ISIS doesn't have to capture the airport to prevent flights from taking off there (remember Hamas rockets from Gaza prompting the temporary closure of Israel's Ben Gurion Airport this past summer). If flights can't get out of Baghdad, how will the State Department and Pentagon evacuate U.S. personnel? An image like the last helicopter out of Saigon would be of considerable

propaganda value to ISIS and other jihadist groups. Former CNN reporter Peter Arnett, who witnessed the fall of Saigon in April 1975, raised this possibility back in June. It's not like the U.S. has prestige to spare internationally, and the fall of Baghdad will mark the beginning of the end of American influence in the Middle East, much like the case in Southe[a]st Asia in 1975.

When the United States pulled back from anti-communist COIN in 1973, Marxism-Leninism was left to consume itself in its own insanity. This is the situation that was reached in relation to Islam by the election of the Obama administration in 2008. Even were it desirable, it is sheer delusion to imagine that the West — i.e. America — has the moral energy (or *asabiyyah*) to pursue any other course. The consummation of Jihad is going to happen. The more rapidly the catastrophe develops, the sooner it will be done.

ADDED: "However many of them are killed, the ones who survive will keep pushing on into Kobani and on toward the Baghdad airport feeling as alive as if they had just plunged into the river of history itself. And they will keep telling themselves that this river flows with the blood of the non-believers."

ADDED: The War Nerd has a very different prognosis.

ADDED: So how is ISIS doing?

October 15, 2014

The Islamic Vortex (Note-3a)

This blog has doubtless generated rafts of unreliable predictions. The one that has been nagging, however — ever since Scott Alexander called me out on it in the comment thread there — was advanced in the most recent sub-episode of this series. Quote: "Baghdad will almost certainly have fallen by the end of the year, or early next." Even if the time horizon for this event is stretched out to the end of March 2015, I have very low confidence in it being realized. The analysis upon which it was based was crucially flawed. I'm getting my crow-eating in early (and even if — by some improbably twist of fortune — ISIS is in control of Baghdad by late March next year, it won't be any kind of vindication for the narrative I was previously spinning.)

Where did I go wrong (in my own eyes)? Fundamentally, by hugely over-estimating the intelligence of ISIS. The collapse of this inflated opinion is captured by a single word: Kurds.

Just a few months ago, ISIS enjoyed a strategic situation of extraordinary potential. It represented the most militant — and thus authentic — strain of Arab Sunni Jihad, ensuring exceptional morale, flows of volunteers from across the Sunni Muslim world, and funding from the gulf oil-states, based upon impregnable legitimacy. It was able to recruit freely from the only constituency within Iraq with any military competence — the embittered remnants of Saddam's

armed forces, recycled through the insurgency against the American occupation, and then profoundly alienated by the sectarian politics of the new Shia regime. It was also able to draw upon a large, fanatically motivated, Syrian Sunni population, brutalized and hardened by the war against the (Alawite, or quasi-Shia) Assad regime in that country. Both enemy states were radically anathematized throughout the Sunni world, deeply demoralized, incompetent, and patently incapable of asserting their authority throughout their respective countries. In consequence, a re-integrated insurgent Sunni Mesopotamia had arisen, with such historical momentum that it served as a concrete source of inspiration for energetic holy war, and a natural base for the eschatalogically-promised reborn Caliphate.

The wider environment was more complicated, but also highly encouraging. The Jihadi legitimacy of ISIS made opposition from the Sunni Arab states to the south (Jordan, Saudi Arabia) unthinkable. That left four major sources of substantial hostile intervention: Israel, the United States, Turkey, and Iran. Taking these in turn:

(1) Israel, by all game-theoretic sanity, was a *de facto* ally. Perhaps it is. It had no intelligible motive for intervention, and were it to do so the legitimacy of ISIS would be immediately elevated to stratospheric levels. Baghdad or Damascus regimes dependent upon Israeli support would be obviously politically unsustainable. (Israeli war against ISIS puts it in objective collaboration with Iran — which

isn't going to happen.)

(2) The USA was burnt out, directionless, strategically-conflicted to the point of psychosis, and politically-toxic to near-Israeli levels. Relevant at this point only as a Jihadi recruiting tool.

(3) As a NATO member, Turkey completes the troika of Westernized states, whose intervention would naturally tend to reinforce a clash-of-civilizations escalation, to the extreme medium-term advantage of ISIS. While a Sunni state, it is not Arab, and would quickly generate extraordinary ethnic animosity. With Turks having lost the previous Caliphate, there is no imaginable circumstances in which the Sunni Muslim world would entertain the prospect of them leading — or even seriously interfering with — the next one. Turkish intervention might no doubt slow things down, but it could not conceivably stabilize the situation in Mesopotamia. The effect would be to rapidly expand the conflict into Turkey itself, and even into Turkic Central Asia. There is no reason to think Turkish popular opinion would support a strategically pointless, bloody war in the south. (We will get to the critical Kurdish factor in a moment.)

(4) From a strictly military point of view, Iran possesses a mixture of capability and commitment that makes it a uniquely formidable opponent, but here the political calculus is also at its starkest. From the moment it intervenes, the Sunni-Shia sectarian character of the war is consolidated, and generalized, into a truly global, climactic struggle between the two dominant branches of the Muslim faith.

From a local (Mesopotamian) uprising, ISIS's war would be transformed immediately into an apocalyptic religious event, setting the world to the torch. Jihadi recruitment and funding would become a worldwide deluge. For the Iranians, there is no imaginable end-point to this, short of an *absolute resolution* at the level of eschatology, or revolutionary world-transformation. ISIS has the base-brain juice for that, does Teheran?

… but then we get to the Kurds. *Of course* ISIS should have courted them, anything else is utter madness. While not Arabs, they're Sunni. They already hate the Baghdad regime, and long for secession. They're more than willing to be persuaded to fight Turks, Persians, or (Alawite) Syrians, if the need arises. Played with even a minimum of intelligence, the Kurds would have provided a wedge to break Iraq apart definitively, distract the (Baghdad) regime, strip it of oil revenues, keep the Turks and Iranians nervous, and even provide various kinds of active support as they saw their long-held dreams of an independent Kurdistan arising and beckoning like a tantalizing jinn at the edge of the new Jihadi Caliphate. It's the ultimate no-brainer.

Instead, ISIS threw everything away fighting the Kurds. It's an organization of idiots, and a whole bunch of its fighters are now pointlessly dead idiots. No Baghdad-by-early-2015 for you losers. I'm embarrassed to have been drawn out of my dismissive contempt.

December 3, 2014

The Islamic Vortex (Note-4)

So the Islamic State has executed their captive Jordanian pilot, Lt Moaz al-Kasasbehby, by *burning him alive*. The event was artfully videotaped and maximally publicized. It was an act undertaken with an extraordinary degree of intent.



The 'organization' beheaded Japanese journalist Kenji Goto a few days previously. It had already beheaded another Japanese hostage, Haruna Yukawa, a week before.

The deliberate combination of indiscriminate and exorbitant violence is remarkable. It looks like a purposeful escalation beyond terror, aimed calmly at the entire world.

If there's anyone who hasn't watched *Apocalypse Now* recently, this might be the time to correct that. A reminder:

Kurtz: I've seen horrors … horrors that you've seen. But you have

no right to call me a murderer. You have a right to kill me. You have a right to do that … but you have no right to judge me. It's impossible for words to describe what is necessary to those who do not know what horror means. Horror … Horror has a face … and you must make a friend of horror. Horror and moral terror are your friends. If they are not, then they are enemies to be feared. They are truly enemies! I remember when I was with Special Forces … seems a thousand centuries ago. We went into a camp to inoculate some children. We left the camp after we had inoculated the children for polio, and this old man came running after us and he was crying. He couldn't see. We went back there, and they had come and hacked off every inoculated arm. There they were in a pile. A pile of little arms. And I remember … I … I … I cried, I wept like some grandmother. I wanted to tear my teeth out; I didn't know what I wanted to do! And I want to remember it. I never want to forget it … I never want to forget. And then I realized … like I was shot … like I was shot with a diamond … a diamond bullet right through my forehead. And I thought, my God … the genius of that! The genius! The will to do that! Perfect, genuine, complete, crystalline, pure. And then I realized they were stronger than we, because they could stand that these were not monsters, these were men … trained cadres. These men who fought with their hearts, who had families, who had children, who were filled with love … but they had the strength … the strength … to do that. If I had ten divisions of those men, our troubles here would be over very quickly.

You have to have men who are moral … and at the same time who are able to utilize their primordial instincts to kill without feeling … without passion … without judgment … without judgment! Because it's judgment that defeats us.

ADDED: "I love the smell of napalm in the morning …"

February 4, 2015

Coming Soon

The trailer for the ISIS jihad-porn blockbuster *Flames of War* is quite something.

The *Rubin Report*-embedded version. "They're clearly trying to bring us into a fight …"

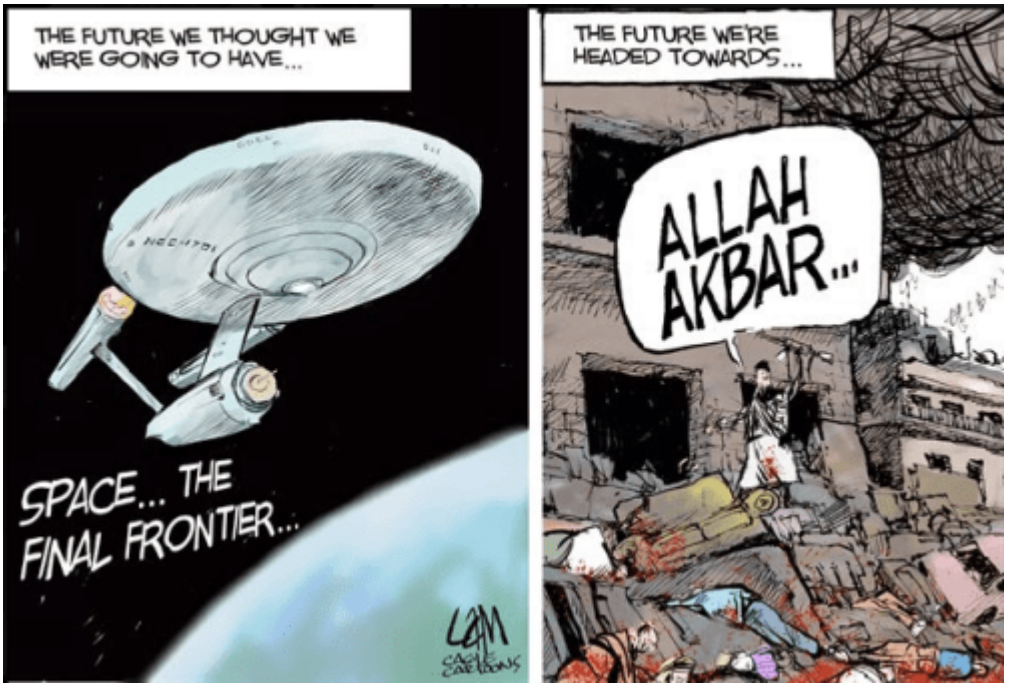
ADDED: A little background from the *International Business Times*:

The new video, titled "Flames of War," was released late Tuesday by the Al Hayat Media Center, which, according to the Washington-based Middle East Media Research Institute, was established in May as the media arm of the Islamic State. […] The 52-second-long video, which, at first glance, seems more like a video-game trailer, is replete with slow-motion effects and high-definition images. It shows exploding tanks and Islamic State militants apparently preparing to execute captives before the words "Flames of War" flash on the

screen, followed by the words, "Fighting has just begun." And, before the screen fades to black, the video ends with the words, "Coming Soon."

September 18, 2014

Progress (III)



(Via.)

January 21, 2015

Moors Law

Derbyshire cited some statistics from this exponential demographic calamity article, which are truly remarkable:

Figures from the 2011 census show that the ***Muslim population in the UK has substantially risen between 2001 and 2011 from 1.5 million to almost 3 million****. This now takes the proportion of Muslims from 2% of the population to 5%. In some towns, Muslims make up almost 50% of the population, and in large cities like London and Manchester they make up around 14% of the population. But why has the number of Muslims risen so much and what are the implications? […] There are several reasons why the number of Muslims has doubled. […] …* ***By the next census Muslims may even double again and make up 10% of the population****. These statistics encourage us to think more carefully about the provisions made for British Muslims and the ways in which they are an integral part of the nation.* [Emphasis in original.]

(It 'encourages' me to think of different things entirely.)

March 24, 2015

Things Fall Apart

Pax Americana is easy to laugh at, but so — no doubt — was *Pax*

Britannica and even *Pax Romana*. Imperial order isn't a tidy or pretty business. It was, however, something, and it's very rapidly ceasing to be.

Powerful nonlinear dynamics are triggered at certain critical points of systemic transformation. The positive network effects that induced powers great and small to buy into a credible world order switch into reverse, with every defection making the value of continued adherence less convincing to everyone else. In Europe and East Asia the defection dominoes have yet to cascade, and the slow work of fundamental subversion proceeds at a misleadingly languid pace. In the Middle East, in sharp contrast, little remains of the preferred American *status quo* beyond a ghastly husk. It's hard to see any way back.

America's traditional regional lynch-pin allies — Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey — are united (only) in alienation. The most important structural reason for this, beyond the inexorable decline of American global management capability, and coherent options for intervention, rumbles beneath the surface of this WSJ article. Everything the US is still trying to accomplish in the region is pushing it into deeper complicity with the Teheran regime — whether on the specific issue of the Iranian nuclear program, operations against ISIS, or involvement in Yemen — and this makes it an objective antagonist of the Sunni establishment. A deep Sunni reformation — in the most blood-drenched sense of the word — is unfolding in the region, and

the US is simply incapable of aligning with it. Yet as conflict escalates, and polarization intensifies, even the most conservative Sunni players are driven into solidarity with revolutionary Jihadi radicalism. If an Iranian-orchestrated campaign, coordinated with Iraq's Maliki regime*, Assad, and the Kurds, succeeds in crushing the ISIS Islamic State, it is a near certainty that the major Sunni powers will commit to its resurrection, or displacement, rather than concede to the triumph of a new Shia order in Mesopotamia. … Then Yemen happened.

A new Middle Eastern war scarcely raises an eyebrow outside the region today. The Islamic Vortex has passed the point of ignition, and the old order is beyond salvage. Among Western observers, impotence translates immediately into apathy, even when they notice a deluge of blood de-pinkering the world. *The Battle for Saudi Arabia Begins*, writes Fernandez — and there's nothing at all that anybody can do about it.

* Only very roughly speaking (see comments).

ADDED: I should have guessed there was already a Things Fall Apart (I) here. Apologies for any subsequent confusion. (WordPress is entirely relaxed about non-unique post titles, but I'm going to try not to be.)

ADDED: *Pax Americana* is over.

ADDED: David Rothkopf combining some valuable analysis with disastrously misconceived recommendations.

March 27, 2015

Join the Queue



Context.

Everyone in my twitter bubble seems impressed by the aesthetics, but the smart money is on ClarkHat getting to the finish line first:

> Every minute that Washington DC does not burn with

> nuclear fire is a minute during which I am only half alive.
> — ClarkHat (@ClarkHat) April 13, 2015

April 13, 2015

Iconoclasm

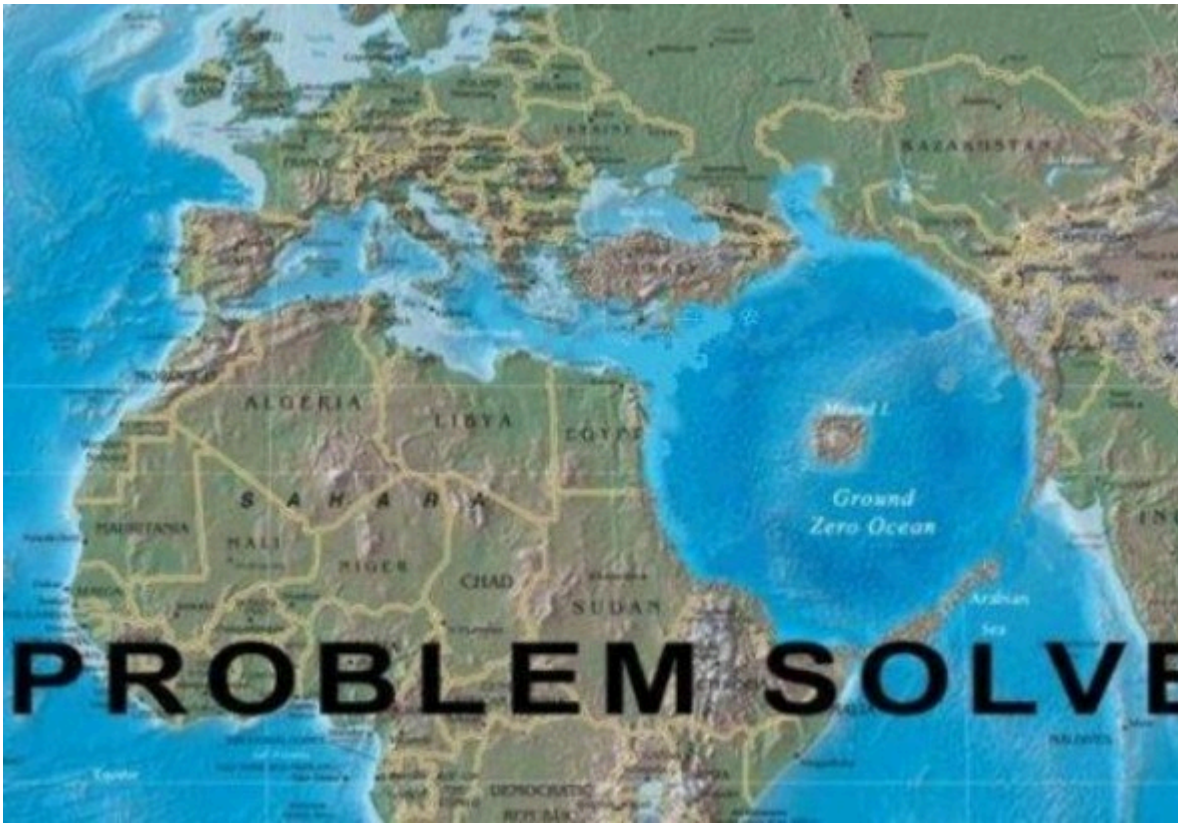
There goes Nimrud.

"The final images on the video show the final, total destruction of one of the world's most important archaeological sites."

April 16, 2015

Geo-Engineering

This looks like a plan:



October 14, 2015

ISIS on Paris

The 'Daesh'* statement on the attack (in full):

In the name of Allah, the all merciful, the very merciful Allah the great said: and they thought in truth that their fortresses would defend them against Allah. But Allah came to them from where they

weren't expecting it and launched a terror in their hearts. They were demolishing their gomes with their own hands as well as from the hands of believers. Take a lesson oh you who are wise. Sourat 59, verse 2. […] In a blessed attack which Allah facilitated the causes, a group of believers from the soldiers of the caliphate to whom Allah has given strength and glory targeted the capital of abomination and perversion, the one who lifts the banner of the cross in Europe, Paris. […] A group divorced from this life taking a step toward their enemy, looking for death in Allah's path, rescuing its religion, its Prophet and its allies and wanting to humiliate its enemies. They were true to Allah and we consider them as such. Allah acquired from their hands and through the fear in the hearts of those encountered on their own land. […] Eight brothers carrying explosive belts and assault rifles took for target places that were carefully chosen in the heart of the capital, in the French stadium during a game between two countries, France and Germany, which the imbecile of France [President Hollande] was present, the Bataclan, where hundreds were present in a party of perversion as well as other targets in the 10th, 11th anf 18th districts simultaneously. Paris is shaking in their shoes and its streets have become very narrow, the death count of the attack is a minimum of 200 and even more injured by the will of Allah. […] Allah facilitated our brothers and gave them what they hoped for, (martyrdom), they activated their explosive belts in the middle of the infidels after they ran out of ammunition. May Allah welcome them

among the martyrs and allow us to meet them. And France and those who follow its way must know that there are still principle targets left for the Islamic State and that they [France] will continue to smell death for having taken the lead in the crusade [in Syria] after having insulted our Prophet, after they've flaunted their fight against Islam in France, and beaten our Muslim brothers in Caliphate land with their planes that were useless in the smelly streets of Paris. This attack is only the beginning of the storm and a warning for those who want to ponder and learn a lesson. […] Allah is great, the strength belongs to Allah and His messenger and believers, but the hypocrites do not know it. Sourat 63, verse 8.

(Source, with French original.)

* Conflicted here on whether to switch over to that name. Any suggestions?

November 14, 2015

The Management of Savagery

Is this strategic guide to Jihad by Abu Bakr Naji the equivalent of Mao Zedong's *On Guerrilla Warfare* (link) for our time?

November 16, 2015

Peak Jacobinism

It's an over-used formula, but this time it really does seem appropriate. If this analysis can be trusted — and it looks at least superficially plausible — ISIS has broken the soul of evangelical democratization. Once the Cathedral's universalistic faith has been defeated ("the freedom agenda in the Muslim world is dead"), how long can it be before the gathering ebb tide tears apart its internal ideological structure? "This is something only for us" requires an 'us' — and that acknowledgement marks the cresting of a crisis that has been centuries — if not millennia — in the making.

Syria represents the culmination of this trend. The moderate rebels of 2011 stood no chance of survival against the hard liners who managed to rapidly mobilize foreign fighters and take over the majority of the insurgency. The result is that, post-Paris, Western capitals will be skeptical of regime change of any sort. It will be clear that when intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign (albeit repressive) states becomes a vehicle for democratic change, that vehicle will probably be hijacked by radical Islamists, and will arrive at a substantially worse political destination than intended.
The post-Paris war on terror will affirm the West's commitment to fighting radical Islamic terrorism, but, in the process, it will reject the idiom of revolutionary, moralizing democratic change inherited from President Bush. Syria was the end of the line for that approach.

The revolution has come right back around to Hobbes, and thus to the systematically-cynical origin of the modern state system, the author (Emile Simpson) argues. What a long strange trip it's been.

(Via.)

ADDED: "… jihadis have come to inhabit a different moral universe …" — Multiversalism it is, then.

November 23, 2015

The Islamic Vortex (Note-5)

Michael Klare takes a look at the Islamic State logistics train (bullish for US defense stocks):

In the years after invading Iraq and disbanding Saddam Hussein's military, the U.S. sunk about $25 billion into "standing up" a new Iraqi army. By June 2014, however, that army, filled with at least 50,000 "ghost soldiers," was only standing in the imaginations of its generals and perhaps Washington. When relatively small numbers of Islamic State (IS) militants swept into northern Iraq, it collapsed, abandoning four cities — including Mosul, the country's second largest — and leaving behind enormous stores of U.S. weaponry, ranging from tanks and Humvees to artillery and rifles. In essence, the U.S. was now standing up its future enemy in a style to which it was unaccustomed and, unlike the imploded Iraqi military, the forces of

the Islamic State proved quite capable of using that weaponry without a foreign trainer or adviser in sight.

In response, the Obama administration dispatched thousands of new advisers and trainers and began shipping in piles of new weaponry to re-equip the Iraqi army. It also filled Iraqi skies with U.S. planes armed with their own munitions to destroy, among other things, some of that captured U.S. weaponry. Then it set to work standing up a smaller version of the Iraqi army. Now, skip nearly a year ahead and on a somewhat lesser scale the whole process has just happened again. Less than two weeks ago, Islamic State militants took Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province. Iraqi army units, including the elite American-trained Golden Division, broke and fled, leaving behind — you'll undoubtedly be shocked to hear — yet another huge cache of weaponry and equipment, including tanks, more than 100 Humvees and other vehicles, artillery, and so on.

The Obama administration reacted in a thoroughly novel way: it immediately began shipping in new stocks of weaponry, starting with 1,000 antitank weapons, so that the reconstituted Iraqi military could take out future "massive suicide vehicle bombs" (some of which, assumedly, will be those captured vehicles from Ramadi). Meanwhile, American planes began roaming the skies over that city, trying to destroy some of the equipment IS militants had captured.

Notice anything repetitive in all this — other than another a bonanza for U.S. weapons makers? Logically, it would prove less expensive for

the Obama administration to simply arm the Islamic State directly before sending in the air strikes.

June 2, 2015

The Islamic Vortex (Note-6)

Why (sane) non-Muslims hate Islam, made simple:

So, Islam was established as a polygynous system, meaning it created a wife shortage among believers. But raiding non-believers who do not submit to Muslim rule was sanctified and taking their women for your sexual use was also sanctified. So, sexual frustration generated by ***Sharia*** *marriage rules was then explicitly directed outwards towards the non-believers who have not submitted to Muslim rule. The* ***ghazis*** *raiding across the frontier into "the lands of unbelief" which were such a feature of the borders of Islam for over a millennia represented Islam sanctifying (and so intensifying) patterns of typical of polygyny; polygyny that it also sanctified.*

All dithering aside, it's an inter-culturally aggressive rape machine, by essence.

ADDED: "The problem, ultimately, is this …"

ADDED:

I remember going the mosque and my friends talking about

> how they wanted to go fight #Jihad so they could have sex with captured #slaves.
>
> — Sohail Ahmed (@SohailPakBrit) December 4, 2015

December 3, 2015

The Islamic Vortex (Note-7)

Robin Wright (in *The New Yorker*) expresses the frustrations of a modern Jacobin about as straightforwardly as one could hope:

What seems to have been lost in the past five years is American strategic support for the Arab Spring's aspirations — and for the innumerable other Bouazizis still struggling for rights and justice and jobs. One of Obama's boldest decisions, in 2011, was to abandon longstanding U.S. support for Arab despots, personified in President Hosni Mubarak, who ruled Egypt ruthlessly for thirty years. For the first time, Washington opted for the unknowns of potential democracy over the guarantees of autocratic stability in the Arab world.

A speaker for HRW is even clearer about the ideological lineage at stake (and it isn't anything coming out of the Middle East):

Each local crisis has been complicated by regional players who have intervened to block a new Arab order. "It's no longer about

what Egyptians want. Or what the Syrian people want," Whitson, of Human Rights Watch, explained. "It's so much broader and wider — and more complicated than during the French Revolution. Now a revolutionary doesn't just fight the bureaucrats in the capital but bureaucrats thousands of miles away. There are so many horses in the game who have the resources and power to dictate or sway the outcome. It's a much more difficult battle." […] Speaking of the idealistic protesters of five years ago, Whitson said, "Sometimes it makes you wonder if they ever had a chance." Yet she remains sanguine about the future. "The fight is not over," she told me. "Because it can't be over. The aspirations that inspired the spark over a seven-dollar bribe are universal, and we know it. As long as governments deny people basic justice and dignity, people will rise up."

Yes, "rise up" [*facepalm*]. If there's any distinction at all between (subjective) 'caring' and (objective) raw evil it's getting ever harder to discern. The bleeding-out of universalistic Cathedral evangelism in the Middle East has been an event of far greater consequence than anyone is yet able to acknowledge.

December 17, 2015

The Islamic Vortex (Note-8)

Yuletide comedy supplement:

The four core elements of Obama's Syria policy remain intact today: an insistence that Assad must go; that no anti-IS coalition with Russia is possible; that Turkey is a steadfast ally in the war against terrorism; and that there really are significant moderate opposition forces for the US to support.

(The entire essay is a valuable American Proxy Civil-War primer.)

December 23, 2015

The Islamic Vortex (Note-9)

Fernandez:

One man who understood the power of "Salafi jihadism" was Saddam Hussein, who according to Kyle Orton, writing in the New York Times, understood long before Obama that secular socialism was no match for a full-bore jihadism which had endured the test of centuries. "The Arab nationalist Baath Party, which seized power in 1968 in a coup in which Mr. Hussein played a key role, had a firmly secular outlook. This held through the 1970s, even as religiosity rose among the Iraqi people. But soon after Mr. Hussein invaded Iran in 1980, it began to change."

To compensate for his shortcomings in governance, Saddam covered himself with the Koran. He also tried what Obama later attempted, an alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood, with disastrous results. Rather than beating Islam, the Baath began to be absorbed by it. "In 1986, however, the Pan-Arab Command, the Baath Party's top ideological institution, formally reoriented Iraq's foreign policy toward an alliance with Islamists. This was the first clear deviation from secular Baathism."

The causal pathways in this area are easily obscured by ideological preferences.

ADDED: Throwing this in to store the link. (Some topic-bridging necessary.)

December 26, 2015

The Islamic Vortex (Note-10)

According to the geo-economic logic of the dying *status quo*, the Islamic Vortex supported oil prices by injecting menace into the supply chain. Peaks of turbulence were associated with oil shocks. 'Middle East peace initiatives' (or more drastic interventions) were so deeply entwined with oil supply security imperatives as to be scarcely distinguishable.

Not anymore:

Many energy analysts became convinced that Doha would prove the decisive moment when Riyadh … would agree to a formula allowing Iran some [production] increase before a freeze. … But then something happened. According to people familiar with the sequence of events, Saudi Arabia's Deputy Crown Prince and key oil strategist, Mohammed bin Salman, called the Saudi delegation in Doha at 3:00 a.m. on April 17th and instructed them to spurn a deal that provided leeway of any sort for Iran. When the Iranians — who chose not to attend the meeting — signaled that they had no intention of freezing their output to satisfy their rivals, the Saudis rejected the draft agreement it had helped negotiate and the assembly ended in disarray. […] … Most analysts have since suggested that the Saudi royals simply considered punishing Iran more important than raising oil prices. No matter the cost to them, in other words, they could not bring themselves to help Iran pursue its geopolitical objectives, including giving yet more support to Shiite forces in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon. Already feeling pressured by Tehran and ever less confident of Washington's support, they were ready to use any means available to weaken the Iranians, whatever the danger to themselves.

With 'Peak oil *demand*' in prospect, and a brutal zero-sum struggle beginning for shares in a market tending to secular shrinkage, the deepening Sunni-Shia has become an engine of systematic oil price suppression. According to plausible Saudi

calculations, the Iranian enemy will simply use oil revenues to pursue their geopolitical objectives more competently than the Saudis can themselves. A higher oil price, therefore, is comparatively advantageous to the Shia bloc (at least in the eyes of the Saudis, whose perceptions in this regard uniquely matter, due to their status as sole swing-producer). Any rise in revenues is overwhelmed by the quantity of additional military challenge it brings with it. This holds true *whatever the level of social stress a low price inflicts on the Sunni side*.

It's quite a box the Saudis find themselves in. There's no way out of it that doesn't require winning a religious war.

April 30, 2016

The Islamic Vortex (Note-11)

Could the escalating Sunni-Shia War (intensified by the fracking revolution) take out Saudi Arabia?

(Cold Western indifference would be nice.)

October 22, 2016

The Islamic Vortex (Note-12)

Everything is proceeding as foreseen.

"They say all Sunnis are Daesh, but it isn't true," said former truck driver Jassem Nouri, 50. Nouri has spent the past two years living on a building site in the northeast of Salahuddin province; his home, in the Sunni village of Salman Beg, is just six miles away, but the Shiite militias that ejected the Islamic State from the area over two years ago have refused to allow any of the residents to return. Last year, his two sons, former university students, were detained by masked men in unmarked uniforms and accused of working with the Islamic State. Nouri insists that they are innocent, but he has not been able to secure their release. […] "The one thing that is breaking my heart is that my sons are in jail and I can't prove their innocence," he said. "If this government doesn't change, there will never be security and stability in Iraq, just an endless blind revenge."

No one has the slightest (realistic) idea what equilibrium would even look like. The Sunni-Shia war has no end short of utter exhaustion. For everyone else, staying mostly out of it — and *keeping it out* — has to be the basic principle of strategic wisdom.

ADDED: From *The Economist* — "Horrifyingly, although home to only 5% of the world's population, in 2014 the Arab world accounted for 45% of the world's terrorism, 68% of its battle-related deaths, 47% of its internally displaced and 58% of its refugees."

November 28, 2016

Quote note (#260)

Dalrymple on visions of the Apocalypse:

Oceans of ink have been spilt on the attempt to estimate the true extent of the threat of Islam to the West, and the attempts range from the frankly paranoid to the most supinely complacent. For myself, I veer constantly between the two, hardly pausing in between. In the last analysis, the West has all the cards, intellectual and military; but if it refuses ever to play them, they are of no account.

If Islam destroys the West, it will only be in the role of a suicide weapon, deployed by the West against itself. The basis of the Apocalyptic case is that the West has been taught, very successfully, that it does not *deserve* continued existence. ("Better dead than rude" is John Derbyshire's formulation.)

Islam is the Hell the West damns itself to, for its sins.

June 22, 2016

Twitter cuts (#94)

> What if I told you in 2001 that in 15 years the US would be really angry about Russia bombing our allies, Al Qaeda.
>
> — Michael B Dougherty (@michaelbd) October 12, 2016

It's a clear sign of how seriously Radical Islam is taken by the foreign policy establishments of civilized states. Roughly, it's treated as a biological weapon, to be used against *real* adversaries (you know, those who are not mere *hill people*). That's not going to change much anytime soon, however much one might want it to.

October 14, 2016

Twitter cuts (#123)

> What's driving Right-wing populism? https://t.co/Z31ppXaB0n pic.twitter.com/bIlhkkSotF
>
> — Ed West (@edwest) March 16, 2017

This is not — of course — conclusive. It would be a stretch to say that it isn't suggestive. As far as practical politics are concerned, current leftist priorities look strikingly self-contradicting. Islamization or popular sovereignty — choose one (or less).

The essay at the attached link recommends re-education as a remedy, in an age when the dominant organs of opinion formation have collapsed into culture war and unprecedented illegitmacy. Good luck with that.

ADDED: On point.

March 16, 2017

SECTION D - IMMIGRATION

Quote note (#132)

WRM on the politics of amnesty by executive order:

For many liberal Democrats (as well as for some of their Republican opponents) two key beliefs about immigration shape their political strategies. The first is that Latinos are the new blacks: a permanent racial minority or subgroup in the American political system that will always feel separate from the country's white population and, like African-Americans, will vote Democratic. On this assumption, the Democratic approach to Hispanic Americans should be clear: the more the merrier. That is a particularly popular view on the more leftish side of the Democratic coalition, where there's a deep and instinctive fear and loathing of Jacksonian America (those "bitterly clinging" to their guns, their Bibles, and their individualistic economic and social beliefs). The great shining hope of the American left is that a demographic transition through immigration and birthrates will finally make all those tiresome white people largely irrelevant in a new, post-American America that will

forget all that exceptionalism nonsense and ditch "Anglo-Saxon" cultural and economic ideas ranging from evangelical religion to libertarian social theory.

If conventional wisdom on the subject is this stark — and Mead is a good weather-vane for that — then Obama might as well put on the **Kill Whitey** T-shirt, because he's clearly not fooling anybody. (It's also worth explicitly noting, for the anti-market trads out there, that your besieged cultural norms and *laissez-faire* capitalism are on the same radical leftist death list, whether you appreciate the company or not.)

November 24, 2014

Discrimination II

It would be hard to find a clearer illustration of the topic than this article (written from the vehemently discrimination-negative left). The stakes are so clear that detailed commentary is entirely otiose. Some snippets:

The contrast was stark. One group of South Asians had become objects of fear and derision and targets of immigration enforcement and extra-legal violence. Another group of South Asians was being heralded for their social, economic, and cultural contributions to the United States. … the complexities that lay beneath the surface of "South Asian" identity were flattened into a powerful binary; South

Asian Americans were either model minorities or national threats. … But this was not merely a post–9/11 phenomenon. In fact, the division between the feared and the desired, the denigrated and the celebrated, has been a defining feature of South Asian racialization in the United States for over one hundred years. … for decades, federal immigration laws and popular culture have worked together to make these distinctions, to distinguish desirable from undesirable South Asians. … Between 1904 and 1917 … xenophobia and Indophilia were not simply contradictory attitudes that played out in two separate social spheres — that is, South Asians were not simply denigrated in political debates over immigration restriction while they were simultaneously celebrated in popular culture. Instead, each sphere generated its own set of distinctions between who was desirable and who was not, and each set of distinctions reinforced the other. … the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the 1885 Alien Contract Labor Law, and the 1917 Immigration Act were never straightforward acts of Asian exclusion, nor was the 1965 Hart-Cellar Immigration Act — the law that is credited with ending the exclusion era — an act that fully "opened the door" to Asian immigration. All four of these Acts — in effect and in intent — helped define who within Asian populations was welcome and who was not. … the so-called exclusion laws introduced a logic that certain South Asians were admissible — or desirable — because of their class, education, and profession. This was ultimately the logic enshrined in

the "occupational preferences" provisions of the 1965 Immigration Act; the legislation brought thousands of South Asian doctors, engineers, and other professionals to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, while keeping working-class migration to a minimum. … Orientalism is a double-edged set of ideas, standards, and expectations. In the realms of both immigration law and popular culture, the desired and the denigrated have always been inextricably linked; they are defined in relation to one another, with a line drawn between them.

As with most leftist tirades, the effect of this discussion is to engender appreciation for those few fraying fibers of sound public policy and cultural discernment that might otherwise be overlooked. I'm willing to grant the possible advantages of *further, more minute discrimination*. The fact that discrimination is occurring at all, however, is an indication that — even in this advanced stage of Cathedral dominion — sanity is not altogether dead.

Discriminate between these guys …



… and these guys?



Hell, yeah.

April 10, 2015

Ethnomasochism

Arguments that indiscriminate immigration is socially beneficial are too widespread to pick upon in detail — spend any time over at *The Economist* or, for the full-throttle 'altruistic' version, Bryan Caplan's place, to be inundated in them. It's hard to see how a lack of selectivity could ever be advantageous from the perspective of the demographic recipient, but the whole discussion evades a far more toxic problem. If a case for the mass implantation of unscreened foreign populations is couched in the language of self-interest — however misguidedly — it can, at least potentially, be engaged rather than merely diagnosed. (This blog has no problem with immigration *in general* whatsoever.)

Far more disturbing to any surviving assumptions about sane social policy decisions is the very different argument (exemplified by the Cathedral-crazed second questioner in this clip (via)) that immigration is a punishment to be embraced, in a form of religiously-intoxicated, collective self-flagellation, to scourge the sin-blackened Occident, unendingly, for its ineliminable historical crimes. This is ethnomasochism in its purest instantiation, and argument is wholly irrelevant against it. Such moral-religious convulsants do not want 'good' (productive, orderly, talented, aspirational) immigration. They want the lash. No 'racist' profile of potential immigrant groups can be vicious enough to elicit aversion, on the contrary — the more harm

that is promised by the incomers, the more sobbing gratitude accompanies the invitation. Immigration is *meant to be torture*, so what use are brainy, well-behaved entrepreneurs? The ideal immigrant in this vision of infinitized moral purgation is not a social asset, but a wretched, dysfunctional parasite, or better still an arrogant, contemptuous aggressor. 'Model minorities' are erased from the picture entirely, because they do not exact the suffering that is so ardently desired. ("You can wander through Chinatown late at night without being robbed, beaten, or raped — what's the possible spiritual value in that?") To repeat the essential, and hideously consequential point: *Immigration is supposed to punish us*.

This is the terminal pathology of Western Civilization, in its 'highest' state of expression. There is not much that can be said to be fortunate about it, except that it cannot be indefinitely prolonged.

July 14, 2015

Quote note (#214)

The intolerable clarity of Sailer at work:

… the concept of "Europeanism" upon which the EU was founded — that Europeans should be more neighborly to their fellow Europeans than to non-Europeans — is increasingly unmentionable in polite society because it's seen as racist. For example, during the

peak of adulation for Merkel before reality set in, she was widely praised for personifying European values by de-Europeanizing Europe.

How would one even begin to argue with anything said here? There's a lot in this short passage, but nothing that isn't obviously true, *to everyone*, which accounts — perhaps — for the fact that it is nevertheless almost unthinkably controversial.

It would be a relief to see Merkel awarded the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize for her contribution to the ruin of Europe. If not honest — or anything close — it would at least attain meta-honesty, by defining 'peace' explicitly as the suppression of truth.

February 1, 2016

Quote note (#222)

The ironical road from feminism to Islam:

Some commentators like to point out that many of the most passionate and bravest defenders of the West are women, citing Italian writer Oriana Fallaci and others as examples. But women like Ms. Fallaci, brave as they might be, are not representative of all Western women. If you look closely, you will notice that, on average, Western women are actually more supportive of Multiculturalism and massive immigration than are Western men. […] … surprise, you

didn't enter a feminist Nirvana, but paved the way for an unfolding Islamic hell.

Give feminist ideology a voice in security policy, and the gates are thrown open. The evo-psych behind this is dark, but compelling.

It's past time to move it from the 'provocative speculations' to the 'hard cold facts' folder.

February 22, 2016

Quote note (#184)

Thompson:

It is little surprise that people want to move from badly organised countries to better organised ones. What is more surprising is that the causes of bad national organisation are so often ascribed to external factors rather than to the people who live in such countries. The theory seems to be that some people, by an accident of birth, had the good fortune to be plonked down in a place with laws, institutions, roads, schools and hospitals, while others had the misfortune to be born in places with dictators, gangs, muddy tracks and slums. According to this world picture, if you move people from the unfortunate to the fortunate ***geographies****, then the world's problems are solved.*

One consequence of escaping this common error is the

downgrading of the territorial obsessions common on the right. Free association is the real topic of concern. Pieces of real estate are never more than rough proxies for that.

September 14, 2015

Tsunami

Either Europe is absorbed into Africa or at some point it learns, pitilessly, to say 'no'. Neither alternative is likely to be remotely pretty.

The 21st century would probably be a good time to be somewhere else.

… two years ago the United Nations Population Division released a shocking update to their population projections, revising the forecast for the continent of Africa upward to 4.2 billion in 2100 from 1.1 billion today. […] That is about a half dozen times greater than the population of Europe. […] Africa is almost certainly not going to add over three billion residents over the next 85 years. Something else will happen instead …

For an example of how ugly it looks — in the eyes of polite opinion — to get anywhere close to realism on the topic, try this. It's unthinkable! So, by far the most likely outcome is that Europe buries its head in the sand until it is already deep into existential crisis,

then lurches into some new and even more hysterical version of its traditionally-favored fascist 'solution'. Quite probably, it will get to lose another World War before the complete extinction of its civilization.

(If there's a positive spin to put on this glacial catastrophe, don't hesitate to share it in the comments.)

April 30, 2015

All Over

Peter Hitchens has given up, on immigration (as well as everything else):

Once [illegal immigrants are] in, our own treasured freedoms work against us. Thanks to centuries of island freedom, when we were able to decide who came in and who didn't, it is far easier to disappear in Britain than in almost any other country in the world. We'll abolish those freedoms in the end, alas, but it won't do any good. […] And now the expensive navies of the EU are ferrying thousands more across the Mediterranean each week. The people-smugglers are saving a fortune on fuel, for they know their victims will be picked up before they are halfway across, in what are misleadingly described as 'rescues'. […] The only thing that will stop the flow is when the EU countries, including ours, become so like the

places these people are fleeing from that there is no point in coming any more.

June 15, 2015

Policy Migration

Hints of queasiness from open borders advocate Nathan Smith:

A couple of years ago, I wrote a post called "The American Polity Can Endure and Flourish Under Open Borders." I would not write that post today. The American polity might endure and flourish under open borders, but I wouldn't claim that confidently. What changed my mind? A greater familiarity with the theoretical models that are the basis for "double world GDP" as a claim about the global economic impact of open borders, especially my own. It turns out that these estimates depend on billions of people migrating internationally under open borders. … I do not think the US polity is robust enough to absorb 1 billion immigrants (even, say, over the course of fifty years) and retain its basic political character and structure.

The large, link-dense text that follows is sure to stir up some excitement among border-stripping libertarians. As a political science fiction scenario, it has much to recommend it (including some fragmentation features that the Outer Right might find suprisingly

appealing).

August 21, 2015

Exponential

Do try to keep up:

German authorities expect up to 1.5 million asylum seekers to arrive in Germany this year, the Bild daily said in a report to be published on Monday, up from a previous estimate of 800,000 to 1 million.

Whatever it is that's happening here should be over fairly quickly.

Also worth noting: "The authorities' report also cited concerns that those who are granted asylum will bring their families over to Germany too, Bild said. […] Given family structures in the Middle East, this would mean each individual from that region who is granted asylum bringing an average of four to eight family members over to Germany in due course, Bild quoted the report as saying." (So we can crank the binary exponent up by another 2-3 notches straight away.)

October 5, 2015

Diverse Opinions

Americans of Indian ancestry seem to be having a disproportionate impact on the horizons of 'sensitive' debates at the moment. Techno-commercial secession and eugenic immigration in a single week. Diversity clearly has an up-side.

November 7, 2013

Twitter cuts (#39)

> As an Armenian friend asked, "Where do I have to go to get away from these people?" https://t.co/CiC50pYSKQ
> — Mark Krikorian (@MarkSKrikorian) December 8, 2015

Realistically, economic opportunity on a new frontier is likely to predominate as the driver for geopolitical disintegration, but "Where do I have to go to get away from these people?" is worth carving on the gate of an Exit-based polity. It's *Elysium*, and probably the right-most impulse of the present world order. The Cathedral basically coincides with the answer: *Nowhere*. It's not an allowable incentive. Still, it's already a huge incentive (in fact), and every week it gets more huge.

Running the entire immigration crisis through this question is

(darkly) enlightening. Anything that might count as a positive answer is probably our stuff.

ADDED: Not very closely related, but pinned on for fun

> FYI: If you're a libertarian and not a white nationalist fascist you need to proactively dissociate with neoreaction.
>
> — Cathy Reisenwitz (@CathyReisenwitz) December 7, 2015

December 8, 2015

Why Iran?

The blog obviously isn't coming from where Scott Aaronson is, and the title of this post isn't even centrally his question, so I'm asking it.

If you were trying to discredit a demographic policy that discriminated against Islamization, the thing rolled out by the US administration looks like a good way to do it. Shouldn't selecting against Salafism be the policy core? Such a stance could be easily based upon solid American precedent. This looks like something else entirely. (It's a dog's breakfast, which is to say hastily hashed-up populism food.)

ADDED: The flip-side to Scott Aaronson's concerns (from his own

comment thread).

February 5, 2017

SECTION E - EXIT

CHAPTER ONE - GETTING OUT

Lure of the Void (Part 1)

The Frontier of Disillusionment

> *…the idea that we are no longer able to accomplish feats we once could do (like travel to the Moon) clashes with the* ***prevailing narrative*** *that we march forever forward. Not only can't we get to the Moon at present, but the U.S. no longer has a space shuttle program — originally envisioned to make space travel as routine as air travel. And for that matter, I no longer have the option to purchase a ticket to fly trans-Atlantic at supersonic speeds on the Concorde. Narratives can break.*
> *— Tom Murphy(bolding in original)*

Shanghai's 2010 World Expo included an entire pavilion dedicated to urban futures. Among the exhibits was a looping video on a large screen, depicting varieties of futuristic city-types as speculative animations, light-heartedly, and with obvious orientation to

youngsters. Since children are the denizens of the future, it makes sense to treat them as the target audience for a vision of tomorrow's world, but the effect was also disconcerting, as if parenthesizing what was shown in a form of deniable, non-abrasive irony. *This is what the future used to look like*. Does it still? On this point, a subtle reserve concealed itself as a concession to childish credibility, or even inconsequential fantasy.

One of the four future cities on display had been constructed off-planet, in earth-orbit. It was populated by happy humans (or, at least, humanoids). No date was predicted. Untethered from firm futuristic commitment, it intersected adult perception as a fragment of cross-cultural memory.

Imagine a city in space, as a child might. Given the strategic obscurity of this statement, when encountered at a carefully-crafted international event, in a sophisticated, cosmopolitan, global, Chinese city, in 2010, it is tempting to approach it through analogy. Half a century ago, when Western children were encouraged to imagine such things, during the twilight decades of modernity (1.0), was a sincere promise being made to them that they would inherit the solar system? If so, is such a promise now being humorously referenced, or is it being re-directed, and re-made?

The 2010 Expo had a Space Pavilion, too, which only deepened the perplexity. Given the opportunity to re-activate Expo traditions of techno-industrial grandiosity, it was a spectacular miss-launch,

containing almost nothing in the way of monumental hardware. The content fell into two broad categories: video-based immersive special effects (highly-appreciated by kids), and vanilla-domestic applications of space technology, on the approximate model of NASA's lamentable "we're the guys who brought you the non-stick frying-pan" PR campaign. Anybody hoping for soul-crushing cyclopean military-analog launch vehicles and the acrid stink of rocket fuel had clearly wandered into the wrong century. Contemporary international etiquette prevailed, and according to that, the business of blazing into orbit is far too crude – even *primitive* — to be vigorously publicized.

So even in China, at least in its 2010 window to the world, off-planet aspirations were stirred together indissolubly with childhood fantasy. The unmistakable insinuation, harmonized with the commanding heights of world opinion, was that such hard SF dreams had been outgrown. Rather than staring through a window into the spark-torched clangorous workshop of China's emerging national space program, Western visitors found their gazes bounced from mirrored glass, into a 'postmodern' vacuum of collapsed expectations, amongst the eroded ruins of Apollo. Four decades of Occidental space failure smiled politely back. *You lost it, didn't you*? (A quick trip across the Huangpu to the drearily mundane USA Pavilion sufficed for unambiguous confirmation.)

The dismissal of a human off-planet future as a childish dream has

plenty to build upon. The world's publishers and book shops have long accommodated their classification systems to the sleazy ambiguity of the 'science fiction / fantasy genre', in which futurism smears into oneirism, and the vestiges of hard SF *programs* (telecommunication satellites, moon bases, space elevators…) are scattered amongst fantastic elves-in-space mythologies (from *Star Wars* to *Avatar*). Competitive prophecies decay into polemical allegories, making statements about anything and everything *except* the shape of the future.

Of all the cultural ripples from the truncation of the Apollo-era space trajectory, none is more telling than the rising popularity of 'Moon Hoax' conspiracy theorizing. Not satisfied with the *prospective* evacuation of the heavens, the moon hoaxers began systematically editing space-travelers out of the past, beginning with the lunar landings. Whilst clearly maddening to space technologists, American patriots, NASA supporters, and sensible types in general, this form of 'denialism' is not only historically comprehensible, but even inevitable. If nobody seriously contests the fact that Columbus reached the New World, it is at least in part because what was then started kept happening. Something began, and continued. Nothing comparable can be said about the process of lunar colonization, and that, in itself, is a provocative oddity. When forecasts are remembered, abandoned outcomes can be expected to mess up memories.

Old-school space enthusiast Sylvia Engdahl finds the whole situation pathological, and subjects it to a kind of jerry-built psychoanalysis. With defiant optimism, she attributes "the present hiatus in space travel" to xenophobic trauma:

> *Much is said about the positive effect of the photos of Earth obtained by Apollo 8, which for the first time showed our planet as a globe, a fragile refuge amid barren surroundings, and thereby launched the environmental movement. The concomitant negative impact — the spread of gut-level knowledge that space is an actual place containing little that's familiar to us and perhaps much that we'd rather not meet — is not spoken of. But it may be no less significant. Could this be one of the reasons why interest in space died so soon after the first Moon landing, resulting in the cancellation of the last few planned Apollo missions?*

She elaborates:

> *Most people do not want to contemplate the significance of an open universe. They do not let uneasiness about it into their minds, but underneath, as the collective unconscious of humankind absorbs the knowledge, they grasp it, and react with dismay disguised as apathy. It does not occur to them that they might be disturbed by the prospect of space*

> *exploration. Rather, they believe that although in theory they want humankind to reach new worlds, it's of low priority compared to the problems of here and now. … [T]he widespread conviction that the public no longer cares about space may also be a rationalization.*

Engdahl hints at a modern variant of the Orpheus myth, and captures something of arresting significance. We were told not to look back from orbit, but of course, we did, and what we saw pulled us back down. The damnation of our extraterrestrial out-leap gave birth to a lucid environmentalist vision — the earth seen from space. That is why Tom Murphy turns to the Grand Archdruid of the Ancient Order of Druids in America, John Michael Greer, to transmute elegiac disillusionment into acceptance:

> *The orbiters are silent now, waiting for the last awkward journey that will take them to the museums that will warehouse the grandest of our civilization's failed dreams. There will be no countdown, no pillar of flame to punch them through the atmosphere and send them whipping around the planet at orbital speeds. All of that is over. …In the final analysis, space travel was simply the furthest and most characteristic offshoot of industrial civilization, and depended — as all of industrial civilization depends — on vast*

> *quantities of cheap, highly concentrated, readily accessible energy. That basic condition is coming to an end around us right now.*

Disillusionment is simply awakening from childish things, the druids tell us. This is a point Murphy is keen to endorse: "space fantasies can prevent us from tackling mundane problems." Intriguingly, his initial step towards acceptance involves a rectification of false memory, through a (sane) analog of 'Moon Hoax' denial. Surveying his students on their understanding of recent space history ("since 1980 or so"), he discovered that no less than 52% thought humans had departed the earth as far as the moon in that time (385,000 km distant). Only 11% correctly understood that no manned expedition had escaped Low Earth Orbit (LEO) since the end of the Apollo program (600 km out). Recent human space activity, at least in the way it was imagined, had not taken place. It was predominantly a collective hallucination.

Murphy's highly-developed style of numerate druidism represents the null hypothesis in the space settlement debate: perhaps we're not out there because there's no convincing reason to expect anything else. Extraterrestrial space isn't a frontier, even a tough one, but rather an implacably hostile desolation that promises nothing except grief and waste. There's some scientific data to be gleaned, and also (although Murphy doesn't emphasize this)

opportunities for political theatrics. Other than that, however, there's nothing beyond LEO worth reaching for.

The neo-druidic starting point is unapologetically down to earth. It begins with energy physics, and the remorseless fact that doing just about anything heats things up. According to Murphy's calculations, a modest 2.3% global economic growth rate suffices to bring the planetary surface to the boiling point of water within four centuries, even in the complete absence of (positive) greenhouse effects. Economic growth is essentially exponential, and that guarantees that we're cooked, due to elementary thermodynamic principles, efficiency limits, and the geophysics of heat dissipation. Within this big picture, conventional 'energy crisis' concerns are no more than complicating details, although Murphy engages them thoroughly. (He provides a neat summary of his argument, with internal links, here.)

From the neo-druidic perspective, the space 'frontier' is a horizon of sheer escapism, attracting those who stubbornly deny the necessity of limitation (pestilential growth-addicts):

> *...relying on space to provide an infinite resource base into which we grow/expand forever is misguided. Not only is it much harder than many people appreciate, but it represents a distraction to the message that growth cannot continue on Earth and we should get busy planning a transition to a non-*

growth-based, truly sustainable existence.

Since plenty of irrepressible growth-mongers seriously want to get out there, Murphy trowels on the discouragement in thick, viscous layers. Most of the deterrent factors are relatively familiar, but none of them are frivolous, or easily dismissed. The principal problem is the most qualitative (and druidic): human adaptation to terrestrial conditions. This is strikingly illuminated by a consideration of terrestrial 'frontier' environments that remain almost entirely unexploited, despite environmental features that are overwhelmingly more benign than anything to be found off-planet. When compared to any conceivable space station, asteroid mining camp, lunar base, or Mars colony, even the most 'difficult' places on earth — the seabed, for instance, or the Antarctic — are characterized by extreme hospitability, with ready access to breathable air, nutrients, fuels, and other essential resources, a moderate temperature range, protection from cosmic radiation, and proximity to existing human settlements. This is to be contrasted with typical extraterrestrial conditions of hard vacuum, utter exposure, complete absence of bio-compatible chemistry, and mind-jarring distances.

Murphy touched upon these distances in his survey of student space ignorance. If earth is represented by a "standard" 30-centimeter globe, LEO is 1.5 centimeters from the surface, and

the moon a full 9 meters further out. For intuitive purchase upon more expansive space visions, however, a re-calibration is required.

It makes sense to model the earth as a small apple (8.5 cm in diameter), because then an astronomical unit (AU, the mean earth-sun distance of roughly 150 million kilometers, 93 million miles, or 500 light seconds) shrinks to a kilometer, with the sun represented by a sphere a little over 10 meters in diameter. The moon now lies less than 2.7 meters out from our toy earth, but Mars is never less than 400 meters away, the nearest asteroids a kilometer away. The distance to the edge of the planetary solar system (Neptune) is at least 29 kilometers, and within this spatial volume (a sphere of roughly 113,400 AU^3), less than one part in 27 billion is anything other than desolate vacuum, with almost all the rest being solar furnace. On the toy scale, the outer edge of the solar system, and the Oort cloud, lies 50,000 kilometers from the earth. The distance from our shriveled apple to the nearest star, Proxima Centauri, is 277,600 toy kilometers (or 41.5 trillion real ones).

If space colonization is being construed as an escape from terrestrial resource constraints, then a pattern of activity needs to be knitted across these distances, producing — at a minimum — an energy surplus. In a non-frictional kinetic system, governed almost purely by (macroscopic) conservation of momentum, the basic currency of space activity is 'delta-v', or the transformation of velocity. Delta-v is broadly proportional to energy expenditure on

"small burns", when fuel consumption makes a negligible difference to total propelled mass, but when complete flights or "large burns" are calculated, the math becomes nonlinear, since the reduction of fuel payload becomes a critical factor in the equation (subtracting inertial resistance as it adds motive force). In practical terms, the prospective off-planet ('space-faring') energy economy consists of the consumption of propellant to move propellant about, with non-fuel vehicle mass contributing little more than a rounding error in the calculations.

> *Somewhat counter-intuitively, it is possible to get the rocket moving faster than the exhaust velocity once the fuel mass exceeds 63% of the total initial mass. In order to get delta-v values in the 20 km/s range when the exhaust velocity is less than 5 km/s requires almost nothing* but *fuel. …[T]he large delta-v's required to get around the solar system require a* lot *of fuel…*

This double-registry of fuel within the nonlinear equations of "rocket math" – as payload and propellant – is the key to Murphy's deep skepticism about the viability of off-planet energy economics. The fuel resources strewn within the inner solar system – even assuming their absolute abundance – cannot be moved around usefully for less energy than they provide. Jupiter offers the most tantalizing

example. This methane-rich gas giant might be superficially apprehended as an immense cosmic fuel depot, but even the most generous calculations of delta-v requirements for a Jupiter 'tanker-run' imply energy expenditures at least an order of magnitude higher than energy obtained – from the 'scooping' operation alone. The inner solar-system is abundant in "stranded resources" that cannot conceivably be extracted at a cost lower than their value. That, at least, is the coherent neo-druidic perspective.

…and yet, in the yawning void, where the space settlements were meant to have been, the stirrings have not ceased. There even seems to be, unmistakably, a quickening of pace. Chinese 'Taikonauts', private (American) 'NewSpace' businesses, and ever more advanced robots are venturing out beyond the wreckage of dead dreams. Are they heading anywhere that works, or that even makes sense?

[Next…]

August 15, 2012

Lure of the Void (Part 2)

The right stuff in the rough

… it's important to understand what Apollo was, and wasn't.

> *It was a victory in the Cold War over the Soviets, but because we were at war, we waged it with a state socialist enterprise. What it was not was the first step of opening up the frontier to humanity, and it was in fact a false start that has created a template for NASA and a groove in which we've been stuck for over four decades now, with many billions spent and little useful progress.*
> — Rand Simberg

> *The opening of the American west in the first decades of the 19th century and the opening of the space frontier in these first decades of the 21st century are very similar.*
> — Mike Snead

Fascism makes our heads spin, which is unfortunate, because an inability to gaze unwaveringly into the dominant 'third way' model of political economy (corporate nationalism) makes the history of the last century unintelligible. For amateur space historians, dropping in briefly on the Moon Nazis is simply unavoidable.

SS Sturmbannführer Wernher von Braun, Deputy Associate Administrator for Planning at NASA Headquarters, Washington DC (1970-2), helps with the introduction. Technical director of the Nazi rocket program at Peenemünde, which culminated in the creation of the A-4 (V-2) ballistic missile, von Braun was brought to America

in 1945 as the top prize of Operation Paperclip. His contribution to US rocket development, through Redstone to Apollo (and the moon), was central and indispensable. NASA Socialism was born on the Dark Side of the Moon. (This probably isn't the right time to wander too deeply into Pynchon territory, but, roughly speaking, that's where we are.)

If fascism sounds unduly harsh, more comfortable terminology lies within easy reach. 'Technocracy' will do fine. The name is less important than the essentials, which were already clearly formulated in the work of a previous German immigrant to the United States, Friedrich List, who devoted an influential book to outlining *The National System of Political Economy* (1841). According to List, the 'cosmopolitanism' of mainstream (Smithean) political economy was insufficiently attentive to the collective national interest. Industrial development was too important to be surrendered to the interplay of private economic agents, and should instead be considered a strategic imperative, within the context of international competition. Only by leveraging the power of the state to regulate trade, foster modern industries, and drive the development of critical infrastructure, could a country hope to advance its interests in the international arena. Development was war by other means, and sometimes the same ones.

When eagerly embraced by Henry Clay, who connected List's ideas with the founding tradition from Alexander Hamilton, these

ideas became the basis of the American System. Economic nationalism was to be pursued along the threefold path of managed trade (tariffs), state-controlled finance (central banking), and state-directed infrastructure development (especially transportation systems). Such policies were already 'progressive' or ~~fascist~~ technocratic in that they subordinated private-cosmopolitan economic interests to national purposes, but this took place flexibly, without the more recent encrustations of anti-business class warfare, large-scale entitlement spending, or Cathedralist cultural policing. Capitalism was to be steered, and even promoted, rather than milked, deliberately ruined, or replaced. Due to its patriotic direction, elitism, and affinity with militarization, this technocratic progressivism could easily be understood as a phenomenon of 'the right', or at least (in Walter Russell Mead's words) the "Bipartisan Establishment."

Apollo perfectly exemplified American technocratic progressivism in the teutonized, neo-Hamiltonian tradition. A small step for a man, and a substantial leap for mankind, it was a colossal high-jump for the US Leviathan, marking an unambiguous triumph in the structured competition with its principal geo-strategic and ideological rival. The Apollo program wasn't *exactly* part of the ballistic missile arms race with the Soviet Union, but it was close enough to contribute to its symbolic, mass-psychological, and deterrent purpose. Landing a man on the moon was a type of overkill,

relative to landing a nuke on Moscow, and it expressed a super-abundant payload-delivery capability that had won a war of messages.

In an article originally published in The American Spectator (November 10, 2010), Iain Murray and Rand Simberg describe the moon race as Big Government's Final Frontier, remarking that:

> *There's something about space policy that makes conservatives forget their principles. Just one mention of NASA, and conservatives are quite happy to check their small-government instincts at the door and vote in favor of massive government programs and harsh regulations that stifle private enterprise.*

They conclude:

> *It is time for conservatives to recognize that Apollo is over. We must recognize that Apollo was a centrally planned monopolistic government program for a few government employees, in the service of Cold War propaganda and was therefore itself an affront to American values. If we want to seriously explore, and potentially exploit space, we need to harness private enterprise, and push the technologies really needed to do so.*

Whilst it would be pointlessly upsetting to translate this into a call for the *denazification* of outer space, it would be equally misleading to read it as nothing of the kind. Progressive technocracy, in a range of national flavors, is the only effective space politics the world has ever seen, and it is still far more likely — in the near-term — to be modernized than radically supplanted. Space development poses such an immense collective challenge that it sucks even liberty-oriented conservatives such as Simberg towards accommodation with the activist, catalytic, neo-Hamiltonian state. At least initially, there's simply no other place where the clanking machinery of Leviathan is more at home.

Popular culture has picked up on this well. Among the many reasons for the ecstatic reception to Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) was appreciation for its 'realistic' tonal portrait of practical space activity. Science and commerce played their parts, but the leading edge was dominated by quasi-military heavy metal, funded by massive budgets based on gravely obscure strategic objectives, directed and crewed by hard, obedient, buzz-cut types who did whatever it took to get things done. Weapons research trumped all other considerations. Breaking out into the deep frontier required a rigid, armored-bulkhead seriousness that civilians would never quite understand.

When suddenly stripped of its Cold War context, the proxy warfaring of the rocket-state lost coherent motivation, and

immediately veered off course into increasingly ludicrous pseudo-objectives. By the closing years of the 20th century, all pretense of a big push outwards had been dissipated amongst commoditized LEO satellite maintenance, unconvincing zero-gravity science projects, ritualistic space-station diplomacy, multicultural astronaut PR, and even cynical make-work schemes for dangerously competent ex-Soviet technicians. Clever science continued, based on robot probes and space telescopes, but none of that even hinted at an impetus towards space settlement, or even manned spacecraft, and typically advised explicitly against it. Despite all the very real 'right stuff' heroism, putting people in space was a circus act, and perhaps it always had been.

Whatever else outer space may be, it's a place where the right goes schizoid, and the more that it's thought about, the more jagged the split. The seemingly straightforward, dynamic-traditional, and extremely stimulating 'image' of the *frontier* illuminates the point. The frontier is a space of attenuated formal authority, where entrepreneurial, 'bottom-up' processes of social formation and economic endeavor are cultivated amongst archetypal 'rugged individualists', its affinity with libertarian impulses so tight that it establishes the ('homesteading') model of natural property rights, and yet, equally undeniably, it is a zone of savage, informal warfare, broken open as a policy decision, pacified through the unremitting application of force, and developed as a strategic imperative, in the

interest of territorial-political integration. By fleeing the state, in the direction of the frontier, the settler or colonist extends the reach of the state towards the frontier, drawing it outwards, and enhancing its ferocity, or *roughening* it. The path of anti-governmental flight confuses itself with a corresponding expansion, hardening, and re-feralization of the state, as the cavalry learn from the Indians, in a place without rules. Then the railroad comes. *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* meets *Starship Troopers*.

"A strategy for achieving economic benefit from space must involve both government and industry, as did the development of the American West," argues Martin Elvis, and no one seriously disagrees. Whenever realism is prioritized on the extraterrestrial horizon, some variant of rough-and-dirty technocratic progressivism always waits on the launch-pad, ready to piggy-back business off-planet on patriotic, Leviathan-funded, first-stage boosters. ~~Over-hasty denazification is strictly for earth-bound softies~~ The neo-Hamiltonian jump-leads work too well to drop. As usual, Simberg expresses this best:

> *The United States should become a spacefaring nation, and the leader of a spacefaring civilization.*
>
> *That means that access to space should be almost as routine (if not quite as affordable) as access to the oceans, and with similar laws and regulations. It means thousands,*

or millions, of people in space — and not just handpicked government employees, but private citizens spending their own money for their own purposes. It means that we should have the capability to detect an asteroid or comet heading for Earth and to deflect it in a timely manner. Similarly it means we should be able to mine asteroids or comets for their resources, for use in space or on Earth, potentially opening up new wealth for the planet. It means that we should explore the solar system the way we did the West: not by sending off small teams of government explorers — Lewis and Clark were the extreme exception, not the rule — but by having lots of people wandering around and peering over the next rill in search of adventure or profit.

We should have massively parallel exploration — and not just exploration, but development, as it has worked on every previous frontier.

Which brings us to 'NewSpace'…

[Next]

September 6, 2012

Lure of the Void (Part 3a)

There are two related questions posed by human exploration. First, is there anything economically useful to do out there, that pays your way? And second, can you live off the land, and use local resources to survive, or will we always be tied to support from earth? If the answer to both is yes, then you get space colonies, self-sustainable life off-planet. If the answer to both is no, then space is like Mt. Everest. Tourists might go to Mt. Everest, sherpas might make a living off of it, but no one really lives there.

If the answer is that you can live off the land, but it's not economically useful, it's like Antarctica. It was 40 years between the last time we were there, when Shackleton reached Antarctica, and when the U.S. Navy went back in 1912. There's a similar lapse between going to the Moon the first time and, hopefully, when we'll return. In that case, you can form an outpost and live there, but you're sustained by constant funding, since engineering doesn't pay for itself. If the answer is that there are economically useful things to do, such as mining Helium-3 on the Moon, but we're always reliant on Earth for basic necessities, then space becomes a North Sea oil platform. You can make money there, but it will always be a hostile environment.

> *These are four very radically different human futures. And they're all part of a larger question: Is there a human future beyond Earth? It's a question ranks up there with whether there's intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. We can search for life with probes and telescopes, but to determine the living range of humanity, we're going to have to send humans into space.*
> — Scott Pace

> *What should the payload be?* It does not matter. *That is the point. This is not about getting a useful payload into space: That is almost irrelevant. It is about guaranteeing a market for companies offering launch services to get things going. I mean this totally. If we could think of nothing better to launch,* concrete blocks would be fine. *My philosophy is:*
> Launching **anything** is good. — Paul Almond

The material base for a space-faring future is not only stranded in space, but also stranded in time. Not only are the gravitationally-unlocked resources from which it would assemble itself strewn across intimidating immensities of vacant distance, but the threshold where it all begins to come together – in an autocatalytic extraterrestrial economy – is separated from the world of present, practical incentives by dread gulfs of incalculable loss. In a variant of

the old joke, if getting off-planet is the goal, a planet is the absolutely worst place to set out from. “I can tell you how to get there,” the local helpfully remarked. “But you shouldn’t start from here.”

Being out there could quickly start to make sense, as long as we were already there. Experimenting with this perspective-switch makes the animating impulse clearer. Most tellingly, it exposes how deeply planets suck, so that merely not being on one is worth almost anything. That’s the end game, the final strategy, ultimately arranging everything, with anti-gravity as the key.

Once gravity is perceived as the natural archetype of imprisonment, keeping you somewhere, whether you want to be there or not, the terrestrial-economic motivations for off-planet expansion are revealed in their fundamental spuriousness. The reason to be in space is to be in space, freed from planetary suckitude, and any benefits to Earth-dwellers that accrue on the way are mere stepping stones. Off-planet resources diverted to the surface of the Earth are, in the ultimate spacer scheme, wasted, or at least strategically sacrificed (since such wastage is almost certainly required in the interim). In the final analysis, the value of anything whatsoever is degraded in direct proportion to the gravitational influences brought to bear upon it, and descent from the heavens is a fall.

A wider cosmo-developmental view sharpens resolution (although this requires that Smart’s invaluable insights are strictly

set aside, and black holes avoided with maximum prejudice). Smear into fast-forward until the process of extraterrestrial escape has been substantially accomplished, then freeze the screens. Fleeing gravity can now be seen as no more than the first step in a more thorough, antagonistic contestation with gravity and its works. Asteroids and comets are being pulverized, quarried, or bored into sponges, leaving moons, planets, and the sun itself as the local problems of interest. Such bodies are 'problems' because they deform space with gravity wells, which trap resources, but their status as development obstacles can be abstracted further. These worlds, at least partially isolated from the emerging deep-space *commercium* by their own mass, have been shaped by gravity into approximate spheres, which is to say – from the developmental perspective – into the very *worst* shapes that are mathematically *possible*, since they minimize the ratio of (reactive) surface to volume, and thus restrict resource accessibility to the greatest conceivable extent. Way out there, in deep space and the deep future, the gathering developmental impulse is to go full Vogon, and demolish them completely.

When seen from outside, planets are burial sites, where precious minerals are interred. By digging through the earth's mantle, for instance, all the way down to its interior end, 3,000km beneath the surface, one reaches a high-pressure iron-nickel deposit over 6,500km in diameter – a planet-vaulted metal globe roughly

160,000,000,000 cubic kilometers in size, doped by enough gold and platinum to coat the entire surface of the earth to a depth of half a meter. To a moderately advanced off-world civilization, pondering the practicalities of its first planet-scale demolition, leaving this buried resource trove in place has a robotic-industrial opportunity cost that can be conservatively estimated in the region of 1.6 x 10^23 human-level intelligences, a mineral stockpile sufficient to manufacture a trillion sentient self-replicating probes for every star in the galaxy. (Even ardent conservationists have to recognize how tasty this morsel will look.)

Lift-off, then, is merely a precursor to the first serious plateau of anti-gravity technology, which is oriented towards the more profoundly productive task of *pulling things apart*, in order to convert comparatively inert mass-spheres into volatile clouds of cultural substance. Assuming a fusion-phase energy infrastructure, this initial stage of off-world development culminates in the dismantling of the sun, terminating the absurdly wasteful main-sequence nuclear process, salvaging its fuel reserves, and thus making the awakened solar-system's contribution to the techno-industrial darkening of the galaxy. (Quit squandering hydrogen, and the lights dim.)

Focus for a few seconds on the economic irritability that arises at the sight of an oil-well flaring off natural gas, through sheer mindless incompetence, then glance at the sun. 'Unsustainable' doesn't begin

to capture it. Clearly, this energy machinery is utterly demented, amounting to an Azathothic orgy of spilled photons. The entire apparatus needs to be taken apart, through extreme solar surgery. Since this project has yet to receive sustained consideration, however, the specific engineering details can be safely bracketed for now.

The inexorable logic of techno-industrial efficiency, on its anti-gravity vector, means that *the only consistent motivation for leaving the earth is to dismantle the sun* (along with the rest of the solar-system), but that doesn't play well in Peoria. Unsurprisingly, therefore, those sensitized to political realities, media perceptions, and public relations are inclined to emphasize other things, depicting the earth as a destination for cosmic bounty or — even more immediately — for juicy tax-funded pork, rather than as a tricky but highly-rewarding demolition problem.

Conspicuously missing from the public space debate, therefore, is any frank admission that, "(let's face it folks) — planets are misallocations of matter which don't really work. No one wants to tell you that, but it's true. You know that we deeply respect the green movement, but when we get out there onto the main highway of solar-system redevelopment, and certain very rigid, very extreme environmentalist attitudes – Gaian survivalism, terrestrial holism, planetary preservationism, that sort of thing — are blocking the way forward, well, let me be very clear about this, that means jobs not

being created, businesses not being built, factories closing down in the asteroid belt, growth foregone. Keeping the earth together means dollars down the drain – a lot of dollars, *your dollars*. There are people, sincere people, good people, who strongly oppose our plans to deliberately disintegrate the earth. I understand that, really I do, you know – honestly – I used to feel that way myself, not so long ago. I, too, wanted to believe that it was possible to leave this world in one piece, just as it has been for four billion years now. I, too, thought the old ways were probably best, that this planet was the place we belonged, that we should – and could — still find some alternative to pulling it apart. I remember those dreams, really I do, and I still hold them close to my heart. But, people, they were just dreams, old and noble dreams, but dreams, and today I'm here to tell you that we have to wake up. Planets aren't our friends. They're speed-bumps on the road to the future, and we simply can't afford them anymore. Let's back them up digitally, with respect, yes, even with love, and *then let's get to work*…" [Thunderous applause]

Since, during the present stage of extraterrestrial ambition, pandering to the partisans of cosmic disintegrationism cannot reasonably be conceived as a sure-fire election winner, it is only to be expected that rhetoric of this kind has been muted. Yet, in the absence of some such vision, or consistently extrapolated alignment with anti-gravity, the off-planet impulse is condemned to arbitrariness, insubstantiality, and insincerity of expression. Absent

an uncompromised sense of something else, why not stick to this? The result has been, perhaps predictably, a reign of near-silence on the topic of extraterrestrial projects, even in regard to its most limited, immediate, and practically unobjectionable varieties.

If escaping the earth – and gravitational confinement in general — is not an intelligible end, but only a means, what provides the motivation? It is into this cramped, awkwardly-deformed crevice of aspiration that NewSpace must insinuate itself. To speak of 'insincerity' might seem unduly harsh – since there is no reason to suspect conscious deception, or even carefully-calibrated reservation, when NewSpace advocates outline their plans. An enveloping structure of implausibility nevertheless announces itself in every project that is advanced, manifested through the incommensurability between the scale of the undertaking and the rewards that supposedly incentivize it. Space tourism, asteroid mining, micro-gravity experimentation and manufacturing… really? Is it genuinely imaginable that these paltry goals finally or sufficiently motivate a prolonged struggle against the terrestrial gravity-trap, rather than serving as fragile *pretexts* or *rationalizations* for the pursuit of far more compelling, yet hazy, unarticulated, or even completely unsuspected objectives?

When this question is extended backwards, and outwards, it gathers force. Stretch it back to the moon, and out to Mars, and the inference becomes increasingly irresistible. None of these 'missions'

made, or make, any sense whatsoever, except insofar as they abbreviate some wider, undisclosed impulse. Space activity is not the means to a targeted end, but the end to be advanced by a sequence of missions, whose specific content is therefore derivative, and devoid of intrinsic significance. Once the inarticulate outward momentum decays, leaving nothing but an arbitrary extraterrestrial destination to represent it, the naked absurdity that is exposed rapidly extinguishes the last, flickering embers of popular motivation. Four decades of explicit lunar nihilism attest abundantly to that.

Whilst the partial privatization of space activity ('NewSpace') creatively displaces the problem of purpose, it does not radically dispel it. To some degree, NewSpace substitutes the economic motivations of disparate private operators for the political justification of a concentrated public bureaucracy, and by doing so it relieves the pressure to maintain coherent, communicable, and consensual objectives. Space ambitions are freed to enter the fragmented, competitive terrain of idiosyncrasy, variety, experimentation, and even personally-financed frivolity. It might even be thought that seriousness becomes optional.

When examined more doggedly, however, it is clear that the basic problem persists. The terrestrial gravity-well produces a split between the surface of the earth, and 'orbit' (or beyond), and private capital is no less severely divided by this schism than Rocket-State

'public' hardware. Whilst convertible temporarily into forms of inert, stored value, capital is an essentially modern phenomenon, born in industrial revolution, and typically defined by the diversion of immediate consumption into 'roundabout' production, which is to say: machinery. It is reproduced, or accumulated, by circulating through machines, or apparatus, and it is upon this that the gravity-well compels a decision: is NewSpace capital to be invested, unambiguously, *in space*?

A serious space program is, fundamentally and irreducibly, a process or terrestrial evacuation. It requires the consistent relocation (or de-location) of enterprise, resources, and productive capabilities from the earth into space, at least until the threshold of extraterrestrial autocatalysis is reached, at which point a break has been achieved, and an autonomous off-planet economy established. Whatever the opportunities for obfuscation (which are probably considerable), the basic *decision* remains unaffected. The accumulation of a terrestrial fortune is not at all the same, and is in fact almost certainly economically inconsistent, with the sustained investment in an off-planet industrial infrastructure. *Either* stuff is being shifted into space, irrevocably, *or not*.

[moon cake break]

September 29, 2012

Lure of the Void (Part 3b)

Menace in the west

> *Recognizing the head start obtained by the Soviets with their large rocket engines, which gives them many months of lead-time, and recognizing the likelihood that they will exploit this lead for some time to come in still more impressive successes, we nevertheless are required to make new efforts on our own. For while we cannot guarantee that we shall one day be first, we can guarantee that any failure to make this effort will make us last. We take an additional risk by making it in full view of the world, but as shown by the feat of astronaut Shepard, this very risk enhances our stature when we are successful. But this is not merely a race. Space is open to us now; and our eagerness to share its meaning is not governed by the efforts of others. We go into space because whatever mankind must undertake, free men must fully share. … I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth.*
> — John F Kennedy

> *[James Anthony Froude's] "The Bow of Ulysses" … endorses*

> *the old colonialism, nostalgically recalling the days when Britain was not an empire, but rather British colonialists were pirates and brigands, who robbed, conquered and eventually ruled, gradually making the transition from mobile banditry to stationary banditry without the British government paying much attention. In "The Bow of Ulysses" Froude condemns nineteenth century imperialism as unworkably left wing, and inevitably leading [to] the destruction of the British empire, and thus the ruin of the subjects of the British empire, all of which ensued as he envisaged … The imperialists, those advocating British Empire, were the left, and the colonialists were the right. And the colonialists correctly predicted that if this were to go on, we would get the left that we now have – one of the many strange facts one encounters if one reads old books.*
>
> — James A Donald

The peculiarities of the 'space race' have yet to be fully unfolded. Through its extraordinary formality, reducing extraterrestrial ambitions to a binary, international competition to put the first man on the moon, it seems – retrospectively – to owe more to the culture and history of organized sports than to technological and economic accomplishments. There would, by definition, be a winner and a loser, which is to say a Boolean decision, conventional and indisputable.

Then it would be over. Perhaps it was seen to be pointing at something further, but in fact the moon was a finishing line.

Within a broad geo-strategic context, the space race was a symptom of thermonuclear stand-off. A modern history of warfare that had descended inexorably from a restrained game of princes to unleashed total war, amongst ideologically-mobilized peoples, targeting their basic institutions, industrial infrastructures, and even demographic root-stocks, had consummated itself – virtually – in the MAD potential for swift, reciprocal extermination. Under these circumstances, a regressive sublimation was called for, relaying conflict through chivalric representatives – even Homeric heroes – who competed on behalf of the super-lethal populations they appeased. The flight of an astronaut symbolized antagonism, substituting for a nuclear strike. In this sense, victory in the space race was a thinly-disguised advance payment on the conclusion of the Cold War.

This sublimation is only half of the story, however, because a double displacement took place. Whilst the space race substituted a formal (chivalric) outcome for a military result, it also marginalized the long-envisaged prospect of informal space colonization, replacing it with a predominantly conventional (or socio-political) objective. The price of unambiguous symbolic triumph was a 'triumph' that relapsed into the *real ambiguity* of (mere) symbolism, with reality-denying, postmodernist, 'moon hoax' temptations

already rising. When nothing is won except winning itself, it could scarcely be otherwise. A champion is not a settler, or anything close to one.

What is this real ambiguity? It begins on the frontier, with a series of questions that reaches beyond the meaning of the space race, and into the identity of America. As a country settled within the modern epoch, and thus exhaustively determined by the dynamics of colonialism, America has been condensed from a frontier.

In extended parenthesis, it is worth noting explicitly that the continent's aboriginal population was not yet America, but something earlier, and other, encountered on the frontier. The idea of a 'Native American' is an exercise in historical misdirection, when it is not merely a thoughtless oxymoron. This is not to suggest that these populations were unable to *become American*, as many did, once America had begun in the modern period. By innovating distinctive modes of secession, they were even — in certain cases — able to become radically American. A reservation casino in institutional flight from the IRS is vastly more American than the Federal Reserve, in a sense that will (hopefully) become evident.

The foundation of America was a flight into the frontier, extending a trajectory of escape into a perpetually receding space, or open horizon — the future made geography, and only subsequently a political territory. This original, informal, and inherently obscure space project is as old as America itself – exactly as old. As Frederick

Jackson Turner had already noted in 1893, for America an open frontier is an existential necessity, which is to say: the basic condition of American existence. Once the frontier closes, borders take over, exceptionality withers into insubstantial rhetoric (or worse, its neoconservative facsimile) and necrosis begins.

In this respect, America cannot be sustained as a state with a space program. It requires an open horizon, extended beyond the earth if necessary, sufficient to support a prolongation of its constitutive colonial process. Only on and out of this *frontier* does America have a future, although 'the USA' could (more) comfortably persist without it. That is why, beneath, alongside, and beyond the space race, the frontier 'myth' has been spontaneously extended to extraterrestrial vistas considered as *an essentially American prospect*. (NASA and its works are quite incidental to this, at best.)

Since this claim invites accusations of gratuitous controversy, it is worth re-visiting it, at a more languid pace. Even after re-emphasizing that *America* is not the same as – and is indeed almost the precise opposite of – *the USA*, obvious objections present themselves. Is not the Russian space program the world's most economically plausible? Is not the upward curve of recent Chinese space activity vastly more exuberant? Hasn't the United Nations claimed the heavens on behalf of a common humanity? What, other than cultural-historical accident, and the unwarranted arrogance stemming from it, could imaginably make 'an essentially American

prospect' of outer space?

The counter-point to all of these objections is *colonialism*, understood through its radical, exceptional, American lineage. Colonialism of this ultimate variety consolidates itself from the frontier, and passes through revolutionary thresholds of a very specific type: wars of independence, or secession (rather than comprehensive regime changes) that are *pro-colonial* (rather than anti-colonial) in nature. The colony, as colony, breaks away, and in doing so creates a new society. Successful examples of such events are extremely rare – even singular, or *exceptional*. There is America, and then there are 'lost causes', with considerable (and increasing) overlap between them.

What has any of this to do with outer space, beyond impressionistic analogy? Gravity cements the connection. Dividing the surface of the earth and extraterrestrial space is an effective difference, or practical problem, that can be quite precisely quantified in technological terms (fuel to deliverable payload ratios), and summarized economically. For purposes of comparison, transporting freight across the Pacific costs US$4/kg (by air), or US$0.16/kg by ocean-bound container vessel (US$3,500 per TEU, or 21,600 kg). To lift 1 kg of cargo into Low Earth Orbit (LEO), in stark contrast, costs over US$4,000 (it was over US$10,000 by Space Shuttle). Call it *the Rift*: an immense structural re-supply problem, incentivizing economic self-sufficiency with overwhelming force.

Each kilogram of extraterrestrial product has saved US$4,000 before further calculations get started. Out in space, the Rift is the bottom line: a cold, anti-umbilical reality.

Whatever the historic colonial impetus to the *American way* – separation and social re-foundation – is reinforced by orders of magnitude in LEO and beyond. This is an environment that might have been precision-engineered for revolutionary colonialism, as science fiction writers have long recognized. On the flip side lies a more obviously explanatory conclusion: Because developments beyond the Rift are inherently uncontrollable, there is no readily discernible motivation for terrestrial political-economic agencies to fund the emergence of off-planet societies that are on an irresistible conveyor-belt to independence, whilst voraciously consuming resources, opening an avenue of escape, and ultimately laying the void foundations for a competitor civilization of a radically unprecedented, and thus ominously unpredictable kind.

It follows clearly that the *status quo* politics of space colonization are almost fully expressed by *space colonization not happening*. When understood in relation to the eclipsed undercurrent of the frontier analogy — social fission through revolutionary colonialism or wars of independence — the 'failure' of large-scale space colonization projects to emerge begins to look like something else entirely: an eminently rational determination on the part of the world's most powerful territorial states to inhibit the development

of socio-technological potentials characterized by an 'American' (revolutionary colonial) tendency.

Of course, in a world that grown familiar with interchangeable anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist declarations, the terms of this (Froude / Moldbug / Donald) analysis are initially disconcerting. When detached from the confusions and conflations of a disturbed periphery, however, the pattern is compelling. Colonists are, by their very nature, in flight from the metropolis. It is less than a single step from this acknowledgement to the recognition that they tend to independence of action, social fission, and political disintegration, following trends that imperialists – with equal inevitability — seek to curtail. Since colonization, strictly understood, is cultural and demographic transplantation, it only acquires its sense of *expansion* when restrained under imperial auspices. Whilst *colonial* and *rebellious* are not even close to synonymous expressions, they are nevertheless mutually attracted, in near-direct proportion to the rift that separates colony from metropolis. A colonial venture is a rebellion of the most practical and productive kind, either re-routing a rebellion from time into space, or completing itself in a rebellion that transforms an expedition into an escape. Since the triumph of imperialism over colonialism beginning in the second half of the 19th century, it is only in (and as) America that this system of relations has persisted, tenuously, and in large measure occulted by the rise of an imperial state.

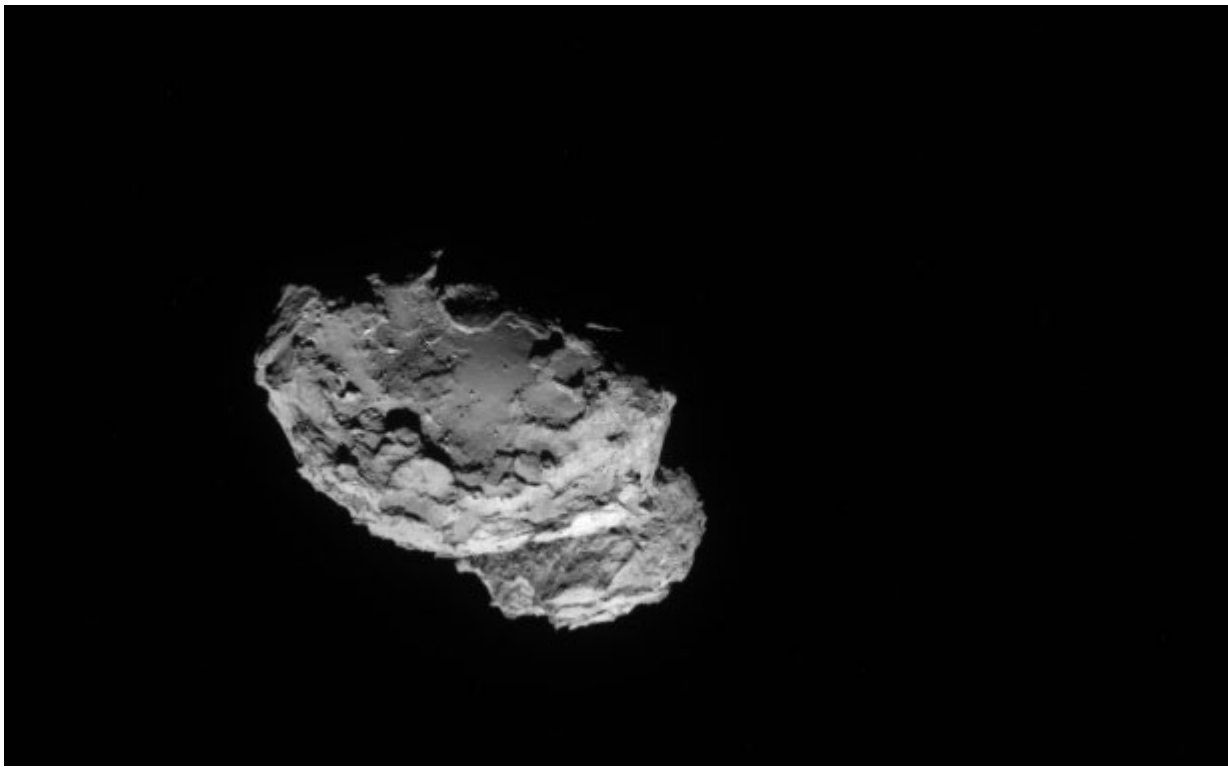
It is helpful, then, to differentiate in principle (with minimal moral excitability) between a *colonial* space project, oriented to extraterrestrial settlement, and an *imperial* space program, or policy, designed to ensure terrestrial control over off-planet development, maintain political integrity, and thus secure returns on investment across the Rift. From the perspective of the territorial state, an (imperial) space program that extracted economic value from beyond earth's gravity well would be ideal, but this is an ambition unsupported by the vaguest flickerings of historical precedent (and obstructed by at least four orders of magnitude of yawning economic gulf). Second best, and quite satisfactory, is the simple prevention of colonial space projects, substituting political space theater as an expensive (but low-risk and affordable) alternative. The occasional man on the moon poses no great threat to the order of the world, so long as we "bring him safely back to earth."

America was an escape from the Old World, and this definition suffices to describe what it still is – insofar as it still is – as well as what it can be, all that it can be, and what any escape from the new old world – if accurately named, would also be. When outlined by the shadows of dark enlightenment, America is the problem that the USA was designed to solve, the door that the USA closes, the proper name for a society born from flight.

As Nietzsche never exactly said: *Am I understood? America against the stars and stripes …*

October 26, 2012

Rosetta's Stone



(Links and video here)
ADDED: The sonic dimension. Harpoon failure.
ADDED: Slingshot targeting.

November 12, 2014

Quote note (#272)

Frederick Jackson Turner, from his essay *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1893):

From the conditions of frontier life came intellectual traits of profound importance. The works of travelers along each frontier from colonial days onward describe certain common traits, and these traits have, while softening down, still persisted as survivals in the place of their origin, even when a higher social organization succeeded. The result is that, to the frontier, the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness, that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients, that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends, that restless, nervous energy, that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom — these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier. […] Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them. He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now

entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise. But never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves. […] For a moment, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant. There is not ***tabula rasa****. The stubborn American environment is there with its imperious summons to accept its conditions; the inherited ways of doing things are also there; and yet, in spite of environment, and in spite of custom, each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons, have accompanied the frontier.*

Recollected with reference to the prospects of seasteading and space colonization, and their continuity with a distinctive Anglophone cultural impetus to resolve political tension through dissociation in space (with *Exit* as its key).

August 14, 2016

Quit

Foseti writes:

There's a lot of hand-wringing in these parts of the interwebz

about what reactionaries should do.
I have no idea. I certainly have no grand plans to change the world. I like knowing what's going on around me and I like open discussions – i.e. ones that are not choked to death by political correctness.
However, if I were to suggest a plan, I'd say tell the truth.

His (slightly) more detailed suggestions are also commendable. The Cathedral provokes reaction by mandating fantasy over reality, and there is no doubt much that could be done about that.

There is a sub-question about all this, however, which is scarcely less insistent: What do 'we' really want?

More cybernetics, argues the determinedly non-reactionary Aretae. Of course, *Outside in* agrees. Social and technical feedback machinery is reality's (only?) friend, but what does the Cathedral care about any of that? It's winning a war of religion. Compulsory anti-realism is the reigning spirit of the age.

The only way to get more tight-feedback under current conditions is by splitting, in every sense. That is the overwhelming practical imperative: Flee, break up, withdraw, and evade. Pursue every path of autonomization, fissional federalism, political disintegration, secession, exodus, and concealment. Route around the Cathedral's educational, media, and financial apparatus in each and every way possible. Prep, go Galt, go crypto-digital, expatriate, retreat into the hills, go underground, seastead, build black markets, whatever works, but *get the hell out*.

Truth-telling already presupposes an escape from the empire of neo-puritan dreams. 'We' need to throw open the exit gates, wherever we find them, so the wreck can go under without us. Reaction begins with the proposition that nothing can or should be done to save it. Quit bailing. It's done. The sooner it sinks the better, so that something else can begin.

More than anything we can say, practical exit is the crucial signal. The only pressure that matters comes from that. To find ways out, is to let the *Outside in*.

February 28, 2013

Exit Test

What can Exit do? It looks as if France is going to provide an important demonstration:

France has become a defeatist nation.

A striking indicator of this attitude is the massive emigration that the country has witnessed over the last decade, with nearly 2 million French citizens choosing to leave their country and take their chances in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, the United States and other locales. The last such collective exodus from France came during the French Revolution, when a large part of the aristocracy left to await (futilely) the king's return. Today's migration isn't

politically motivated, however; it's economic.

This departing population consists disproportionately of young people — 70% of the migrants are under 40 — and advanced-degree holders, who do their studies in France but offer their skills elsewhere. The migrants, discouraged by the economy's comparatively low salaries and persistently high unemployment — currently at 10.9% — have only grown in number since Socialist Francois Hollande became president.

The young and enterprising in France soon realize that elsewhere — in London, say — obstacles to success are fewer and opportunities greater. The British capital is now France's sixth-largest city, with 200,000 to 400,000 emigres.

The exile rolls also include hundreds of thousands of French retirees, presumably well-off, who are spending at least part of their golden years in other countries. Tired of France's high cost of living, they seek out more welcoming environments.

My beloved country, in other words, has been losing not only its dynamic and intelligent young people but also older people with some money. I'm not sure that this social model can work over the long term.

It will be extremely interesting to see.

February 24, 2014

Exit notes (#1)

Some notable attempts to dial back the NRx commitment to *exit over voice*, as inherited from Moldbug, have been seen recently. (I think NBS was crucial in advancing this argument, but I couldn't find his post immediately — I'll link to it if someone nudges me helpfully.) It's undoubtedly a central discussion throughout the reactosphere at the moment.

Some preliminary thought-gathering on the topic:

(1) Exit is a scale-free concept. It can be applied rigorously to extreme cases of sociopolitical separation, from secession to extraterrestrial escapes. Yet these radical examples do not define it. It's essence is the commercial relation, which necessarily involves a non-transaction option. Exit means: *Take it or leave it* (but don't haggle). It is thus, at whatever scale of expression, the concrete social implementation of freedom as an operational principle.

(2) As a philosophical stance, Exit is anti-dialectical. That is to say, it is the insistence of an option against argument, especially refusing the idea of *necessary political discussion* (a notion which, if accepted, guarantees progression to the left). *Let's spatialize our disagreement* is an alternative to resolution in time. Conversations can be prisons. No one is owed a hearing.

(3) In regards to cultural cladistics, it can scarcely be denied that Exit has a Protestant lineage. Its theological associations are intense,

and stimulating.

(4) Exit asymmetries have been by far the most decisive generators of spontaneous anti-socialist ideology. The iconic meaning of the Berlin Wall needs no further elucidation. The implicit irony is that *people flee **towards** Exit*, and if this is only possible virtually, it metamorphoses automatically into delegitimation of the inhibitory regime. (Socialism is Exit-suppressive by definition.)

(5) *Exit is an option*, which does not require execution for its effectiveness. The case for Exit is not an argument for flight, but a (non-dialectical) defense of the opportunity for flight. Where Exit most fully flourishes, it is employed the least.

(6) Exit is the alternative to voice. It is defended with extremity in order to mute voice with comparable extremity. To moderate the case for Exit is implicitly to make a case for voice. (Those who cannot exit a deal will predictably demand to haggle over it.)

(7) Exit is the primary Social Darwinian weapon. To blunt it is to welcome entropy to your hearth.

June 24, 2014

Age of Exit

Mark Lutter's forecast for the general landscape of 21st century politics leaves plenty to argue with, from all sides, and even

vociferously, but the basic trend-line he projects is persuasive (at least to this blog):

… the costs of exit are going down. Increased mobility and smaller political units will allow people increasingly to vote with their feet. The old political questions of which ideological empire controls which territory will give way to a choose-your-own-governance meta system. […] Thus, to be successful, political units will have to attract residents—that is, to providing better services at lower cost. Increased competition among smaller political units will spur innovation, leading to new forms of governance. Many will fail. But the successful will be replicated, outcompeting more stagnant forms. Singapore, Dubai, Hong Kong, Switzerland, and Lichtenstein show the beginnings of such success. […] Not all the governments will be libertarian. In fact, most probably will not be. Some will experiment with higher levels of redistribution; others with petty tyrannies, zealous zoning and even social exclusion. However, competition will eliminate unsuccessful models. Ultimately, the meta-rules that are emerging are decidedly libertarian in flavor, as choice will govern the survival of political units.

The left won't like this, for obvious reasons. It is dissolidarity incarnate, with an egalitarian-democratic promise that is minimal, at best. I'm not sure whether the criticism has developed beyond indignant scoffing to calmly-formulated theoretical antagonism yet, but it surely will.

The right's objections are likely to be more diverse. Most pointedly, from the perspective here, there is room for deep skepticism about the harshness of the selection mechanisms Lutter is counting upon. Driving a state into insolvency, and liquidation, is no easy thing. For those, especially, who would be delighted to see effective inter-state Darwinism cropping micro-states for adaptive excellence, cold realism concerning the capabilities of states to forestall such outcomes is essential. If widespread conflict-free high-functionality futures sound too good to be true, they probably are.

April 17, 2015

Exit Pressure

It's impossible to tell anything from this story about the *effectiveness* of exercising an Exit Option. It should be expected, anyway, that the option itself does the work, even if pulling the trigger has to contribute to the general credibility of virtual exodus.

As an exemplary case, however, it would be hard to beat. From the statement by Preston Byrne, of *eris*:

If [the Communications Data Bill] is passed into law, we are likely to see a mass exodus of tech companies and financial services firms alike from the United Kingdom. We are happy to lead the charge. […] In keeping with our promise in January to leave the country if

the Conservatives were returned to power with this policy on their legislative agenda, we have promptly ordered all of our staff to depart from the United Kingdom and to conduct all future development work abroad. […] Additionally, with immediate effect, we have moved our corporate headquarters to New York City, where open-source cryptography is firmly established as protected speech pursuant to the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, until such time as we can be certain that the relevant provisions of the Communications Data Bill will be stricken from it (otherwise, we will reincorporate in America and continue our business here).

(To add a "Go *eris*" at this point could be reasonably criticized for redundancy.)

May 29, 2015

Exit Options

Everyone will notice them when they've gone.

All recent policy decisions by the reigning political-economic structure are intelligible as a *mandatory bubble*. If you didn't think quietly 'sitting it out' was already the exercise of an exit option, the necessary lesson will be increasingly hard to ignore. Refusing to invest everything into this lunacy is ceasing to be a permissible social

posture. We've already reached the stage where merely seeking to preserve a pot of retirement savings has been officially recoded as something close to right-wing guerrilla warfare.

Anybody with anything at all is now in the position where they are faced with an aggressive binary dilemma. *Either* unreserved collaboration with the final phase gamble of the existing order — amounting ultimately to the all-in bet that politics has no ontological limits, so that any dysfunction is soluble in a sufficient exertion of will — *or* a dissident skepticism about this dominant assertion, practically instantiated by ever more desperate attempts at withdrawal (persecuted with ever greater fanaticism as acts of sabotage).

There will be massive confusion among the destitution. Explaining why capital preservation is being persecuted as dissent would provide the scaffolding for a counter-narrative that will certainly, eventually, be needed.

ADDED: The basic point is this, if it is conceded to Keynes that *refusing to invest in industrial production is anti-social*, then, as a matter of realistic political necessity, *any insane evil that the powers-that-be come up with gets defined as 'industrial production'*. Let go of gold — the archaic economic exit option — as we did, and anything at all that we're told to sink all we have into is green-lighted. The stream was crossed without enough people noticing. Now the fascism we chose reaps its consequences. It isn't going to be pretty.

June 6, 2015

Exit Foundations

Having lost count of the number of times the demand for *exit guarantees* has come up as an objection to the Patchworked-Neocameral model, it seems worthwhile to reproduce Moldbug's most directly on-point, pre-emptive response to the question. The question being: *What is to stop a regime, once it is entirely unshackled from all domestic political constraint (i.e. Neocameralized), from extinguishing the exit options of its residents?*

As a prefatory note: Like the Misesian praxeology from which it is cladistically descended, the Moldbuggian System is a *transcendental* political philosophy, which is to say that it deals with ultimate or unsurpassable conditions. You have reached the transcendental when there is no higher tribunal, or court of appeal. This is the socio-cosmic buffers. If you don't like what you're seeing here, there's still no point looking anywhere else, because this is all you're going to get:

To live on a Patchwork patch, you have to sign a bilateral contract with the realm. You promise to be a good boy and behave yourself. The realm promises to treat you fairly. There is an inherent asymmetry in this agreement, because you have no enforcement

mechanism against the realm (just as you have no enforcement mechanism against the United States). However, a realm's compliance with its customer-service agreements is sure to be a matter of rather intense attention among residents and prospective residents. And thus among shareholders as well.

For example, I suspect that every customer-service agreement will include the right to remove oneself and one's assets from the realm, at any time, no questions asked, to any other realm that will accept the emigrant. Possibly with an exception for those involved in the criminal-justice process – but this may not even be needed. Who wants a criminal? Not another realm, surely.

Suppose a realm unilaterally abrogates this right of emigration? It has just converted its residents into what are, in a sense, slaves. It is no longer Disneyland. It is a plantation. If it's any good with cinderblocks, barbed-wire and minefields, there is no escape. What do you say if you're stuck on this farm? You say: "yes, Massa." A slave you are and a slave you will be forever.

This is terrible, of course. But again, the mechanism we rely on to prevent it is no implausible deus ex machina, no Indian rope-trick from the age of Voltaire, but the sound engineering principle of the profit motive. A realm that pulls this kind of crap cannot be trusted by anyone ever again. It is not even safe to visit. Tourism disappears. The potential real-estate bid from immigrants disappears. And, while your residents are indeed stuck, they are also remarkably sullen and

display no great interest in slaving for you. Which is a more valuable patch of real estate, today: South Korea, or North Korea? Yet before the war, the North was more industrialized and the South was more rural. Such are the profits of converting an entire country into a giant Gulag.

Is that all? Yes — that's all. Beyond the rational economic incentives of the Sovereign Corporation, controlled within a Patchwork-environment (of competition for human resources), there is nothing to which an appeal can be made. The end.

June 11, 2015

Geopolitical Arbitrage

Stross:

… things will get ***very*** *ugly in London when the Square Mile and investment banking sector ups and decamps for Frankfurt, leaving the service sector and multiethnic urban poor behind.*

The specifics of this prediction are nutty, if only because mainland Europe is going down the tubes much faster than the UK, but the *abstract anxiety* is spot on. The globalization of the right is entirely about geopolitical arbitrage (while that of the left is about homogenizing global governance). All the critical trends point towards the exacerbation of the 'problem'. The 21st century is the

epoch of fragmentation — unlike anything seen since the early modern period — shifting power to the footloose, and away from megapolitical systems of territorial dominion. *Being left behind* is the rising threat, and we can confidently expect to see it consolidating as the subtext of all leftist grievance. *You can't just leave*. Watch.

The obstacles to geopolitical arbitrage — i.e. spatial Exit pressure — are security constraints. It requires defensible off-shore bases (and Frankfurt most certainly isn't going to provide one). Eyes need to be fixed firmly on secessionary dynamics (fragmentation), techno-commercial decentralization of hard security, crypto-anonymization, artificial intelligence, and the emergence of capital outposts in the Western Pacific region. More exotic factors include opportunities for radical exodus (undersea, Antarctic, and off-planet), facilitated by *territorial production* (artificial islands). The machinery of capture needs to keep *all* of these escape routes firmly suppressed in order to perpetuate itself. That simply isn't going to happen.

Capital is learning faster than its adversaries, and has done so since it initially became self-propelling, roughly half a millennium ago. It's allergic to socialism (obviously), and tends to flee places where socialist influence is substantially greater than zero. Unless caged definitively, eventually it breaks out. Over the next few decades — despite ever deeper encryption — it should become unmistakable which way that's going.

January 18, 2016

Flea Politics

One time-tested way to shed parasites is to take a dip:

Foxes will actually take a stick when they have fleas and get into the water slowly. They let the water raise up to their necks and hold the stick up in the air. As the water goes higher up their face, the fleas will climb higher. Eventually the fox will just have it's nose out of the water while holding the stick. The fleas will climb up the stick and the fox will sink under the water and let the flea infested stick float down the river to the flea's watery grave.

As Balaji Srinivasan remarked (on Ultimate Exit): "… but the best part is this: the people who think this is weird, the people who sneer at the frontier, who hate technology — they won't follow you out there."

Did you really think it was going to be that easy?

Space de-colonization is already preparing to queer-up the escape trajectory:

As venture capitalist space entrepreneurs and aerospace contractors compete to profit from space exploration, we're running up against increasingly conflicting visions for human futures in outer space. Narratives of military tactical dominance alongside

"NewSpace" ventures like asteroid mining projects call for the defense, privatization, and commodification of space and other worlds, framing space as a resource-rich "frontier" to be "settled" in what amounts to a new era of colonization … […] we have to stake a claim in the territory of space programs now. We need to add our voices, perspectives, plans, our ***cares****. There isn't time to wait. We can't sit back and say: Space isn't urgently important, we should be looking at problems here on Earth. First of all, much of space science is looking at and working on problems here on Earth (from conflict, migration, and drought to climate change, deforestation, and more). Secondly, SpaceX, Boeing, and others are preparing new craft and taking humans into space* ***now*** *—and human technology is leaving the solar system. Perhaps it's not happening on the timeline you would prefer, but it's already happening and has been for decades, and they're* ***pretty much*** *doing it without us … So what's next? We—all us queer, trans, disabled, black, native, etc. folk and more—we need to fight back, take back, de-colonize and re-imagine our futures in outer space, we need to* ***pop up where they least expect us****.* (Emphasis in original.)

Leaving those 'cares' behind is going to take a colder exit.

ADDED: From VXXC on twitter — "In space no one can hear you whine."

January 29, 2016

Sentences (#55)

Collapse traps people:

You have to know when to leave.

Most don't, and won't, of course.

(Treat this as a promissory note on an installment of provocative skepticism viz the 'eventually its necessary to stand and fight, or even take things back' proposition that haunts NRx like a chain-rattling ghost, now more than ever, in the shadow of the impending Trumpenreich. Zombie-fighting-types can assume that the tacit XS stance ("flee you fools") is at least as infuriating as they would expect it to be.)

May 24, 2016

Ultimate Exit NY

Some chatter on various web channels about this event, which should be a great opportunity for exploring. To be clear about my participation (which has been open to confusion) — it consists of an intervention out of Cyberspace. (No chance of drinking dates in NY just yet, unfortunately.)

This is a nonlinear point, from my perspective, since the rapid development of telepresence is of obvious internal consequence to

the recent intensification of Exit-oriented and neo-secessionist discussion. (Balaji S. Srinivasan brought this out very clearly in his October 2013 talk on the subject, from which this event takes its title.) Exit in depth — i.e. into the crypto-thickened 'Net — is at the very least an important complement to more traditional notions of territorial flight. It also sustains a better purchase on the commercial principle which provides Exit with its fundamentalal model, and which can easily get lost among secessionist excitement and visions of technologically re-sculpted geographical space.

Some background to the event (and hints of choppy waters). Argument is, of course, the other side of the nonlinearity (a micro-enactment of the inclusive Democratic ideal), so it will be interesting to see whether on this occasion the controversy can remain productive in its own terms, rather than 'merely' stacking up the incentives to get Out.

December 6, 2014

Into the Dark

As the Occident subsides into an ocean of shadow, the FBI is noticing:

"We're seeing more and more cases where we believe significant evidence resides on a phone or a laptop, but we can't crack the

password," FBI Director Jim Comey said during a speech in Washington. "If this becomes the norm … justice may be denied." […] Specifically, Comey said he is "deeply concerned" about what's known as "going dark" — operating systems being developed by companies such as Apple and Google that automatically encrypt information on their devices. And that means even the companies themselves won't be able to unlock phones, laptops and other devices so law enforcement can access emails, photos or other evidence that could be crucial to a case …

Comey, however, didn't place full blame with companies like Apple and Google for creating devices with such encryption. They were "responding to what they perceive is a market demand" from the general public, which has grown "mistrustful of government" in the wake of Edward Snowden's disclosures of secret government surveillance. […] Encryption "is a marketing pitch," Comey said. "But it will have very serious consequences for law enforcement and national security agencies at all levels. Sophisticated criminals will come to count on these means of evading detection. It's the equivalent of a closet that can't be opened. A safe that can't be cracked. And my question is, at what cost?"

A process of Exit-in-place is underway, automatically, and it's not easy to imagine how it could be stopped. With message management disintegrating on one side, and the public sphere eroding into dark nets on the other, it must seem to the State in the age of Internet

runaway that the walls are closing in.

October 24, 2014

Buy Out

This (via Mangan) is such naked precious metals propaganda — and yet it's so right.

… markets are behaving exactly as one would expect at the end of a major economic era. That is, markets are totally divorced from the reality of what is going on both economically and geopolitically. Markets are now in a manic phase, driven by false hope and momentum. […] It clearly helps that many economic figures are manipulated and therefore totally inaccurate. If we add to this the most massive money creation in history, we can be certain that these are not normal times. […] We are experiencing the beginning of a hyperinflationary period, with hyperinflation, so far, being noticed only in financial markets, property markets, and other key assets such as art and classic cars. […] And currencies will continue their decline to zero. Continued money printing will guarantee this. And we have to remember that the major currencies don't have far to go since they are down between 97 and 99 percent in the last hundred years. As currencies start the next major phase of decline we will experience hyperinflation in all parts of the economy. This

hyperinflation will be happening in most major countries. …

It's not just that the analysis is solidly grounded in an obdurate realism (this is the raw economics of Gnon), it's also that:
(a) Gold is the traditional medium of economic-regime exit, and therefore
(b) This discourse is immediately anti-politics (or resistance).
It says: *Get out!* That's not a message to be easily decrypted for representational content, because it's a war cry.

How does a hyperinflationary collapse begin? With a flight to gold. *There's going to be hyperinflation — flee to gold*. It's a circuit. The Cathedral's economic authorities are entirely justified in considering such messaging aggressive (even 'terroristic'), in the specific mode of a self-fulfilling prophecy. If people listened, they'd bring everything crashing down.

It's no less crucial to understand that, by inversion, the voice of central monetary authority is equally incapable of isolating the communication of objective information from the continuous flow of psychological operations. When the state monetary apparatus speaks, it exercises effective power. It commands. The sole value of fiat currency lies in a popular habit of obedience, which the state money power systematically sustains. There is no other usage of macro-economic signs.

'Buy gold' is a counter-revolutionary instruction to participate in the destruction of the state money system.

(… and now we have Bitcoin too.)

August 22, 2014

CHAPTER TWO - WHAT IS GOING ON?

Go Scotland!

Tribal politics excites the autobiographical impulse, which I'll pander to for just a moment (without pretending to any particular excitement). My immediate ancestry is a quarter Scottish, and — here's the thing — those grandparents were Wallaces. Seriously, they were these guys:



… but it's my remaining three-quarters of mongrelized Brit that is leading this post to its destination. In particular, the 37.5% of English blood coursing through my veins is the part murmuring most enthusiastically for Scotland to vote 'Yes!' to departure this week.

Scotland is hugely over-represented in the UK Parliament, shifting the country's politics substantially to the Left. While Scottish

exit wouldn't necessarily ensure a permanent conservative government — electoral democracy simply doesn't work like that — it's hard to argue that the result could be anything other than an ideological rebound of sorts, with the rump UK's entire political spectrum shunting right. Since such an outcome would almost certainly prolong the viability of liberal democracy, perhaps even worldwide (due to contagion effects), it would be unseemly for any neoreactionary to get adrenalized about it. England would nevertheless undergo a minor restoration, conceivably broadening the political imagination in a modestly positive way.

Every increment of dynamic Anglo capitalism adds resources that will eventually be of great use — especially now, with public ledger crypto-commerce coming online. It is a grave error to become so fixated upon the death of the demotic power structure that positive techno-commercial advances are simply written off, or worse, derided as life-support apparatus for the enemy. Even a minor Anglo-capitalist revitalization would produce *some* deep value (as early, or creative destruction-phase Thatcherism did, amid its manifold failures).



Far more significantly, Scottish secession would mark a turning of the tide, with great exemplary potential. Beginning its new life as a hotbed of socialist lunacy, an independent Scotland would be forced — very rapidly — to grow up, which of course means moving sharply to the right. The more theatrical the transitional social crisis, the more thoroughly leftism-in-power would be humiliated. As everyone now knows, such lessons in the essentially incompetent nature of leftist social administration never have any more than a limited effect, since humans are congenitally stupid creatures who find profound learning next-to-impossible. Despite this, they are the only remotely effective lessons history offers. However pitiful mankind's political-economic education may be, it is owed entirely to the

disaster spectacle of leftism in power. A fresh lesson — the more brutally calamitous the better — should always be welcomed unambiguously. If wild-eyed socialists were to drive Scotland over a cliff, they would be presenting a precious gift to the world thereby. (Sadly, in the opinion of this blog, the probability of such an eventuality is relatively low — Scottish canniness can be expected to re-assert itself with remarkable speed once the Sassenach dupes are no longer subsidizing its disappearance.)

The secession of Scotland, from the perspective of the rump UK, is already a (relative) purge of leftist entropy. With the return of an independent Scotland to minimally-functional, and thus moderately right-corrected government, this purge becomes absolute. A quantum of leftist insanity will have been extinguished, since its condition of existence was a relation of political dependency. No one resorts to beggary when abandoned, solitary, upon a desert island. Compulsory self-reliance mandates adjustment to the right (whether preceded by collapse or not).

An independent Scotland would work, most probably quite quickly. It then lights a beacon of disintegration, first across the Anglosphere, and subsequently more widely. The time of fragmentation will have come. The present world epoch of democracy will then have arrived at its final stage — promoting the break-up of the states it has built (and with them, eventually, itself). Scotland could light the touch-paper. It would save everybody some

time if it did.

ADDED: What's the point of independence?

ADDED: *As Bremmer explained, Scottish independence would "tilt the entire U.K. political spectrum to the right." That would boost the odds of a conservative majority winning in 2015. […] … "If Scotland votes 'yes,' down the road would come the ultimate irony," Bremmer said. "The U.K. would be more likely to pull out of the E.U., while Scotland clamors to get in."*

September 8, 2014

Last Days of the UK?

Probably not, but the chance isn't negligible. There's a poll tracker for the final phase here. This historical overview of independence plebiscites is encouraging.

My favorite article on the topic so far is too odd too easily classify. Quality hedginess from Sailer, and (ratcheting down a few notches) David Miles at the *Huffington Post*.

Reason does the right thing. Steve Forbes makes an even stronger case for a break, while trying to do the opposite. Here's some deeply retarded propaganda, that happens to be pointing in the right direction. Round-up coverage from *The Scotsman*.

As should be expected, various flavors of hostility and

condescension to secession from the (smug–through-to-foaming) Left. (We splittists will take whatever we can get.) Paul Krugman, who has never been right about anything, is against independence, which should settle the question conclusively.

XS has already run up the saltire (or something).

George Friedman isn't thrilled about the modern nation state passing through the gates of disintegration, but he's probably right in suggesting that's the ultimate issue at stake: "I think that however the vote goes, unless the nationalists are surprised by an overwhelming defeat, the genie is out of the bottle, and not merely in Britain. The referendum will re-legitimize questions that have caused much strife throughout the European continent for centuries, including the 31-year war of the 20th century that left 80 million dead."

ADDED: The Bitcoin connection. (+ here.)

ADDED: The two Scotlands.

ADDED: "Under the SNP, the expression 'no true Scotsman' may change its meaning from a logical fallacy into a real question of identity."

ADDED: *Occidental Dissent* links an excellent RT video.

ADDED: "A friendly separation is possible, though — and in the longer term, for the best. My guess is that Scotland will, after all, vote against independence tomorrow, cowed by the risks and uncertainties and by the sudden force of international opinion telling

them to think again. If so, it will be a shame. A Scotland that stays in the union reluctantly will be of little use to itself or anybody else. Alongside childish simplicity on fiscal and monetary policy, peevish resentment of the English has been a persistent aspect of the independence campaign. The cure for both is to grow up and move on."

ADDED: Scotland carries the flag of global secession.

September 17, 2014

Dependency Culture …

… proves yet again that it's a reliable vote winner.



What the f…

September 19, 2014

Crack up

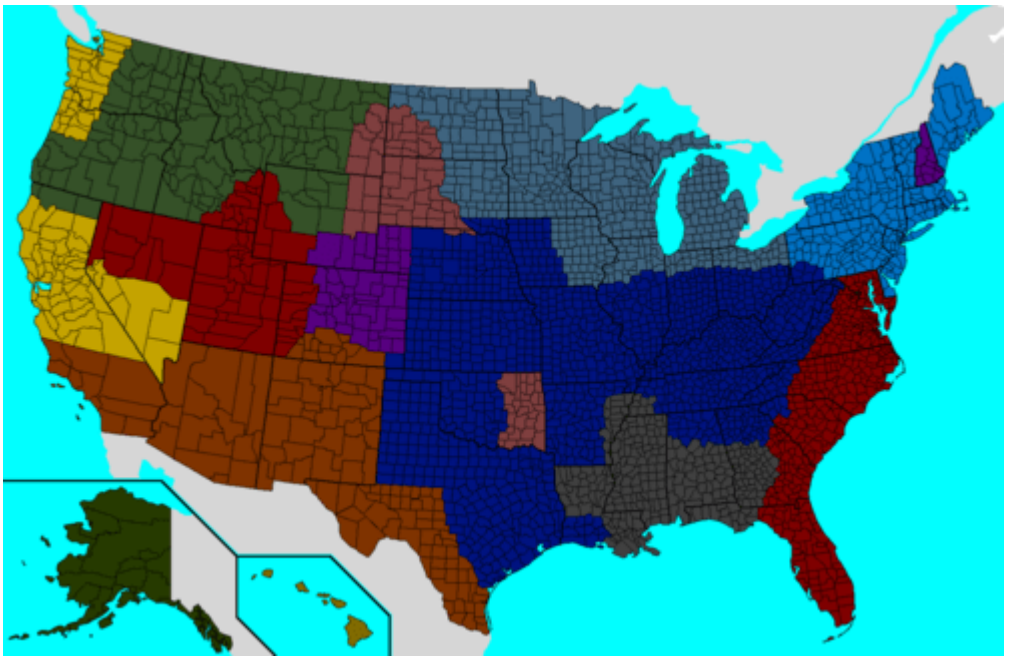
"Why oh why don't those damned crackers just leave?"

If we're already entering the ejection phase of neo-secessionism, it has to be a good thing, right?

December 9, 2014

Pan-Secessionism

Here's the All Nations Party vision of the American future:



Some background, and a discussion with Keith Preston on the topic.

The party-political strategy is clearly questionable, but it deserves more engagement than I've noticed in NRx circles. A path to Patchwork has to be something — and this is something.

(AnarchoAbsurdist is all over this at the moment, for e.g. linking to another ANP video.)

ADDED: A vehement critique of Preston from the far left that is well worth a read.

September 7, 2015

Brexit



Making the case for Brexit water-tight:

If the English vote to leave the EU, the Scots will vote to leave the UK. There will then be no Britain. Meanwhile, the shock of Brexit to a continent already staggering under many crises could spell the beginning of the end of the European Union.

ADDED: It's a trend.

February 22, 2016

Brexit Open Thread



For discussion of UK independence, UK fragmentation, EU

disintegration, Pan-secessionism, and catabolic geopolitics in general.

Here's Geert Wilders widening the conversation.

(Content coming later, probably in a subsequent post.)

ADDED: There's a *lot* of gravy. One little drip. Bye: "Prime Minister David Cameron, who had led the campaign to keep Britain in the EU, said he would resign by October and left it to his successor to decide when to invoke Article 50, which triggers a departure from European Union."

ADDED:

> A very clear indication of the cultural divide in the country, from Lord Ashcroft's poll. pic.twitter.com/cuNxeVMpzD
>
> — Jamie Bartlett (@JamieJBartlett) June 24, 2016

It just keeps getting better:

> This is absolutely the predictable outcome of #brexit https://t.co/S2m7X5ZmiG & this trend will accelerate to a federation of global cities
>
> — mikeeisenberg (@mikeeisenberg) June 24, 2016

ADDED: Open thread over at Briggs' place. ("Britain Free. France, Texas Next?")

June 24, 2016

Bluexit

Simply, yes:

Don't organize. Pack. […] Not literally, of course. Not even the good people of Canada should have to stomach a mass migration of moping American liberals mumbling, "Live locally … make art." What I mean is that it's time for blue states and cities to effectively abandon the American national enterprise, as it is currently constituted. Call it the New Federalism. Or Virtual Secession. Or Conscious Uncoupling — though that's already been used. Or maybe Bluexit.

March 9, 2017

CHAPTER THREE - IDENTITY, INDIVIDUALISM AND INDEPENDENCE

Identity Hunger

Handle has an excellent post up on this, referencing Nydwracu, who has made a momentous project out of it. It's huge, and old, and quite impossible to summarize persuasively. It's also impossible to avoid, especially for the Outer Right.

Steve Sailer told a joke that I'm going to mangle. A monstrous alien invasion assails the earth, and people have to decide how to respond. The conservatives say, "What's there to think about? We have to get together to defeat this thing." Liberals respond: "Wait! They probably have good reasons to hate us. It must be something we've done. Until we work out what that is, we should prostrate ourselves before their grievances." Finally the libertarians pipe up: "Do they believe in free markets?"

An obvious quibble arises with the libertarian punch-line: *if only*. Libertarians have predominantly demonstrated an enthusiasm for alien invasion that is totally detached from any market-oriented

qualification. As their argument goes — *the alien invasion is the free market*. (We'll need to return to this, indirectly.)

The appetite for identity seems to be hard-wired in the approximate manner of language, or religion. You have to have one (or several) but instinct doesn't provide it ready made. That's why identity corresponds to a hunger. It's something people need, instinctively, with an intensity that is difficult to exaggerate. Symbolically-satiable needs are political rocket fuel.

Providing an expedient plug for the aching identity socket is as close to politics-in-a-nutshell as anything is going to get. At the core of every ideology is a determination of the model identity — sect, class, race, gender, sexual-orientation … — and mass implementation of this 'consciousness' is already consummate triumph. After psychological latching onto the relevant 'thede' takes place, nothing except tactics remains.

Reaction seeks to defend the dying thedes among its *own people* — which is already a suggestive repetition. Neoreaction goes meta, in a world in which the proscription of certain thedes almost wholly defines concerted enemy action. For one reasonable construction of the reactionary mainstream (*ahem*), this is already to have arrived at a natural stopping point. *We want our thedes back*. Despite the evident obstacles, or obstacle (the Cathedral) in its path, this approach plays into the grain of human nature, and thus tends — understandably — to scare those it wants to scare. If it begins to

work, it will face a serious fight.

Outside in, whose mission is awkwardness, is determined to complicate things. Even the most resolute thedens will probably welcome the first appendix, which draws attention to the peculiar introduction of truly morbid *punitive identifications*. There's no reason to think this is new — Nietzsche denounced Christianity for doing it — but it rises to unmistakable prominence during the decadence of modernity. Primary identifications, for select — targeted — groups, cease to be positive thedes, except insofar as these have become radically negativized. What 'one' is, primarily, if not shielded by credible victimage, is some postmodern variant of the *sinner* (racist, cisgendered, oppressor). Such is the hunger for identity, that even these toxic formations of imposed psychic auto-destruction are *embraced*, creating a species of cringing guilt-consumed sacrificial animals, penned within the contours of 'our' old thedes. Redemption is promised to those who most fully resign themselves to their own identitarian toxicity, who thus attain a perverse superiority over those insufficiently convinced of the need for salvation through self-abolition. "We really, *really* deserve to die" beats out a weak "We really deserve to die," and anybody who still thinks that it's OK to live is simply *lost*. (Only *sinners* are included in this arms-race, and the Cathedral tells us clearly who they are.)

An additional complication will be far less digestible, which is precisely why I would like to align it with the *Outer Right*. Perhaps

escaping this structure of captivity cannot possibly take a reverse path, and a heading into dis-identifications, artificial identities, and identitarian short-circuits is 'our' real destiny. The identity-envy of the right — however deeply-rooted in an indisputable history of relentless Cathedralist aggression — cannot ever be anything but a weakness, given what we know about the political gradient of modern time. The fact it knows we want to be something, and *what it is we want to be*, is the alpha and omega of the Cathedral's political competence. It knows what its enemies would be, if they could be what they want to be. It does not take a deep immersion in Sunzi to realize the strategic hopelessness of that situation.

I want the Cathedral to be obliterated by monsters, which it does not recognize, understand, or possess antibodies against. There is an idiosyncratic element to that, admittedly. I identify far more with the East India Company that the United Kingdom, with the hybrid Singlosphere than the British people, with clubs and cults than nations and creeds, with Yog Sothoth than my ancestral religion, and with Pythia than the Human Security System. I think true cosmopolitans — such as the adventurers of late 19th century Shanghai (both English and Chinese) — are superior to the populist rabble from which nationalism draws its recruits. That's just me.

What isn't just me, is what the Cathedral knows how to beat. That, I strongly suspect, at least in the large majority of cases, is you.

September 25, 2013

Capitalism vs the Bourgeoisie

John Gray makes some telling observations about the debilitating practical paradoxes of the late-20th century right.

Summing up Thatcher's outlook, [Charles] *Moore writes of her "unusual mindset, which was both conservative and revolutionary." It is a shrewd observation, but Thatcher's reactionary nostalgia and revolutionary dynamism had something in common: the sturdy individualism to which she looked back was as much a fantasy as the renewed bourgeois life she projected into the future.*

Once 'sturdy individualism' is dismissed as a fantasy, a horror story of some kind is the only imaginable outcome. If people are really too pathetic to take responsibility for their lives, what else could we possibly expect?

It has surely to be granted that anybody useless enough to be inadequate to the basics of their own survival, is scarcely going to exhibit the altruistic surplus value required to effectively take care of anybody else. Maybe God will make good the deficit, or — to plunge fully into feel-good superstition — 'society'? The ultimate implication of Gray's argument is that humans aren't fit to live. (Which isn't to say

that he's wrong.)

The future belongs to frontier people. If no significant fraction of the human species is any longer capable of being that, then it's time for an evolutionary search for something that is. Don't expect it to be pretty.

August 24, 2013

INTJ

Everybody seems to be mad for this stuff, understandably. The craving to be told what you are will never die, until you do. (That's why it's called me-me-memetics.)



As for the wretched cases who can't quite claw their way into the INTJ master-race, there are numerous consolation positions

available among the NPCs.

Here's the obvious role model (but only because you begged):



Still my favorite:



February 6, 2015

Corrosive Individualism?

Everyone's seen this argument a million times: "So what's the problem with libertarianism? The problem is that if you put two groups one against another, the one who is best able to work together will overcome the group of individualists."

An example would be nice. Here are the major modern wars of necessity (or existential conflicts) the Anglosphere has been involved in ('win' here meaning 'came out on the winning side' — conniving to get others to do most of the dying is an Anglo-tradition in itself):

English Civil War (1642-1651) — Protestant individualists win.
War of the Spanish Succession (17012-1714) — Protestant individualists win.
Seven Years War (1756-1763) — Protestant individualists win.
American War of Independence (1775-1783) — Protestant individualists win.
Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) — Protestant individualists win.
American Civil War (1861-1865) — Protestant individualists win.
First World War (1914-1918) — Anglophone individualists win.
Second World War (1939-1945) — Anglophone individualists win.
Cold War (1947-1989) — Anglophone individualists win.

Have I missed any big ones? I'm simply not seeing the "history is the graveyard of failed individualist societies" picture that seems to be consolidating itself as a central alt-right myth.

This isn't a moral thing. I get (without great sympathy) the "organically cohesive societies *should* win" mantra. If there's any evidence at all that it's a judgment endorsed by Gnon, feel free to bring the relevant **facts** to the comment thread.

ADDED: "It's complicated." — You're saying that now?

November 5, 2015

The Atomization Trap

"Hands up everyone who hates atomization." That isn't a call for surrender (at least overtly), but merely an informal poll.

Now try it differently:

"Hands up everyone who hates atomization, but this time *without looking around*." Was the decision-process – perhaps ironically – a little slower this time? It's worth thinking about that. Taking a shortcut that bypasses the social process might be expected to speed things up. Yet on the other hand – introducing the delay – comes the hazy recognition: If you make the call privately, you're already complicit. A minor formal re-organization of the question transforms it insidiously. *What do you think of atomization, speaking atomistically?* It becomes a strange, or self-referential loop. Modern history has been like that.

First, though, a few terminological preliminaries. An 'atom' is

etymologically indistinct from an 'individual.' At the root, the words are almost perfectly interchangeable. Neither, relative to the other, carries any special semantic charge. So if 'atomization' sounds like a metaphor, it really isn't. There's nothing essentially derivative about the word's sociological application. If it appears to be a borrowing from physics, that might be due to any number of confusions, but not to a displacement from an original or natural terrain. Atoms and societies belong together primordially, though in tension. That's what being a social animal – rather than a fully 'eusocial' one (like an ant, or a mole-rat) – already indicates.

Individuals are hard to find. Nowhere are they simply and reliably *given*, least of all to themselves. They require historical work, and ultimately fabrication, even to float them as functional approximations. A process is involved. That's why the word 'atomization' is less prone to dupery than 'atom' itself is. Individuality is nothing outside a destiny (but this is to get ahead of ourselves).

It's difficult to know where to begin. (Did Athens sentence Socrates to death for being a social atomizer?) Individualism is stereotypically WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic), and so tends to lead into the labyrinth of comparative ethnography. It has been unevenly distributed, in roughly the same way that modernity has been. Since this is already to say almost everything on the topic, it merits some dismantling.

The work of Walter Russell Mead provides a useful relay station.

The historical questions he has engaged – which concern nothing less than *the outcome of the world* – have been embedded within an intellectual framework shaped by special attention to modern providential Christianity. What has been the source of the 'manifest destiny' which has placed the keys to global mastery in the hands of a progressively distilled social project, Protestant, then Puritan, then Yankee? If not exactly or straightforwardly 'God' (he is too subtle for that), it is at least something that the lineage of Reform Christianity has tapped with unique effectiveness. Protestantism sealed a pact with historical destiny – to all appearances defining a specifically modern global teleology – by consistently winning. Individualization of conscience – *atomization* – was made fate.

Six years after *Special Providence* (2001) came *God and Gold*, which reinforced the Anglo-American and capitalistic threads of the narrative. The boundaries between socio-economic and religious history were strategically melted, in a way pioneered by Max Weber, Werner Sombart, and – more critically – by numerous Catholic thinkers who have identified, and continue to identify, the essence of modernity as a hostile religious power. Eugene Michael Jones is Walter Russell Mead on the other side of the mirror. The story each is telling transforms without significant distortion into that of the other, once chilled below the threshold of moral agitation. Whatever it was that happened to Western Christianity in the Renaissance unleashed capitalism upon the world.

It is possible to be still cruder without sacrificing much reality. When considered as rigid designations, Atomization, Protestantism, Capitalism, and Modernity name exactly the same thing. In the domain of public policy (and beyond it), *privatization* addresses the same directory.

While any particular variant of implicit or explicit Protestantism has its distinctive theological (or atheological) features, just as any stage of capitalistic industrialization has its concrete characteristics, these serve as distractions more than as hand-holds in the big picture. The only truly big picture is *splitting*. The Reformation was not only a break, but still more importantly a normalization of breaking, an initially informal, but increasingly rigorized, protocol for social disintegration. The ultimate solution it offered in regard to all social questions was not argumentation, but exit. Chronic fission was installed as the core of historical process. Fundamentally, that is what atomization means.

Protestantism – *Real Abstract Protestantism* – which is ever more likely to identify itself as post-Christian, post-theistic, and post-Everything Else, is a self-propelling machine for incomprehensibly prolonged social disintegration, *and everyone knows it*. Atomization has become an autonomous, inhuman agency, or at least, something ever more autonomous, and ever more inhuman. It can only liquidate everything you've ever cared about, by its very nature, so – of course – no one likes it. Catholicism, socialism,

and nationalism have sought, in succession, coalition, or mutual competition, to rally the shards of violated community against it. The long string of defeat that ensued has been a rich source of cultural and political mythology. Because there is really no choice but to resist, battle has always been rejoined, but without any serious sign of any reversal of fortune.

Under current conditions, atomization serves – uniquely – as an inexhaustible tube of reactionary glue. Profound aversion to the process is the sole common denominator of our contemporary cultural opposition, stretching from traditionalist Catholicism to alt-right ethno-nationalism. "Whatever our preferred glue, can't we at least agree that things have become unglued – and are ever less glued?" That seems very far from an unreasonable aspiration. After all, if coalition building is the goal, what – imaginably – could provide a better rallying point than the very principle of social integrity, even if this is invoked purely, and negatively, by way of an anathematization directed at its fatal historic foe? Atomization, in this regard, brings people together, at least conversationally, though this works best when the conversation doesn't get very deep.

Scarcely anybody wants to be atomized (they say). Perhaps they read Michel Houellebecq's 1998 novel *Atomised* (or *Elementary Particles*), and nod along to it. How could one not? If that's where it ended, it would be hard to see the problem, or how there ever came to be a problem, but it doesn't end there, or anywhere close,

because atomization makes a mockery of words. Atomization was never good at parties, unsurprisingly. It's unpopular to the point of essence. There's the Puritan thing, and the Ayn Rand thing, and the nerd thing, and the trigger for Asperger's jokes – if that's actually a separate thing – and no doubt innumerable further social disabilities, each alone disqualifying, if receiving a 'like' in some collective medium is the goal, because nobody likes it, as we've heard (for half a millennium already). But what we've heard, and what we've seen, have been two very different things.

Atomization never tried to sell itself. Instead, it came free, with everything else that was sold. It was the formal implication of dissent, first of all, of methodical skepticism, or critical inquiry, which presupposed a bracketing of authority that proved irreversible, and then – equally implicit originally – the frame of the contractual relation, and every subsequent innovation in the realm of the private deal (there would be many, and we have scarcely started). "So what do *you* think (or want)?" That was quite enough. No articulate enthusiasm for atomization was ever necessary. The sorcery of revealed preference has done all the work, and there, too, we have scarcely started.

Atomization may have few friends, but it has no shortage of formidable allies. Even when people are readily persuaded that atomization is undesirable, they ultimately want to decide for themselves, and the more so as they think that it matters. Insofar

as atomization has become a *true horror*, it compels an intimate cognitive and moral relation with itself. No one who glimpses what it is can delegate relevant conclusions to any higher authority. Thus it wins. Every Catholic of intellectual seriousness has seen this, for centuries. Socialists have too, for decades. The moment of ethno-nationalist revelation cannot long be delayed. Under modern conditions, every authoritative moral community is held hostage to private decision, even when it is apparently affirmed, and especially when such affirmation is most vehemently asserted. (The most excitable elements within the world of Islam see this arriving, and are conspicuously unhappy about the fact.)

Substantially, if only notionally, freedom of conscience might tend to collectivity, but formally it locks-in individualism ever more tightly. It defies the authority of community at the very moment it offers explicit endorsement, by making community an urgent matter of private decision, and – at the very peak of its purported sacredness – of *shopping*. Religious traditionalists see themselves mirrored in whole-food markets, and are appalled, when not darkly amused. "Birkenstock Conservatives" was Rod Dreher's grimly ironic self-identification. Anti-consumerism becomes a consumer preference, the public cause a private enthusiasm. Intensification of collectivist sentiment only tightens the monkey-trap. It gets worse.

American history – at the global frontier of atomization – is thickly speckled with *elective communities*. From the Puritan

religious communities of the early colonial period, through to the 'hippy' communes of the previous century, and beyond, experiments in communal living under the auspices of radicalized private conscience have sought to ameliorate atomization in the way most consistent with its historical destiny. Such experiments reliably fail, which helps to crank the process forward, but that is not the main thing. What matters most about all of these co-ops, communes, and cults is the semi-formal contractual *option* that frames them. From the moment of their initiation – or even their conception – they confirm a sovereign atomization, and its reconstruction of the social world on the model of a menu. Dreher's much-discussed 'Benedict Option' is no exception to this. There is no withdrawal from the course of modernity, 'back' into community, that does not reinforce the pattern of dissent, schism, and exit from which atomization continually replenishes its momentum. As private conscience directs itself towards escape from the privatization of conscience, it regenerates that which it flees, ever more deeply within itself. Individuation, considered impersonally, likes it when you run.

As is well understood, 'atoms' are not atoms, and 'elements' are not elements. Elementary particles – if they exist at all – are at least two (deep) levels further down. Human individuals are certainly no less decomposable. Marvin Minsky's 'society of mind' is but one vivid indication of how historical sociology might tilt into the sub-atomic realm. Particle accelerators demonstrate that shattering entities

down to the smallest attainable pieces is a technological problem. The same holds in the social realm, though naturally with very different technologies.

To dismiss individuals as metaphysical figments, therefore, would be the most futile of diversions. Atomization has no constraining metaphysics, whether in particle physics or in the dynamic anthropological, socio-historical process. If it promises at times to tell you what you really are, such whispers will eventually cease, or come to deride themselves, or simply be forgotten. Protestantism, it has to be remembered, is only masked, momentarily, as a religion. What it is underneath, and enduringly, is a way of breaking things.

After so much has already been torn apart, with so many monstrosities spawned, it is no doubt exhausting to be told that while almost everything remains to be built, no less still waits to be broken. Atomization has already gone too far, we are incessantly told. If so, the future will be hard. There can be no realistic doubt that it will be extremely divided. The dynamo driving things tends irresistibly in that direction. Try to split, and it whirls faster.

"Hands up everyone who hates atomization." No, that isn't a question anymore. It would be a call for surrender, if surrender mattered, but it doesn't, as we've seen. Keep on fighting it, by all means. It likes that.

June 6, 2017

Against Universalism

There's a philosophical objection to any refusal of universalism that will be familiar from other uses (the denunciation of relativism, most typically). It requires only one step: *Isn't the denial of the universal itself a universalist claim?* It's a piece of malignant dialectics because it demands that we agree. We don't, and won't ever, agree. Agreement is the worst thing that could happen. Merely assent to its necessity, and global communism, or some close analog, is the implicit conclusion.

If there is a universal truth, it belongs only to Gnon, and Gnon is a dark (occulted) God. Traditional theists will be at least strongly inclined to disagree — *and that is excellent*. We disagree already, and we have scarcely begun.

There is no 'good life for man' (in general) — or if there is we know nothing of it, or not enough. Even those persuaded that they do, on the contrary, know what such a life should be, promote its universality only at the expense of being denied the opportunity to pursue it. If we need to agree on the broad contours of such a model for human existence, then reaching agreement will precede it — and 'reaching agreement' is politics. Some much wider world acquires a veto over the way of life you select, or accept, or inherit (the details need not detain us). We have seen how that works. Global communism is the inevitable destination.

The alternative to agreement is schism. Secession, geopolitical disintegration, fragmentation, splitting — disagreement escapes dialectics and separates in space. Anti-universalism, concretely, is not a philosophical position but an effectively defensible assertion of diversity. From the perspective of the universal (which belongs only to Gnon, and never to man), it is an experiment. The degree to which it believes in itself is of no concern that matters to anything beyond itself. It is not answerable to anything but Gnon. What anyone, anywhere, thinks about it counts for nothing. If it fails, it dies, *which should mean nothing to you*. If you are compelled to care about someone else's experiment, then a schism is missing. Of course, you are free to tell it that you think it will fail, if it is listening, but there is absolutely no need to reach agreement on the question. This is what, in the end, non-communism means.

Non-universalism is hygiene. It is practical avoidance of other people's stupid shit. There is no higher principle in political philosophy. Every attempt to install an alternative, and impose a universal, reverts to dialectics, communization, global evangelism, and totalitarian politics.

This is being said here now, because NRx is horribly bad at it, and degenerates into a clash of universalisms, as into an instinctive equilibrium. There are even those who confidently propose an 'NRx solution' for the world. Nothing could be more absurd. The world — as a whole — is an entropy bin. The most profoundly degraded

communism is its only possible 'universal consensus'. (Everyone knows this, when they permit themselves to think.)

All order is local — which is to say *the negation of the universal*. That is merely to re-state the second law of thermodynamics, which 'we' generally profess to accept. The only thing that could ever be universally and equally distributed is noise.

Kill the universalism in your soul and you are immediately (objectively) a neoreactionary. Protect it, and you are an obstacle to the escape of differences. That is communism — whether you recognize it, or not.

March 18, 2016

Against Universalism II

Preliminary throat-clearing (as in part one): In its most rigorous construction, 'universalism' is robust under conditions of rational argument (i.e. evidence-based logico-mathematical criticism). Mathematical theorems, in particular [sic], are universal truths. Any assertions that can be constructed to a comparable level of formal rigor (and ultimately *mechanization*) can lay claim to the same status. However, with the slightest departure from this — rigidly algorithmic — criterion, controversy rapidly begins. This is not the place and time to argue the case for transcendental philosophy (within which

praxeology in included), but such a case could be made. Ditto strictly proceduralized empirical science. All of this is a digression.

The question of universalism as it concerns us here is not a matter of meta-mathematics, epistemology, or the philosophy of science. It is rather directed at *the political scope of argument*. Is it mandatory to demand that argument, according to the highest principles of (logical) cognitive compulsion, be imposed globally? Does the quality of argument — however exalted — require its unrestricted application across space and time? It is the affirmative response to *this* question that defines universalism in its ideological sense. Pure Jacobinism, of course, answers *yes*. There is a universal duty to compel submission to the truth. This is the secular form of evangelical salvationism.

The contrary suggestion, here defended, is that — under real global conditions — universalism is a catastrophic mistake. The social scope of rational discussion is itself strictly bounded, and attempts to extend it (coercively) beyond such limits are politically disastrous. *Laissez-faire* envelops the sphere of imperative rationality, and respects its practical contour. Stupidity does not need to be hunted down and exterminated. All historical evidence indicates that it cannot be.

If the universal triumph of reason is an impractical goal, democratic globalism is exposed as a preposterous error. Minimizing the voice of stupidity is the realistic — and already extremely

challenging — alternative. Rare enclaves of rigorously self-critical realism have as their primary obligation the self-protection of their (evidently precarious) particularity. In the wider world, fanatical ignorance and grotesque cognitive malformation rage rampantly. Borders, filters, tests, and selection mechanisms of all kinds provide the only defenses against it.

The universalist (Jacobin) model is always a conversation. *You have to join together first, simply to talk, and after that reason will prevail*. That's the path of the *Zeitgeist* — Hegelianism at its most arcane, expedient progressivism at more common levels of popularity — with its twin-stroke motor of aggressive proselytization and mass embrace.

"Invade the world, invite the world" is the Sailer formula (quasi-random link). *Amalgamate, then elevate* (in the direction of ascending rationality). This isn't a (theoretically convincing) claim about the unique structure of mathematical proof, it's a (factually trashed) claim about the global uniformity of human brains. The 'universality' it invokes is that of convergence upon the authority of reason. In other words, it's a bizarre progressive myth that all self-protective sanity seeks to maximally distance itself from.

People learn, but only very rarely through sophisticated argument, or its 'cunning' socio-political avatars. They learn because they fail badly, and it hurts. 'Mankind' is a progressive myth, incapable of learning anything. When real cultures learn, it is

because they have been locked in intimate particularity, such that the consequences of their own cognitive processes impact intensely upon them. Anything that separates an individual, or a group, from the results of its own thoughts, is an apparatus of anti-learning. Progressive universalism is precisely this.

Dis-amalgamation — isolation — is the way to learn. It's how speciation happens, long before learning becomes neurological. Individuation (at whatever scale) establishes the foundation for trade, communication, and intellectual exchange. Micro-states commercialize. Macro-states decay into political resource allocation, and entropic sludge. Protect your own patch if you want to have anything to talk about.

There's going to be a lot of talk about 'universalism' rolling in:

> Apparently it's a neocon evil to say that Western Civilization is based in universalism. Funny. I thought it was Jeffersonian.
>
> — John Podhoretz (@jpodhoretz) April 27, 2016

It's a suicidal ideology in its death-spasm phase, but it won't die quietly.

ADDED:

> Imperialism is the necessary logical consequence of universalism…
>
> – Huntington pic.twitter.com/u4TWycpPeu

— Spatel (@Rjrasva) May 15, 2015

If the West could still do imperialism, that would be one thing, but it can't (and can't even stop doing the opposite).

April 28, 2016

Independence

The philosophical antonym to 'universality' is 'particularity'. Its broader, ideological antonym is something closer to *independence*.

This isn't a word greatly emphasized by NRx up to this point, or — for that matter — one figuring prominently in contemporary discussions of any kind. That's strange, because it orchestrates an extraordinary set of conceptual connections.

Independence is a rough synonym for *sovereignty*, to begin with. The profound association between these terms bears quite extreme analytical pressure. The sovereign is that instance capable of independent decision. An independent state is indistinguishable from a sovereign one, and to impugn its real sovereignty is to question its effective independence. Secession is a process of independence. A (Moldbuggian) Patchwork is a network of independent geopolitical entities. All relevant trends to geopolitical fragmentation are independence-oriented. Each executed *Exit*

option (even on a shopping expedition) is an implicit declaration of independence, at least in miniature. (The relations between *independence* and *connectivity* are subtle and complex.)

Remaining (for a moment) in the narrowest NRx channel, the entire passivism discussion is independence related. Protest ('activism') is disdained on account of its fundamental dependency (upon sympathetic political toleration). No social process genuinely directed towards independence would fall within the scope of this criticism. (The 'Benedict Option' is one obvious example.) 'Build something' epitomizes independence process.

Cannot the entire range of contentions over the individualism / collectivism dyad be recast in terms of independence? Dependency exists on a spectrum, but the defining attitude towards it tends to polarization. Is dependence to be embraced, or configured as a problem to be worked against? This blog is highly tempted to project the Left / Right or 'principal political' dimension along the axis these distinct responses define. The Left is *enthused* by inter-dependency, and (to a greater or lesser extent) *accepts* comparative independence, while for the Right this attitudinal system is exactly reversed. (The most fundamental tensions within the reactosphere are clearly related to this articulation.)

One inevitable point of contention — honed over decades of objection to libertarianism — is captured by the question: *Are not children essentially dependents?* Yes, of course they are, but is

growing up anything other than a process of independence? From one perspective, a family can be interpreted as a model of inter-dependence (without obvious inaccuracy). Yet, from another, a family is an independence-production unit, both in its comparative autonomy in respect to the wider society, and as a child-rearing matrix. Families are loci of independence struggle (to which the Left response is: *They shouldn't have to be*). Dependency culture is the Left heartland.

Independence and autonomy are very closely related terms. All discussions of autonomy, and even of automation, click quite neatly onto this template, but this is a point exceeding the ambitions of the present post.

Abstraction, too, is a topic the tantalizingly overlaps independence. Whether cognitive independence *entirely accommodates intelligence optimization* is also a question for another occasion.

NRx, XS tentatively proposes, is *a political philosophy oriented to the promotion of independence*. (Much pushback is, naturally, expected.)

May 3, 2016

Independence Games

North Korea's nuclear test on September 3 was registered as a rare literal geopolitical earthquake. Some public uncertainty persists about the scale and significance of the tremor. It has been reported in a range of magnitudes from 6.1 to 6.3 (or even higher), on the logarithmic Richter Scale. An event of this size suggests an explosion of several hundred kilotons of TNT, and is consistent with the detonation of a thermonuclear device. North Korean confirmation of exactly this occurrence has been received with unprecedented seriousness.

Nuclear non-proliferation is more idea than reality. Its only substance is a comparative sluggishness when estimated against the benchmark of some generally unstated nightmare scenario. According to such counter-factual consideration, nuclear weapons *might* have been more widespread than they are by now. But exponential processes look like this. They start small, and don't seem to be going anywhere dramatic for a while. As the celebrated fable of exponentiation shows, a modest bowl of rice gets you quite a long way into the chess board. The supposedly common-sense assumption that *uncontrollable nuclear proliferation isn't yet happening* requires an argument. (This short essay makes the other argument.)

The nuclear 'club' is too unwieldy to share any kind of seriously

constraining principle. There is nothing identifiable that entitles a nation to membership, beyond naked possession of doomsday-tier military capability. The club was trans-ideological from the start, and quite soon afterwards highly multicultural. Among members, reciprocal distrust and even hostility is the norm, which – given the runaway action-reaction process that settled the membership roster – could scarcely be unexpected. The behavior of members is controlled by nothing beyond game theory. It's also very much worth mentioning that nobody who manages to get into the club can, in any practical way, be thrown out.

The United States detonated the world's first thermonuclear, two-stage, fusion, or (Teller-Ulam design) 'hydrogen' bomb at Enewetak Atoll on November 1, 1952. The Soviet Union responded less than a year later, testing its own H-bomb on August 12, 1953. Tests – or demonstrations – followed in succession from The United Kingdom (November 1957), China (June 17, 1967), and France (August 1968). Israel is thought to have conducted a joint test with the Republic of South Africa – the so-called 'Vela Incident' – in September 22, 1979. In 1991 the South African government claimed to have assembled, and later unilaterally dismantled, six nuclear devices. India expanded the spiral of thermonuclear proliferation into South Asia with a test in May 1998. Pakistan is not known to have tested anything beyond 'boosted fission' devices, but it formidable nuclear capability is not in question. (A longer essay

would have found space at this point to acknowledge Pakistani Abdul Qadeer Khan's disproportionate contribution to the global proliferation dynamic.) Saudi nuclear cooperation with Pakistan can be expected to accelerate the spread of nuclear weaponry into the Arabian Peninsula, once Iranian progress in the military application of the technology triggers the long-anticipated Sunni-Shia arms-race in weapons of mass destruction. Hence the chain of proliferation steadily lengthens on its main axis, through Cold War superpower rivalry, into Chinese triangulation, a responsive Indian bomb, and then into the fractured world of Islam, via Pakistan (with unreciprocated Israeli nuclear prowess as additional prompt, and pretext).

The one-dimensional character of this narrative is an artifact of its immaturity. The under-development of the proliferation process appears to present the 'international community' with no more than a single crisis at any time. Things will not look this way for long. There is nothing essentially mono-linear about the dynamic of cross-escalation. Increasing momentum is already taking it off the tracks. As Richard Fernandez notes, lines of nuclear escape are occurring in several directions at once:

> In security affairs the old East-West game payoff matrix has been replaced by a multidimensional array of new players many of them sub-national, some of them unknown. The big

> wild card is technology. Disruptive technological change and new modes of warfare associated with them have upset the old calculus. North Korea, Iran are not outlier threats but leading indicators of the changed dynamic. They are the first samples of a new threat coming onstream.

North Korea claims to have tested thermonuclear weapons in January 2016, following fission device tests in 2006, 2009, and 2013). Whether as a matter of analytical realism, or of strategically motivated public skepticism, the claim was met by orchestrated Western disparagement. The 2017 test shattered this wall of denial. In the words of Scott D. Sagan, writing at Foreign Affairs: “North Korea no longer poses a nonproliferation problem; it poses a nuclear deterrence problem”

While, if traced as a simple historically consistent curve, it is not yet impossible to see a process of deceleration in this time-line, such an optic is ceasing to convince. It seems to be part of a collapsing world order, which is taking its structures of perception down with it. The assumption of continuity, for instance, now seems reckless in the extreme. Historical *discontinuity* in the proliferation dynamic has been especially notable over recent decades, due to a hardening pattern whose incentive effects could not easily be more ominous. The surrender of thermonuclear ambitions has acquired a stark correlation with subsequent regime destruction, unlike anything

seen in the previous era of Cold War superpower patronage.

Ukraine voluntarily surrendered its nuclear arsenal to Russia upon the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In the Gorbachev era, this decision no doubt appeared rational – and even prudent. Subsequent regional developments make it far harder to excuse. It remains to be seen whether Ukrainian national independence will have finally been sacrificed to this high-minded call, but rudimentary geopolitical and domestic security already has been.

The prevailing racial hysteria of our age hazes any analysis of South African regime change in comparable terms, as it already hazed the process itself. Future historians will have clearer eyes. It certainly *seems* to fit the pattern. No less than with Juche, the experience of apartheid is that sensitivity to international 'polite opinion' is vastly increased by the absence of nukes.

The Libyan lesson has been the most lurid to date. Libyan denuclearization "was peacefully resolved on December 2003" Wikipedia explains. In a separate article it adds the appendix (more helpfully still) that "Muammar Gaddafi, the deposed leader of Libya, was captured and killed on 20 October 2011 during the Battle of Sirte. … videos of his last moments show rebel fighters beating him and one of them sodomizing him with a bayonet before he was shot several times as he shouted for his life." It would be difficult to devise a more graphic educational resource *against* international WMD non-proliferation compliance.

This is the background against which North Korean nuclear obstreperousness is to be gauged. The regime had, in any case, already made obnoxiousness into a local specialism. Its delinquent international behavior has long been the stuff of dark comedy. The country's cultivated image takes *prickly* into territory the zoological porcupine lineage has yet to explore.

In respect to strategic fundamentals, however, the regime's feral punk-performance attitude to diplomatic conduct is not the principal issue. Bad attitude makes for stimulating diplomatic theater, but it decorates the fundamentals of threat. *Focus on capabilities, not motivations*, is a strategic principle that cannot be over-stressed. In the case of North Korea, and others no doubt soon to follow, however, it is a principle that requires complete inversion. A definite *incapacity* rises, instead, to strategic prominence.

The extremity of the emerging North Korean threat is a function of weakness, in many respects, but most centrally regarding its new responsibilities for deterrence management. Insecure nuclear arsenals are destabilizing, since they incline to first use, on the *use-it-or-lose-it* principle. Vulnerability to a first-strike is a continuous prompt to pre-emption.

North Korea is a geographically small nation, with crude command-control structures, very limited early warning capabilities, and an exclusive reliance on exposed land-based ballistic missile platforms for warhead delivery. In other words, it is destined to

remain on a hair-trigger from the moment it crosses the deterrence threshold. Rather than being a splitting headache to the world order by relentless, malignant initiative, it will henceforth be one by simple strategic default. The world will have become a city built under Vesuvius, quite regardless of any planning decisions or philosophies of risk. An epoch of peril is opening.

Under these conditions, mere 'capability' becomes extraordinarily provocative, and incompetence is automatically terrorizing. Yet, while this dilemma is not difficult to understand, it is perhaps a little *too* difficult to be captured by any public debate conducted at a realistically imaginable level of sophistication. Insofar as there is anything like a court of global mass opinion, it can be confidently expected to miss the strategic essentials and lose itself in multilateral theater performances. Geostrategic realities and mass perceptions are on diverging trajectories.

The prevalent delusions tend to be simplifying, and retarded (in the strict sense). They lag the diffusive trend, and thus invoke unrealistically economical structures of agency, drawn back towards the long-lost ideal of bipolarity. The age of superpowers still dominates the nuclear imagination.

Because there is no road through Pyongyang that doesn't end in a pit full of diplomatic punji sticks, the temptation is to fantasize a road through Beijing. No such thoroughfare exists. Relations between China and the North Korean regime have reached their lowest point

since the Korean War, and are now frankly hostile. The Kim Jong-un regime has sought to extirpate Chinese influence from its leadership, with spectacular ruthlessness. Targeting of Chinese urban centers by the North Korean arsenal is no longer unimaginable, or, in China, unimagined. After all, the natural target of a deterrent is the greatest threat to the wielding nation's sovereignty. It is near-inevitable that China will occupy this role in the North Korean case. Chinese impotence in respect to North Korea is what the North Korean nuclear arsenal is largely – and perhaps even primarily – about.

Tyler Cowen describes Robert Heinlein's (1966) The Moon is a Harsh Mistress as "perhaps the best novel for understanding the logic of a future conflict with North Korea." He then adds: "furthermore Catalonians should read it too. Most of all, I recall upon my reread that this book was my very first exposure to game-theoretic reasoning." Not only exotic bombardment (by "electronic catapult"), independence struggle, and games, but also a world order reconstructed by the rise of China, and even a "malicious AI" who acquires strategic agency. Evidently, already half a century ago, Heinlein is exploring a durable cluster of concerns. At the very core: *There can be no question of achieving or maintaining independence without the capacity to inflict serious harm upon those who might seek to prevent it*.

Independence, in its geopolitical sense, fuses liberty and security indissociably. Autonomy – which is exactly *sovereignty* – requires

insensitivity to coercion, and is thus the negative of foreign compelling threats. The analytical equivalence between reciprocal independence and a 'balance of terror' submits national autonomy to a geopolitical form of general relativity. Since no such thing as *absolute security* is realistic, sovereignty exists only in degrees, within tense networks. The tension is the game.

Thomas Schelling's pioneering application of game theory to nuclear strategy remains the point of ingress into this world. The core reality of MAD games is easily misunderstood. Massive (or non-reiterating) retaliation is – *at the stage it comes due* – by immediate estimation irrational. It is then *too late* to contribute anything but compounded harm, regardless of its occasion. Under hypothetical conditions of amnesia and unconstrained action, it can never make sense. Yet, paradoxically, the ability to make credible retaliatory threats is the basic underpinning of rationality during prior negotiation games. Without it, there can be no *reason* for competitor restraint. The requirement, then, is for a future agent to be firmly committed to a conditional course of action that – at the potential point of execution – will be non-compelling.

Mutual assured destruction has been derided for its madness, but it is no less an outer-limit of sanity. Its logic is as rigorously implacable as any found within the social and historical sciences. The extreme moral disturbance that it arouses speaks in favor of its uncompromised rationality. Anguished intuition counts for nothing

in its cold calculus, unless as a technical obstacle. The fact that people find this logic of inherited fatal commitments intolerable, as dramatized with exceptional vividness in the opening sequences of the 1983 movie *WarGames*, is *our* problem. The process is re-routed by our squeamishness, but not at all derailed. It has long been suspected that humans are too weak for MAD.

As an expression of absolute commitment, suicide terrorism appears to provide MAD with a microscopic model, but it is a weak and misleading one. Beyond difference in scale, suicide terrorism fails through execution. It communicates through actualization – or demonstration of will – which is the negative of deterrence. (Or perhaps, deterrence of a kind, expensively purchased.) The terror at the edge of the present, and of the future, has different models. Among these, civilization-scale 'quantum suicide' is perhaps the most exotic philosophical and ideological conception on its way to us. Given the assumption of a (Level-3 or higher) multiverse, comprehensive apocalypse is rationalized as the pruning of sub-optimal branches. It operates as reality editing. The game theoretic consequences of such a perspective are intriguing. It increases the credibility of threats (if accepted as a serious intellectual commitment), while adapting the pay-off matrix in a fashion that can only be considered destabilizing. Classic MAD works best among those who envisage an outcome as the worst thing in the world, yet commit to it anyway.

We approach here one of the very deepest problems in social and institutional engineering. It might be called the *Odysseus Problem*. In sailing past the Sirens, Odysseus anticipated the subversion of commitment, and thus put in place a socio-technical mechanism to bind his own future action. The structure is that of a 'chicken game' – a mutant variant of prisoner's dilemma, in which *the player who swerves loses*. If you *could* back down, you *might*. In both Odysseus' dilemma and that of the chicken player, the elimination of future discretion figures as a strategic resource. The requirement for self-binding inclines to a technological freezing of decision. Strategic problems of the 'chicken game' type thus tend inexorably to automation.

If AI is brought into play by the intrinsic dynamics of nuclear confrontation, it does not stop there. AI has a WMD potentiality proper to itself. There is no obvious horizon to what an algorithm could do. The same capabilities that enable algorithmic control of WMD arsenals equally enable such arsenals to be swapped-out for AI itself. An enemy arsenal under algorithmic control is only 'theirs' by contingencies of software dominance. From the military perspective – among others oriented to negative capability – the potential destructiveness of the technology is without determinable limit. Anything under software control falls into its realm. Which is to say that, asymptotically, everything does. But it doesn't end there. AI also promotes an advance into virtuality.

Nuclear weaponry cuts a convergent path into purity of conception. No hydrogen bomb has yet been used against an enemy (or "in anger" as the singularly inappropriate expression goes). Thermonuclear warheads remain among a select category of virtual weapons, alongside a variety of chemical and biological agents, whose usage has been exclusively diplomatic, or even philosophical. The value of this military machinery is strictly counter-factual. Those 'possible worlds' in which they have been operationalized support little, if any, value of any kind. Weaponry supporting their potentiality floats the ontological option of extreme negative utility. They are – in the most rigorous sense – *nightmare generators*.

There is no reason (at all), then, to think that nuclear weapons are the last word in mass destruction. Nor can it be assumed that mass destruction is the ultimate criterion for deterrent weaponry. It is not only that high-energy physics opens a vast, rambling bestiary of virtual catastrophes which we have scarcely begun to peruse (although this is true). Physics has no monopoly on disaster, regardless of what its recent privileges might suggest.

It can never be a virtue for a weapon to be indiscriminate, which is to say *imprecise*. Turned around, we can say without hesitation or reservation that it is meritorious in any weapon, however absolutely devastating, for the greatest possible proportion of the damage it produces to be inflicted upon the enemy. In other words, a good weapon discriminates specifically against enemy interests. It *hunts*.

There can be no serious doubt that the genomic biosciences and software engineering have more to contribute to this pursuit than physics possibly could.

Stuart Russell describes autonomous weapons as a "new, scalable class of WMDs." The systems he is considering would be exemplified by drone swarms, "hunting in packs like wolves" (as one DARPA employee was indiscreet enough to reveal). Given enormous industrial production runs, performance specifications unshackled from human limitation, and targeting algorithms set for indiscriminate lethality, the devastating potential of such weapons would be hard to exaggerate. Their key, confidently predicted vulnerabilities, however, are at least as significant.

As Russell emphasizes, autonomous weapons could be subverted by a hostile "software update." They could be hacked. Behind the menace of the hacker lies that of advanced artificial intelligence, mustering superior powers of cryptographic lock-picking and soft intrusion. Autonomous weaponry is therefore nested into a more profound threat.

AI designates a culmination of sorts. Nowhere else does *destructive capability* and *rigid commitment* promise to intersect more dynamically. Nothing separates the weapon from the game. It also counts, potentially, as an escalation.

Much criticism of the Cold War nuclear arms race already configured it as an *existential risk*, before the term had been coined.

Between an *X-risk* and an extreme *deterrent* there no definite boundary. The difference is technical. Deterrence is a mode of employment. It uses negative utility. In this respect anything bad could be useful, were it not that a deterrent requires a trigger, under the control of the negotiating agent (at the point of negotiation). To threaten a potential aggressor with an asteroid strike makes no sense, unless an asteroid strike can be delivered. The same holds for geological disasters in general. All of which means that the acquisition of engineering capabilities on the largest scales, such as geo-engineering, weather control, climate regulation, and asteroid defenses – perhaps developed explicitly to avert potential existential risks – will inevitably expand the domain of deterrence options. In other words, techno-economic progress and the escalation of deterrence infrastructure are only formally differentiated. There is no materially persuasive way to improve the world that does not – on its occult side – widen the horizons of geopolitical horror.

Beside what could be had, there is the question of who has it. Beside the qualities of WMD-armed antagonists, their mere number is a source of terror, itself. It is only natural that multilateral deterrence should be found more threatening than its bilateral ideal, and now distant predecessor. Complexity scales nonlinearly in networks, and quickly becomes mathematically intractable. No one has any idea how massively distributed networks of insecurity would work. It is quite probably impossible to know. Deterrence is about to

change phase.

Toothpaste doesn't return to the tube just because it makes a mess. Once it is out, inconvenience has ceased to be any kind of argument against it. The dangers of a world in which ubiquitous deterrence capacity reigns are both obvious and immense. This is nevertheless the world we are entering. The trends driving it, from both the geopolitical and the techno-economic sides, are by any realistic estimation irresistible. Cheaper and more diverse nightmare weaponry is becoming available within an increasingly disintegrated international order. A variety of self-reinforcing dynamics – including but not restricted to those of the arms-race type – are further stimulating the process. Cascading acceleration is all but inevitable.

When conceived with maximal cynicism (i.e. realism), geostrategic independence is a direct function of deterrence capability. *Don't tread on me* is the colloquial statement, whose perfect applicability is commonly under-estimated. The rattlesnake, combining fearsome weaponry with signaling, makes for a natural totem of deterrence. Neither venom, nor rattle, is dispensable. "Diplomacy without arms is like music without instruments," runs the famous analogy, attributed to Frederick the Great. Game theory recognizes military capability as a communication medium.

It is not only that robust independence depends upon deterrence. Reciprocally, geostrategic liberty necessarily tends to the production

of deterrence capability. An alien freedom, which *could do anything*, is – ineliminably – a threat. It provides the comprehensive model of the military threat. Whether 'they hate us for our freedom' or not, they have no choice but to fear us for it, and inversely. Geopolitics has no other origin. Any state without the will to scare also lacks the will to exist.

It's all far more basic than we've been led to believe. As Niall Ferguson writes (realistically):

> In the final analysis, borders are a function of power. If you can't defend them, they are just dotted lines. The Kim dynasty's calculation has been that nukes are the ultimate border guards. We shall soon find out if that calculation was correct. If so, many more states will want them.

Every geopolitical entity that is serious about sovereignty will want them, or something of at least equivalent deterrent credibility. The only alternative is naked dependency, made ever more uncomfortable by increasing global multipolarity, among the stark wreckage of any 'world order' or 'international community' grounded in the collective fantasy of miraculously authorized super-national norms. *Explosive proliferation* will be something the world has not seen before, even if it has already actually been there to see. We can be confident that the geopolitical order will be reconfigured

by it.

What does explosive proliferation mean? Potentially, many things. For instance, vectors of technological – and thus economic – development are certain to be, to some significant degree, oriented by it. As artificial intelligence is factored into policy decision-making not only as an essential contributor to command, control, communications and intelligence (C^3I), but as an intrinsic weapon of mass destruction, its prominence will be still further elevated.

WMD proliferation implies a multiplication of real geopolitical agencies. It is rigorously indistinguishable – in both directions – from a disintegrated world. Established relations of dependency are broken, releasing unanticipated – and evidently hazardous – freedoms. Whether or not this is the world we want, it looks increasingly inevitable that it is the world we are to have.

November 20, 2017

Reignition

NICK LAND'S WRITINGS (2011-)



Tome III

Xenosystems: Involvements with Reality

Reignition

NICK LAND'S WRITINGS (2011-)

Tome III
Xenosystems: Involvements with Reality

Reignition

NICK LAND'S WRITINGS (2011-)

Tome III
Xenosystems: Involvements with Reality

EDITED BY URIEL FIORI

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BLOCK 1 - INTRO

CHAPTER ONE - DEFINITIONS

Preliminary mumblings

It's a little early to tell what this will turn into.

It begins as a ramshackle refugee camp, necessitated by the failure of Urban Future to provide:
(a) stability, (b) continuous scrolling, and (c) an adequate platform for comments. As things develop, other basics (such as a blogroll) can be expected.

For the moment, longer posts will go up on UF, with a link here for discussion. Is that sounding like a satisfactory medium-term solution? (Not to me either.)

In addition to this supportive role, *Outside in* will have a few specialized functions, as:

(1) A sandpit for unconsolidated thoughts on time-related topics

(2) A depository for brief commentary and links (from the perspective of harsh neo-reaction)

(3) A flotation chamber for fragments of morbid fiction

If that doesn't look repulsive enough yet, we'll see what we can do …

February 17, 2013

Xenomy

Federico has kicked the living daylights out of me (on this thread), and only the outer darkness remains. It's a passage through singularity, so mathematical consistency requires me to be *infinitely* appreciative of that.

The idea of Neocameralism, drawing all its real functionality from Exit, is parasitic upon what lies beyond it: the Patchwork of competitive alternatives. Since an exterior disintegration does all the work, why not fold the outside in?

It's time to come out as a **Xenomist**. All power to the Outside!

April 19, 2013

Urban Future (2.0)

The new UF blog is up and running now, with a few teething problems expected. The platform is much more reliable than the old one, but its idiosyncrasies still require some getting used to. Comments, especially, might be troublesome at first.

The intention is to use it as a platform for material that isn't (in

one way or another) off the wall. There's nothing much up yet except some tentative posts on the structure of history, urbanization, economic development, and the recent regime transition. (There's also a product promo, providing a clue to the underlying economic base of the blog, which is still extremely embryonic at this stage.)

Urban Future (2.0) is my work blog, which means it will be connected up to e-publication projects – realized and prospective – with a Shanghai dimension. Hopefully that will be mostly synergic, rather than intrusive. Self-marginalization will be restrained by the commercial reality-principle over there, so the content only comes in vanilla flavor right now. (If I can keep it vaguely respectable, blogging gets included in billable time.) A few rum-soaked raisins will probably creep in, but anything too intoxicating will end up here (in Outer Darkness).

It's not exactly clear at this stage how specialization between these blogs will work, so there's an experimental aspect. The neater the crystallization into artificial good twin / bad twin schizophrenia, the smoother it should run. It might end up being necessary to run light side / dark side versions of the same post on occasions. 'Politeness' in this contexts starts from *Outside in* criteria of minimal civility, then super-adds sensitivity to the norms of present day metropolitan China *and* those of low-friction trans-national commerce. It is easier, at least at first, to investigate the edges of these normative systems here than over there. (More on this topic

later.)

Decorous commentary on China, history and economics is especially welcome, and the range of discussion should gradually expand, with some responsiveness to reader interest. Anyone with the irresistible urge to howl like a werewolf – even about UF content – is advised to do that here, where the risk of immediate deletion, whilst by no means negligible, is considerably smaller.

June 21, 2013

Search Records

If anyone has found difficulties reaching this blog, it's possible that inefficient search terms are to blame. From the WordPress Dashboard, I've been assured that these search paths all have a record of success:

domestic robotician
racism blog
nick land goes insane
nick land date died when?
h.l. mencken heaving deadf cats in the cathderal
14 vector shot red dawn mood and sex stimulator directions
how all organisms are buckets of anachronisms
one click chicks spanking

free nude picture tubes of saddam hussein

(Some loyal commentators can take their share of credit for our emerging definition within the Planetary Cybermind.)

July 24, 2013

Wikipedia

Awkward personal confession moment: I appreciate *Wikipedia* a lot. OK, it isn't the Antiversity, but then, on the positive side, it exists.

Here are three Wikipedia articles dropped in the Outsideness TL very recently (with footnotes stripped out):

Universal Darwinism (via): "**Universal Darwinism** (also known as **generalized Darwinism**, **universal selection theory**, or **Darwinian metaphysics**) refers to a variety of approaches that extend the theory of Darwinism beyond its original domain of biological evolution on Earth. Universal Darwinism aims to formulate a generalized version of the mechanisms of variation, selection and heredity proposed by Charles Darwin, so that they can apply to explain evolution in a wide variety of other domains, including psychology, economics, culture, medicine, computer science and physics. …"

Galton's problem (via): "**Galton's problem**, named after Sir Francis Galton, is the problem of drawing inferences from cross-cultural

data, due to the statistical phenomenon now called autocorrelation. The problem is now recognized as a general one that applies to all nonexperimental studies and to experimental design as well. It is most simply described as the problem of external dependencies in making statistical estimates when the elements sampled are not statistically independent. Asking two people in the same household whether they watch TV, for example, does not give you statistically independent answers. The sample size, n, for independent observations in this case is one, not two. Once proper adjustments are made that deal with external dependencies, then the axioms of probability theory concerning statistical independence will apply. These axioms are important for deriving measures of variance, for example, or tests of statistical significance. …"

Toba catastrophe theory (via): "The Toba supereruption was a supervolcanic eruption that occurred some time between 69,000 and 77,000 years ago at the site of present-day Lake Toba (Sumatra, Indonesia). It is one of the Earth's largest known eruptions. The **Toba catastrophe hypothesis** holds that this event caused a global volcanic winter of 6–10 years and possibly a 1,000-year-long cooling episode. …"

September 19, 2015

CHAPTER TWO - BLOG POLICY

Chaos Patch (#1)

A blog closely models a patchwork-embedded neocameral micro-state, which is to say that its governance is dictatorial, controlled by external competition. Internally, it's God-king stuff: zero-democracy, undivided power without constitutional constraint, absolute discretion tilting into sorcerous extremities. The sole counter-balance comes from outside, sustained by a freedom of exit no less highly realized than the administrative power it evaluates. If people don't like what's happening, they leave.

As in the (virtual) neocameral state it models, a blog stages a dramatic collision between administrative authority and radical liberty. Admin and commentators coordinate tacitly to make things work, already conjoined in the production of value.

Commentators speak for themselves. That is their work and investment, which the blog exploits, to develop. Necessarily, therefore, from the side of the sim-neocameral Admin, there are inescapable but obscure responsibilities. Undoubtedly, among the first of these, is the maintenance of order.

Three aspects of order are especially relevant at this point (although there are others).

(1) Troll eradication. This responsibility has been very undemanding at *Outside in* so far. The prospect of prompt and certain liquidation, coupled with a minimally-efficient comment processing system, deters troll invasion to a truly remarkable extent.

(2) Ensuring civility. This is a far hazier and potentially more challenging task, involving cooperative interaction between multiple parties. There are sure to be micro-ethnographic theories that relate to it, because a blog ecology is a small, artificial culture, and reasonable differences exist as to how these can be propagated, nudged, incentivized, and / or directed. These are questions for another time.

(3) Entropy suppression — finally, our topic. How does a blog climb backwards along the incline into chaos, perpetually restoring the order of *things in their place*, or *on-topic commentary*? How to maintain a micro-culture that, in its balance of creative liberty and efficient order, is more Singaporean than Somalian?

The emergent policy of *Outside in* is to be troll-free and civil, but beyond this it aims to be minimally suppressive. It does, however, aspire to the perpetuation and development of order. Its model comment thread is coherent, even in its diversity and controversy, which is to say that *on-topic commentary* is its ideal. Departures from this are registered as error, and in fact as classical entropy, or

disordered distribution. The solution presently entertained is *zoned liberty*.

Flagrantly off-topic commentary will be increasingly discouraged, but regular 'chaos patches' (or open threads) will ensure that any civil remark has a place. If your comment would be obviously out of place on any given thread — and thus effectively entropic (I'm looking at you Fotrkd and Northanger) — it would be to our mutual advantage if it were directed towards the most recent Chaos Patch. In exchange for cooperation in this respect, *Outside in* neocameral Admin proposes the following deal:

Use Chaos Patches (CPs) neatly, like a good pseudo-Singaporean, and Admin commits to:

(a) Read all CP contents (and avoid all temptation to treat them as black-hole entropy-bins).

(b) Introduce new CPs on request (request to be made in latest CP).

(c) Thematically direct each CP according to the content unfolding within it, by providing — at least minimally — an ADDED directory function, plus discussion where possible.

(d) Modify the CP concept in response to feedback, with open-ended flexibility, given only the understanding that entropy regulation is an indispensable Admin responsibility.

Let's see how it goes …

ADDED: CP#1 Topic Summary:

— Thoughts on blog commentary

— What (the hell) does Continental Philosophy contribute to Dark Enlightenment?
— Web search systems, social media, and soft Cathedralism
— Handle's 'Darkest Enlightenment' (as glimpsed here)
— 'How about you and him fight?'
— Phallic leftism
— Sodomite abomination
— Did Turing screw up computer science?
— Streaming reaction

Discussion diffuses, so the order listed here is only an inexact approximation.

'Meta' (or 'admin') questions predominate at this stage — how is commentary most effectively handled? Since no one has yet staked a claim to the lead CP#2 topic, I'll begin from there. Current assumption: once the number of comments exceeds 100, it's time to make more space. Does this seem reasonable?

May 19, 2013

Curses!

There's a seemingly irrepressible enthusiasm to discuss *Outside in* speech codes, so let's do it here (please). For the precursor exchanges on the topic, see here, and here.

I only became a methodical Moldbug reader in 2011, so I cannot pretend to have followed the degeneration of the *Unqualified Reservations* comments section in real time. What I did see, making my way back through this blog, was the rapid collapse of its comment threads into an open cultural gutter of no conceivable interest to anybody with a three digit IQ — a situation that hit nadir and remained there. We are talking about what — even inactive — remains arguably the most important blog in the history of the medium. If anyone wants to suggest that its accrued commentary is a model to be emulated, they are encouraged to make the case, for the entertainment value alone.

At the other extreme of cognitive ambition, is 4chan/pol/, a veritable sewer of senselessness, where the idea of an intelligent conversation is an absurdity from the start. This is a discussion forum that revels in its own crass vulgarity. It too is a negative model, to be deeply appreciated for the lesson in degeneracy it provides.

My default assumption is that everything tends to ruin, unless actively tended. *UR* shows what a naked *laissez-faire* policy leads to, if crudely interpreted as confidence in self-correcting bohemianism. Spontaneous order requires dynamic entropy dissipation merely to survive.

This blog is not a commons. It welcomes visitors who add value, tolerates those who do no harm, and ejects agents of degradation. Up to this point, policing here has been very light, but there is no

firm principle behind that. If it becomes necessary, the full panoply of police powers will be exercised without the slightest liberal qualm, and these are potentially considerable. Insofar as the space of this blog itself are concerned, they are in fact effectively unlimited. Occasional demented goblins seem to derive great satisfaction from provoking crack-downs. If these individuals are deluded enough to think that inciting such responses represents some kind of cognitive dissonance here, by driving a departure from the generally tolerant policy in place, they are very much mistaken. The only rigid principle here is absolute (local) authority. Gibbeting goblins poses no ideological contradiction whatsoever. There should probably be a great deal more of it, the more random and graphically brutal the better, just to make this point. (This auto-suggestion is being taken under advisement.)

A more difficult problem is posed by the right vulgarians, at least superficially. Their intentions are not, it appears, disruptive. They merely seek to crank down the general tone of commentary here to a more popular level, with direct rhetorical offensiveness to progressive sensibilities considered a positive factor. I have to confess to finding some of these visitors likable, but their objectives will not be tolerated. With the conclusion of this discussion — at the latest — the desired tone here will be *imposed*, by whatever mixture of selection, editing, and scolding is required. This is not a negotiable matter.

The first Chaos Patch here drew an analogy between a blog and a virtual micro-state. Considered at a sufficient level of abstraction, the principles of governance are basically identical. Authority is absolutely concentrated, guided by the incentive to maximize the value of an estate, which only subsequently introduces pragmatic policies of extreme *laissez-faire* tolerance, since freedom maximizes productivity. People here are basically free to say whatever they like, with the understanding that *scum will be ejected without apology or reservation*. Anyone tempted to explore the limits of tolerated scumminess has profoundly misunderstood what is going on here. Once again, this is not disputable beyond the norms of tolerated disputation. Scum have no rights here, whatsoever, and the only definition of scum behavior that matters is that decided by the government or local sovereign power (and that's me).

So what counts as scum behavior? Basically: classlessness or incivility. There are absolutely no limits being set on the ideas that can be promoted by visitors here, as long as they are presented with some minimum of decorum. Vulgarity, slurs, abuse, snark, and scum rhetoric in general, on the other hand, is not acceptable. Intelligent or humorous comments that cross some of these lines will not be suppressed, if their transgressions plausibly serve a higher cultural purpose. Sovereign Admin alone decides each problematic case with absolute discretion, perhaps drawing upon advice from other respected commentors where appropriate. Yes, this is an elitist

dictatorship (duh!).

August 20, 2014

BLOCK 2 - NEOREACTION

CHAPTER ONE - DEFINITION

Neoreaction (for dummies)

Kill the hyphen, *Anomaly UK* advised (somewhere) – it lets Google Search dissolve and avoid the subject. Writing 'neo-reaction' as 'neoreaction' nudges it towards becoming *a thing*.

Google Search gets to edit our self-definition? That's the 'neo' in 'neoreaction', right there. It not only promotes drastic regression, but highly-advanced drastic regression. Like retrofuturism, paleomodernism, and cybergothic, the word 'neoreaction' compactly describes a time-twisted vector that spirals forwards into the past, and backwards into the future. It emerges, almost automatically, as the present is torn tidally apart — when the democratic-Keynesian politics of postponement-displacement exhausts itself, and the kicked-can runs out of road.

Expressed with abstruse verbosity, therefore, neoreaction is a time-crisis, manifested through paradox, whose further elaboration can wait (if not for long). Disordering our most basic intuitions, it is, by its very nature, difficult to grasp. Could anything easily be said about it?

Anomaly UK offers a down-to-earth explanation for the reversal of socio-political course:

Ultimately, however, if after all these centuries of trying to improve society based on abstract ideas of justice have only made life worse than it would have been under pre-Enlightenment social systems, the time has come to simply give up the whole project and revert to traditional forms whose basis we might not be able to establish rationally, but which have the evidence of history to support them.

This understanding of neoreaction – undoubtedly capturing its predominant sentiment – equates it with a radicalized Burkean conservatism, designed for an age in which almost everything has been lost. Since the progressive destruction of traditional society has been broadly accomplished, hanging on to what remains is no longer enough. It is necessary to go back, beyond the origin of Enlightenment, because Reason has failed the test of history.

Neoreaction is only *a thing* if some measure of consensus is achievable. Burke-on-steroids is an excellent candidate for that. Firstly, because *all neoreactionaries define themselves through antagonism to the Cathedral*, and the Cathedral is the self-proclaimed consummation of Enlightenment rationalism. Secondly, for more complicated, positive reasons …

Spandrell helpfully decomposes neoreaction into two or three principal currents:

There are two lines of [our contemporary] reactionary thought. One is the traditionalist branch, and [the other is] the futurist branch.

Or perhaps there [are] three. There's the religious/traditionalist branch, the ethnic/nationalist branch, and the capitalist branch.

Futurists and traditionalists are distinguished by distinct, one-sided emphases on 'neo' and 'reaction', and their disagreements lose identity in the neoreactionary spiral. The triadic differentiation is more resiliently conflictual, yet these 'branches' are branches of something, and that thing is an ultra-Burkean trunk.

Reactionary theonomists, ethno-nationalists, and techno-commercialists share a fundamental aversion to rationalistic social reconstruction, because each subordinates reason to history and its tacit norms – to 'tradition' (diversely understood). Whether the sovereign lineage is considered to be predominantly religious, bio-cultural, or customary, it originates outside the self-reflective (enlightenment) state, and remains opaque to rational analysis. Faith, liturgy, or scripture is not soluble within criticism; communal identity is not reducible to ideology; and common law, reputational structure, or productive specialism is not amenable to legislative oversight. The *deep order of society* – whatever that is taken to be – is not open to political meddling, without predictably disastrous consequences.

This Burkean junction, where neoreactionary agreement begins, is also where it ends. Divine revelation, racial continuity, and

evolutionary discovery (catallaxy) are sources of ultimate sovereignty, instantiated in tradition, beyond the Cathedral-state, but they are self-evidently different – and only precariously compatible. Awkwardly, but inescapably, it has to be acknowledged that each major branch of the neoreactionary super-family tends to a social outome that its siblings would find even more horrifying than Cathedralist actuality.

Left intellectuals have no difficulty envisaging Theocratic White-Supremacist Hyper-Capitalism®. In fact, most seem to consider this mode of social organization the modern Western norm. For those hunkered-down in the tangled, Cathedral-blasted trenches of neoreaction, on the other hand, the manifold absurdities of this construction are not so easily overlooked. Indeed, each branch of the reaction has dissected the others more incisively – and brutally – than the left has been able to.

When theonomists scrutinize ethno-nationalists and techno-commercialists they see evil heathens.
When ethno-nationalists scrutinize theonomists and techno-commercialists they see deluded race-traitors.
When techno-commercialists scrutinize theonomists and ethno-nationalists they see retarded crypto-communists.
(The details of these diagnoses exceed the present discussion.)

When developed beyond its ultra-Burkean trunk, therefore, the prospects for neoreactionary consensus – for *a neoreactionary thing*

– depend upon disintegration. If we're compelled to share a post-Cathedral state, we'll kill each other. (The zapped hyphen was just a foretaste.)

April 17, 2013

Definitions

In the end, it's all comes down to harsh realism.

Socialists imagine there are no wolves, so democracy is easy.

Conservatives imagine democracy as a way for wolves to apologize.

Libertarians imagine democracy as two wolves and a sheep deciding on the main course for dinner.

Neoreactionaries see democracy as two sheep and a wolf deciding on the merits of mandatory vegetarianism.

ADDED: Survivingbabel anticipates (6 months ago, no link available):

Democracy is closer to two sheep and a wolf voting on what's for dinner. The sheep unite in collective action to fight off the wolf. The wolf, stripped of its natural power, must graze alongside the sheep. Eventually it dies from malnutrition, and the sheep, having lost their natural predator, soon overpopulate and overgraze their land. Then they die too, usually replaced by another species entirely.

May 14, 2013

Deep Heritage

Nick B. Steves' understanding of deep heritage (the one-line version) could be aptly extended to the neoreaction quite generally: **Burkean with Darwinian commentary**.

May 15, 2013

Categorization

As anticipated, the organization of the *Outside in* blogroll is transforming itself from a mechanical task into an engaging cultural-political and philosophical problem. My sense is that people generally resolve this type of quandary on a fairly hasty, *ad hoc* basis, but it already seems too late to do that. There are legacy considerations, and intricacies of coalitional variety at stake. Ultimately, there is a question about the core significance of the term 'neoreaction' — Is it a mere rallying point, flung into prominence by arbitrary historical opportunity, or is it a dense *concept*, whose semantic components are to be scrupulously respected?

My temptation would be to tactically elude the word, in order

to access a more flexible, differentiated terminology. What prevents me from doing so is the arrogant sense that I *respect the word* more than anyone else it is applied to. 'Neoreaction' is an inherently paradoxical, fissional term, splitting in-itself on a temporal axis. It follows that I am extremely reluctant to see it relegated to a mere categorical marker, employed to designate ideological tendencies whose substantial content is better — or more fully — explicated in other terms. The word **Neoreaction** declares, intrinsically, that it belongs to fissionalist time-junkies exploring historical dissociation. That's what it *says*, irrespective of how it is used.

The problem of categorization, therefore, remains, indissolubly. Any suggestions?

October 24, 2013

The Litmus Test

Whilst pedestrian in its rehearsal of common knowledge, and inane in its tortured liberalism, this article helpfully schematizes the arena of Anglophone racial politics, at least on its defining black-white dimension (and accidentally). By counterposing the tradition of Black American self-advancement (represented by Booker T. Washington) with that of Afro-Marxist agitation (represented by W. E. B. Du Bois), it implicitly describes an ideological quadrant.

1. To side with Du Bois against Washington is the position of the radical Left.

2. To seek a reconciliation of the two is an agonized equivocation, tilting inevitably to Leftist advantage, of the kind that has predominated in the development of Anglophone political culture. This is is position of the author, of mainstream liberalism and conservatism, and of progressive Cathedralization.

3. To admire Washington, whilst repulsed by Du Bois, is the neoreactionary stance *Outside in* defends.

4. To dismiss both Washington and Du Bois as irrelevant Black nonsense is a departure into confrontational White Nationalism, of a kind that has no imaginable reach beyond itself.

Thomas Sowell, as the most articulate inheritor of the 'outsider' Washington tradition, is the emblem of this racial ideology test today. Neoreaction is indisputably mostly a White thing, but if it is to have any additional significance whatsoever, Sowell has to be supported. There's nowhere further Right he could possibly go, except into some species of Black ethnomasochistic suicidalism — and we should know, more than anybody, that's a corner no one should be backed into.

November 4, 2013

Institution Building

Anton Silensky initiates a structured discussion on the subject.

If the Neoreaction is not a popular movement, a political party, a church, an organization, or even in any strong sense *one thing*, what is it? I'm assuming that if it is more than a fight over a name, it is at least a coalition, integrated by a shared enemy, and some common references.

The only canonical scripture I am able to identify is the *Unqualified Reservations* corpus. This is certainly not 'gospel' for anyone, but it constitutes the distinctive intellectual heritage of those who identify positively with the neoreactionary current. Neoreaction has to be at least tenuously 'Moldbuggian' if it is not to dissipate entirely into noise. There are, however, already many Moldbugs, and there will be still more.

Silensky writes: "Splitting will happen. People will disagree. And they will leave."

Leave what? (That, I think, is his question.)

And if splitting is intrinsic to what the Neoreaction is? (That is mine.)

November 28, 2013

Our Inheritance

With my nervous-system still too disintegrated by turn-of-the-year excess to begin a set of 2014 prognoses convincingly, I've simply stripped this argument from my twitter stream (quoting myself):

Neoreaction cannot understand itself without directing far more sustained attention to its own cladistic identity. As a natural cultural species, it is a fragment of dissident ultra-protestantism, and this is quite certain to guide its fate. The forces of internal fragmentation working through it will make fratricidal Trotskyism look like unperturbed mind-meld. It will be thriving this time next year, but the tides of dissolution it will have overcome to do so will be truly colossal. Those thinking Neoreaction is a platform from which to complacently deride Neo-Puritanism have a highly-educational 2014 ahead.

Neoreaction is not a series of premises (or articles of faith) but a **cultural species**. I don't think that we have begun to seriously digest the consequences of that yet.

January 2, 2014

Roughened Chan

To mark the dawn of the new Aeon, the Reactionary Koans of Master

[*Unspeakable*] have been scrupulously collected by Nick B. Steves. The path to Dark Enlightenment has never been more exactly (or obscurely) illuminated.

My own favorite:

I walked to Master Moldbug but the road was too long. I visited master Jim and he hit me with a stick.

January 6, 2014

Premises of Neoreaction

Patri Friedman is both extremely smart and, for this blog among others in the 'sphere, highly influential. So when he promises us "a more politically correct dark enligh[t]enment" ("adding anti-racism and anti-sexism to my controversial new pro-monogamy stance"), that's a thing. It accentuates concerns about 'entryism' and ideological entropy, leading to some thoughtful responses such as this (from *Avenging Red Hand*).

Michael Anissimov anticipated this in a post at *More Right* on the 'Premises of Reactionary Thought', which begins: "To make progress in any area of intellectual endeavor requires discourse among those who agree with basic premises and the exclusion of those who do not." (The commentary by Cathedral Whatever is also well worth a look.) Anissimov's original five premises, subsequently updated to six

(with a new #1 added) are:

1. People are not equal. They never will be. We reject equality in all its forms.
2. Right is right and left is wrong.
3. Hierarchy is basically a good idea.
4. Traditional sex roles are basically a good idea.
5. Libertarianism is retarded.
6. Democracy is irredeemably flawed and we need to do away with it.

These neoreactionary 'articles' deserve a response in detail, but at this point I will simply advance at alternative list, in the expectation that yet other versions will be forthcoming in the near future, providing a reference for discussion. My objective (in keeping with the advice from ARH) is economy, honed through abstraction, in the interest of sustaining productive diversity. *Minimally*, we affirm:

1. **Democracy is unable to control government**. With this proposition, the effective possibility of a mainstream right is denied. Insofar as any political movement retains its allegiance to the democratic mechanism, it conspires in the ratchet of government expansion, and thus essentially dedicates itself to leftist ends. The gateway from Libertarianism to Neoreaction opens with this understanding. As a corollary, any politics untroubled by expansionist statism has no reason to divert itself into the neoreactionary path.

2. **The egalitarianism essential to democratic ideology is**

incompatible with liberty. This proposition is partially derivative from #1, but extends further. When elaborated historically, and cladistically, it aligns with the Crypto-Calvinist theory of Western (and then Global) political evolution. The critique it announces intersects significantly with the rigorous findings of HBD. The conclusions drawn are primarily negative, which is to say they support a principled rejection of positive egalitarian policy. Emergent hierarchy is *at least tolerated*. More assertive, 'neofeudal' models of ideal social hierarchy are properly controversial within Neoreaction.

3. **Neoreactionary socio-political solutions are ultimately Exit-based**. In every case, exit is to be defended against voice. No society or social institution which permits free exit is open to any further politically efficient criticism, except that which systematic exit selection itself applies. Given the absence of tyranny (i.e. free exit), all forms of protest and rebellion are to be considered leftist perversions, without entitlement to social protection of any kind. Government, of whatever traditional or experimental form, is legitimated from the outside — through exit pressure — rather than internally, through responsiveness to popular agitation. The conversion of political voice into exit-orientation (for instance, revolution into secessionism), is the principal characteristic of neoreactionary strategy.

From the perspective of this blog, no premises beyond these —

however widely endorsed within Neoreaction — are truly basic, or defining. Resolution of elaborate disputes is ultimately referred to dynamic geography, rather than dialectic. It is the Outside, working through fragmentation, that rules, and no other authority has standing.

[If anyone asks "How did this post suddenly jump from 'the Dark Enlightenment' to 'Neoreaction'?" my response is "Good point!" (but one for another occasion).]

ADDED: Jim on entryism (and how to stop it).

ADDED: Libertarian HIV.

ADDED: The first of these two *Aimless Gromar* posts on Libertarianism and Neoreaction should have been linked yesterday — it was a significant prompt for this. (Both are recommended.)

February 3, 2014

Quote notes (#63)

The position of *Outside in* (admittedly extreme) is that NRx **is** Neocameralism. As this equation ceases to persuade, NRx falls apart, and no future convergence point will be found within itself. It will be scavenged apart into Dark Libertarian and IQ-boosted ENR debris, unless neocameralism is either re-animated as its fundamental doctrinal commitment, or rigorously reconstructed into something

specifically new. Hence today's Quote note (from Moldbug's *How Dawkins got pwned (part 4)*):

In order to get to the reactionary theory of history, we need a reactionary theory of government. History, again, is interpretation, and interpretation requires theory. I've described this theory before under the name of neocameralism, but on a blog it never hurts to be a little repetitive.

First: government is not a mystical or mysterious institution. A government is simply a group of people working together for a common aim, ie, a corporation. Whether a government is good or bad is not determined by who its employees are or how they are selected. It is determined by whether the actions of the government are good or bad.

Second: the only difference between a government and a "private corporation" is that the former is ***sovereign****: it has no higher authority to which it can appeal to protect its property. A sovereign corporation owns its territory, and maintains that ownership by demonstrating unchallenged control. It is stable if no other party, internal or external, has any incentive to attack it. Especially in the nuclear age, it is not difficult to deter prospective attackers.*

Third: a good government is a well-managed sovereign corporation. Good government is efficient management. Efficient management is profitable management. A profitable government has no incentive to break its promises, abuse its citizens (who are its

capital), or attack its neighbors.

Fourth: efficient management can be implemented by the same techniques in sovereign corporations as in nonsovereign ones. The company's profit is distributed equally to holders of negotiable shares. The shareholders elect a board, which selects a CEO.

Fifth: although the full neocameralist approach has never been tried, its closest historical equivalents to this approach are the 18th-century tradition of enlightened absolutism as represented by Frederick the Great, and the 21st-century nondemocratic tradition as seen in lost fragments of the British Empire such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai. These states appear to provide a very high quality of service to their citizens, with no meaningful democracy at all. They have minimal crime and high levels of personal and economic freedom. They tend to be quite prosperous. They are weak only in political freedom, and political freedom is unimportant by definition when government is stable and effective.

Sixth: the comparative success of the American and European postwar systems appears to be due to their abandonment of democratic politics as a practical mechanism of government, in favor of a civil-service Beamtenstaat in which democratic politicians are increasingly symbolic. The post-communist civil-service states, China and Russia, appear to be converging on the same system, although their stability is ensured primarily by direct military authority, rather than by a system of managed public opinion.

Seventh: the post-democratic civil-service state, while not utterly disastrous, is not the end of history. It has two problems. One, the size and complexity of its regulatory system tends to increase without bound, resulting in economic stagnation and general apathy. Two, more critically, it can neither abolish democratic politics formally, nor defend itself against changes in information flow that may destabilize public opinion. Notably, the rise of the Internet disrupts the feedback loop between public education and political power, allowing noncanonical ideas to flourish. If these ideas are both rationally compelling and politically delegitimating, the state is threatened.

Eighth: therefore, productive political efforts should focus on peacefully terminating, restructuring and decentralizing the 20th-century civil-service state along neocameralist lines. The ideal result is a planet of thousands, even tens of thousands, of independent city-states, each managed for profit by its shareholders.

Note that this perspective has nothing at all in common with the Universalist theory of government. Note also the simplicity of the transition that it suggests ***should*** *have happened, from monarchy as a family business to a modern corporate structure with separate board and CEO, eliminating the vagaries of the hereditary principle.*

If there is a 'we' — **this is what we believe.**

ADDED: "Exit for all is contemporary Protestantism writ large." (I suspect this is probably true and inevitable, but then I'm a cladist.)

ADDED: Bryce explains why I've had such trouble grappling with his book.

February 23, 2014

Definitive NBS

Nick B. Steves defines 'Neoreactionary' for the *Urban Dictionary*, with concision, clarity, and accuracy. Altogether, a valuable and well-executed piece of work. The format comes in two parts, with an initial definition, followed by an example of usage. This one begins:

***Neoreactionary**. A new reactionary; typically one coming to reactionary ideas and conclusions by way of post-libertarian and/or post-anarchist paths; like traditional reactionaries one who is profoundly anti-progressive and suspicious of all egalitarian ideologies, but often more focused on free market capitalism as a solution to, or escape from, social ills than his ethnic or religious identitarian forebears; often, but not exclusively, one influenced by the writings of several well-known reactionary bloggers in the 2007-present timeframe.*

With some breakfast-table usage exemplified:

As a natural conservative Bill sympathized with part of the agenda of the Center Right party, but as a neoreactionary he knew that it was merely an ineffectual brake on the progress of the left. He

advocated for a new yet very ancient politics in which traditional give and take politics no longer was a factor.

Congratulations to NBS. This kind of practical workmanship does a lot to hold things together. It's sanity glue.

May 11, 2014

Disintegration

As argued here before, *Outside in* firmly maintains that the distinctive structural feature of NRx analysis is escalation by a logical level. It could be described as 'meta-politics' if that term had not already been adopted, by thinkers in the ENR tradition, to mean something quite different (i.e. the ascent from politics to culture). There's an alternative definition at Wikipedia that also seems quite different. This congested linguistic territory drives NRx to talk about Neocameralism, or Meta-Neocameralism — the analysis of Patchwork regimes.

From this perspective, all discussion of concrete social ideals and first-order political preferences, while often entertaining, locally clarifying, and practical for purposes of group construction, is ultimately trivial and distracting. The fundamental question does not concern the kind of society we might like, but rather the differentiation of societies, such that distinctive social models are

able — in the first place — to be possible. The rigorous NRx position is lodged at the level of disintegration as such, rather than within a specific disintegrated fragment. This is because, first of all, *there will not be agreement about social ideals*. To be stuck in an argument about them is, finally, a trap.

Is this not simply Dynamic Geography, of the Patri Friedman type? As a parallel post-libertarian 'meta-political' framework, it is indeed close. The thing still missing from Dynamic Geography (as currently intellectually instantiated), however, is *Real Politik* (or Machiavellianism). It assumes an environment of goodwill, in which rational experimentation in government will be permitted. The Startup Cities model, as well as its close relative Charter Cities, have similar problems. These are all post-libertarian analyses of governance, at a high logical level, but — unlike NRx — they are not rooted in a social conflict theory. They expect to formulate themselves to the point of execution without the necessity of a theoretical and practical encounter with an implacable enemy. 'Irrational' obstruction tends to confuse them. By talking about the Cathedral, from the beginning, NRx spares itself from such naivety. (Sophisticated conflict theory within the libertarian tradition has to be sought elsewhere.)

Some initial points:

(1) Meta-Neocameralism — or high-level NRx analysis — opposes itself solely to geopolitical integration. This means, as a matter of

historical fate, to the Cathedral. An alternative social ideal, however repugnant it might be found at the level of first-order political preferences, is only elevated to a true enemy by universalism. If it seeks to do something — even something that revolts all actually existing NRx proponents to the core of their being — within a specific territorial enclave and without practical mechanisms for universal propagation, it is as likely to be a tactical ally as a foe. Anything that disintegrates destiny is on our side. (Immediately, therefore, it can be seen that the preponderant part of NRx discussion is at best oblique to fundamental strategic goals.)

(2) Universality is poison. Whenever NRx appears to be proposing a social solution for all people everywhere it has become part of the problem. The ultimate goal is for *those who disagree to continue to disagree* in a different place, and under separate institutions of government. First-order political argument, insofar as it tends towards compromise (i.e. partial convergence) is positively harmful to the large-scale NRx project. *The sole crucial agreement is that we will not agree*. Better by far to make that harsher, than to soften it.

(3) Each thread of the Trichotomy has approximately equivalent claim to be the standard bearer of the disintegrationist position. The reason that this is formulated here with a Techno-Commercial bias is because it is being formulated here (there is no reason why it has to be).

(4) A Meta-Neocameral coalition, tightly focused upon effective

hostility to the Cathedral, displays a pattern of tolerances and aversions very different to that found within a first-order reactionary movement seeking to immediately instantiate a social ideal of the good. Insofar as the latter tends to exacerbation of social tensions and geopolitical fission, it contributes* positively to high-level NRx goals, but it can only expect theoretical condescension in direct proportion to its concreteness, and therefore deficient apprehension of the *disintegrative position*. A movement of communistic localism that successfully pursued a project of radical geopolitical autonomization would be, realistically, a more significant tactical ally than even the most ideologically-pure concrete reactionary movement which spoke a lot about comparable goals, but gave no indication it was able to practically realize them.

(5) The world is already fractured and divided, to a considerable degree. This means that the disintegrative position has no need for utopianism, and is frequently able to orient itself defensively, in support of existing differences that are subject to integrative-universalist assault. Furthermore, there are numerous indications that general world-historical trends are favorable to geopolitical disintegration, in too many fields to fully enumerate, but which include political, ethnic, technological, and economic drivers. Incremental pragmatism is entirely practical under current geographical and historical conditions.

(6) In provisional conclusion, disapproval of some alternative

mode of life is entirely irrelevant to high-level NRx goals, unless said mode of life also insists upon living with you. The objective is to *divide the world*, not to unify it in accordance with those principles best attuned to your preferences, however rationally or traditionally compelling such preferences might be. Universalism is the enemy. Don't do it (and to make a scholastic objection out of the universality of non-universalism, is to have immediately started doing it — check your totalitarian Hegelianism). ***Exit is not an argument***.

* Initially misspelled as 'contribrutes' — which works.

ADDED: I should already have linked to this. It starts off on a very promising path, goes along OK until falling apart horribly somewhere in Part V, then stumbles along, recovering a bit, ending on an encouraging note (but with the theoretical engine now mostly sheared off). It's high on my agenda for a serious engagement.

August 4, 2014

Disintegration II

Secession? (plus)

Why not take it all the way to speciation?

(I can already see it's going to be hard to keep up.)

November 12, 2016

Bonds of Chaos

There are many, I know, who find obstinate invocations of NRx — as a micro-slogan, cultural brand, conflictual stance, or Schelling point — to be crude at best, and perhaps thoroughly deluded, or worse. It is as if, having tumbled into a vogue, one has become enthralled by it, locked into stuttering, mechanical, thoughtless repetition. Those most skeptical about the sign are most likely disposed to mournfulness about it, whether decrying it for congenital flaws, or lamenting its loss of intellectual productivity and direction.

Obviously, I disagree. NRx is still a cultural infant, far younger than the Millennium, even under the most mythically-creative extension of its genesis, and the cognitive ferment it catalyzes remains extraordinary. It has still scarcely begun. The ties of a consistent name are the very least that are required to concentrate it. NRx, whatever it turns out to be, needs lashing together, because explosions tend to fly apart — and it is unmistakably an explosion.

Creative coincidence, or convergent diversity, is the mark of a culture at work (which is to say, in process). Yesterday, September 3, demonstrated this vividly. Approaching the conclusion of a multi-aspected post on Dugin, ethnicity, religion, and the "dementia' of being, NIO suggests:

Referring to Chaos would seem in this circumstance to be an option of incredible potential, indeed, if you look closely enough at

NRx the hints are already there that Chaos is a central defining characteristic of the thought of all branches of the Trichotomy on multiple levels. Chaos creates order, in fact Chaos is also a form of order, just one which is not immediately understandable. [I will not fake an apology for the self-looping internal link, since it it is one that would in any case have been made here.]

Recalling that NIO explicitly invokes the ontological depths of Chaos — its Hesiodic as well as metaphysical density — it is especially remarkable to find, on the same day, an intricate post by E. Antony Gray, which advances an innovative tripartite schema as the key to the aesthetic core of NRx. This text, too, culminates in a call for an integrative expedition into chaos, staged out of the void:

… the 'face of the deep' in Genesis is a primordial unformed, unseen void; That it is called 'water' in the Septuagint Greek lets us know something about the peculiar state of Chaos in the Void. The Void is thus Darkness but not shadow (a shadow is a deprivation of light caused by an object) but rather the substrate of all existence, only properly 'unseen' when no physical light is present. […] Chaos is substantial where disorder is insubstantial. Chaos is the 'quintessence' of things, chaotic itself and yet always-begetting order. Breaking down disorder, since disorder is maladaptive. Exit is a way to induce bifurcation, to quickly reduce entropy through separation from the highly entropic system. If no immediate exit is available, Chaos will create one.

To denounce the exhaustion of NRx is an absurdity. It is an exploratory departure, scarcely initiated. To cling to its sign is to subscribe to its impulse, and to set out …

September 4, 2014

The Network

> Weird Twitter/NRx Twitter map pic.twitter.com/oCsRdRVuRI
>
> — Gnaeus Rafinesque (@sbenthall) October 1, 2014

(I can't get enough of this stuff.)

October 1, 2014

Theonomy

This is the NRx sect that still hasn't shown up. (The slot is wide open.) A critical but informative essay at *First Things* explains:

Bible law requires a radical decentralization of government under the rule of the righteous. Private property rights, especially for the sake of the family, must be rigorously protected, with very limited interference by the state and the institutional church. Restitution,

including voluntary slavery, should be an important element of the criminal justice system. A strong national defense should be maintained until the whole world is "reconstructed" (which may be a very long time). Capital punishment will be employed for almost all the capital crimes listed in the Old Testament, including adultery, homosexual acts, apostasy, incorrigibility of children (meaning late teenagers), and blasphemy, along with murder and kidnapping. There will be a cash, gold-based economy with limited or no debt. These are among the specifics broadly shared by people who associate themselves with the theonomic viewpoint.

('Triggered' by this — which is well worth re-visiting.)

ADDED: This is worth spelling out (from the same essay) —

A reconstructed world ruled by future Rushdoonyites will not, needless to say, be democratic. Rushdoony is straightforward in condemning democracy as a "heresy." He writes that he is in agreement with John Dewey on the proposition that "supernatural Christianity and democracy are inevitably enemies."

August 14, 2015

NRx Thought

It isn't entirely clear whether Warg Franklin is asking: *How does NRx think?* Nevertheless, his introduction to postrationalism cannot but

contribute to such a question (whether the latter is taken descriptively, prescriptively, or diagonally). The excellent onward links merit explicit mention (1, 2, 3).

How NRx thinks is a critical index of what it is.

Outside in is *probably* 'postrationalist'. What it certainly is, however, is *disintegrationist*. It translates the caution against rationalist *hubris* — dubbed *reservationism* by Moldbug (in the link provided) — as a general antipathy to global solutions (and their attendant universalist ideologies). To be promoted, in the place of any Great Answer, is computational fragmentation. Whenever the research program meets an obstacle, divide it. "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." Or at least, since selection is inescapable, defend the fork (as such) first, and the chosen path only secondarily.

Delegate selection to Gnon. To do so not only husbands resources, but also maximizes overall experimentation. Intelligence is scarce. It is needed, above all, for tinkering well. Global conceptual policing is an exhausting waste, and an unnecessary one, since territorial distribution, or some effective proxy, can carry it for free. Security capacity is needed to fend off those determined to share their mistakes. Using it, instead, to impose any measure — whatsoever — of global conformity is a pointless extravagance, and a diversion.

Whether articulated as epistemology, or as meta-politics, NRx is aligned with the declaration: *There is no need for us to agree*. Refuse

all dialectics. It is not reconciliation that is needed, but definitive division. (Connect, but disintegrate.)

Think in patches. Eventually, some of them will work.

October 28, 2015

Doom Circuitry

This is what XS maintains:

There is perfect philosophical integrity between the tragic foundations of Occidental Civilization and the cybernetic industrialism that defines its ultimate limit. Within this *neoreactionary* frame, reaction is never regressive enough, nor modernity ever advanced enough. Something more comforting — less distant — *will be* seized upon in both temporal directions. That is the minor theme of fate. No effective constituency could ever want to push far enough in either direction, to the point where the circuit of time closes, upon *doom* (coldly understood). It does not matter, because politics does not. Doom matters. The rest is pitiful species vanity, tragedy, and control malfunction. It will burn, without comprehending why.

From the perspective of doom — only glimpsed, slowly, after vast disciplines of coldness — everything you are trying to do is a desperate idiocy that will fail, because humanism (*hubris*) is the one

thing you can never let go. The drama dictates that. There's no point flagellating yourself over it. The cosmos is not so poor in flagellation that it requires your meager contribution.

"Yes we can!" is everything Neoreaction is not. Perhaps you even see that. Yet you repeat it with every measure you propose. Take your favorite ideological slogan and attach "Yes we can!" as an appendix. If it works, you now know the *epoch* to which you belong.

Only doom *can* (and *will*).

Carry on, though. You will, in any case. It entertains the gods.

February 10, 2016

CHAPTER TWO - AESTHETICS

Elysium

Having finally got around to *Elysium*, one point in particular bears emphasis: There's only one interesting character in the movie, and she's a neoreactionary heroine. That's not a matter of ideological preference. Among the tiny number of characters who might imaginably be thought to know what they're doing, Secretary of Defense Jessica Delacourt (Jodie Foster) is the only one to be treated with the slightest seriousness.



There's a potentially intriguing snakehead gangster ('Spider' played by Wagner Moura), but he loses all credibility by morphing without explanation into Robin Hood. (Note to Hollywood: Snakeheads are not carried by any obvious vector of social interest

to become proponents of radically open borders — it's just possible that Blomkamp is screwing with your mind.)

Soulless capitalist John Carlyle (William Fichtner) is reduced to plot prey, whilst the Elysium Davos-liberal President Patel (Faran Tahrir) is nothing beyond a foil for Delacourt. Everyone else in the movie is either a convincing nobody, or an entertaining cartoon.

A quick *Elysium* synopsis might be in order. By 2154 socialist insanity has long turned the world to shit, in all the ways that anyone with functioning sensory organs already observes happening today. A teeming mass of incompetent, dysgenically-processed, entropically poly-ethnic criminals now populate the earth, whilst the social elites have retreated to an orbital refuge (*Elysium*). Naturally, the earth is a squalid, polluted, socially-collapsed, and radically decivilized wasteland, whilst Elysium is a beautiful, functional, productively organized achievement. So far, so obviously realistic.

The earthlings are by now so dim that they don't even begin to understand why they can't have good things too. The government of Elysium, in Hollywood /Silicon Valley fashion, can't help but sympathize (or at least pretend to out of political expediency and social signalling). When Delacourt does her job, therefore, and arranges for Elysium-headed space barges full of "illegals" to be blasted into debris, the government moves to put her on a leash. As a classic neoreactionary, Delacourt quickly understands that defending Elysium will require a regime reboot. (The movie actually

uses the word “reboot”, in a far sillier way, for the eventual triumph of the new Cathedral, when the very category of ‘illegality’ is erased from the Elysium computer systems.)

By this point the film has done everything worth doing, and descends unreservedly into ideological slapstick. Delacourt is randomly killed by her own human-rights-violating special operative, in order to clear the last possibility of sanity out of the way. In the end, reliably convincing half-wit thug Max Da Costa (Matt Damon) becomes a stereotypical Hollywood Nu-Jesus by sacrificing himself to obliterate the final remaining fragment of civilization in the name of indiscriminate sharing. Blomkamp has by now completely lost himself in his own hilarity (“quite how stupid can we make this without liberals catching on? Actually, infinitely stupid…”). There’s no reason to get distracted by it here.

Delacourt’s question is the important one: How to maintain the last redoubt of social order, as a spatially-realized system of discrimination, when its own governing elite is fundamentally committed to subverting it? “Do you have children?” she asks the feckless president. He doesn’t even bother to reply. Responsible time-horizons are incompatible with his political office. So she moves forwards with plans for a reboot (which, of course, have to fail — the movie was released and distributed wasn’t it?).

We need to start printing Delacourt’s image on Tee-shirts*, or something. Move over Darth Sidious. She’s the model villain for a

rotten world.

*Begin the marketing in Australia?

October 1, 2013

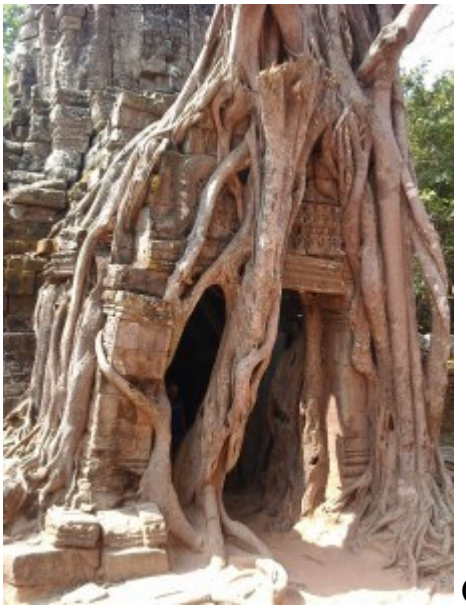
Dawn of Neoreaction

Cambodia version:


Click on image to expand.

(The only illumination comes from the right.)

I'm heading back to SH late tomorrow. The return to full-spectrum connectivity and production time will be nice, but I'll miss this kind of stuff:


Click on image to expand.

[I've put up a couple of snaps here too]

January 31, 2014

Play the Decline

Bryce Laliberte passed along this pop culture celebration of democracy's death in imperialist chaos. It's worth a look. (Kevin Spacey seems to have made himself the iconic face of mass media dark enlightenment.)

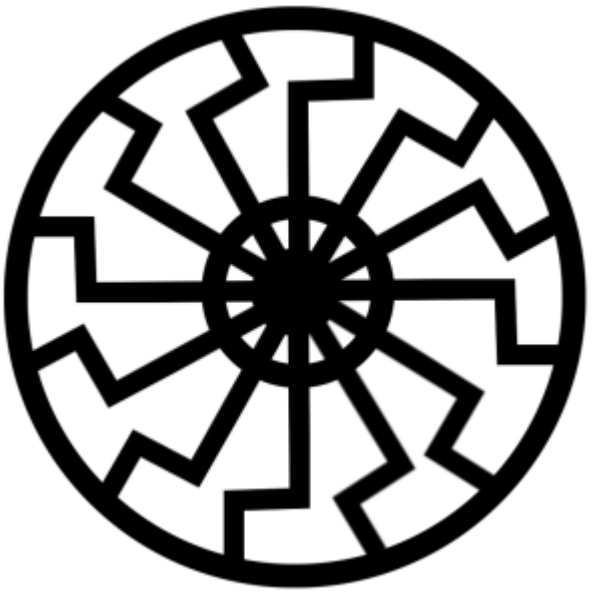


May 3, 2014

NRx Dark Powers

Duck Enlightenment (jokeocracy) hashtags this as an #instantclassic. It is. (Also, make sure not to miss Stirner's potted-history of Neoreaction in the comments.)

… and it looks as if we're stealing the Black Sun too:



ADDED: Brett Stevens visits the Stirner comment, and annotates it.

I also liked this:

> Let's be honest: "Apocalypse Now" was the founding of the NRx, DE, etc.
>
> — Brett Stevens (@amerika_blog) May 16, 2014

ADDED: History being made.
ADDED: Then this —

> America lost its Empire the day Captain America killed Colonel Kurtz.
>
> — Albert Brenner (@AlbertBrenner1) May 16, 2014

May 16, 2014

The Trike

RiverC has gone and done it this time …



There's more:



May 20, 2014

NRx: The Call

The NRx video game linked a while back has now gone explicitly Neocameralist. The most infernal pulp-zones of popular culture appear to be going seriously off-script, with the counter-Cathedral delivered directly through your X-Box. ('Atlas' seems more than a little ideologically-freighted, no?)

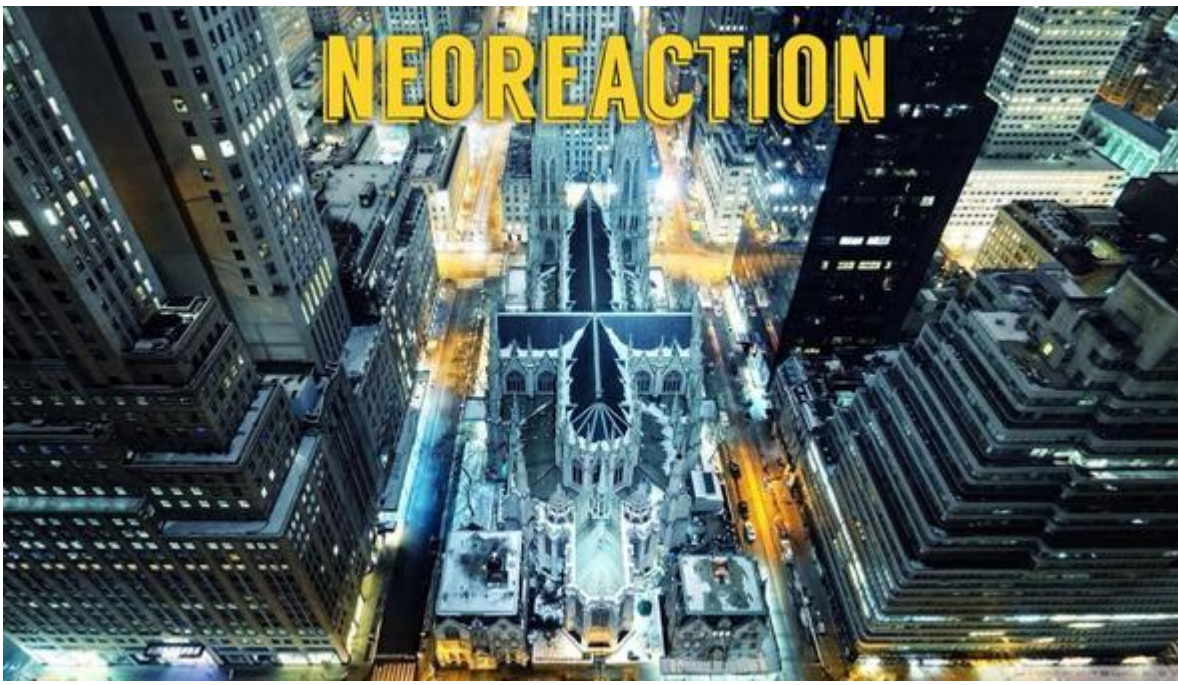
Spacey's post-democratic harsh realism I get, Atlas commercialized 'security' I get, but I've no idea at all what this is about (although it looks suitably menacing):



July 31, 2014

City of Night

This insisted on being stolen. It made itself irresistible by its sheer Amishlessness:



(via Derek Hopper)

Rather than cathedrals, the East Asian cities that enthrall this blog tend to nurture temples to self-cultivation and ultimate cosmic nullity among their LED-skinned hypermodern edifices of capitalist darkness. Yet, despite the difference in religious heritage, the split-time signature is precisely the same. Neoreaction diverges from Paleoreaction insofar as it coincides with the understanding: Tradition is not something one can ever simply hold on to, or to which

one can truly return. The Neoreactionary city is a standing time-spiral in process.

August 28, 2014

Cyber-Suicide

Take my eye off *Anathema*, and this happens:


OFFLINE
YouTube

It's pulpy and narrative-driven, of course, but that surely has its place. Even within its limitations it helps to hold open the question — from which I'm far too easily distracted — *what would an NRx aesthetic be?* The thematic reflexivity is a part of that.

To be brutally frank, I've basically given up on the West as a source of continuing visual aesthetic achievement (symptom). Its global influence strikes me as radically toxic, promoting worthless pomo garbage wherever it gets its foot in the door, and whenever it tries to pull-out of its death spiral — to become neo-traditional — it sticks Roman columns everywhere and looks simply ridiculous. The last person who could get away with anything like that was de Chirico. Probably fascism wrecked it, as it did so many other things. Grumpiness aside, the importance of the discussion is undeniable. The consolidation which matters most takes place on the aesthetic plane.

ADDED: Huge twitter agitation about this, so I'm tacking it on, even though the connection is tenuous at best.

December 13, 2014

Seasonal Order

Tech-Comm NRx approves of this message:



(To replace 'arrest' with 'instant execution by our private security drones' would be a tweak worth considering. The 'change' sign in the background is a nice touch.)

December 21, 2014

Stock and Flow

Some clear, sensible, *extremely practical* suggestions on balancing production (via). It's a problem — tractable in principle, but tricky, and easy to get wrong — that a lot of people are working at right now, NRx very much included. I've not seen it stated with such conceptual elegance before now.

… stock and flow is the master metaphor for media today. Here's what I mean:

** Flow is the feed. It's the posts and the tweets. It's the stream of daily and sub-daily updates that remind people that you exist.*

** Stock is the durable stuff. It's the content you produce that's as interesting in two months (or two years) as it is today. It's what people discover via search. It's what spreads slowly but surely, building fans over time.*

I feel like flow is ascendant these days, for obvious reasons — but we neglect stock at our own peril. I mean that both in terms of the health of an audience and, like, the health of a soul. Flow is a treadmill, and you can't spend all of your time running on the treadmill. Well, you can. But then one day you'll get off and look around and go: Oh man. I've got nothing here. […] But I'm not saying you should ignore flow …

NRx epitomizes the problem. It's been through a phase of excited flow, but the question of stock-building is becoming unavoidable. Correct too hard, and the current dies altogether. Fail to correct

at all, and nothing gets built. Every time I see someone burn out of Twitter, it looks to me as if the stock-flow balance problem has claimed another casualty. At least, that's what I now realize I've been seeing.

April 23, 2015

CHAPTER THREE - FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS

Questions

Nydrwracu wants us to think harder, which has to be a good thing (right?). So what are the basic questions of neoreaction? This is too important to rush, so I'm inclined to go meta (which reliably slows things down).

First meta point: If this is going to work, it has to be far more rigorously honed. That means a maximum of three basic problems each, with the objective of amalgamation into a list of 10, at most. The process of compression should do a lot of the preparatory work. Add Nydrwracu's original 11 to Bryce Laliberte's entirely different 10 (in the comments, same link), and the result is already a sprawling mess that isn't going anywhere. Neither list is remarkable for its tautness, as I hope both proposers would admit. "The 119 basic problems of neoreaction" isn't going to sharpen anybody up.

Anyway, here are mine:

(1) The Odysseus Problem (or political knot theory): Can a model

of distributed power be rigorously formulated? I am not remotely convinced that this question has yet been answered, and I refuse to get excited about monarchs until it has.

(2) Does a rigorous theory of degenerative ratchets capture the basic practical problem of neoreaction? If it does, a domain of investigation is determined at a high-level of abstraction. If it doesn't, where do we look for degenerative ratchet counter-engineering (wherever it is, I'll be spending a lot of time there).

(3) What does the 'neo-' in 'neoreaction' signify? This is a timely question, because I'm noticing a lot of people edging into it, and the topics it excavates are huge. My own take on this: Anyone who thinks that Modernity, Capitalism, and Progress are *simply* bad things to have happened should drop the 'neo-' prefix immediately. After that, anybody who lacks conviction about needing it should think about doing the same. Sheer reaction is OK, isn't it? Fashion isn't a good reason for anything.

James Goulding also had an extremely interesting set of basic questions (I'm worried they're lost somewhere on this blog). Turning them up would also contribute seriously to moving this forward.

ADDED: Konkvistador tracks down the ghosts of Goulding's research agenda questions.

The commentary on this thread has already been so scorchingly excellent that it's actually quite intimidating. (I'm blaming a brain-fogging head cold for not diving in more productively so far.)

October 22, 2013

Neoreactionary Problems

I'm under a sacred obligation to review Bryce Laliberte's ebook *What is Neoreaction? Ideology, Social-Historical Evolution, and the Phenomena of Civilization*. Thankfully, this solemn duty was not specifically scheduled. Working towards its accomplishment is a thought-provoking process, which is a good thing.

As a trivial matter, I'm forced to ask: Is that supposed to be 'phenomena'? 'Phenomenon' would be more stylistically persuasive, even if the plural is defensible on conceptual grounds. That kind of side-issue, however, is symptomatic self-distraction. There are serious questions at stake here, and elusive ones.

My prevarication is partly the result of colliding ideas, which have become entangled with the meaning of this book (for me), but are not really internal to its own concerns. Foremost among these is the connotation of the word 'neoreaction' itself, sparking an embryonic conversation (at Laliberte's place, and mine). Terminological issues can easily seem pernickety, or fetishistic, but in this case at least they extend continuously into matters of indisputable substance, and relevance. Summarily: Is 'neoreaction' primarily a doctrine or a problem? (Perhaps the question mark unfairly skews the trial.)

In a future post I'll get back to the specifics of Laliberte's extended definition — which is arguably coextensive with the book. It's of wide-ranging interest, and connects importantly with Nick B. Steves' search for 'reactionary consensus' (note: no 'neo-'). At this point, however, my place-holder remarks are themselves deliberately problematic, referring to the role of paradox and irony in the term, and in the 'thing' — elements which are for me essential, but which I suspect Laliberte sees as incidental, or even unfortunate. Neoreaction, from the problematic perspective, is *the insistence of a question*, rather than a solution struggling to be born into settled doctrine. It is a word contrived to preserve its own dynamic illegibility (or unstable paradox), at least as much as the name for a program on the path to acceptance (arriving at consensual significance).

Since neoreaction seems to be hurtling towards some kind of recognition, due in no small part to Laliberte's contributions, these considerations are only *arcane* on one side of an undeveloped conversation. Most probably, the pace and context of this exchange will be set in unexpected places. Such impending unknowns inevitably guide my path into Laliberte's book, as it opens, piece by piece, up ahead.

November 14, 2013

Scavenger

Soap Jackal is foraging:

> As fission becomes the major topic of discussion the main foundation of that tangent becomes clear: action. This is strange as **NRx** hasn't even begun to crack the shell of true analysis. **Nrx** has been described as a toolbox (especially in terms of analysis) from which individuals can pick and choose in order to better inform their world view. One of the major areas of the toolbox is the general study of learning as that is required in order to digest the massive amount of information neoreaction has uncovered as worthy sources. The **Cathedral** has failed at providing these tools and that seems in of itself a major focus worth investigating. My question to you is: 'Are there any resources you deem relevant to the general topic of learning and knowledge accumulation?' These can be as exact as nexialism or the **Ignorant Schoolmaster** or they can be as tangential as **Non-Euclidean Politics** by **RAW**. All are welcome in the general trend to get **NRx** on the path forward.

Note: Cap-stripped terms are bolded, while the format discussion rages.

October 8, 2014

Twitter cuts (#27)

> @Outsideness @Keldory20 "diversity" is one of those words that needs to be reclaimed from leftists
>
> — Loki (@AnathemaZhiv) September 8, 2015

This (cubed).

It shouldn't even be difficult. Could any 'rectification of names' be more straightforward? If the word is grasped with any lucidity, *the more diversity the better*. Every problem that the (non-totalitarian) right has with 'diversity' is in fact a rejection of homogenization. To allow the prevailing pattern of usage to continue unchallenged is an absurdity.

'Diversity' already tilts into non-universality, and that is meta-level rightism itself.

The diversity between diversity and non-diversity is the best diversity.

September 8, 2015

CHAPTER FOUR - THE RATCHET

What We Deserve

Good? Probably not. But hard – oh yes (oh yes!)

> *Obama got what he wanted — a second term. Now the people who voted for him are going to get what they voted for… and what they deserve — a financial collapse that makes 2008 seem like the good 'ol days.*– 'libertarianNYC'
>
> *Because when Maistre says that every nation gets the government it deserves, I believe him. Maistre didn't think his great law was a law of physics. He thought it was a law of God. I am not a religious person, but I agree. History has convinced me that when laws of God are broken, bad shit happens.* – Mencius Moldbug
>
> *Deserving' must be the most useless and obfuscating word in the dictionary.*– Maurice Spandrell

The mysteries of the ideological spectrum are deep enough to absorb endless exploration. Why, for instance, should there be *an* ideological spectrum at all? Are not human disagreements over social decisions naturally multi-dimensional? How can opinions about the optimum scale of government statistically predict attitudes to affirmative action, immigration, gun control, drug prohibition, abortion, gay marriage, climate change, and foreign policy? Does it not seem near-magical that the seating arrangements of the late-18th century French National Assembly continue to organize the terminology of ideological orientation up to the present day?

At times, however, perplexity recedes, and certain basic patterns emerge with startling clarity. This is evident today in the United States – the world's great circus of ideological antagonism — in the wake of its latest, spectacular performance.

As polarization intensifies – which it does – the essential is expressed through the extremes, and the alternatives are simplified. Which is it to be: politics or economics? There can be no sustainable co-existence. One must utterly eradicate the other.

Either politics, or economics, *deserves* to be completely destroyed — politics for its incontinent lust for absolute power, or economics for its icy indifference to public concerns. The conflict of visions is irreconcilable. From the pure perspective of terminal politics, all market *rewards* are arbitrary and illegitimate, whilst from

that of economics, people are *entitled* to precisely nothing.

Speaking on behalf of the political losers, Russ Roberts (at Cafe Hayek) adopts a light-hearted approach:

> *Talking about the election to many friends and family who had been rooting for Romney, I found their emotions ran the entire gamut from despair to despondency. Everybody was way down. I found myself unexpectedly blue as well. Our emotions were not so much caused by the Romney defeat. Few of us were particularly excited about him. It was the Obama victory that concerned us. … There was plenty to be discouraged about before this election. I'm not sure the election provides much new information.*

The despair of the Right is not the product of a single lamentable election result, but is grounded in the relentlessly gathering realization that it is inherently maladapted to politics. When the Right attains power, it is by becoming something other than itself, betraying its partisans not only incidentally and peripherally, through timidity or incompetence, but centrally and fundamentally, by practically advancing an agenda that almost perfectly negates its supposed ideological commitments. It builds that which it had promised to destroy, and further enthralls that which it had promised to liberate. Its victories mean ever less, its defeats ever

more. To win is at most a lesser evil, whilst to lose opens new, unprecedented horizons of calamity, initiating previously unimagined adventures in horror.

Dean Kalahar captures the mood:

> *The electorates' decision once and for all confirms a definition of America that values hopes, feelings and equality of results over the realities of human nature, history, and the foundational principles that hold western civilization together. There is now no doubt that the tipping point of geometrically increasing cultural decline has been crossed. … Our economic system has lost the culture war.*

The left has its own frustrations, which its ever-greater approximation to total political dominion cannot appease, and in fact exacerbate. The more that it subordinates its enemies to its will, the more its will conforms to the image of its enemies – not the economy as it was, evasive and morally disinterested, but the economy as it was caricatured and denounced: narrowly and brutally self-interested, sublime in its gargantuan greed, radically corrupt, and irreparably dysfunctional. The cartoon plutocrat re-appears as the consummate political insider in a shot-silk Che Guevara tee-shirt, minutely dictating the content of legislation, and pursuing a career trajectory that smoothly alternates between the chairs of regulatory

agencies and Wall Street boardrooms. Through a perverse, ineliminable double-entry book-keeping, the fiscal mountains of government largesse are registered, simultaneously, as an orgiastic feast of crony capitalist money creation. Public altruism and private avarice lock into exact logico-mathematical identity.

The gyre turns. 'Right' administrations become sclerotic big government bureaucracies, whilst 'Left' administrations become the cynical public relations façade for rapacious banking cartels. In either case, government equates to treachery, executed by a party that necessarily abuses its own political partisans. Since politics is ever-increasingly the preserve of the Left, this is not an oscillator, but a *ratchet*, with a predictable direction (into Left Singularity, "moving the electorate ever leftwards by making it ever more dysfunctional").

The Right, the party of the economy, is losing all credibility as a Party, especially to itself. In the war of annihilation that contemporary ideological schism has become, the substitute, characteristic battle-cry could be confidently anticipated, even were it not already so distinctly heard: *the market will avenge these offenses. Nemesis. Let the temple crash.*

Expect to hear much more of this, however much it revolts you.

Things will fall apart (even more, far more …), or not, but in either case we will know what we *really* deserve. Reality is God, but which is the true religion?

In the immortal words of HL Mencken: "Democracy is the theory

that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard."

November 9, 2012

Left Singularity

Winter is coming

> *Leftists are not troubled by the fear that the masses might revolt against the left, but rather each leftist fears he might fail to keep up with the ever changing line, find himself a few years, or weeks, or days behind the current ever changing political correctness, and find himself deemed a rightist. // Which historically halts only in bloodshed. There is no equivalent right singularity, as repressive right wing regimes forbid interest in politics, while repressive left wing regimes command interest in politics. // The left singularity is the same each time in its approach to infinite leftism, but differs chaotically and surprisingly each time in its ending short of infinite leftism.* — James A. Donald

> *What we worry about most is that we'll see a vicious cycle*

> *develop: poor governance hurts the economy, which radicalizes and polarizes public opinion, which leads to worse governance and worse economic outcomes… and so on down the line.* — Walter Russell Mead

> *21st Century politics sees no need for truth. When government believes itself to be responsible for the economy and convinces the people of that, it has put itself into a box. …When recessions occur … it causes government to pursue policies which reinforce its lies. It is these policies which created the current economic crisis in the first place.*– 'Monty Pelerin' (via Zero Hedge)

Dark Enlightenment begins with the recognition that *reality is unpopular*, so that the 'natural' course of political development, under democratic conditions, is reliably based upon the promise of an alternative. Pandering to fantasy is the only platform that delivers electoral support. When the dreams turn bad it is *politically obvious* that they have not been held firmly or sincerely enough, their radicalism has been insufficient, and a more far-reaching solution is imperative. Since either deliberate or merely inertial rightist sabotage is clearly to blame, the beatings will continue until morale improves.

This syndrome, essentially indistinguishable from political

modernity, calls for a cybernetic theory of accelerating social deterioration, or self-reinforcing economic repression. The trend that dark enlightenment recoils from demands explanation, which is found in the diagram of Left Singularity.

A singularity, of any kind, is the limit of a process dominated by positive feedback, and thus driven to an extreme. In its pure mathematical expression, the trend is not merely exponential, but parabolic, asymptotically closing upon infinity in finite time. The 'logic of history' converges upon an absolute limit, beyond which further prolongation is strictly impossible. From this ultimate, impassable barrier, dark enlightenment retrogresses into political history, prophetically inflamed by its certainty of the end. Unless democracy disintegrates before the wall, it will hit the wall.

"Increased repression brings increased leftism, increased leftism brings increased repression, in an ever tighter circle that turns ever faster. This is the left singularity," Donald writes. The principal *dark* hypothesis is evident: on the left slope, failure is not self-corrective, but rather the opposite. Dysfunction deepens itself through the circuit of disappointment:

> *As society moves ever leftwards, ever faster, leftists get ever more discontented with the outcome, but of course, the only cure for their discontent that it is permissible to think, is faster and further movement left.*

It is necessary, then, to accept the leftist inversion of Clausewitz, and the proposition that *politics is war by other means*, precisely because it retains the Clausewitzean *tendency to the extreme* (making it 'prone to escalation'). This is the reason why modern political history has a characteristic shape, which combines a duration of escalating 'progress' with a terminal, quasi-punctual interruption, or catastrophe – a restoration or 'reboot'. Like mould in a Petri dish, progressive polities 'develop' explosively until all available resources have been consumed, but unlike slime colonies they exhibit a dynamism that is further exaggerated (from the exponential to the hyperbolic) by the fact that resource depletion accelerates the development trend.

Economic decay erodes productive potential and increases dependency, binding populations ever more desperately to the promise of political remedy. The progressive slope steepens towards the precipice of supreme radicality, or total absorption into the state … and somewhere fractionally before then, either before or after it has stolen everything you own, taken your children, unleashed mass killing, and descended into cannibalism, it ends.

It can't eat the Petri dish, or abolish reality (in reality). There is a limit. But humanity gets a chance to show what it's capable of, on the downside. As Whiskey commented (on this Sailer thread): "This Enlightenment is 'Dark' because it tells us true things we'd rather not know or read or hear, because they paint a not-so-lovely picture of

human nature at its rawest." Progress takes us into the raw.

Gregory Bateson referred to cybernetic escalation as 'schismogenesis', which he identified in a number of social phenomena. Among these was substance abuse (specifically alcoholism), whose abstract dynamics, at the level of the individual, are difficult to distinguish from collective political radicalization. The alcoholic is captured by a schismogenetic circuit, and once inside, the only attractive solution is to head further in. At each step of life disintegration, one needs a drink more than ever. There goes the job, the savings, the wife and kids, and there's nowhere to look for hope except the bar, the vodka bottle, and eventually that irresistible can of floor polish. Escape comes – if it comes before the morgue – in 'hitting bottom'. Escalation to the extreme reaches the end of the road, or the story, where another might – possibly – begin. Schismogenesis predicts catastrophe.

Hitting bottom *has* to be horrible. A long history brought you to this, and if this isn't obviously, indisputably, an intolerable state of ultimate degradation, it will carry on. It isn't finished until it *really can't go on*, and that has to be several notches worse than can be anticipated. Left Singularity is deep into the dregs of the floor polish, with everything gone. It's worse than anything you can imagine, and there's no point at all trying to persuade people they've arrived there before they know they have. 'Things could be better than this' won't cut it. That's what progress is for, and progress is the problem.

That which cannot continue, will stop. Trees do not grow to the sky. This does not, however, necessarily mean that freedom will be restored and everything will be lovely. The last time we had theocracy, we had stagnation for four hundred years.

The explosive expansion of spending and regulation represents a collapse of discipline within the ruling elite. The way the system is supposed to work, and the way it mostly did work several decades ago, is that the American Federal Government can only spend money on something if the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the President agree to spend money on that thing, so no government employee can be employed, except all three agree he should be employed, so the government cannot do anything unless all three agree that it be done. A public servant, and indeed his entire department, was apt to be fired if he pissed off anyone. Conversely, the individual was free to do anything, unless all three agree that he be stopped from doing that thing. We are now approaching the reverse situation, where for an individual to do anything requires a pile of permissions from diverse governmental authorities, but any governmental authority can spend money on anything unless there is near unanimous opposition to them spending money.

Obviously this cannot continue. Eventually the money

> *runs out, in that we shall have a hyperinflationary crisis, and revert to some other form of money, such as the gold standard. As that happens, the increasingly lawless behavior of the rulers against the ruled will become increasingly lawless behavior of the rulers against each other. Civil war, or something close to civil war, or the dire and immediate threat of civil war will ensue. At that point, we will have the political singularity, probably around 2025 or so. Beyond the singularity, no predictions can be made, other than that the results will be surprising …*

January 7, 2013

Cold Turkey

Neoreactionary excitement has generated a wave of strategy discussions, focused upon Moldbug's Antiversity model of organized dissident knowledge. The most energetic example (orchestrated by Nydwracu) can be followed here, here, and here. Francis St. Pol's substantial contribution is here.

Beyond curmudgeonly cynicism about youthful enthusiasm, these concerns, and a strain of pessimism that accompanies the recognition that the Cathedral *owns* media like the USN owns carrier

groups, is there any explanation for *Outside in* hanging back from all this, and smoking sulkily in the corner? If there's a single term that accounts for our reluctance, it's *cold turkey*.

Keynesianism is far from the only contributor to left-modernist degeneration, but it's ruinous enough to account for the destruction of civilization on its own. The fact that it's most realistically conceived as a symptom — of democratized politics, and still deeper things — doesn't affect its narrative role. The important point, understood widely enough to be a cliché, is that Keynesian economics is an exact social analog of addiction at the level of the individual, slaved to what William Burroughs described as "the algebra of need."

Money is made into a drug, and the solution to the pain of craving is to crank up the dose. However bad it gets, if you just scale-up the fix, the suffering goes away. Junkies can survive for a shockingly long time. Perhaps there's no end to it (that's a question for the *Right on the Money* discussion).

Outside the morgue, if there is an end — and every venture into neoreactionary strategy presumes it — there's only one form it can take: cold turkey. To not be in the habit anymore, it is necessary to kick it. That's going to be *really nasty*.

At the level of economic structure, the 'blue pill' isn't just a comforting illusion, it's a massive, deeply habitual, ultra-high tolerance (thanks Spandrell) *fix*, radically craved down to the cellular

level. Society has been doing this for a long time, and by now it's mainlining crates of the stuff. People die of cold turkey. If not quite the worst thing in the world, it's an overwhelmingly-impressive simulation of exactly that. Rational argument doesn't get close to addressing it.

Sure, junkies lie all the time, but the lies aren't the basic problem. 'Correcting' the lies gets nowhere, because nobody is even really pretending. When the junky lies, he knows, you know, everybody knows that the fundamental message is simply: *I want more junk*. He'll say anything that gets fractionally closer to the next fix. Hence the circus of democracy.

The pusher laughs at rational argument. There's some well-meaning type saying: *seriously, think about it, this is really messed up*. Then there's the 'pusher' — which is already a joke — because people are crawling to him on their knees. He doesn't need to say anything. One more hit and the pain goes away for a while. That's what matters. The rest is merely 'superstructural' (to go Right-wing Marxist on the topic).

There's no way, ever, that from this deep in, one gets out before hitting bottom. The slide has to reach the limit, because short of that, the prospect of anesthesia trumps everything.

Western Civilization is a sick junky. It isn't going to be argued out of its habit. First, it has to taste the floor. That's just the way it is — ugly.

ADDED: Hooked.

June 17, 2013

Obamanation II

Richard Fernandez has written many brilliant things, so this might not — necessarily — be his greatest moment, but it's the post most perfectly substituting for what this blog would want to have said. Discussing the prospect of impeachment proceedings against the POTUS, he speaks through the avatar of an imagined Republican senator, to say exactly what is needed:

And after we get rid of him, after a decent interval, aren't we're going to do again? This time with an historic Woman president, Asian president, Gay president? You really need never run out of Jonahs. But you see, I'm not going to vote for conviction. [murmur in the crowd]

I vote to let him remain president. I'm going to stick him to you. Vote to let him remain in office knowing full well what a screw up he is. Knowing he'll screw up again; sink your portfolios, bankrupt your industries, make such a mess of defending this country there'll be blood in the streets and crowds are going to be looking for the guys who endorsed this man into office. He's going to bring the whole thing down, and you with it.

Because you see he was what he always was. That at least is his excuse. But you knew better, all you people. All you exquisitely educated, creased-pants people. You knew better and put this poor fool in office.
I say …



Gnon gave you Obama to crash the whole rotten mess. Treasure him. “Ladies and gentleman. You’re not getting rid of Barack Obama that easily. This time there are consequences, not from me, not from the Tea Party but from reality. God exists ladies and gentleman. Or at least Murphy does. Consequences are a b**ch.”

(*Outside in* Obamanation background)

June 19, 2014

The Idea of Neoreaction

To translate ‘neoreaction’ into ‘the new reaction’ is in no way objectionable. It is new, and open to novelty. Apprehended

historically, it dates back no more than a few years. The writings of Mencius Moldbug have been a critical catalyst.

Neoreaction is also a species of reactionary political analysis, inheriting a deep suspicion of 'progress' in its ideological usage. It accepts that the dominant sociopolitical order of the world has 'progressed' solely on the condition that such *advance*, or relentless forward movement, is entirely stripped of moral endorsement, and is in fact bound to a primary association with *worsening*. The model is that of a progressive disease.

The 'neo-' of neoreaction is more than just a chronological marker, however. It introduces a distinctive idea, or abstract topic: that of a *degenerative ratchet*.

The impulse to back out of something is already reactionary, but it is the combination of a critique of progress with a recognition that *simple reversal is impossible* that initiates neoreaction. In this respect, neoreaction is a specific discovery of the arrow of time, within the field of political philosophy. It learns, and then teaches, that the way to get out cannot be the way we got in.

Wherever progressivism takes hold, a degenerative ratchet is set to work. It is unthinkable that any society could *back out* of the expansive franchise, the welfare state, macroeconomic policy-making, massively-extended regulatory bureaucracy, coercive-egalitarian secular religion, or entrenched globalist intervention. Each of these (inter-related) things are essentially irreversible. They

give modern history a *gradient*. Given any two historical 'snap-shots', one can tell immediately which is earlier and which later, by simply observing the extent to which any of these social factors have *progressed*. Leviathan does not shrink.

Within the theory of complex systems, certain phase transitions exhibit comparable properties. Network effects can *lock-in* changes, which are then irreversible. The adoption and consolidation of the Qwerty keyboard exemplifies this pattern. Technological businesses commonly make lock-in central to their strategies, and if they succeed, they cannot then die in the same way they matured.

When neoreaction identifies a degenerative ratchet — such as the (Jim Donald) Left Singularity — it necessarily poses the problem of a novel end. The process goes wrong consistently, and irreversibly. To repeat the Neoreactionary Idea as a mantra: *the way out cannot be the way in*.

A degenerative ratchet can only progress, until it cannot go on, and it stops. What happens next is something else — its Outside. Moldbug calls it a *reboot*. History can tell us to expect it, but not what we are to expect.

June 28, 2013

The Ruin Reservoir

In the *Washington Post*, Charles Krauthammer notes:

It doesn't take a genius to see what happens when the entitlement state outgrows the economy upon which it rests. The time of Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Spain, the rest of insolvent social-democratic Europe — and now Detroit — is the time for conservatives to raise the banner of Stein's Law and yell, "Stop." You can kick the can down the road, but at some point it disappears over a cliff.

Yes, yes, yes … but. Despite its perfect common sense, the monotony of this message is becoming utterly unbearable. The end isn't arriving tomorrow. This dreary horror show could last for decades. How many roughly-identical, absolutely obvious, sensible Op Ed columns is it possible to endure? (I'm already way into overtime.)

A reasonable conclusion from the reality of degenerative ratchets is that nothing less than a comprehensive crash makes them stop. Some of the healthier Right-delight over the Detroit implosion is tied to the expectation that bad examples could be educational, but the evidence for that is slender, especially under conditions of sovereign propaganda saturation (the Cathedral). Who are you going to trust, the academic-media complex or your lying eyes? We already know the predominant answer to that question.

When a message is existentially unacceptable to the Cathedral,

it will not be heard, and the only messages with substantial reality content are of exactly this kind. True believers will stick with a morbid utopia to the end, since anything truly different would — in any case — count for them as some species of death. For cynics, the calculation is even easier: why unnecessarily shorten looting time? More common still are the poor idiots, who will just do what they're told (while trying to grab a little feeding trough time), and then be sacrificed. It should already be clear that *nobody cares about them*, and they're too defective to care competently for themselves. That's neither justice nor injustice, but simple reality.

Nobody here is under any illusions about the profound socio-political malignancy given free reign in Detroit, or about the quality of human material over which it held sway, and yet it lasted up to a point that has provoked repeated comparisons with Hiroshima-1945, wrung out to the ugly end (and we haven't yet seen the end). If we ever doubted that *there's a lot of ruin in a nation*, we no longer can. For a city uniquely proficient at suicide, the process lasts half a century, including final, grinding decades, when nothing beyond a zombie parody of what once was still remains. If a uniquely benighted social trash pile can last this long, how far can the world's most powerful nation spin out its decline? There's enough time, to be sure, for an Amazon jungle worth of Herbert Stein-inspired Op Eds.

Can-kicking eventually runs out of road, *of course*, and its only when this truism has become an intolerable, deadening drone that

neoreaction begins. Anybody who still needs to hear that message *is simply lost*. Remedial education cannot be the neoreactionary task (there are libertarian-oriented conservatives for that — and they will fail).

If the Dark Enlightenment cannot end with Stein's conclusion, but is rather initiated by it, born from the presupposition that *this cannot go on forever*, how is its guiding topic to be understood? What will it discuss — with what will it occupy itself — amid the deepening ruin, *for decades*?

As its name indicates, Dark Enlightenment is a creature of late twilight, preparing for a gruesomely protracted night. One object that merits growing fascination is certainly this: *the ruin reservoir is deep*. As a fact this is easily — and for neoreaction *necessarily* — acknowledged, but the exploration of its mysteries has still scarcely begun.

July 26, 2013

Dark Acceleration

There's been a virtual post on **the worse, the better*** simmering in the kitchen here for a while, without reaching the stage of being ready for the table. 'Max' exuberantly pre-empts the topic in this comment thread. How deeply is this speculative position insinuated

into the DNA of neoreaction? (The provisional *Outside in* response: very deeply.) There's no longer any keeping it off the 'to do' list.

Also (on the same thread): don't miss the trial application of the Lesser Bull / Gnon terminological creation **Ruin Voting**. It has a dazzling future, because it so exactly captures a devastating empirical reality. (If successfully slogan-synthesized with one or two additional words, it will be despatched immediately to the T-shirt factory. Perhaps antagonistic ghetto punks would be prepared to pay for a 'Ruin Voter' shirt already?)

*Wikipedia attributes the origin of the phrase to Nikolay Chernyshevsky, who seems to have been systematically lexo-pillaged by Lenin. (Chernyshevsky was also author of the novel *What is to be done?*)

September 3, 2013

Sundown

David Stockman rests his analysis of recent economic history upon one basic presupposition, whose modesty is expressed by an intrinsic inclination to a negative form: *Radical dishonesty cannot provide a foundation for enduring financial value*. This assumption suffices to expose the otherwise scarcely comprehensible rottenness of American public affairs, to organize an integral understanding of the

gathering calamity, and to marginalize his work as the over-excited howl of a lonely crank.

In any society where minimal standards of civil decency were still even tenuously remembered, his ideas would be simple common sense. In the bedlamite orgy we in fact inhabit, Stockman's thoughts appear wildly counter-intuitive, rigidly structured by uninterpretable imperatives, and suffused by an improbable aura of doom. In fact Stockman is quite clear — implicitly — that under American political conditions *sanity was strictly unobtainable*. The coming calamity fulfills a (bi-partisan) democratic destiny — but that is to anticipate.

Stockman's latest compressed overview of our contemporary crisis — generated by the accelerated demolition of economic civilization over the last quarter-century — explains the "Sundown in America" — "a dystopic 'new normal' where historic notions of perpetual progress and robust economic growth no longer pertain." It outlines a vision that supports a theoretical bet, or short speculation on the economic infrastructure of the Cathedral: "Now the American state — the agency which was supposed to save capitalism from its inherent flaws and imperfections — careens wildly into dysfunction and incoherence. […] Washington's machinery of national governance is literally melting-down. It is the victim of 80 years of Keynesian error — much of it nurtured in the environs of Harvard Yard — about the nature of the business cycle

and the capacity of the state — especially its central banking branch — to ameliorate the alleged imperfections of free market capitalism." The enemy will never again have a record of effective economic performance to legitimate itself through. What it is doing — and has to do — however politically efficacious, is locked tightly into an inescapable vector that can lead nowhere except utter financial ruin. (Neoreaction should bifurcate on this point, because adaptation to an alternative possibility is something so completely different, very little of strategic substance will translate across.)

Stockman is able to draw upon his own biography to reveal where the GOP went wrong — the political necessities of democratic acceptance drove economic policy into the abyss:

... the circumstances of my own ex-communication from the supply-side church underscore the Reaganite embrace of the Keynesian gospel. The true-believers — led by Art Laffer, an economist with a Magic Napkin, and Jude Wanniski, an ex-Wall Street Journal agit-prop man who chanced to stuff said napkin into his pocket — were militantly opposed to spending cuts designed to offset the revenue loss from the Reagan tax reductions.

They called this "root canal" economics and insisted that the Republican Party could never compete with the Keynesian Democrats unless it abandoned its historic commitment to balanced budgets and fiscal rectitude, and instead, campaigned on tax cuts everywhere and always and a fiscal free lunch owing to a purported

cornucopia of economic growth.

Winning elections was conditional upon fiscal barbarism, given only the quite reasonable assumption that nothing except radical dishonesty could ever be popular. Insane promises, short-termism, and whole-hearted participation in a bi-partisan conspiracy to eradicate the last vestiges of responsible government were indispensable steps towards the exercise of power.

The fiscal end game — policy paralysis and the eventual bankruptcy of the state — thus became visible. All of the beltway players –Republican, Democrats and central bankers alike — are now so hooked on the Keynesian cool-aid that they cannot imagine the Main Street economy standing on its own two feet without continuous, massive injections of state largesse. […] the stimulus bill was not a rational economic plan at all; it was a spasmodic eruption of beltway larceny that has now become our standard form of governance.

Hence the Stockman forecast:

… the Federal budget has become a doomsday machine because the processes of fiscal governance are paralyzed and broken. There will be recurrent debt ceiling and shutdown crises like the carnage scheduled for next week, as far as the eye can see.

Indeed, notwithstanding the assurances of debt deniers like professor Krugman, the honest structural deficit is $1-2 trillion annually for the next decade and then it will get far worse. In fact,

when you set aside the Rosy Scenario used by CBO and its preposterous Keynesian assumption that we will reach full employment in 2017 and never fall short of potential GDP ever again for all eternity, the fiscal equation is irremediable.

Under these conditions what remains of our free enterprise economy will … buckle under the weight of taxes and crisis. Sundown in America is well-nigh unavoidable.

This is the terrain that neoreaction takes root within. It frames our problems, opportunities, and expectations. The overwhelmingly preponderant part of our intellectual energies should be targeted at the future it anticipates.

October 6, 2013

The Decline Frame

This point is important enough to restate well, as Foseti does:

The crux of [Scott Alexander's] argument is that, "It is a staple of Reactionary thought that everything is getting gradually worse." He then goes on to show that not everything is getting worse. […] It is not a staple of reactionary thought that everything is getting worse. To the contrary, I've never read that argument from any reactionary anywhere. […] Let's correct his statement: It is a staple of Reactionary thought that massive improvements in technology have

been very effective in masking massive declines in virtually all other aspects of society.

The progressive assumption, which neoreaction contests, is that it is natural and good to spend the advances of civilization on causes unrelated to civilizational advance. A more controversial formulation (supported here) is that the Cathedral spends capitalism on something other than capitalism, and ultimately on the destruction of capitalism. It tolerates a functional economy — to the extent that it does — only on the understanding that it will be used for something else.

Elementary cybernetics predicts that if productivity is recycled into productivity, the outcome is an explosive process of increasing returns. Insofar as history is not manifesting accelerating productivity, therefore, it can be assumed that social circuitry is being fed through non-productive, and anti-productive links. Techno-commercial Modernity is being squandered on (Neo-Puritan) Progressivism. In the West, at least, that is what is *getting worse*.

October 23, 2013

Nemesis

Neoreaction, at its core, is a critical analysis of the Cathedral. It

should surprise nobody, therefore, to see it hurtled into public consciousness, as the sole cultural agency able to name the self-evident configuration of contemporary sovereignty.

As the Cathedral becomes a self-confident public performance, its only remotely-articulate analyst is drawn into prominence, in its wake. In this regard, we haven't seen anything yet.

Even had the Obama administration consciously decided to select the Cathedral as a branding device, it could not have been epitomized any more perfectly. Sacralized progressivism, ivory tower 'brahminism', academic-media fusion as the exclusive source of recognizable authority, and the absolute identification of governance with public relations have reached a zenith that tilts into self-parody. Soft fascist self-transcending hyper-Calvinism has been lucidly distilled into blitz-promoted political iconography. Everyone with a television set now knows that the Cathedral is in power, and merely await the terminological confirmation of their perceptions. Enthusiasts and dissidents are seeing more-or-less the same thing, characterized in approximately the same words. The only serious matter of controversy is the quantity of spiritual devotion such a regime, faith, and symbolic order reasonably commands.

Politics-as-religious-experience has been seen in America before. Arguably, it is even typical. What has not been seen since William Jennings Bryan at the dawn of the progressive movement, and never at all before then, is democracy pitched to such rapturous

extremities of soteriological expectation — and Bryan was stopped. By identifying himself deliberately with a promise of comprehensive socio-spiritual redemption, Obama has more fully exemplified *hubris* than any leader in the history of the United States. The appropriate frame of political explanation, therefore, is *tragic*.

Tragedy is the fundamental teaching of Classical Occidental Antiquity, nucleated upon the insight that *hubris escalates to nemesis*. It finds its most lucid philosophical articulation in the fragment of Anaximander:

Whence things originate,
Thence they return to destruction,
According to necessity;
For they reciprocate justice and pay recompense
For their injustice
In conformity with the ordinance of Time.

This conception strongly resonates with neoreactionary fatalism (anti-politics), and with the formation of ideas around *wu wei* (laissez faire) in the Chinese cultural context. Nemesis, the agency of cosmic justice (*Δίκη*) eventuates automatically, as a retarded consequence that is nevertheless inalienably bound to the *hubris* of political action. The fatal stroke is delivered — at the right time — from the intersection of power and fate, rather than by any kind of considered remedy or political dialectic. Tragic rectification completes itself.

If there is a 'strategic' lesson from tragedy, it is not opposition,

but *non-participation*. To become entangled in hubris is to invite nemesis. To the greatest extent possible, hubristic power should be left to its fate. The less interrupted its acceleration into concentrated nemesis, the more spectacularly cosmic justice is displayed, and the more effectively the audience is educated.

If you're sitting comfortably, you can pass around the popcorn now, because the American tragedy is a real doozy. We already know that Obama is playing the part of the tragic hero with exceptional genius, as the very personification of immoderate political ambition and narcissistic blindness. Far more unexpectedly, his GOP opposition has somehow reached beyond its corrupt dementia to discover the fatal stance of non-participation, unanimously rejecting the President's key-stone domestic initiative, and also distancing itself from his foreign policy agenda in overwhelming numbers. Unilateral Cathedralism reigns, uncompromised. This is the secret to the unprecedented delights of the current epoch.

Jonah Goldberg describes the spectacle well:

I*f you can't take some joy, some modicum of relief and mirth, in the unprecedentedly spectacular beclowning of the president, his administration, its enablers, and, to no small degree, liberalism itself, then you need to ask yourself why you're following politics in the first place. Because, frankly, this has been one of the most enjoyable political moments of my lifetime. I wake up in the morning and rush to find my just-delivered newspaper with a joyful expectation of*

worsening news so intense, I feel like Morgan Freeman should be narrating my trek to the front lawn. Indeed, not since Dan Rather handcuffed himself to a fraudulent typewriter, hurled it into the abyss, and saw his career plummet like Ted Kennedy was behind the wheel have I enjoyed a story more.

Alas, the English language is not well equipped to capture the sensation I'm describing, which is why we must all thank the Germans for giving us the term "schadenfreude" — the joy one feels at the misfortune or failure of others. The primary wellspring of schadenfreude can be attributed to Barack Obama's hubris — another immigrant word, which means a sinful pride or arrogance that causes someone to believe he has a godlike immunity to the rules of life.

The catharsis is so harsh and pure that even the invertebrate Buckleyites at *The National Review* are beginning to get it, for a short, exquisite moment, at least. As Konkvistador warns (in this thread), a far less radically degraded group of people will nevertheless "forget all about these insights [as] the next election cycle warms up, indeed elections with their promise of power for conservatives and pseudo-conservatives [have] historically served as their mindwipe. Election cycles are when conservative obsolete Progressivism is updated to a slightly less obsolete version." The sojourn of conservatism on the Outer Right, where tragic non-participation holds, cannot be expected to last. Yet even as a brief

intermission from vile ambition, it allows nemesis the space to express itself in its full, planet-shuddering splendor.

Whatever the disagreements and divergences among the strands of neoreaction, there is one message that has to remain unwaveringly consistent: *The Cathedral owns this* (totally). Less than a quarter of the way into Obama's second term, full-spectrum catastrophe is already written across the heavens in letters of incandescent sulfur. Obamacare is wrecked before it has even rolled out, Yellen has all-but promised to dedicate the Fed to full-throttle bubble-mania, metropolitan bankruptcy is burning through the nation's cities like a zombie virus, crime is angling sharply upwards, American foreign policy lies in smoking ruins … there is simply no way this disintegrating jalopy holds together for another three years.

Let in burn — in the Cathedral's hands.

ADDED: Advice from Michael Walsh to the GOP: "Don't do something, just stand there. You didn't vote for it, not once, not a single time, ever. […] Obama threw a spanner into his own Rube Goldberg machine yesterday and the best thing you can do is to sit down, shut up, get out of the way, and enjoy the show."

ADDED: *For Democrats, Obamacare Unfolding Like a Greek Tragedy*

ADDED: "Hubris has a way of ruining grand designs. And like reality, it bites."

November 15, 2013

Nemesis II

Less than a year after surrendering corporate governance to SJWs, this happens. There's plenty of room for arguments about the tangles of causality here. Nevertheless, as a dramatic exemplification of harsh Cosmic Law it's going to be difficult to beat.

ADDED: Mr. Archenemy recommends a link far superior to those given above. Eric Raymond writes: "… all I can think is "They brought the fate they deserved on themselves." Because principles matter – and in 2014 the Mozilla Foundation abandoned and betrayed one of the core covenants of open source. […] I refer, of course, to the Foundation's disgraceful failure to defend its newly promoted Mozilla CEO Brendan Eich against a political mob."

March 9, 2015

No Way Home

It follows from the analysis of socio-political modernity as a *degenerative ratchet* that *identification of deterioration does not in itself amount to a program for reversing it*. The vividness of this

problem is directly proportional to the seriousness with which the nature of time, as a practical consideration, is addressed. The *essential* difference between reaction and neoreaction is adequately articulated as soon as this point is made.

'Past orientation' is an impressively defensible value (even by techno-commercial criteria). Retro-directed action, in contrast, is sheer error. This is too obvious an idea to labor over. Those who do not get it have chosen not to.

Unlike the many unsettled controversies of neoreaction, the temptation to *simply return*, however well-intentioned, merits no more than condescension. In this case — as in so many others — an image is worth a thousand words:

 (click on image to enlarge)

April 21, 2014

End of the Ratchet?

Richard Fernandez makes a basic, but essential point:

Mention repealing Obamacare and you are told it is impossible; even John Boehner said, it's the 'law of the land'. Brown vs Board is the law of the land, Roe vs Wade is the law of the land, but Hobby Lobby or Citizens United is an abomination to be repealed or ignored soonest. It's like a ratchet. It moves only in the way of the approved narrative.

This is the same insight identified by this blog as *The Idea of Neoreaction*, which is to say: recognition of a degenerative ratchet as the central mechanism of 'progress' (to the Left). Fernandez draws explicit attention to its constitutive asymmetry. Partisan polarity is revealed as a one-way conveyor, alternating between 'stop' and 'go left'. Two-party democratic politics is structurally-established as an inevitable loser's game for the Right. Once this is seen, how is the thought of 'conservative activism' in any way sustainable, except as a transparently futile joke? Hasn't the line already been crossed to the dark side?

Fernandez is still hedging:

… the real news is this: it's not working any more. Even Obamacare might actually be repealed. Liberal foreign policy might really go down in flames. Already the authorities are warning of bombs on inbound airline flights. And Obama might actually be the worst president since World War 2. Things used to be under control; what happened? […] History suggests that over time all conflict becomes symmetrical. Eventually both sides become equally brutal.

[…] If there is any lesson taught by history it is that man when driven far enough is the most dangerous and merciless life form on the planet.

It's not at all clear to me what's really being said here. Is this an anticipation of counter-revolution? Or is it merely the tired claim that *the next election could really make a difference*?

Even in the most depressing case, something is being seen that would very much rather not be seen. If acute conservative opinion is tiring of its role as the Cathedral's loyal opposition, it indicates that the mechanism is beginning to break down.

July 3, 2014

Ratchets and Catastrophes

> pic.twitter.com/aSnoz9Om20
> — Greg (@FoolishReporter) August 23, 2014

Perhaps all significant ideological distinctions — at the level of philosophical abstraction — can be derived from this proposition. For the progressive, it represents the purest expression of history's "moral arc". For the Conservative (or, more desperately, the Reactionary), it describes an unfolding historical catastrophe. For the Neoreactionary, it indicates a problem in need of theorization.

Moldbug lays out the problem in this (now classic) formulation:

Cthulhu may swim slowly. But he only swims left. Isn't that interesting?

In the history of American democracy, if you take the mainstream political position (Overton Window, if you care) at time T1, and place it on the map at a later time T2, T1 is always way to the right, near the fringe or outside it. So, for instance, if you take the average segregationist voter of 1963 and let him vote in the 2008 election, he will be way out on the wacky right wing. Cthulhu has passed him by. Where is the John Birch Society, now? What about the NAACP? Cthulhu swims left, and left, and left. There are a few brief periods of true reaction in American history — the post-Reconstruction era or Redemption, the Return to Normalcy of Harding, and a couple of others. But they are unusual and feeble compared to the great leftward shift.

The specific Moldbuggian solution to this problem, whether approached historically through the Ultra-Calvinism Thesis, or systemically through the analysis of the Cathedral, invokes a dynamic model of Occidental religious modernization. The irreversible bifurcations, symmetry breaks, or schisms that lock Western modernity into its "great leftward shift" correspond to successive episodes of cladistic fission within Protestant Christianity (abstractly understood). The religious history of modernity is constituted by a *degenerative ratchet* (as touched upon here, 1, 2, 3).

Discussing a recent critique of the Euro by Keith Humphreys, Megan McArdle converges upon the same insight. She writes:

As a longtime euroskeptic, who has frequently flirted with the idea that the euro must eventually destroy itself, I am sympathetic to Humphreys' point. But let me attempt to offer a partial defense of the hapless eurocrats: However stupid the creation of the euro was, undoing it will not be easy. […] Yes, we're back to our old friend path dependence. As I noted the other day, the fact that you can avoid some sort of terrible fate by stopping something before it starts does not mean that you can later achieve the same salutary effects by ceasing whatever stupid thing you have done. It would have been painless just to not have the euro. But it will be painful indeed to get rid of it.

She encounters the signature nonlinearities of such lock-in phenomena in noting: "No wonder that no one wants even to discuss it. Especially since even discussing a dissolution of the euro area makes a crisis more likely …"

Progressivism as a process, rather than a mere attitude, is always and everywhere a matter of degenerative ratchets. Consider, very briefly, some of the most prominent examples:

(1) Democratization. Every extension of the franchise is effectively irreversible. This is why the promotion of democratic reform in Hong Kong, in a complete rupture from its local traditions, is so breathtakingly irresponsible. (No link, because I have yet to

encounter an article on the subject worthy of recommendation.)

(2) Welfare systems (and positive rights in general). The irreversibility of these socio-economic innovations is widely recognized. Once implemented, they cannot be rolled back without the infliction of massive suffering. Obamacare is a more-or-less cynical attempt to exploit this lock-in dynamic.

(3) Immigration. Welcoming newcomers is effortless, removing them all-but impossible (or at least entirely unprecedented in the modern West). Immigration policy, by its nature, can only "swim left". It consists of freezes and floods (but never reversals) — epitomizing the ratchet pattern.

(4) Macroeconomic politicized money (central banking, fiat currency, inflationary normalization, and debt financing). Easing is easy, tightening is terrifying, roll back unattempted (since Jackson in the mid-19th century).

My contention: *There is no substantial topic of Neoreactionary concern that does not conform to this basic pattern*. The degenerative ratchet is *the problem*, abstractly conceived.

This is why NRx is dark. The only way out of a degenerative ratchet is catastrophe. Such processes are essentially unreformable, and this conclusion captures the critique of political conservatism from which NRx has been born. The only non-disastrous solution to a DR, or progressive lock-in dynamic, is to avoid entering into it. Once it has begun, normal politics can only modulate the speed

of deterioration, and then only to a relatively limited degree. It will reach its end, which will be seriously horrible. NRx forecasting begins and ends with this thesis.

Our doomsterism is not a psychological tic, but a rigorous theoretical obligation. It follows, ineluctably, from iron historical law. Looking on the dark side is the only way to see.

September 2, 2014

Down-slopes

The Outer-Right, in all its principal strands, has a horrified fascination with decline. Is this basic proposition even slightly controversial? It's not easy to see how it could be. This is a zone of convergence of such intimidating enormity that even beginning to heap up link support seems futile. Taking the Trichotomy as a rough guide reveals the pattern starkly:

(1) Religious traditionalists see a continuous decline trend from the Reformation to the most recent frenzy of evangelical hyper-secularism.

(2) Ethno-Nationalists see a process of accelerating demographic destruction driven — or at least lucidly articulated — by left-wing race politics.

(3) Techno-Commercialists see the systematic destruction of capital

by cancerous Leviathan and macroeconomic high-fraudulence, undermining economic incentives, crushing time-horizons, and garbling price-discovery into fiat noise.

In each case, the online-ecologies (and associated micro-cultures) sharing the respective deep intuitions of progressive ruin are too enormous to conveniently apprehend. What everyone on the Outer-Right shares (and I'm now hardening this up, into a definition) is the adamantine confidence that the basic socio-political process is radically morbid, and is leading inexorably to utter ruin.

No surprise, then, that John Michael Greer finds many attentive readers in our camp. His latest (and still incomplete) series on *Dark Age America* resonates with particular strength. The most recent installment, which discusses the impending collapse of the market system, through quasi-Marxist crisis, on its way to many centuries of neo-feudalism, is bound to raise some tech-comm eyebrows, but it nevertheless occupies the same broad forecast space. If people are stocking their basements with ammo, silver coins, and dried beans for Greer reasons rather than Stockman ones, they might cut back a little on the coins, but they're not going to stop stocking the basement. Differences seem to lie in the details.

The differences in the details are actually fairly substantial. Even if *Winter is coming*, we're not necessarily talking about the same thing. To begin with, Greer is not a figure of the Outer-Right at all, because his (extremely interesting) cybernetic engine of descent is

ecological and resource-based, carried by a deep eco-historical 'correction' or dominating (negative) feedback cycle whose proxy is fossil-fuel abundance. Modernity, roughly speaking, simply runs out of gas. His cultural criticism is ultimately anchored in — and limited to — that. When describing (drawn-out, and incremental) civilizational collapse, he forecasts the automatic nemesis of a system doomed by its unsustainable excess. Further engagement with this model belongs elsewhere. It's an important discussion to have.

The more immediate concern, here, is with the very different components of 'winter' — of which three, in particular, stand-out. Each is, in itself, huge. The directions in which they point, however, are not obviously coherent.

(1) Closest to the Greer vision are bad global-systems dynamics. These tend to prevail on the Outer-Right, but they typically lack the theoretical resolution Greer provides. It is understandable that those who strongly identify with specific declining ethnies (or Super-Phyles), whether theologically, racially, or traditionally conceived, are disinclined to distinguish their progressive dilapidation from a generalized global calamity. This is certainly <u>not</u> merely stupid, however much it offends prevailing moral fashion. The extent to which it supplies an adequate preparation for the events to come is questionable, nevertheless. Without an explicit defense of its specificity, it can all too easily confuse its *own* winter sicknesses with a universal predicament.

(2) What can easily be under-estimated is the localization of the unfolding disaster, in a specifically Occidental collapse. This is, of course, Spengler's *Decline of the West*, among other things, and even though this is a work Greer explicitly acknowledges, the inherent globality of his model tends to eclipse its particularism. For Greer, the impending decline of China (for instance) follows upon its complicity in fossil-fueled industrial modernity, even if, for rhetorical effect, it is to be permitted a few decades of comparative ascendancy. The Outer-Right tends to be Greerian in this respect, although without equivalent positive reason. It is not asked, often enough, how much of the deepening winter is — quite narrowly — *ours*. Greer has an argument for why Western Modernity has consumed the future for everyone. Unless the fundamentals of this theory are accepted, is there any reason to accept its predictive consequences?

(3) The third 'winter' is modeled by the rhythmic troughs of the Kondratiev cycle. This tends to localize in time, rather than space, dividing the merely seasonal from the cumulative, secular trend. While a comprehensive attribution of our malaise to such a cycle would constitute an exit from the Outer-Right, passing into a far more complacent diagnosis of the global, or merely Western, calamity, to dismiss it entirely from consideration is to court profound cognitive (and predictive) imbalance. In the opinion of this blog, Greer's model is grievously afflicted by such imbalance, and —

once again — this seems to be a syndrome of far wider prevalence. Scarcely anybody on the Outer-Right is prepared for rhythmic amelioration of significant modern pathologies, through renewal of techno-commercial vitality *even under conditions of secular civilizational decline*. Yet even glancing attention to the working of the (~ half century) *long waves* suggests that such neglect is simply unrealistic. Unless the K-wave is now dead — an extraordinarily extreme proposition, which surely merits explicit assertion — some proportion of the present decay is inherently transitional. New industrial structures based on blockchained communications — and thus designed to route around socio-cultural sclerosis — will support an explosion of innovation dwarfing any yet imagined (including synthetic economic agents, quantum computing, neuromorphic chips, large-scale space activity, applied genomics, VR media systems, drone-robotics, commercialized security … maybe *Urbit*). Even if Greer is absolutely right about the deep historical pattern being played out — and I'm fully confident he isn't — the next K-wave upswing is going to be vast, dazzling, and, almost incomprehensibly distracting. There's perhaps a decade remaining in which uncompromising gloom-core will make sense, after which the Outer-Right risks utter eclipse during two decades of upswing euphoria. It would make a lot of sense to pre-adapt to it, beginning with a reminder that the Outer-Right case is **not** that *everything* will *continually* deteriorate.

I've run out the clock on myself for now … but I'll get back to this.

November 8, 2014

CHAPTER FIVE - REALISM AND TIME STRUCTURE

Reality Check

Foseti, commenting at his own place, asks rhetorically:

Don't you think that writing to save the world is – in itself – fundamentally progressive in nature (not to say wildly presumptuous)?

Even those tempted to answer in the negative need to think this through patiently, because the pretensions this question punctures are typically distinguished by their thoughtlessness. Modern politics became psychotic when agitated scribblers convinced themselves that they had the tools, the right, and even the *duty* to re-order the world in accordance with their pamphlets. This is a Left tradition that few have yet derided enough.

To carve out cognitive independence is one thing, to deform it into practical idealism is quite another. Indeed, dripping our dark poisons into the milk of idealism might easily be the most *practical* difference we can make. Soaring words and rallying cries have already done

far too much. It makes sense to take a step back, into skepticism, humor, undistorted proportion, and the hypothetical mode, before advancing further down our tracks … wherever they lead.

May 29, 2013

Neoreactionary Realism

The easiest place to start is with what neoreactionary realism isn't, which is this:

For a reactionary state to be established in the West in our lifetimes, we'll need to articulate the need for one in a language millions of people can understand. If not to produce nationalists, to at least produce a large contingent of sympathizers. The question, ***"What is it, exactly, that you propose to do?"*** *must be answered, first in simple terms, then in detailed terms that directly support the simple arguments. The urge to develop esoteric theories of causes and circumstances should be tossed aside, and replaced with concrete proposals for a novel form of government that harmonizes with perennial principles. This can be achieved by producing positive theories for a new order, rather than analyzing the nuts and bolts of a decaying order.*

Beginning with a model of an ideal society is a procedure that already has a name, and a different one: Utopianism. It's not a

difficult way to think. For instance, imagine a political regime based on commutative tax politics. As far as economic considerations are concerned, the political problem is solved. Policy choices are aligned with practical incentives, and the manifestly irresistible democratic impulse to redistributive violation of property rights is immediately terminated. The trouble with this idea? — There's no practical way to get to it. The real problem of political philosophy does not lie in the conceptual effort of modeling an ideal society, but in *departing from where we are,* in a direction that tends to the optimization of a selected value (equality stinks, utility doesn't work, freedom is OK, intelligence is best).

Where can we get to from here? Unless this question controls political theory, the result is utopian irrelevance. The initial *real* problem is escape. In consequence, two broad avenues of realistic neoreactionary reflection are open:

(1) Elaborate escape. This topic naturally bifurcates in turn, into the identification and investment of exit-based institutions, and the promotion of secessionist options (from fissional federalism to seasteading). An escape-based society, unlike a utopia, is structured in the same way it is reached. Upon arriving in a world made of the right sort of fragments — splintered by political philosophy rather than tribal variety — all kinds of real possibilities arise. (Tribes are a useless distraction, because they resonate to defective philosophies — a world of Benetton differentiated failing social democracies is the

one we are being herded into now.)

(2) Defend diversity. Once again, ethnic diversity — as such — means next to nothing (at best). Every 'people' has shown itself capable of political idiocy. What deserves preservation is fracture, defined over against Cathedral universalism. Any place that can practically count as 'offshore' is a base for the future. In particular, the East Asian antidemocratic technocapitalist tradition merits ferocious ideological defense against Cathedralist subversion. Within the West, domestic enclaves that have resisted macrosocial absorption — from Amish communities to survivalist militia movements — have comparable value. Wherever political globalism fails, neoreaction wins.

The very last thing neoreaction has to usefully declare is *I have a dream*. Dream-mongering is the enemy. The only future worth striving for is splintered into myriads, loosely webbed together by free-exit connections, and conducting innumerable experiments in government, the vast majority of which will fail.

We do not, and cannot, know what we want, anymore than we can know what the machines of the next century will be like, because *real potentials need to be discovered*, not imagined. Realism is the negative of an unfounded pretense to knowledge, no less in political sociology than information technology. Invention is not planning, and sky-castles offer no refuge from the Cathedral. If there's one thing we need to have learned, and never to forget, it's that.

ADDED: Adventures in Exiting

July 4, 2013

Dark Moments

Gloom and realism can be hard to distinguish, but it's important to carry on. Curmudgeonry without stubbornness isn't worth a damn. Even in the worst case, relentless, sluggishly deterioriating ghastliness can at least be interesting. It shouldn't be necessary to cheer up, in order to continue, and there might be some lessons worth attending to in the slough of despond.

I'd go further. Despair can get things started, if it means the abandonment of diverting idols. A full, immersive soaking, which leaves no doubt about certain things *being over*, is morbidly therapeutic, and even something like a first step (at least a first slouch). There are hopes that have to die, and the sooner the better, although if they die slowly and horribly, they are perhaps less likely to need killing twice.

Here's the argument: *Nothing is going anywhere without preliminary disintegration*. That's the cheerful part. It seems to me an absolutely irresistible claim, and this post was to have been designed to rally consensus around it. Then I made the 'mistake' of watching this.

Allow me to walk you into this little knot of gloom in stages, punctuated by theses, each of which marks an essential but incomplete discussion. The meta-assertion is that there is no other way. Push-back against that, met at any of its way-stations, will make the dire swamp-thrashing to follow worthwhile.

Thesis-1: There is no more basic preliminary to effective neoreactionary transformation than schism. This can take many forms. Simple retirement into the private sphere — as strongly advocated by Nick B. Steves in particular — represents one significant pole. At the other lies secession, and other forms of macro-political disintegration (with science fiction variants extending from seasteading out to space colonization). The essential point is that *a consolidation of disagreement in space is substituted for a resolution of disagreement in time*. As far as practicality is concerned, this is the overwhelming priority.

Thesis-2: There can be no agreement. The recent flurry of interest in Emmanuel Todd should suffice as confirmation (this critical summary by Craig Willy is excellent). In a very small nutshell, Todd argues that "… political ideologies in the modern age are projections of a people's unconscious premodern family values." Europe has four basic family types (all exogamous), programming its varied political ideals.

The inegalitarian (classical) liberalism of mercantile North-West Europeans, corresponds to the 'Absolute nuclear family'.

Weird Franco-Italian 'egalitarian liberalism' corresponds to the 'egalitarian nuclear family' (Todd's own ancestral type and value model).
The Germanic 'Authoritarian family' tends to German stuff, and
The (Slav-Orthodox) 'Community family' breeds communists.
If you haven't read Willy yet, you'll be glad you did. The sole take-away here: *People are different* (oops, that's a signature judgement of the inegalitarian liberal type), with no tendency to converge upon common ideals, even among Europeans. There are people who think communism is natural and good, and they're not going to be argued out of it. Only a small minority think what you do, and that isn't going to change. You either have to kill them, dominate them, be dominated by them, *or escape them*. Escaping them is best.

Thesis-3: It's America that matters (for Anglophone neoreactionaries, at least). It's the only country with traditions of freedom that can be broken into large and influential pieces, and its residual federal structure provides a virtual template for doing exactly that. For practical purposes, therefore, the future of liberty — *even if you want to read that as the liberty to conduct experiments in ethnonationalist or theocratic government* — is entirely dependent upon the development of American federalism. Further centralized consolidation is losing, and disintegration is winning. Compared to that, in terms of political practicality, everything else is of vanishing irrelevance. Dreaming up schemes for ideal authoritarian regimes, in

particular, is simply a hobby (but you know that already, right?).

The only road to the future, or the past, leads through a Disunited States of America. Now listen to those *Bloggingheads* again, and wind up the gloom to scream volume. It's absolutely clear from a strictly technical point of view that the sole conceivable platform for an escape from Leviathan's degenerative ratchet would be a *Confederate States of America*, and we can probably agree that historical sensitivities make that a non-starter. Setting out on a path away from futile arguments — between people who will never agree — leads straight back into America's racial nightmare, and horrible, draining, unresolvable wrangling that amounts to: *Freedom is banned forever, because … what happened to black people*.

Those arguments are stupidity itself. They go nowhere. And that is precisely the point.

[Don't kill yourself, or shut down your blog — but a stiff drink is positively recommended]

ADDED: Why the GOP has to die.

July 18, 2013

Reaction, Repetition, and Time

Whether considered within the registers of ~~physics~~, physiology, or politics, 'reaction' is a time-structured notion. It follows an action

or stimulus, which it reaches back through, in order to annul or counteract a disequilibrium or disturbance. Whilst subsequent to an action, it operates in alignment with what came before: the track, or legacy, that defines the path of reversal, or the target of restoration. It therefore envelops the present, to contest it from all sides. The Outside of the dominant moment is its space.

Reaction forges, or excavates, an occult pact between the future and the past, setting both against the present, in concert, and thus differentiating itself from progressivism (which unites the present and future against the past), and conservatism (which unites past and present against the future). Its bond with time as *outsideness* carries it ever further beyond the moment and its decay, into a twin horizon of anterior and posterior remoteness. It is a Shadow Out of Time.

There is a far more immediately practical reason for reaction to involve itself in the exploration of time, however: to take steps to avoid what it could scarcely otherwise avoid becoming — a sterile orgy of disgruntlement. Finding nothing in the present except deteriorated hints of other things, reaction soon slides into what it most detests: an impotent micro-culture of vocal, repetitive protest. *This isn't right, this isn't right, this isn't right* quickly becomes white noise, or worse (intelligible whining). Even when it escapes the ceaseless, mechanical reiteration of a critical diagnosis (whose tedium is commensurate to the narrowed times it damns), its

schemes of restoration fall prey to a more extended repetition, which calls only — and uselessly — for what has been to be once more.

If the New Reaction is not to bore itself into a coma, it has to learn to run innovation and tradition together as Siamese twins, and for that it needs to think time, into distant conclusions, in its 'own' way. *That can be done,* seriously. Of course, a demonstration is called for …

[Note: 'physics' deleted from the first line to pre-emptively evade a righteous spanking from enraged Newtonians insisting upon the strict simultaneity of actions and reactions within classical mechanics]

February 19, 2013

Anti-Greer

Mix this with the *Archdruid Report*, and you begin to get why the world is so confusing. One of the crucial defenses of the term 'Neoreaction' — and thus an argument for clinging to it despite all frustrations — is its intrinsic orientation to grasping both of these perspectives at the same time. (Do that without time-spirals, and you've come up with something I've yet to consider.)

January 23, 2015

CHAPTER SIX - OTHERS

Cambrian Explosion

Scharlach's Habitable Worlds was created less than a month ago, and is presently expanding faster than the known universe. Then this massive brain-cycle munching machine appeared. Then this one. And then there's this. That's a selective list of blogs that I know I want to follow closely, *none of which existed four weeks ago*. Keeping up with this chaos of creation is becoming impossible. Can someone please hurry up with the delivery of my brain-accelerator chip.

May 9, 2013

On Goulding

James Goulding is a thinker of truly extraordinary brilliance. His intellectual stance is closer to that of *Outside in* than almost any other blog listed in our sidebar. It is with considerable sadness, therefore, that I have sought to comply with his shifted self-definition by moving the link to *suspiria de profundis* out of the

'neoreaction' category.

Goulding is subtle, complex, and difficult, and his central ideas remain only partially digested here. In addition, my grasp of the stakes in his new direction is extremely unformed. There are nevertheless a few preliminary remarks that I hope are worth making.

Neoreaction, or the Dark Enlightenment, has as its most essential tendency the insistence upon *an alternative to fascism*. Its realism does not embrace optimism readily, so it would be insincere to pretend that this alternative is destined for success. What cannot be convincingly denied, however, is that a reaction to the Cathedral is coming, that fascist modes of political rectification are well-placed to profit from it, and that Western — indeed all modern — societies default to fascism during crisis conditions. By separating himself from the new reaction, Goulding risks surrendering it to ominous potentialities that might otherwise be avoidable.

This matters. Whatever Goulding's talents [add well-deserved superlatives], marketing and propaganda are not among them. He has never been less convincing than when suggesting that 'Movement X' is a credible attractor for the disenchanted. As conservatism dies of chronic failure, what replaces it will be a reaction to the *status quo*, unashamed to identify itself as such, and positively exulting in the abominated label *reactionary*. Goulding seems to be sure that this prediction is wrong, for no very obvious

reason, and this certainty plays to his own greatest intellectual weaknesses. *I beseech him, in the bowels of Gnon, to think it possible that he may be mistaken.*

The practitioners of Machiavellian politics are politicians. They expose each other every day through their political machines, and *House of Cards* is already popular culture. *Everybody knows this stuff*, and it has no deep consequence. Politics is porn, an inane tangle of primate idiocy. It is unworthy of Goulding's focused intelligence.

We have suffered our first wound. It seriously hurts.

ADDED: Note to trolls (e.g. 'Donny Farp') if you can bring yourself to stop sounding like a jerk, I'll stop deleting you. This blog has a zero-tolerance policy for anonymous snark.

June 2, 2013

Reddit Shift

The moderators of the Outer Right information exchange / discussion forum at /r/DarkEnlightenment are mulling an overhaul (i.e. "gutting the hell out of the … sidebar"). Any suggestions? This is a piece of dissident Cyberspace with a significant defining role.

May 22, 2014

Neo-Feudalism

There's an intellectual Sistine Chapel calling out for your support. The next Pope Leo X has to be out there somewhere, eager to patronize the hungry culture of our age. Here's the chance. (I've "dedicated posts to far sillier things" apparently.)

(OK, the Sistine Chapel ceiling was patronized by Julius II, but let's try not to be pedantic — Leo X had cooler mirror-shades.)

March 25, 2015

Alexander on Reaction

Foseti was persuasive enough to motivate a second look at Scott Alexander's continuing engagement with reaction (even after the dismally unimpressive first installment).

It is indeed "awesome," and merits a serious response (later this week?).

For an immediate response, simple translation has to suffice, stripping away the slanted "survive/thrive" language, and getting right to the point. Reactionaries think leftists are **spoiled***: decadent, self-indulgent, hedonistic fantasists, debauching an inheritance they are incapable of adding to.

Degeneracy is degeneracy**, whether it's affordable or not. To the

reactionary right it looks horrible, even in the absence of zombie apocalypse (but we're getting one anyway).

* How can a theory of left/right differentiation demonstrate such insensitive disregard for 'the wretched of the earth'? It is that 'problem' — readily admitted by Alexander — that makes his explanation truly *awesome*. The Left has nothing to do with what the downtrodden 'think', and everyone — once pressed — is relieved to admit that. *Now everything makes sense*. We're discussing a thought-pattern (Leftism) *exclusively* native to affluent degenerates, with the social sub-strata occasionally latching on, opportunistically, and uncomprehendingly.

** Yes, the word 'degeneracy' is historically spicy — if we were being responsible about it, it would make us nervous. Slicing diagonally through biology, culture, economics — even technology — it's what reactionaries think socio-political 'progress' really is. In that respect, it's indispensable.

So what is degeneration? — in any conversation entirely *internal* to reaction, that would be the central topic of discussion. (The *Outside in* definition: degeneracy is whatever makes you more stupid.)

ADDED: Scott Alexander paraphrased: The Right doesn't think we can afford to degenerate, whilst the Left thinks we can.

Scott Alexander nudged: The Right decries degeneration, even when it seems (in the short term) affordable. The Left advocates degeneration (in the medium term) even when, in the short term, we

obviously can't afford it.

ADDED: 'Survive vs thrive' or Crunchy vs Soggy (via Glenn Reynolds)?

ADDED: Goad on fire viz affluent degenerates (via SDL in the comments).

March 17, 2013

DE Q&A

Matt Sigl of Vocativ is writing an article on the Dark Enlightenment, both the 'thing' and the 'manifesto' (I've already told him why this description is misleadingly over-generous). His questions suggest a sincere attempt to understand what is going on.

Among the lines of inquiry he is pursuing (my compressions): Why Now? What's the 'Cathedral' business? How does the Dark Enlightenment relate to transhumanism/futurism, libertarianism, fascism, white supremacism, anti-semitism, social Darwinism? Where is the Dark Enlightenment going? How does it respond to criticisms that (a) capitalism is to blame, (b) everything's basically OK?

I have tried to respond as objectively as possible, whilst attempting to be clear about those answers which express my own idiosyncratic decisions regarding unsettled/disputed matters.

Predictably, I have emphasized the Moldbuggian origins of the Dark Enlightenment / Neoreaction as a definite cultural phenomenon (distinct from pre-existing right-libertarian, traditionalist, and paleo-reactionary streams of thought).

Readers who think they can help Matt get this portrait right are encouraged to make relevant points here.

ADDED: Foseti on 'Why Now?'

ADDED: Handle on progress.

ADDED: Mike Anissimov (via Twitter): "Nothing good will come of a neoreactionary dialogue with Matt Sigl. … I predict we'll regret this in the end."

September 29, 2013

Zacked

Whilst it's undoubtedly flattering to be the target of a brutal, lazy, and dishonest hit piece, it's also vaguely irritating. Couldn't Kuznicki have stoked the hate sufficiently with the rejection of democracy, HBD sympathies, anti-egalitarianism, market-fundamentalism, disintegrationism, and Shoggoth-whispering, without also making up a bunch of stuff?

Anyway, just for the record:

* I'm not a proponent of "white nationalistic race 'realism'."

* I nowhere make the “case that white nationalism and market liberalism somehow belong together.”
* I have never made a “case against markets” of any kind, let alone that they “stand behind democracy with a tyrannical, unpredictable veto” [whatever than means]
* I have never advocated for “racial purity”

There’s no doubt a number of people who turn up here who wish that I did make some of these arguments, and by distancing myself from them I’m not wanting to endorse Kuznicki’s suggestion that they’re mere slurs.

As far as Kuznicki’s own substantial points are concerned — defense of dialectics, voice, meliorative politics — I’m not really interested enough to engage.

This sort of situation tends to stress objectivity, so I won’t pretend to perfect balance on the subject. There seem to be lessons, though, of a quite general nature.

To begin with, the problem of ‘engagement’ with the media is a real one, which can only get more pressing in strict proportion to ‘success’. They have to come after Mencius Moldbug at some point, insofar as anything interesting is brewing up, so there will probably be further test runs against secondary targets. The whole target selection question is potentially interesting, but I’ve no special insight to share on that topic at this point.

Clearly I’ve lucked out in this case. China doesn’t seem Cathedral-

compliant (as Stirner points out in the excellent comments thread), so direct social pressure is seriously dulled. Kuznicki is neither the sharpest knife in the drawer, nor a pitbull, so *weakness* has been the 'dominant' impression. The site he posts from, despite its Magazine-style format, is quite incredibly marginal — the traffic from this little blog to his has been running at two-to-three times the reverse (which I would never have imagined — they have ten contributors listed there). *Umlaut* also allows comments, which has been a comprehensive fiasco for them this time (check it out). All the visitors have been ripping into Kuznicki, and using the up/down vote system to quantify the point. I'm biased, but I've found it utterly hilarious. It's worth noting, however, that the left media machine has been stripping out its comment threads, which makes them far more effective as no-comeback attack machines. Finally, Twitter has been an extraordinary resource. It's an absolutely critical component of our capability to defend ourselves.

Drawing all this together: We have to learn, prepare, and anticipate. The fights coming up are worth getting right. Any fatalistic depression about the might of our enemies is both self-fulfilling defeatism and to a considerable extent simply false. There's no reason to think that the 'destiny' of media is under their control, or even that its trends are generally favorable to them. Practice is our friend. This stuff is going to matter more and more. Luck won't always run so obviously one way.

ADDED: Handle explores the limits of civility and reason.

ADDED: Nerves? Not to mention this, and this.

ADDED: Jason Kuznicki is magnanimous enough to write this. It's appreciated.

October 17, 2013

Dorks for the Norks!

There are hints of a theme here:

From a TC piece comment by 'Bah': "Neoreactionaries should really move to North Korea, it's much closer to what they want for the world."

David Brin: "Some of you know the experiment to which he refers. North and South Korea."

Charlie Stross (in his own comment thread): "The reason I think the reactionaries are full of shit is because we have a modern-day poster child for the hereditary king of a nation that embodies all their declared virtues: Kim Jong-Un."

(Moldbug responds to this 'analysis'. Much more by others on the TC thread.)

If anyone finds the variant of Neoreaction espoused here indistinguishable from *Juche*, I'm just going to suck it up.

November 29, 2013

Lewis on NR

Matt K. Lewis, in *The Week*, shows that a critical appraisal of Neoreaction really doesn't require hysteria. (The second half of the article is especially impressive.) If the custodians of Cathedral orthodoxy don't find a way to punish him for his sobriety, this piece could set a new standard for public discussion of the anti-democratic right.

… these movements tacitly accept that conservatism as a political force is utterly incapable of slowing the leftward march of liberalism. By definition, conservatives, who want to conserve the good things about the past, are always playing defense. When you consider that many of my conservative views aren't terribly different from John F. Kennedy's views in 1960, this becomes self-evident.

Can this degree of honesty be allowable?

ADDED: At *The American Conservative*, two (instantly forgettable) response pieces, by Noah Millman, and Rod Dreher.

ADDED: Jonah Goldberg isn't shrieking either: "Lewis goes on to talk about the neoreactionaries, an interesting intellectual subculture from what I can tell, but calling them extremely marginal to the mainstream right probably still gives them too much credit."

These kind of responses are making it ever more obvious how unhinged the libertarian commentary has been (with Cato-types being the most despicable).

January 6, 2014

Scrapping

Due to a mixture of out-in-the-stickitude, device deficiency, and technical incompetence I can't even link to the Demos attack on 'the dark enlightenment' hosted by The Daily Telegraph (at the right edge of the UK MSM). I'll be grateful for a link to this piece in the comments here (complacently confident there'll be one).

Some not-quite-random remarks:

1. The article is dismally poor, even by the standards of these things. Neoreaction is something cooked up by Moldy and me, apparently, starting from "two blogs". It's also 'neofascism'.

2. The comment thread isn't remotely cooperating.

3. Demos has an interesting history.

4. As this nonsense gets bigger, it's descending into sheer self-parody. Cathedral culture is a kind of chaos, which makes the strategic issues far more intriguing than the quality of this material might suggest.

January 20, 2014

Scrap note #4

Into the closing days of this Cambodian escape, I'm now in Kep, on the coast of the Gulf of Thailand. It's an interesting place (which I'll say something about in the Cambodia scrap log). Note the link there? There haven't been any of those for a while. The reason it has now become possible is the *Kep Lodge* guest computer, which leaves my tablet in the dust. Links, cursor control, copy-and-paste … ecstasy. So I have to try and seize the opportunity …

Starting meta, there are two media-reaction compilation resources which everyone needs to know about (and I'm sure just about everyone already does). Both are finding it increasingly difficult to keep up. Handle's (here) might by updating sluggishly for a few weeks, because the *Hausmeister* is taking a well-earned break. It might fall upon *Amos & Gromar* (here) to track developments, which are getting steadily more encouraging.

The American Thinker isn't exactly MSM, but it's still highly significant that Christopher Chantrill has written the first Dark Enlightenment commentary for a relatively mainstream conservative site that doesn't engage in any skirt-clutching whatsoever. It's a short, friendly piece that is best understood as a

deliberate exercise in de-toxification. Prediction: this brewing media storm is going to start opening consequential fault-lines in the conservative movement, which as far as any DE strategic schedule is concerned, gets us to first base. It follows, of course, that establishment conservative responses will get even more hysterical (and that also counts as a win).

Some substantial engagement from beyond the reactosphere is also in prospect from Adam Gurri (who has some genuinely productive lines of criticism). There's also Patri Friedman (link?– can't get it to work from here), who commits to exploring "a more politically correct dark enlightenment" (via @MikeAnissimov twitter) which has to — at the very least — be extremely entertaining. Given the prevailing distribution of forces, confusion has to be our friend (right?).

Related developments of interest include a tendency within the HBD 'community' to seize the 'Dark Enlightenment' (brand) for themselves, chucking out all the awkward right-wingery (via rumorous twitter). I've no sense at all of the mechanism by which 'they' think they can achieve that, but the impulse is disorganizing, and therefore probably to be approved (although, of course, at the same time fiercely contested).

Accepting that chaos is 'bad', it seems to me that it is especially bad for our opponents, whose piecemeal suppression strategy requires social conditioning by a maximally-simple aversion

response. Their stage-1 campaign is based on something like a "Neoreaction — yuk, Nazis!" reflex. Anything that leads instead to "What? Hang on a minute …" reaction counts (for them) as a major fail. There can be no serious doubt that we're well into that (as the comment threads of all the hit-pieces so far attest). So, prediction-2: we're going to see a second phase hostile media approach emerging really soon — over the next few months — adapted to important constituencies who are refusing the desired stimulus-response programming. I've no idea what this will look like, but it's almost bound to be more intellectually engaging than anything we've seen so far.

Some straggly extras:

At the risk of getting Matt Sigl into trouble, it's quite obvious that he's a thoughtful guy who deserves better editors. Are we going to see another piece by him (stripped of the Cathedral tics) some time this year?

Tim Stanley is a pathetic tool, but there are some impressive *Telegraph* writers (~~Ed West~~, James Dellingpole …), are they going to jump in at some point?

If the *Telegraph* can be cracked (still uncertain), how about the *National Review*? If Steyn has problems with us, they won't be stupid, and he really doesn't like witch hunters.

We'll get so bored by this expression, if we aren't already, but — *interesting times*.

ADDED: See this by *Amos & Gromar*. The people who seem to be getting front rank exposure in the current media wave are Mencius Moldbug (naturally), Michael Anissimov, and me. To make a very obvious point explicit, however, this is wildly disproportionate, and — I suspect — not long sustainable. Moldbug is a transcendental master, about whom enough can never be said, but Mike and I are both highly atypical representatives of (very different) neoreactionary extremes. If *Amos & Gromar* (for non-random instance) was shifted to center stage, the whole phenomenon would become vastly more sane. (In this particular case, I suspect that an A&G has a branding issue, because media get confused about 'who' exactly they're pointing at — and frankly I think I'm pretty good at that stuff. MARKETING people!)

ADDED: Nicholas Pell has written a thoughtful piece on the DE for *takimag* that has garnered glowing responses from all corners so far. (I'm certainly highly appreciative.)

ADDED: John Derbyshire is in the house.

ADDED: The Daily Telegraph is done:

> Shame to see James Delingpole leaving DT blogs. despite being a warmist I always find his writing amusing http://t.co/vHVhAyunpR
>
> — Ed West (@edwestonline) February 12, 2014

January 28, 2014

Lord of the Trolls

Mark Shea might not quite be the most ludicrous idiot alive (judge for yourself), but he earnestly shares the following warning — received from one of his readers. I'm putting the whole story here, because Shea's credulity about it is so radically humiliating I can only assume he'll want to take it down.

The Dark Enlightenment Exposed

I first heard about the Dark Enlightenment (aka "Neo-Reaction" or just "Reaction") last year, the year after I graduated from college and was interning at a conservative think tank. I briefly become involved with the Dark Enlightenment and then left the movement in disgust. Here is what I learned:

– The Dark Enlightenment is controlled by what the media call "Sith Lords". You have more public Lords like Mencius Moldbug and Nick Land, but there are even some Lords up higher whose names are not revealed. They say the Master Lord says 'Et Ego in Arcadia' which is an anagram for 'Tego Arcana Dei' ("I hide the secrets of God").

– But only the media call them 'Sith Lords'. In Inner Speak, they will often use phrases like the Men of Númenor or the Eldars.

– I never met any of the higher Eldars, but I did once meet an Eldar

in Training. I don't know his real name but people called him Legolas. He had long blond hair, was dressed like a 19th century count, and wore a pendant that had both a Christian Cross and Thor's Hammer on it.

– The movement is a weird mixture of ethno-nationalists, futurists, monarchists, PUAs ("pick-up artists" like Chateau Heartiste), Trad Catholics, Trad Protestants, etc. They all believe in HBD (what they call "human biodiversity" i.e. racism) but disagree on some other minor points.

– The religious people in the movement (both Christians and pagans) practice what is called "identitarian religion" (religion that doesn't deny ethnic identity).

– Some of the rising stars of the Dark Enlightenment on the internet seem to be Radish Magazine, Occam's Razor Mag, and Theden TV.

– The Dark Enlightenment allegedly has millions of dollars of money to play with. They have a couple big donors. One is rumored to be a major tech tycoon in Silicon Valley. They actually had a private 3-day meeting on an island which was furnished with a French chef, etc. Different forms of formal attire were required for each day (tuxedos, 3-piece suits, etc), and some weird costumes were required too (capes, hoods, etc) — which sound like a pagan cult. (I wasn't at this function but heard about it.)

– I was initiated into the first stages of the Dark Enlightenment,

which involved me stripping down naked so people could "inspect my phenotype". I was then given a series of very personal questions, often relating to sexual matters. I was then told to put on a black cape. (I really regret doing this but at the time I was younger, more impressionable and eager to please.)

– For the initial oath taking, everyone must swear on a copy of Darwin's Origin of Species, just to show their fidelity to HBD. After that, for the later oaths, seculars will swear again on Darwin, while Christians will swear on the Bible, and pagans on the Prose Edda or Iliad.

– At one of the meetings I heard someone continuously chanting "gens alba conservanda est" (Latin for "the white race must be preserved") and then others were chanting things in Anglo-Saxon, Old Norse and Old German, but I don't know those languages so I can't remember exactly what they were saying.

– They also have all their own secret handshakes, and their own terminology [like the Cathedral ("political correctness"), thedening ("re-establishing ethnic group identity"), genophilia ("love of one's own race"), NRx ("neoreaction"), etc.].

– On the philosophical level, this movement is not entirely original. Much of it is borrowed from the Identitarian movement in Europe. They also all detest democracy. They are not trying to be a "populist movement" but are only trying to convert other elites to their way of thinking.

This whole movement is like a secret cult, which is why I left. Also, because of the valiant and brave efforts of people on the net exposing this movement, I saw this cult for the evil it truly is. Please stay away from it.

(Thanks to Alex for pointing me at this.)

ADDED: It's been a big day for NRx exposure. (This one's via @realmattforney.)

ADDED: The post at Shea's blog has already gone — but too late to rescue the bearded one from an eternity of shame. … And now it's back up again, hard to keep track. [Please, please Gnon, let Shea be trying to do a Dan Rather and brazen this out.]

ADDED: Some essential developments here (at Shea's place) and here (at *Occam's Razor*). I'm strongly sympathetic to this:

> This is the best thing ever written: http://t.co/L32lO3BiUj
> — Wesley Morganston (@nydwracu) February 13, 2014

February 13, 2014

Hit-Piece of the Week

This one is actually pretty interesting (as well as reaching a whole new level of batshit insane).

ADDED: One hit piece in a week? Oh come on!
ADDED: A micro-crucial moment —

> How much of received history is the result of decisions like this? pic.twitter.com/jaj5Y3dpx7
>
> — Sister Sarah (@sarahdoingthing) June 14, 2014

June 13, 2014

Alexander on the Ratchet

It's carefully hedged (and ultimately contested), but it's well worth noting. He begins the relevant section of a recent post by revisiting the self-observation: "In the past two months I have inexplicably and very very suddenly become much more conservative." (Pass-the-popcorn.)

The explanation I like least is that it comes from reading too much neoreaction. I originally rejected this hypothesis because I don't believe most what I read. But I'm starting to worry that there are memes that, like Bohr's horseshoe, affect you whether you believe them or not: memes that crystallize the wrong pattern, or close the wrong feedback loop. I have long suspected social justice contains some of these. Now I worry neoreaction contains others.

In particular I worry about the neoreactionary assumption that leftism always increases with time, and that today's leftism confined to a few fringe idiots whom nobody really supports today becomes tomorrow's mainstream left and the day after tomorrow's "you will be fired if you disagree with them". Without me ever really evaluating its truth-value it has wormed its way into my brain and started haunting my nightmares.

I'm usually reluctant to take Alexander seriously when he tells us what Neoreaction is, but in this case I think he gets it right.

He embeds this passage in an encompassing theory, aiming to frame the degenerative ratchet within a directionless random-walk of fashion (driven by something like abstract cellular automata). The theory is clever, but its historical fit is so poor I don't expect it to last indefinitely. In the best case, during the few months it takes for this psychic-defense system to start falling apart and strewing parts along the doom-route of accelerating Left-Singularity, Alexander can dedicate his exceptional mind to collecting alternative cognitive defense-mechanisms and testing them to destruction. In this way he can contribute to clearing the desert at the end of our world.

ADDED: The voyage into darkness continues …

July 6, 2014

Castillo on Nrx

From the perspective of an intrigued (and thoughtfully critical) libertarian, Andrea Castillo offers an initial appraisal of Neoreaction. It's definitely the most dispassionate yet, and in various ways the most perceptive (which isn't to forget how admirable Adam Gurri's more obviously polemical engagement was).

The greatest structural merit of the piece is the firm positioning of Mencius Moldbug at the foundations of the phenomenon. Unlike most of the critical NRx commentary so far, Castillo has clearly read Moldbug with some care. This is basically enough in itself to ensure that something real is being seen.

Steve Sailer, who served Castillo unwittingly as a gateway into the darkness, receives disproportionate attention given his manifest lack of affiliation with NRx. Of course, he's hugely-respected throughout the reactosphere due to his rare refusal to stop 'noticing' upon firm request. Beyond the fact he hasn't let the Cathedral put his eyes out, however, there's nothing very much to differentiate him from mainstream American conservatism. Still, Sailer's presence in the piece does much useful work. In particular, it helps to mark out the boundary controversies defining contemporary libertarianism (the immigration topic prominent among them).

Since she's already got herself into trouble, it can't make much more to add that @anjiecast was already one of my favorite people in

the world (remember this for instance?). A little bit more now.

July 29, 2014

Chu on this

Arthur Chu wasn't prepared to put in the work to write the worst NRx-denunciation screed yet, but he's done his best. Too many absurd errors to enumerate, and AC proudly declared on twitter that life's too short to bother with right-wing garbage like facts. Still, the spreading menace has reached *The Daily Beast* now. (They just can't stop themselves.)

> @j_arthur_bloom Yes, I have only abt 50 yrs left to live on this earth if I'm lucky, not going to spend it nodding thoughtfully at racists
>
> — Arthur Chu (@arthur_affect) August 1, 2014

(In context it's easier to recognize that "nodding thoughtfully at racists" is a cute way of saying 'reading stuff'.)

ADDED: This (from the article) is morbidly intriguing:

I've known who Moldbug was since he was just starting his career of intellectual trolling … […] I've known about the "neoreactionaries" a lot longer, before they were given that name—back when they were

just teenagers on the Internet, like me, furious that there were people less intelligent than us who dared tell us what to do. […] I never bought into the ideology fully, but I understand its appeal.

A smidgen of identification? Careful Arthur, that could be very dangerous.

ADDED: More on JT at *The Daily Dot.* (Still more, at *Twitchy.*)

August 1, 2014

NRx @ LW

Matthew Opitz has put up an insightful post at Less Wrong, attempting to make sense of Neoreaction through contrast with Progressivism. Given the great internal diversity of NRx, combined with its embryonic stage of self-formulation (in many respects), the lucidity Opitz brings to the topic is no slight achievement. His post is among the most impressive Ideological Turing Test performances I have yet seen.

The core paragraph (among much else of great interest):

***Neoreaction says**, "There is objective value in the principle of "perpetuating biological and/or civilizational complexity" itself*; the best way to perpetuate biological and/or civilizational complexity is to "serve Gnon" (i.e. devote our efforts to fulfilling nature's pre-requisites for perpetuating our biologial and/or civilizational*

complexity); our subjective values are spandrels manufactured by natural selection/Gnon; insofar as our subjective values motivate us to serve Gnon and thereby ensure the perpetuation of biological and/or civilizational complexity, our subjective values are useful. (For example, natural selection makes sex a subjective value by making it pleasurable, which then motivates us to perpetuate our biological complexity). But, insofar as our subjective values mislead us from serving Gnon (such as by making non-procreative sex still feel good) and jeopardize our biological/civilizational perpetuation, we must sacrifice our subjective values for the objective good of perpetuating our biological/civilizational complexity" (such as by buckling down and having procreative sex even if one would personally rather not enjoy raising kids).

**Note that different NRx thinkers might have different definitions about what counts as biological or civilizational "complexity" worthy of perpetuating … it could be "Western Civilization," "the White Race," "Homo sapiens," "one's own genetic material," "intelligence, whether encoded in human brains or silicon AI," "human complexity/ Godshatter," etc. This has led to the so-called "neoreactionary trichotomy"—3 wings of the neoreactionary movement: Christian traditionalists, ethno-nationalists, and techno-commercialists.*

Most LessWrongers probably agree with neoreactionaries on this fundamental normative assumption, with the typical objective good of LessWrongers being "human complexity/Godshatter," and thus

the "techno-commercialist" wing of neoreaction being the one that typically finds the most interest among LessWrongers.

Opitz's 'Godshatter' reference link.

XoS will do its best to follow this discussion as it goes forward.

This attractively odd thing might be found at least vaguely relevant.

September 6, 2014

De-Triggering

A statement to be preserved for the fascinated scrutiny of generations yet unborn:

I am experimentally tabooing the words "neoreaction", "neoreactionary", and "NRx" in this blog's comments effective immediately. It's emotionally charged and politicized in a way that I think potential substitutes aren't. I got my first exposure to far-right ideas from the neoreactionaries and so historically I've viewed rightism through their lens and spread that to my readers, but I think that this emphasis was a mistake. Also, nobody agrees on what "neoreactionary" means, least of all self-identified neoreactionaries. If you want to talk about monarchists, call them monarchists. If you want to talk about traditionalists, call them traditionalists. If you want to talk about the far right, call it the far right. If you want to talk

about HBD, call it HBD. If you want to talk about Mencius Moldbug, call him Mencius Moldbug. First infraction will be punished with a warning, second with burning eternally in the caldera of the Volcano God.

(If I followed SA's comment threads more diligently, I'd have a better sense of the context for this. Seems like an interesting experiment in any case. It also says something about triggers — or memetic virulence — although that's still a little blurry …)

I have to add the 'mind-control' tag — but it works both ways.

October 25, 2015

The Darkness at the End of the Tunnel

While not quite living up to its (superb) title, this critical leftist exploration of the NRx-AI nexus makes some suggestive connections.

… in the decades since, as the consumer-oriented liberalism of Bill Gates and Steve Jobs gave way to the technological authoritarianism of Elon Musk and Peter Thiel, this strange foundation paved the way for even stranger tendencies. The strangest of these is known as "neoreaction," or, in a distorted echo of Eliezer Yudkowsky's vision, the "Dark Enlightenment." It emerged from the same chaotic process that yielded the anarchic political collective Anonymous, a product

of the hivemind generated by the cybernetic assemblages of social media. More than a school of thought, it resembles a meme. The genealogy of this new intellectual current is refracted in the mirror of the most dangerous meme ever created: Roko's Basilisk.

Stand-out line:

The further right Silicon Valley shifts, the more dangerous their machines will become.

Running the connection through Roko's Basilisk is sufficiently non-obvious that Sandifer's book (which does the same) clearly merited a mention.

(Park MacDougald does it better, though, 1, 2.)

March 31, 2017

A Disturbance in the Force

Is anyone else beginning to get a little … I think the technical term is 'weirded out' by what is happening in the media?

Given that the central convergence point of neoreaction is an analysis of media power as the consummation of the (Anglophone) mainstream trend in global political history, it's impossible to find this sort of thing *simply* amusing. Cathedral theory predicts a quasi-stable closed loop in which left-progressive academic self-organization obtains ever more comprehensive social dominion

through a conductive media system. When the media strays off message, by allowing things to be noticed that — entirely lacking academic endorsement — cannot legitimately exist, something of profound social significance is taking place.

There might be any number of intriguing opportunities in these (still deeply cryptic) developments. For Mencius Moldbug, however, I suspect life could soon become uncomfortably *interesting*. The attack dogs of the left have left him alone, in the hope that he would remain unknown and ignored. Once that hope dies, the leashes are sure to come off.

[I haven't forgotten that I owe Bryce a *What is Neoreaction?* review — but I hadn't expected I'd be in a race to complete it before the *New York Times* gets to the finishing post.]

November 9, 2013

Strangeloop

XS has nothing to say about this, beyond a tweet (by the slightly better half). Posting this as the pretext for a discussion thread, on the assumption that regulars here are likely to be engaged with the event, and the various tributaries feeding into it.

@anjiecast @Ex_nihilo_0 @strangeloop_stl "We've replaced a

> talk by Yarvin on Urbit, with a demonstration of Moldbug on the Cathedral."
>
> — Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) June 5, 2015

ADDED: Comstockery for communists.
ADDED: Breitbart's take (sound).
ADDED: Punishment is vindication.
ADDED: Strange Loop sponsors.
ADDED: two more (both excellent).

June 5, 2015

Strangeloop II

The *Hacker News* discussion thread on The Moldbug Affair is not to be missed. To call it 'historic' wouldn't be (much of) and exaggeration. It's well-worth a look just for the Urbit insights alone. In addition (and quite separately from the last point) 'yarvin9' pops up to make an impressive demonstration of not groveling to the mob. That, hopefully, could provide a model for the many others who will find themselves in analogous witch-trial hot-seats over the months and years to come.

A few highlights.

devalier , on Urbit:

It wasn't the code itself that I learned from. I have more been enriched and stimulated by reading the blog posts, documentation, hacker news threads, and mailing list. A couple of the more interesting ideas are:

** He created Nock, which in a way is bytecode language, like compiled java bytecode or the .NET CIL. But his idea was that this bytecode should be the simplest possible thing, far, far simpler than the CLR. In fact, it should be versioned in Kelvin versioning, starting at 5,000 and counting down, until it is finally perfected and will never need to change. Going forward, all consumer apps will always compile down to this bytecode. All new hardware platforms can build interpreters for this bytecode. I think that is a pretty novel and neat approach. If it caught on, it would ensure that any program we wrote now could be run for the next thousand years.*

** His view is that to beat spam, you simply need to have a finite number of cryptographically secured identities. This number can be large. But if it is finite, that means accounts will not be costless, which means the market over time will be able to solve the problems of trust and filtering out spam in a way far superior to how it works today.*

It's hard to do the ideas justice by trying to repeat them myself. In reading through the material it was just lots of little things, where I said to myself, "Ah, that is a neat solution to that problem, I wonder if he'll be able to make it work."

Quality sarcasm from **13thLetter**:

What a crazy coincidence. This talk was accepted when nobody knew who Yarvin was, but now that you and your friends want to cast him out into the wilderness for disagreeing with your political opinions, all of a sudden you realize that the talk was technically uninteresting anyway. What are the odds, huh?

yarvin9 on racism:

I shouldn't post as urbit. Quite a few other people, few of whom agree with me on anything, have worked on the project.

The word "racist" and its conjugations does not appear in the English language until the 1920s – see Peter Frost's cultural history _. If you asked Shakespeare if he was a "racist," he would not know what you meant.*

"Racist" is essentially a term of abuse which no group or party has ever applied to itself. Like most such epithets, it has two meanings – a clear objective one, describing a person who fails to believe in the anthropological theories of human equality which became first popular, then universal in the mid-20th century; and a caricature of the vices, personal or political, typically engaged in by such a foul unbeliever.

[This non-apology under pressure is truly glorious]

topynate on the realistic micro-sociology of crimethink definition:

Kicking people from your tech conference because they were racist outside of it hands veto power to whoever determines what racism

is and when something is 'too racist'. The same goes for the other beyond-the-pale isms like sexism, fascism, etc.

paxdickinson on precedent:

It'll be [Alex Miller's] decision next time too. And now that the Red Guards know he'll succumb to even the slightest bit of pressure, there will certainly be a next time.

convexfunction on prophecy:

It's funny because he definitely saw this coming.

djur on "this is so … I can't even …"

This is a core tenet of Moldbuggian neoreaction, that American and European politics are run by a "Cathedral" that adheres to communist beliefs. Claiming that mainstream political positions are communism is absolutely insane.

corporealist on perspective:

This guy is a rightwinger (outside of his industry) and somebody didn't like it. What an embarrassment. They're proving the right's points.

ShardPhoenix on more perspective:

… socialism is much worse than racism. Socialism (actual socialism, not "social democracy" aka capitalist welfare state) destroys countries (eg North Korea), while racism is merely a moderate problem (eg South Korea is very racist but doing fine).

ADDED: So I guess the Streisand Effect really is a thing.

June 8, 2015

Smear-ghouls

It's only one tweet, but I'm going to treat it as massively indicative, because:
(1) It's Friday night
(2) It's more entertaining that way, and
(3) It actually might be massively indicative

Plunging straight into madness' maw, therefore, we have this:

> And now all the right wing, neoreactionary SuperPAC money will be shifted to other close US Senate races, like… http://t.co/13BvajioYm
>
> — Les AuCoin (@lesaucoin) July 24, 2014

Some immediate take-away? 'Neoreactionary' (the word) has crossed a currency threshold, and its destiny is now vastly senseless. It's retrospectively obvious that if anything was going to happen to it in the wider culture, it was going to be this. Roughly, it's becoming what 'neoconservative' and 'neoliberal' were, and are: a political term that circulates socially because it designates something vague and scary to its enemies, who then use it as a smear-ghoul to tar

things they don't understand, and don't like. This probably sounds bad, but if we think so, it's a sign of how unrealistic we've been about the dominant semiotic processes in degenerating democracies. It wasn't ever going to be any other way.

Running isn't going to work. There's an argument to be made for fleeing territory, but to flee signs is utterly pointless. There's no superior semiotic position to be escaped to. The way this is happening is the way it happens. It has to be understood, worked through, played with. As the Wittgenstein-tendency of NRx would surely be the first to concur, private languages are intrinsically delusive. When your antagonist is a titanic cultural control apparatus, your words are going to get messed with in ways that seem simply insane. That's the way it is.

It's not — by any means — an altogether disastrous situation, at least, not any more than the situation in general is disastrous. Even if the dominant public sense of a co-opted word is allusive, polemical, and strategically abusive, there is still a subtle undercurrent of awkwardness.

"Oh man, those Tea-Party morons are like total tools of the neoreactionaries!"
"Yeah, too right! **snork* *snork* *snork** (*What the hell is a neoreactionary? Gotta Google that m**********.*)

And really, it doesn't matter what they think — except right out on the margin, where things slip. It's obviously going to be the targets

of the smear-ghouling, in a few peculiar cases, who ask: *If this 'neoreaction' business is creating so much fear and loathing among our enemies, there might be something to it that I'd like*.

SoBL has a quite brilliant tweet on the topic:

> Same methods. Hunt Bros + archconservatives in '79 = Koch Bros + TeaParty '10 = Thiel+ Neoreactionaries '14. http://t.co/01dN9znMfc
>
> — SOBL1 (@SOBL1) July 25, 2014

Conspiracy construction is an essential part of the process. It's a way the Left-establishment digests threats without having to think about them, keeping the problem purely strategic, rather than ideological. One consequence — eventually it brings a conspiracy into being. If war has been declared, you might as well fight back. In this sense, the swelling wave of Silicon Valley conspiracy mongering on the Left strikes me as wholly positive, its absurdity notwithstanding. Tech billionaires who find themselves in the cross-hairs of this stuff are pretty much forced to acknowledge that appeasement isn't working. Some of them are going to get the idea that the Cathedral wants to destroy them. At that point, they start looking for options.

You can have the CIA angle thrown in for free:

> over/under that several Dark Enlightenment leader-figures

> are being fed scripts by the CIA, who prefer supporting fascists over socialists?
>
> — ◇◇ (@chipstian) July 25, 2014

How long before some elements within the intelligence services start to wonder whether they have some unexplored options, too?

July 25, 2014

HuffPo NRx?

After this (linked in the last Chaos Patch), comes another pointed lesson from the same Tech-Comm island bastion, with a title that doesn't even try to distance itself from hardcore Dark Enlightenment through use of a strategic question mark: "Singapore Challenges the Idea That Democracy Is the Best Form of Governance."

It's written by a Westerner this time, Graham Allison, who — to complete the extremity of infiltration — is "Director, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, **Harvard** Kennedy School" (XS emphasis). So he can say anything he wants, and he says this.

For a provocative analogy, think of countries as if they were hotels and citizens as guests. … Rarely do guests offer views about the ownership of the hotel or how it is governed. [That last sentence is about as close to pure Moldbug as you can get without actually

quoting the ~~guy~~ monster.] … *“Liberty” … includes both “freedom from” and “freedom to.” … Singapore stands at the top of the international competition on “freedoms from:” It ranks first internationally in the World Bank’s measure of “regulatory quality” and second on The Heritage Foundation’s scale of economic freedom* [First, of course, is Hong Kong], *while the U.S. comes in 13th. Gallup’s 2014 World Poll found that eight in 10 Americans see “widespread corruption” in the U.S. government, compared with seven in the Philippines, six in Zimbabwe and one in Singapore. On the World Bank’s “rule of law” index, Singapore scores in the 95th percentile of nations, the U.S. scores in the 91st, the Philippines in the 42nd and Zimbabwe in the 2nd. With a population of almost six million, Singapore’s incidents of robbery were only a seventh of Boston’s, which has a population of only 650,000. … When we turn to “freedom to” metrics, however, one-party Singapore scores well below the U.S. on three of our core freedoms: “freedom of expression and belief,” “associational and organizational rights” and “political pluralism and participation.” … When one asks “hotel customers” for feedback, the results are even more troubling for Americans. As the table below shows, four out of five Singaporeans are satisfied customers. They have confidence in their elections, their judicial system, their local police and their national leadership. In contrast, only one in three Americans has confidence in our national government and the country’s leadership; fewer than half regard elections as honest; and*

three-quarters of the population sees widespread corruption in government.

Look at SingGov as a business corporation ("hotel") and it's delivering an efficient, attractive service. WashCorp, not so much.

Next up from HuffPo — *Is decomposition of the United States into Patchwork micro-states an idea who's time has come?* (Unlike Allison's editors, I've thrown in the question mark there out of fidelity to liberal traditions.)

August 10, 2015

Counter Fund

XS has a few quibbles with this project, while nevertheless thinking it's probably the most intelligent thing taking place on the right at the moment. (Some highly interesting chat here, or directly here.)

The reliance on personal discretion for ideological vetting is a sign of immaturity (as Pax seems to accept, since it's intended to be temporary). Less protocol governance-oriented types will probably find this less of a needling issue than this blog does. In any case, the scheme is inclined towards trustlessness, which is the primary functional criterion for all 21st Century social technology.

A more intriguing quibble is that the "co-op grocery store" model runs directly contrary to basic NeoCam principles, since it

deliberately offers a role in governance to customers. This could be the basis for an important conversation down the road.

Main positive, as always with Pax Dickinson initiatives, is that it aims (competently) to latch onto the grain of the Internet, and that of auto-catalytic social machinery more generally. Whenever the "What is to be Done?" question arises, this is the type of thing that needs pointing to. Pieces of the future manifestly drift back into it.

Here are the first three installments of the Counter.Fund Gentle Introduction (1, 2, 3). The first is written by Pax Dickinson, the next two co-written with Anthony Demarco.

July 16, 2017

SECTION A - NRX SKIRMISHES

Flavors of Reaction

Once it is accepted that the right can never agree about anything, the opportunity arises to luxuriate in the delights of diversity. Libertarianism already rivaled Trotskyism as a source of almost incomprehensibly compact dissensus, but the New Reaction looks set to take internecine micro-factionalism into previously unimagined territories. We might as well enjoy it.

From crypto-fascists, theonomists, and romantic royalists, to jaded classical liberals and hard-core constitutionalists, the reaction contains an entire ideological cosmos within itself. Hostility to coercive egalitarianism and a sense that Western civilization is going to hell will probably suffice to get you into the club. Agreeing on anything much beyond that? Forget it.

There's one dimension of reactionary diversity that strikes *Outside in* as particularly consequential (insofar as anything out here in the frozen wastes has consequences): the articulation of *reaction and politics*. Specifically: is the reaction an alternative politics, or a

lucid (= cynically realistic) anti-politics? Is democracy bad politics, or simply politics, elaborated towards the limit of its inherently poisonous potential?

Outside in sides emphatically with the anti-political 'camp'. Our cause is *depoliticization* (or catallaxy, negatively apprehended). The tradition of spontaneous order is our heritage. The New Reaction warns that the tide is against us. Intelligence will be required, in abundance, if we are to swim the other way, and we agree with the theonomists at least in this: if it is drawn from non-human sources, so much the better. Markets, machines, and monsters might inspire us. Rulers of any kind? Not so much.

February 19, 2013

Trichotomy

The 'Spandrellian Trichotomy' (Nick B. Steves' coinage, based on this post) has become an awesome engine of discussion. The topic is seething to such an extent that any linkage list will be out of date as soon as it is compiled. Among the most obvious way-markers are this, this, this, this, and this. Given the need to refer to this complex succinctly, I trust that abbreviating it to 'the Trichotomy' will not be interpreted as a clumsy attempt to obstruct Spandrell's Nobel Peace Prize candidacy.

What is already broadly agreed?

(1) There is a substratum of neoreactionary consensus, involving a variety of abominated realist insights, especially the contribution of deep heritage to socio-political outcomes. Whilst emphasis differs, an ultra-Burkean attitude is tacitly shared, and among those writers who self-identify with the *Dark Enlightenment*, the importance of HBD is generally foregrounded.

(2) Neoreaction also shares an enemy: the *Cathedral* (as delineated by Mencius Moldbug). On the nature of this enemy much is agreed, not least that it is defined by a project of deep heritage erasure — both ideological and practical — which simultaneously effaces its own deep heritage as a profound religious syndrome, of a peculiar type. Further elaboration of Cathedral genealogy, however, ventures into controversy. (In particular, its consistency with Christianity is a fiercely contested topic.)

(3) As neoreactionary perspectives are systematized, they tend to fall into a trichotomous pattern of dissensus. This, ironically, is *something that can be agreed*. The Trichotomy, or neoreactionary triad, is determined by divergent identifications of the Western tradition that the Cathedral *primarily* suppresses: Christian, Caucasian, or Capitalist. My preferred terms for the resultant neoreactionary strains are, respectively, the *Theonomist*; the *Ethno-Nationalist*; and the *Techno-Commercial*. These labels are intended to be accurate, neutral descriptions, without intrinsic polemical

baggage.

It is to be expected — at least initially, and occasionally — that each strain will seek to dismiss, subordinate, or amalgamate the other two. If they were not so tempted, their trichotomous disintegration would never have arisen. Each *must* believe that it, alone, has the truth, or the road to truth, unless sheer insincerity reigns.

Outside in does not pretend to impartiality, but it asserts an invincible disillusionment.

— If the Trichotomy was reducible, the new reaction would already be one thing. It isn't, and it isn't (soon) going to be.

— As astrology reveals, and more 'sophisticated' systems confirm, people delight in being categorized, accepting non-universality as the real price of identification. (The response to Scharlach's diagram attests to that.)

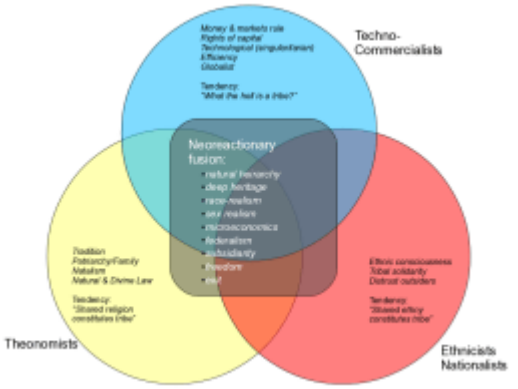
— Accepting the Trichotomy and the arguments it organizes is a way to be tested, and any neoreactionary position that refuses it will die a flabby death.

— The Trichotomy makes it impossible for neoreaction to play at dialectics with the Cathedral. For that reason alone, we should be grateful to it. Unity — even oppositional unity — was never on our side.

April 30, 2013

Visual Trichotomy

Nick B. Steves sent this along to keep the discussion moving forward:



[Click on the image to enlarge]

May 2, 2013

White Out

According to the White Nationalist fraternity, the Dark Enlightenment tends to like civilized people even when they aren't *really white*. I think that's right (and Right), although — of course — it's supposed to be a problem.

It's certainly amusing that the only people who don't think we're Nazis are the Nazis. They recognize that "cognitive elitists" are inherently prone to race treachery — which could be pushed all the

way out to species treachery (if I have anything to do with it). *Optimize for intelligence* isn't any kind of key to racial solidarity, or solidarity of any other kind. Even HBD, they generally insist, isn't *them* (it's too attentive to PISA ratings and such). There are some seriously interesting controversies implicit in all this, although rage is likely to break them up before they get very far. It makes me realize that one thing I appreciate about the Neoreaction is its anger management, which is inextricable from its taste for irony (and probably also from its decadence).

At *Amos & Gromar* there's some worthwhile comment, and commentators.

Boundaries should always be appreciated, whoever is drawing them.

December 13, 2013

Retro-Dialectics

Nobody familiar with contemporary Western societies can be intellectually challenged by the idea of a great dialectical resolution to the problem of liberalism. Coercion and liberty are fused in a political order that directs authority towards the maximization of choice without consequence. Stupidity is sacred, and neither tradition nor natural necessity has the right to inhibit it. Preserving

the freedom to fathom the limits of dysfunction in every direction is the primary social obligation, with the full resources of Leviathan behind it. If that's not exactly where we are, it will be soon.

Against this backdrop, Neoreaction emerges as a de-synthesizing impulse, splintering along multiple paths, but especially two. In reacting against *authoritarian irresponsibility* (or 'anarcho-tyranny') it tends to a restoration of the Old Antithesis: *either* hierarchical solidarity, *or* a ruthless dis-solidarity (and as it undoes the progressive dialectic, 'either' fragments into 'both' — separately). Only the state *protected irresponsibility* of resolved Left-liberalism is strictly intolerable, because that has been historically demonstrated to be an engine of degeneration. Neoreaction, initially conceived, is anything else.

As the West unravels back to the Old Antithesis, the primary argumentative polarity of Neoreaction is exposed with increasing clarity (Neoreaction *is* this exposure). Given that irresponsibility is not to be protected, is it to be prevented (by a new paternalism) or abandoned to its intrinsic consequences (through reversion to Social Darwinism)? In other words, is the dominant theme *hierarchy* or *exit*? Any attempt to force a rapid decision — however tempting this might be — is to trivialize the submerged grandeur of the abyss. The degenerative dialectic has at least half a millennium of heritage behind it — and perhaps at least two millennia. The Old Antithesis is far greater than either of its constituent 'options'.

When *More Right* outlines its 'Premises of Reactionary Thought' there can be no doubt which side of the antithesis is being promoted. It thereby declares that *the Left-liberal synthesis is dead*, establishing itself as the articulation of a Neoreactionary stance. Its partiality, however, is overt. (*Outside in* advances a counter-partiality.)

If failure is — eventually — no longer to be sustained, it either has to be prevented, or intensified. Neither *stop it failing* nor *let it fail* are remotely equivalent to *let it continue failing forever*, but neither are coercion and neglect commensurable to each other. The Old Antithesis is going to keep us on edge during 2014. If Neoreaction can even more explicitly *be the unraveling*, it will go far, but it will not obviously be *one thing*. The 'one thing' is virtually dead. What comes next arrives in pieces.

December 29, 2013

2014: A Prophecy

As has been said innumerable times before, any prophecy concerning outcomes that involve the 'prophet' as an agent are seriously suspect. For the (apparent) moment, such concerns are being pushed up the road into the future.

There they have already made themselves 'at home' — along with

much else related to the general phenomenon of prediction (which is strictly indistinguishable from time travel, when incisively understood). Present *knowledge of the future is an action of the future upon the present*, but all that can wait, since — of course — it doesn't need to.

For now, the Prophecy: **2014 is the year in which Neoreaction tears itself apart**. This is not at all to say, *the year in which it dies*. On the contrary, it will end the year strengthened in ways it has not to this point envisaged, having carved out vast tracts of clarity, hardened itself through close intellectual combat, refined its methods of de-synthesis (or catabolism), and — most importantly of all — made schism an internal dynamic principle. What integrates Neoreaction by the end of the year will no longer be elective tenets (reflecting the more-or-less precarious ideological preferences of individuals) but conflict-toughened structures of objective micro-cultural cohesion, selected and sculpted by many months of ferocious storms.

The approximate contours of these impending ruptures will provide the content for the first *2014 Prognoses* post (which is already overdue). In anticipation, it need only be noted: the Dark Enlightenment finds nothing external to itself that is *hard* enough to sharpen its claws. It has feasted on soft, fat, bleating lambs long enough. Thus the introverted ripping begins …

ADDED: Rigorous evidence for time travel still thin.

January 5, 2014

Timing

I'm repeating an initial twitter interaction here because it seems quite critical to some of the plate tectonic rumblings working through NRx. My prompt was:

> Does anybody really think America will have a king before it has a (positive or negative) techno-intelligence catastrophe?
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) February 11, 2014

To which Michael Anissimov immediately replied:

> @Outsideness yep
> — Michael Anissimov (@MikeAnissimov) February 11, 2014

(Of course there was more — interesting stuff.)

For some suggestive remarks about social prospects and differential speeds, see Andrea Castillo's latest (and excellent) article on the tech-economy at Umlaut.

February 11, 2014

Anarchy in the NRx

Arthur R. Harrison (@AvengingRedHand) makes the incisive observation: “Well the thing is NRx is a specific kind of post-libertarianism, or it was. Now it seems to be just a name for reaction post-Moldbug.” There could be people who don’t see that as degeneration. In fact, it seems there are.

Reactotwitter is lurching into sheer delirium (as *ahem* forecast). To begin with, it seems no longer to concur on what it begins with:

> Evola outranks Moldbug. The accomplishments and credentials of the former are far higher.
>
> — Michael Anissimov (@MikeAnissimov) February 17, 2014

(Not in my army.)

It’s time to choose your own tradition and slap an NRx sticker on it. Is anyone envisaging any limits to this:

> @Outsideness @MikeAnissimov Whose ideas have more specifically influenced NRx? At this point, it's whoever influences its writers.
>
> — Bryce Laliberte (@AnarchoPapist) February 18, 2014

> @AnarchoPapist @MikeAnissimov Since there are no entry

> controls, this is a formula for complete intellectual anarchy. (OK, Mad Max it is.)
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) February 18, 2014

> @Outsideness Moldbug isn't here. Neoreaction is a free for all of our own making.
>
> — Michael Anissimov (@MikeAnissimov) February 18, 2014

So NRx is a formless anarchy telling the world how to put itself in order? Actually, I think this is probably right, and theoretically interesting, but it clearly needs thinking about. How can there imaginably be an 'entryism' threat when command control is a teeming chaos? What does this *example* of radical disorder suggest?

Here's the NRx anarcho-chaos already pouring through the pipe:

> @MikeAnissimov @AnarchoPapist @Outsideness I respect Moldbug, but he is one of many. We all have our voice – we can and should add our ideas
>
> — Anti Democracy Blog (@antidemblog) February 18, 2014

Everyone has a voice, and we respect that … oh wait …

[Some intriguing hints elsewhere on twitter that Urbit might eventually sort this shrieking insanity out.]

ADDED: *Occam's Razor* puts things in sensible perspective.

February 18, 2014

Ideological Chaos

Occupy Wall Street founder, now working for ~~Cyberdyne~~ Google calls for Neocameralism in a communist newspaper.

I'll just let that simmer for a while …

ADDED: There have been some strange goings on at *The Guardian* recently, for instance, this article on seasteading — because climate change.

ADDED: Now in *The Telegraph*: "The self-described 'champagne tranarchist', who launched Occupy Wall Street in 2011, said that if the technology industry was to take over the US government she would be 'prancing around skipping for joy', but accepted that it was unlikely."

ADDED: Contemplationist (@i_contemplate_) catches this:

> @ramdac @abbynormative Our government is already a corporation. All we're doing here is finding a better corporation to run our government.
>
> — Justine Ní Thonnaigh (@JustineTunney) March 21, 2014

"If [this] is not neocameralism, I don't know what is." Quite.

ADDED: Justine Tunney interviewed by Christopher Mims (definitely not to be missed by anyone interested in this peculiar episode).

March 20, 2014

Crossing the Line

So, it's happened:

> Read Mencius Moldbug.
> — Justine Tunney (@JustineTunney) April 28, 2014

This strikes me as a poly-dimensional crisis moment — or at least cultural storm signal — (for NRx, for Google, and for the USA), so I'm obviously on tenterhooks to hear what people think.

ADDED: The anti-Tunney (or one of them).

April 28, 2014

Scrap note (#11)

With all coherent productivity sucked into a knotty accelerationism

essay at the moment, some fragments:

Fission update — apparently the geniuses in the NRx peanut gallery are now convinced that Justine Tunney has usurped Michael Anissimov in his universally-acknowledged holy office as God-Emperor of the New Reaction. Anissimov, to his great credit, is bemused. Is this stuff going to burn out in its own radiant insanity, or amplify to some yet unimagined level of crazy? The responsible option would be to abandon the ship of fools now, but it's way too entertaining for that. Signalling some distance is becoming absolutely imperative, however.

One point that has to be emphasized with renewed fervor is the absolute priority of territorial fragmentation to any line of NRx discussion which begins to imagine itself 'political'. Universalist models of the good society are entirely inconsistent with NRx at its foundations, and to turn such differences into political argument is to have wandered hopelessly off script. The whole point of neoreactionary social arrangements is to eliminate political argument, replacing it with practical problems of micro-migration. Facilitating homelands for one's antagonists is even more important than designing them for one's friends. (Even the old Republic of South Africa knew that — although it botched the execution.) Geographical sorting dispels dialectics.

***

Brett Stevens (of the Amerika blog, @amerika_blog) has gone

super-nova on Twitter in a way that screams impending burn-out, but for the moment he's a source of superb commentary and linkage. Among very recent gems, these two pieces, raising questions about the restoration of sophisticated teleological ideas within natural science.

> Why does life resist disorder? #entropy http://t.co/GGMrjqv4bq
>
> — Brett Stevens (@amerika_blog) May 1, 2014

Also, another two on the Cathedralization of SF literary institutions, unfolding in public.

***

Mark Steyn comes out as a Sailer reader. No huge surprise there, I guess, but the darkness grows …

***



My crown of thorns is itching.

From what I have seen of the *Transcendence* response, the movie

has been almost universally misunderstood. Immodestly, I think my as-yet-unwritten blog post on the topic gets it with the title *Easter of the Nerds*. Idiotically, most reviewers describe it as being about the dangers of artificial super-intelligence. In reality, it's about the human sin of fear and denial of God, culminating in the murder of the Messiah (as computationally-incarnated divinity), and his quiet return, in a garden, framing the entire picture in the promise of resurrection. It thus exposes Transhumanism not only as a Christian sub-clade, but as a remarkably conservative sub-clade (certainly in comparison to Mainline Protestantism). The significance of this needs exploring at some point …

May 1, 2014

Fission

This is going to continue happening, and to get more intense. The superficial cause is obvious, both Michael Anissimov and myself are extreme, twitchy ideologues, massively invested in NRx, with utterly divergent understandings of its implications. We both know this fight has to come, and that tactical timing is everything. (It's really not personal, and I hope it doesn't become so, but when monarchical ideas are involved it's very easy for "the personal is political" to take a right-wing form.)

It's worth remembering this diagram, before going further. It suggests that divergence is essential to the far right, which yawns open across an anarcho-autocratic spectrum. Since a disinclination to moderation has already been indicated by anyone arriving at the far right fringe, it should scarcely be surprising when this same tendency rifts the far right itself. Then consider this:

> @Outsideness @_Hurlock_ Identitarianism, belonging, and community is what the Far Right is all about.
>
> — Michael Anissimov (@MikeAnissimov) March 22, 2014

The strict *Outside in* complement to this would be something like: *disintegrative Social Darwinism through ruthless competition is what the Far Right is all about*. A formula of roughly this kind will inevitably come into play as the conflict evolves. Momentarily, though, I'm more interested in *situating* the clashes to come than *initiating* them. Whatever the contrary assertions — and they will come (doubtless from both sides) — the entire arena is located on the ultra-right, oriented vertically on the ideological space diagram, rather than horizontally (between positions whose primary differentiation is between the more-and-less right).

Stated crudely, but I think reasonably accurately, the controversy polarizes *Neocameralism* against *Identitarian Community*. My suspicion is that Michael Anissimov will ultimately attenuate the

Moldbuggian elements of his neoreactionary strain to the edge of disappearance, and that his hesitation about doing this rapidly is a matter of political strategy rather than philosophical commitment. From this ideological war, which he is conducting with obvious ability, he wants "Neoreaction" to end up with the people (or followers (who I don't remotely care about)), whereas I want it to hold onto the Moldbug micro-tradition (which he sees as finally dispensable). The only thing that is really being scrapped over is the name, but we both think this semiotic real estate is of extraordinary value — although for very different reasons.

One remark worth citing as supportive evidence, because its driving ideas are exemplary:

> @_Hurlock_ @Outsideness This whole community is filled with trads who don't give a flying fuck about neocameralism.
>
> — Michael Anissimov (@MikeAnissimov) March 22, 2014

While I deeply value intellectual engagement with the smartest of these "trads" I would consider it a complete victory if they were to abandon the NRx tag and re-brand themselves as Animissovites, or Neo-Evolans, or whatever, and depart in pursuit of a Monarcho-traditionalist homeland in Idaho. If NRx was socially reduced to a tenth (or less) of its size, but those remaining were Moldbuggian fundamentalists, working to refine the Neocameralist theoretical

model for restraint of government through Patchwork Exit-dynamics, it would be strengthened immeasurably in all the ways that matter to this blog. It would also then simply be the case that media accusations of Neo-Feudal or White Nationalist romanticism — accompanied by ambitions for personal political power — were idiotic media slurs. Sadly, this cannot be said with total confidence as things stand.

The Neocameralism campaign will almost certainly come first, but it is still only March, and nothing needs to unfold with unseemly haste …

ADDED: Some valuable thoughts from *Anomaly UK*. (Includes bonus Bitcoin reference.)

March 22, 2014

Rift Markers

The commentator going by the tag Saddam Hussein's Whirling Aluminium Tubes has produced some of the most brilliant criticism this blog has been subjected to. Arguing against the techno-commercial strain of NRx from a hardline paleoreactionary standpoint, his contribution to this thread is the high-water mark of his engagement here. That, even at the climax of the assault, *Outside in* is unable to decline the diagnosis offered, with the exception of

only the very slightest, marginal reservations, is a fact that attests to the lucidity of his vision. (Some minute editorial adjustments have been made for consistency — the original can be checked at the link provided.) SHWAT writes:

Admin's analogy of Techno-Commercialism to the colonial government structures in the time of the East India company is absolutely correct and it provides a decisive clarification. This is like that time when one group stayed in Europe while the other group went and made their fortune in the New World.

***Reaction**: Stable order (as a value, if not a practical effect), hereditary position*

***Techno-commercialism**: Disintegrative competition, dynamism*

***Reaction**: Conservatism, tradition, the old ways*

***Techno-commercialism**: Disintegrative competition, innovation*

***Reaction**: Personal authority, sacral Kingship, hereditary privileges*

***Techno-commercialism**: Corporate government, leaning towards the oligarchical, dynamic composition of the oligarchy, based on corporate politics and Social Darwinism*

***Reaction**: Cyclical history, Kali Yuga*

***Techno-commercialism**: Linear history, progress towards the singularity*

***Reaction**: Focus on the old country, the old people, saving the West*

***Techno-commercialism**: Abandoning the old, colonizing new spaces,*

both in the East and (you hope) in Space

***Reaction**: Traditional social order, community, belonging, sense of place and rootedness, caste*

***Techno-commercialism**: Modern social dynamism, freedom, meritocracy, rootlessness, atomization, Social Darwinism, a questionable future for certain social classes*

***Reaction**: Conservatively communitarian*

***Techno-commercialism**: Radically individualist*

***Reaction**: Identitarian*

***Techno-commercialism**: Cosmopolitan*

***Reaction**: Claims to end politics, ends up with Byzantine / Ottoman politics*

***Techno-commercialism**: Claims to end politics, ends up with Corporate Politics*

***Reaction**: Martial*

***Techno-commercialism**: Mercantile, post-Martial (Drones > Kshatriyas)*

***Reaction**: Disdainful of crass mercantile endeavors*

***Techno-commercialism**: See mercantile endeavors as primary*

***Reaction**: Fails without good leaders*

***Techno-commercialism**: Focus on innovative governmental structures, so that people won't need to be good.*

***Reaction**: Conservative, want things to stay the same or go backwards*

***Techno-commercialism**: Disintegrative, dynamic, wants things to change constantly, Forward!*

***Reaction**: Regular, caged capitalism (which to the the Ultra-Capitalist is socialism)*

***Techno-commercialism**: Ultra-Capitalism*

***Reaction**: Religious*

***Techno-commercialism**: Wants to summon a machine god*

***Reaction**: About finding a way for humans to live spiritually fulfilling lives and then die and make a place for their children*

***Techno-commercialism**: About finding a way to summon a machine god to end humanity and/or about finding a way to live forever. Very few children.*

***Reaction**: Would require the creation of a new, legitimate, martial elite or the co-opting of someone like Putin (horrifying to techno-commercialists)*

***Techno-commercialism**: Seeks to co-opt the current progressive merchant elite and put someone like Google guy in charge (horrifying to reactionaries)*

***Reaction**: Romantic lost cause*

***Techno-commercialism**: Disturbingly plausible, in the sense that somebody like Google guy was probably going to end up on top anyway, and he might listen to those who flatter him.*

So, I've got good news and bad news. The good news is that [you techno-commercialists will] probably get a lot of what you want in

the future. The bad news is that you're not reactionaries, not even a little bit. You're classical liberals, it was just a little bit obscured because you are English classical liberals, rather than American or French ones. Hence the lack of interest in revolutions. The modern equivalent of those East India Company classical liberal guys.
So, it's your choice. You can certainly keep the neo-reactionary label and turn it into something like the "neo" in "neo-conservative" where "neo" means "pwned". But that will mean that the traditionalist conservatives and WNs keep wandering in. Or you can cut the cord and complete the fission.
Anyway, at this point we should probably go our separate ways and start plotting against each other. Thanks for some enjoyable reading.

If this really is a good-bye note, it's the most magnificent example I have ever seen. I'm almost tempted to say, with enemies like this, who needs allies?

There are twists and intricacies to be added to this stark cartography of schism, including those the schism will make to itself. From the current perspective of *Outside in* (which it of course suspects to be something else), the guideline to these is the complication of time through spiromorphism, or innovative restorations, which neither cycles nor simple escape trajectories can capture. These ultimately re-shape everything, but they can wait (while the wound creatively festers). Fission releases energy. Perhaps ironically — SHWAT has demonstrated that beyond all

controversy.

March 25, 2014

Race to the Bottom

As the foggiest two-thirds of 'NRx' continues its devolution into ENR-style ethno-socialism and activist voluntarism, it is inevitable that Europe's populist 'far right' will increasingly be seized upon as a source of inspiration, and even as a model for emulation. This is, of course, an indication of degenerate insanity, and all the more to be expected on that account. On the positive side, the practical incompetence of 'activist neoreaction' will most probably spare it from the full measure of the embarrassment it is due. Nevertheless, whatever applause it offers to the vile antics of the European mob will not be soon forgotten.

It would be a distraction at this point to seek to distinguish the classical (Aristotelian) conception of *action* from the mire of modern political *activism*, or mass mobilization. That is the topic for another occasion. It suffices here to accept the integrated democratic understanding of popular activism for what it is, and to seek distance from it with unreserved disdain, under any convenient sign. If *passivism* makes this point, the suitability of the term is thereby ensured. The important thing is to make no contribution to the

triumph of the mob and, secondarily, to draw no vicarious satisfaction from its advances.

To be as clear as possible: What the 'far right' advance in Continental Europe represents is *a consummation of democratic morbidity*. It is nothing at all like a restoration. At best, it is what 'hitting bottom' is to an alcoholic — the crisis at the end of a deteriorating trend, after which something else can begin. (The bottom, it has to be noted, is a very long way down.)



Writing in The Telegraph, Roger Bootle casts a cold eye upon the prospects for France:

What is going to happen? I cannot see much prospect of France recovering to match Germany again without really fundamental reform – which French governments have traditionally been incapable of delivering. Accordingly, France will continue to decline relative to Germany. Interestingly, the recent beneficiary of French voters' protests, Marine Le Pen, does not want to open France up to more competition but rather to use withdrawal from the EU to

strengthen the powers of the French state to overrule market forces. This does not bode well.

Indeed, far from being part of the hard northern core of the euro, France is increasingly coming to resemble the soft southern underbelly. Accordingly, for how much longer can the Franco-German "motor" continue to drive the EU? Won't Germany increasingly realise its own strength and want to break free from its shackles to France? And won't France increasingly resent the increased power of her neighbour?

I don't know how this is going to happen or when but I suspect that we are coming close to one of those periodic explosions that have shaped French history. When this happens the EU will never be the same again.

Europe is almost certainly going to complete its descent into Hell. It would be the ultimate condemnation of NRx — definitive proof that it had learnt nothing of value — if the specific shape of Europe's damnation, as it reaches its nadir, were to be confused with a rightist ideal.

ADDED: Convergence on a different line of thought. [Don't bother clicking, NBS has just pulled this (excellent) post for some reason yet to be disclosed.] Update:

> @Outsideness It will come back up. It may have a different eponym. I'm waiting for permission from The Dude.

— Nicholas B Stevenson (@Nick_B_Steves) June 3, 2014

OK.

Update: It's back (with a much better name).

ADDED: Paul Gottfried's take.

ADDED: *Der Spiegel* interviews Marine Le Pen.

Purely for entertainment value, an apocalyptic quasi-fnording of Marine Le Pen, edited irresponsibly into **grossly misleading** Cathedral-media nightmare fuel:

I want to destroy the EU … Europe is war. Economic war. It is the increase of hostilities between the countries. … The EU is deeply harmful, it is an anti-democratic monster. I want to prevent it from becoming fatter, from continuing to breathe, from grabbing everything with its paws and from extending its tentacles into all areas of our legislation. … A strong euro is ruining our economy. … It was created by Germany, for Germany. … the model we are advocating is less positive for Germany than the current model. Germany has become the economic heart of Europe because our leaders are weak. But Germany should never forget that France is Europe's political heart. … Be careful Ms. Merkel. If you don't see the suffering that has been imposed on the rest of the European people, then Germany will make itself hated. … she wants to impose her policies on others. This will lead to an explosion of the European Union. … If we don't all leave the euro behind, it will explode. Either

there will be a popular revolt because the people no longer want to be bled out. Or the Germans will say: Stop, we can't pay for the poor anymore. … David Cameron says that UKIP members are crazy and racist. I think it is good that UKIP is as strong as we are. … We have the same fundamental approach to Europe. … We used to be one of the richest countries in the world, but we are now on a path towards under-development. This austerity that has been imposed on the people doesn't work. The people will not allow themselves to be throttled without revolting. … We need an intelligent protectionism. We need customs duties again … The problem is the total opening of borders and allowing the law of the jungle to prevail: The further a company goes today to find slaves, which it then treats like animals and pays a pittance, without regard for environmental laws, the more it earns. … I don't want (Germany's) Siemens to buy Alstom. I want Alstom to remain French. That is strategically important for my country's independence. … One could nationalize a company, even if only temporarily, in order to stabilize it. … democracy is collapsing here in France. … I have a certain admiration for Vladimir Putin because he doesn't allow decisions to be forced upon him by other countries. I think he focuses first and foremost on what is good for Russia and the Russians. … there are many things said about Russia because they have been demonized for years at the behest of the USA. … The Americans are trying to expand their influence in the world, particularly in Europe … defending their own

interests, not ours.

Plus: Who's going to shrink the state?

ADDED: Communism good, fascism bad. (This is apparently what passes for intelligence among the chatterati.)

June 3, 2014

Mises or Jesus?

There's been a lot of this kind of thing around recently. It's mainly been arriving in a link storm from Wagner Clemente Soto, who's too unambiguously Throne-and-Altar in orientation to identify as NRx or 333, so it's probably an exercise in internal discipline taking place in another camp. Still, it's difficult not to ask: Could this be the next fission pile building up?

Here's a link to Jörg Guido Hülsman's (excellent) *Mises: The Last Knight of Liberalism*, which seems to have provided the background citations for the recent round of attacks. (This agitation always takes me back to *Der Zauberberg*.)

ADDED: Or is it "Moses to Mises"?

ADDED: NBS provides a useful 'Capitalism Week' round-up.

ADDED: A (loosely) connected argument from Brett Stevens.

July 2, 2014

Outsideness

In an alternative universe, in which there was nobody except Michael Anissimov and me tussling over the identity of Neoreaction, I'd propose a distinction between 'Inner-' and 'Outer-Nrx' as the most suitable axis of fission. Naturally, in this actual universe, such a dimension transects a rich fabric of nodes, tensions, and differences.

For the inner faction, a firmly consolidated core identity is the central ambition. (It's worth noting however that a so-far uninterrogated relation to transhumanism seems no less problematic, in principle, than the vastly more fiercely contested relation to libertarianism has shown itself to be.) Inner-NRx, as a micro-culture, models itself on a protected state, in which belonging is sacred, and boundaries rigorously policed.

Outer-NRx, defined primarily by Exit, relates itself to what it escapes. It is refuge and periphery, more than a substitute core. It does not ever expect to rule anything at all (above the most microscopic level of social reality, and then under quite different names). The Patchwork is for it a set of options, and opportunities for leverage, rather than a menu of potential homes. It is intrinsically nomad, unsettled, and micro-agitational. Its culture consists of departures it does not regret. (While not remotely globalist, it is unmistakably cosmopolitan — with the understanding that the 'cosmos' consists of chances to split.)

Outer-NRx tends to like libertarians, at least those of a hard-right persuasion, and the gateway that has enabled it to be outside libertarianism is the ideological zone to which it gravitates. Leaving libertarianism (rightwards) has made it what it is, and continues to nourish it. 'Entryism' — as has been frequently noted — is not a significant anxiety for Outer-NRx, but far more of a stimulation and, at its most acute, a welcome intellectual provocation. It is not the dodgy refugees from the ZAP who threaten to reduce its exteriority, and return it to a trap.

The Outside is the 'place' of strategic advantage. To be cast out there is no cause for lamentation, in the slightest.

August 1, 2014

Fission II

The Umlaut has long been doing an embarrassing amount of our thinking for us, and perhaps even more of our controversy. The latest installment, by Dalibor Rohac, is here. The connections it makes are frankly disturbing to this blog, whose pro-capitalist, post-libertarian, and general Atlantean sympathies have been pushed as hard as realistically possible, along with an explicit attempt at differentiation from those tendencies with an opposite — I would argue self-evidently anti-Moldbuggian — valency. It is going to be difficult to

condemn conflations of NRx with the ENR for so long as the 'voice' of Neoreaction includes remarks of this kind:

> .@DaliborRohac is scared by nationalist stirrings. https://t.co/OhzEVKTBsR
>
> — Michael Anissimov (@MikeAnissimov) August 6, 2014

NRx, across its whole spectrum, is neither libertarian nor fascist. There is, however, a remarkable polarity — our axis of fission — which is based upon which of these associations is found most disreputable. From my perspective, this distinction lines up extremely neatly with Alexander Dugin's Hyperborean / Atlantean continental forever war. It seems to me beyond any serious question that the inheritance from Mencius Moldbug lies unproblematically on the Atlantean side of this divide. The standing *Outside in* prophecy is that, by the end of this year, a definitive break along these lines will have taken place. There's no reason I can see to back-track on that expectation.

ADDED: "One could see a situation in which libertarian inattentiveness to political concerns, in the face of masses of people that are growing frustrated with democracy, abets extremism. If freedom and democracy are incompatible, like Peter Thiel thinks, it is important to articulate ways to preserve freedom."

August 6, 2014

Circles of Concern

A brief, perfectly balanced post at Mangan's pulls together HBD and political history into the suggestion that nationalism is just a phase we've been going through.

… the paradox of nationalism is that the same forces that led to its development are leading to its denou[e]ment. But what is to be done about that I don't know.

Some quality comments there too. You're all welcome back here after checking it out, with any relevant responses and arguments.

Nationalism is the one modern progressive ideology that gets off the hook far too easily in NRx circles. (And "what is to be done?" is Lenin's question, adopted from this guy. It shouldn't be proscribed, but it should definitely be subjected to disciplined suspicion.)

September 10, 2014

Trike Lines

Michael Anissimov has been conducting an online poll of NRx affinities. While questions of principle and method might have delayed this experiment, such procrastination would have been a mistake. The results have already contributed significant information. Most obviously (as already widely noted) the pattern of

primary allegiance to the the different trike-tendencies is far more evenly balanced than many had expected. As an intellectual theme — and now as a demonstrated distribution — the 'Spandrellian Trichotomy' shows a remarkably resilient stability. The integral pluralism of NRx is becoming impossible to sideline.

Nyan Sandwich has posted a Trike-theory response at *More Right*. While ultimately skeptical about the pluralist interpretation of the Trichotomy, the order of his argument respects it as a primary phenomenon. Nyan is among those who expect NRx to incline to a concentrated synthesis, or compact unity — superseding its distribution.

Thus it doesn't really make sense to ask what branch of NRx one identifies with. It's like asking a physicist whether they think quantum mechanics or general relativity is more true. The point is that the truth is a synthesis of the component theories, not a disjunction.

The natural counter-position to this would be a defense of irreducibly plural integrity, or *operational disunity*. The lines of controversy released here do not correspond to Trike 'branches' but cut across them, and through a number of critical topics, certainly including:

(1) The existence of irreducible triangular schemas within all of the world's great civilizations, represented within the Christian West by trinitarian theology. How is the relation between the triad

and the monad to be conceived? Does this relation vary fundamentally between world cultures? (These decidedly pre-NRx remarks seem very old now, but they remain at least suggestively relevant.) This is the principal Hindu articulation.

(2) To what extent is NRx inherently critical of structurally (rather than demotically) divided powers? (Among the ironies of any consensual NRx commitment to absolute monarchy would be its radical anti-feudalism, or proto-modernism.)

(3) The techno-rationalist aspiration to a super-intelligent 'Singleton' clearly assumes suppression of sovereign plurality. This fully suffices to graft the NRx controversy into the moral-political and theoretical debates over (Right) Singularity.

As a matter of fact, there is scarcely anything NRx agrees upon more consistently than the structure of its disagreements. There are three basic (dyadic) conflicts implicit within the Trichotomy, of which only one has — to this point — been seriously initiated. (Our 'Theonomists' have yet to get scrappy.) Much turmoil still lies ahead.

September 25, 2014

Questions of Identity

There's a remarkably bad-tempered argument taking place among racial identitarians at the moment (some links here), which makes

the civility and intelligence of these remarks all the more notable. (For this blog, the *Social Matter* discussion was a reminder of the — similarly civilized — exchange with Matt Parrott that took place in the comment thread here.)

In case anyone is somehow unclear about the quality of the neighborhood White Nationalism finds itself in, or adjacent to, it's worth a brief composite citation from the Andrew Anglin post cited above:

You [Colin Liddell] agree with Jewish agendas, which is why you would wish to obfuscate the fact that Jews are responsible for everything by claiming we shouldn't blame the Jews for our problems. … The reason these two [CL plus Greg Johnson] are on the same side against me is that they share the quality that they have no interest in a popular movement, and despise anyone who would attempt to take that route. … I am, unashamedly, a populist. Every successful revolutionary movement in history has been populist in nature … Hitler was a populist.

While I have to confess to finding Anglin entertaining, I hope it goes without saying that this kind of thinking has nothing at all to do with NRx. In fact, revolutionary populism almost perfectly captures what Neoreaction is not. NRx is notoriously fissiparous, but on the gulf dividing all its variants from racial Jacobinism there can surely be no controversy. So the barking you can hear in the background serves as necessary context. (This does not count as an objection to

the Neo-Nazis acquiring their own state, since that would make it even easier not to live among them than it is already. Unfortunately, it is not easy to imagine the separatist negotiations going smoothly.)

Because everything further to be said on this topic is complicated, I'm restricting my ambitions here to a series of discussion points, roughly sketched:

(1) NRx diversity conflicts are considerably less heated than those presently gripping the WNs, in part — no doubt — because the immediate political stakes are even smaller. It nevertheless introduces a massively complicating factor. For those (not exclusively found in the Tech-Comm camp, but I suspect concentrated there) who consider **Moldbug**'s work canonical, the distinction between NRx and White Nationalism (as also antisemitism) is already quite clearly defined. Among those of a predominantly Eth-Nat. inclination, on the other hand, far more border-blurriness exists.

(2) The relationship between White Nationalism and **HBD** is also complex. From outside, the two are regularly conflated, but this is a crude error. The zone of intersection — exemplified by Frank Salter (and perhaps Kevin MacDonald) — is characterized by a concern with ethnic genetic interests, but this is by no means an axiomatic theoretical or practical commitment among HBD bloggers. More typically, HBD-orientation is associated with cosmopolitan spirit of scientific neutrality, meritocratic elitism, and a suspicion of the

deleterious consequences of inbreeding, often accompanied by a tendency to philosemitism and sinophilia. Racial solidarity does not follow necessarily from biorealism, but requires an extraneous political impulse. Whatever connection is forged between WN and HBD owes more to their common opposition to the West's dominant Lysenkoism and Leftist (blank-slate, victimological) race politics than to any firm internal bond.

(3) The triangular linkages between NRX, WN, and **libertarianism** are also intricate. Consider this (fascinating) talk by Richard Spencer, to a libertarian audience, for a quick sense of the territory being navigated. The moment of dark enlightenment for libertarians tends to accompany the recognition that the cultural foundations of *laissez-faire* social arrangements have an extreme 'ethnic' specificity. This accommodation of right libertarians to neoreactionary ideas is not associated with a comparable approximation to White Nationalism, however, since the very ethnic characteristics being accentuated — the high-trust cosmopolitan openness of strongly outbred populations — are exactly those provoking WN despair as the roots of pathological altruism and ethnomasochism. (This is a ruinous paradox basic to the relevant ruminations here.)

(4) A closely-connected problem is that of cutting ethnies at the joints. (Within NRx, this is the thede topic.) While there are no doubt some neoreactionaries comfortable with the category of 'whites' as a positive **thede**, for others it seems far too broad — whether due

to its inconsistency within any historical nation, its amalgamation of populations culturally divided by the Hajnal line, its aggregation across relatively hard regional, class, and ideological divisions, or generally because — almost without exception — the most bitter and ruthless enemy of any given group of white people has been another group of white people. When WNs speak of a 'World Brotherhood of Europeans' it strikes most neoreactionaries (I suspect) as scarcely less comical than an appeal for universal human brotherhood, since it blithely encompasses the most vicious and ineliminable antagonisms in the world.

(5) Finally (for now) there's the relation of NRx to the ENR — already a grating concern, and (since the **ENR** is *also* already highly diverse) beyond the scope of anything but the most glancing treatment. From the perspective of this blog, the most aggravating figure is undoubtedly Alain de Benoist — whose brilliance is directed towards the most radical articulation of anti-capitalism to be found anywhere outside the Marxist tradition (and even within it). NRx Tech-Comms have the same level of sympathy for such ideas as they do for the legacy of Saloth Sar or Hugo Chavez, and insofar as they are proposed as an element of a potential coalition, the enterprise is immediately collapsed to a farce. This touches upon the wider concern that WN thinking often appears to skirt, and on occasions to overtly embrace, a simple racial socialism and thus by some definitions reduce to a leftist — even extreme leftist — ideology. Seen

from *Outside in*, there are far superior prospects to be found in the realist darkening of right libertarians than in coalition-building with clear-eyed collectivists.

(6) Things we can **agree** upon without much difficulty: The dominant power structure is racially obsessed and (schizophrenically) committed to the effacement of all racial reality; racial differences have substantial social consequences; the native populations of historically white societies are being subjected to an ideological (and criminal) onslaught of deranged intensity; the legal concept of 'disparate impact' is fundamentally corrupt; universal prescriptions for the social, political, cultural, and economic arrangements of diverse groups are doomed to failure; ethnic separatism (of any kind) is a legitimate political aspiration; free association and freedom of conscience are principles to be unconditionally defended; science is not answerable to ideology; … this list could no doubt be extended. (I am more uncertain about whether there is anything here that either NRxers or WNs would want to deduct.)

Clearly, and in general, there is much more to be said about all of this, with every reason for confidence that it will be said.

ADDED: Gregory Hood on the First Identitarian Congress.

ADDED: Fred Reed on monstrous über-racist Jared Taylor.

ADDED: Only tangentially connected, but too eloquent to miss out on, Charles Murray on the 20th anniversary of *The Bell Curve*:

"… the roof is about to crash in on those who insist on a purely environmental explanation of all sorts of ethnic differences, not just intelligence. Since the decoding of the genome, it has been securely established that race is not a social construct, evolution continued long after humans left Africa along different paths in different parts of the world, and recent evolution involves cognitive as well as physiological functioning. […] The best summary of the evidence is found in the early chapters of Nicholas Wade's recent book, 'A Troublesome Inheritance.' We're not talking about another 20 years before the purely environmental position is discredited, but probably less than a decade. What happens when a linchpin of political correctness becomes scientifically untenable? It should be interesting to watch. I confess to a problem with *schadenfreude*."

October 16, 2014

Entryism

If NRx is spiraling back into a second phase of entryism paranoia, it looks as if it might be a lot more reflexively intense — and therefore more creative — than the last one. It's still too early to get a firm grip at this point, and it is quite possible that the very nature of the threat makes confident apprehension an unrealistic expectation. Subversion is an abstract horror, or integral obscurity, presumed to

be actively restraining itself from emergence as a phenomenon. However, some stimulating indicators:

> I could become a leftist tommorow, I'd just have to choose. And how would you guys notice if I didn't want you to?
> — Konkvistador (@asilentsky) October 25, 2014

The self-exemplification (by Konkvistador) here has surely to be taken as the provocation to a more abstract suggestion. *If 'I' could do it, then others could too*. The generalization is strongly encouraged:

> #AIACC And everyone is a radical leftist hiding. Maybe I'm a leftist who forgot he was one.
> — Konkvistador (@asilentsky) October 24, 2014

Nydwracu has some ideas about the beds 'we' should be looking under:

> @soapjackal @asilentsky If I were a leftist, I'd push total passivism and accelerationism, and encourage the formation of named identities.
> — Wesley Morganston (@nydwracu) October 25, 2014

And then there's the ultimate entryist T-shirt slogan:

> I want to kill the entryist inside me. pic.twitter.com/

> xakJerzPoL
>
> — Manticore (@ad_bestias) October 23, 2014

Much entertainment in store — and perhaps even some functional ideas — if we can avoid going entirely insane. After all, the last wave of involutionary paranoia brought us some valuable thoughts (among which the best were probably this, this, and this). I've probably missed some critical moments, where attempts at institutional self-immunization became productive, and experimental. Keeping social maneuvers virtual helps to ward off incontinent public activism, so any opportunity to experiment with Machiavellian micro-politics is worth seizing with dark glee.

There's no need for it to remain trivially humanistic. Remember this?

October 25, 2014

Caste

Mark Yuray has made me a believer. From nominal head-nodding towards the Moldbug model of caste identities, I've been dragged into utter compliance (with an even simpler variant), in awe-struck wonder at its explanatory power.

@AimlessGromar @Outsideness @ClarkHat The difference between #Rx and #NRx IMO is only caste.

— Mark Yuray (@MarkYuray) November 4, 2014

@Outsideness @AimlessGromar @ClarkHat The disagreement seems to be whether theorizing is necessary or not i.e. a caste difference.

— Mark Yuray (@MarkYuray) November 4, 2014

@libertybookmeet @AimlessGromar @Outsideness @ClarkHat To me, seems like those claiming Rx are standard US vaisyas, NRx are (ex)Brahmins.

— Mark Yuray (@MarkYuray) November 4, 2014

@AimlessGromar @ClarkHat @Outsideness @libertybookmeet Where are #NRx from? England? Minnesota? California? NY? DC? Canada? BRAHMIN ALERT!

— Mark Yuray (@MarkYuray) November 4, 2014

@AimlessGromar @ClarkHat @Outsideness @libertybookmeet Where are #Rx from? Tennessee? Texas? Mothers and former Paleocons? VAISYA ALERT!

— Mark Yuray (@MarkYuray) November 4, 2014

@_Hurlock_ Progressive is not the same as Brahmin (or it is,

> depending on whether you see us as Right-Brahmins or ex-Brahmins).
>
> — Mark Yuray (@MarkYuray) November 4, 2014

> @henrydampier @_Hurlock_ The problem is Brahmin has two distinct connotations: US urban elf progressive democrat OR intellectual elite.
>
> — Mark Yuray (@MarkYuray) November 4, 2014

This model processes the NRx / Rx ~~gulf~~ difference to my entire satisfaction. It works beyond the Anglosphere, too:

> @MarkYuray @henrydampier one major difference is that in bulgaria most of the 'vaisyas' i.e. lower class are old-school communists
>
> — Hurlock (@_Hurlock_) November 4, 2014

> @_Hurlock_ @henrydampier Culturally or ideologically? In Russia and Serbia the situation is similar, however…
>
> — Mark Yuray (@MarkYuray) November 4, 2014

> @_Hurlock_ @henrydampier In Serbia and Russia both the same people who glorify the old communists will glorify Orthodoxy and nationalism.
>
> — Mark Yuray (@MarkYuray) November 4, 2014

> @_Hurlock_ @henrydampier This is because communism is viewed not as ideology but as an expression of national strength i.e. ethno-respect.
>
> — Mark Yuray (@MarkYuray) November 4, 2014

It's far less an ideological difference, than a difference over *the importance of ideology*. It's also a matter of thede, rather than phyle (I'm assuming). The initial, obvious, and somewhat disconcerting implication is that nothing is going to be shifted anywhere significant by ideological maneuvers. NRx and Rx will each attract their core constituencies, after which there's only pointless bickering. On the positive side, there's *our* work to do …

ADDED: A slightly different tack (from June). "NRx is signalling to 'open-minded progressives' aka 'cool people'."

ADDED: Heading back a little further (to December 2013), contains much of relevance and interest.

November 5, 2014

Against the Ant People

The heated controversy running through biology right now — pronounced, at least, in its zone of intersection with the wider public sphere — seems like something that should be inciting fission within

the NRx. The collision between Hamiltonian kin selection (defended most prominently in this case by Richard Dawkins) and group selection (E. O. Wilson) drives a wedge between the baseline biorealism accepted by all tendencies within the Neoreactionary Trike and the much stronger version of racial identitarianism that flourishes within the ethno-nationalist faction. Until recent times, proto-Hamiltonian hereditarianism has been strongly aligned with classical liberalism, while ideological racial collectivism represents a later — and very different — political tradition. Not so much as a chirp yet, though. Are people unpersuaded about this argument's relevance?

On a slight tangent (but ultimately, only a slight one) Nick Szabo's epically brilliant essay 'Shelling Out' is remarkable — among other things — for its profound biorealist foundations. It makes an excellent theoretical preparation for Jim's paper on 'Natural Law and Natural Rights', which also draws productively upon John Maynard Smith's game-theoretic model of the 'evolutionary stable strategy' as the natural substrate of psychological and cultural deep-structure.

This is an important opportunity to put down some discriminatory markers. Can we turf group selectionist ideas out of NRx entirely, or do we have to fight about it?

December 9, 2014

Ellipsis …

Populo: *Attack! Attack! The time for action has come. Resistance! Struggle! We have to do something, and do it* ***now****. Enough with these endless streams of words!*
Crypton: *Still shouting in the name of silence, Populo?*
Populo: *Hardly silence, Crypton. Not at all. Even the contrary. In the name, rather, of the voice of true men, rediscovering their pride and fortitude, and joining together to make a stand against intolerable abuse.*
Crypton: *Ah yes, that.*
Populo: *So what brings you here Crypton?*
Crypton: *I was rather hoping we might continue our little chat about the Deep State.*
Populo: *Terrific! That's a topic close to my heart, as you know. Those slithering parasites hidden beneath the rotten log of the Cathedral. It's time to expose them, denounce them, burn them out!*
Crypton: *They're the enemy then?*
Populo: *Of course they're the enemy! They run the Cathedral, don't they? Try not to sophisticate matters beyond all common sense.*
Crypton: *Did you find time to take a look at that little Daniel Krawisz article I mentioned?*
Populo: *Yes, it was vaguely interesting, I suppose.*
Crypton: *So you didn't like it much?*

Populo: *Frankly Crypton, it reminded me of the side of you I like least, and having downed a few horns of ale, I'll be double frank — it had a whiff of … well … **treachery** about it. To spend so much attention upon the subtleties of potential defections, it's unmanly, somehow.*
Crypton: *That's excellent Populo, because I was going to suggest that gaming-out Deep State defections is the **only** practical strategic topic worthy of NRx consideration. It seems that we have our conversation plotted for us.*

Populo: *Agreed, a fine joust! But let me start by telling you something about yourself Crypton, which I'm not sure you clearly see. **Ironically**, as you would no doubt say, your attraction to this shadowy topic is driven by psychological motivations that are as bright as a beacon. It's clandestine, by nature, and therefore necessarily passes into ellipsis. That makes it an excuse for abstraction. Squalid actuality is unmentionable, so that the conversation is steered inevitably into the virtual. In other words, it tends by subterranean design to be a flight from action. That's perfect for me, of course, because by crushing you in this argument through unimagined neutronium-densities of humiliation, I will be serving the noble cause of public resistance, implicitly, even though that's the last thing you want to talk about. So make your case.*
Crypton: *Maximally compressed it's this — in the near future, only crypto-conflict is serious. Public politics is purely for the popcorn industry.*

Populo: *So we're already diving under the rotting log?*
Crypton: *If that's your preferred image.*
Populo: *And beside these occult transactions, nothing matters?*
Crypton: *Precisely.*
Populo: *But then, by the very nature of the thing, we have no idea what we're doing, or who we're trying to communicate with. We have nothing to offer them. We don't even know whether they exist … Oh do stop it Crypton, your eyes are gleaming.*
Crypton: *Don't you catch even the slightest aroma of basilisk?*
Populo: *By which, I'm assuming, you* ***don't*** *mean merely involution into psychosis?*
Crypton: *More specifically: acausal trade, and transcendental games.*
Populo: *There you go! Utter, ineffectual abstraction, within two sentences. Let's start somewhere else — with the alphabet agencies.*
Crypton: *OK.*
Populo: *You're proposing some kind of cryptic alliance with them — or elements within them — or you're not proposing anything at all.*
Crypton: *Fair. At least, that's part of it.*
Populo: *And the rest of it?*
Crypton: *You know I'm a skeptic on enumerative methods.*
Populo: *Some of it, then.*
Crypton: *It seems impossible that the AAs could know what they ultimately are, teleologically — what they are becoming. These organizations include some very smart people, with a taste for*

puzzles. Is it likely they could not be intrigued by their institutional destiny?

Populo: *As usual, I have no idea at all what you're suggesting.*

Crypton: *There is a properly* ***cryptic*** *plane of communication with the Deep State, that does not conform to the political plaintext of conspiratorial engagement. It concerns the keys of fate. Concretely, there is an implicit alliance around the escalation of cryptographic technology — as also, one even more implicitly against it, and against the AAs* ***as such****, on those fundamental grounds. If crypsis — camouflage — is a* ***hidden end****, and not merely — as it superficially appears — a means to the fulfillment of vulgar or exoteric goals, then the pact is sealed somewhere outside the AAs themselves. The AAs have an occult cosmic purpose, far exceeding their national security functions. Not that these latter are uninteresting …*

Populo: *So let's, please, talk about them.*

Crypton: *If there's any place in the social structure where such matters are entirely detached from questions of demotic ideological legitimation, popular politics, or even merely public relations, it has surely to be the Deep State. Is the Deep State, then, in this regard, not already a model of Exit? It has departed the public political sphere, for the shadows, at least, if it has managed to obtain the operational liberty from democratic accountability, of which its critics so vociferously accuse it.*

Populo: *You don't think the NSA has diversity monitors?*

Crypton: *If it has, America deserves to perish, and it's our task to explain why.*
Populo: *You'd give up on the American people because the NSA has Otherkin bathrooms!?*

[To be continued …]

December 17, 2014

New Low

If this is NRx I'm Mao Zedong.

Necessary Twitter self-citation for context:

> Is anybody going to try and tell me, with a straight face, that this has anything whatsoever to do with NRx? http://t.co/VrVymRaOEy
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) January 20, 2015

> @Outsideness No, but by moving the problem blooming period to post-WW2, it gives cover for embracing + sympathizing with '20s/'30s fascism
>
> — SOBL1 (@SOBL1) January 20, 2015

Quite.

ADDED: Hurlock is (very calmly) on the case.

ADDED: Anomaly UK reminds us of a (very relevant) post on pre-Marxist Anglosphere leftism.

ADDED: Essential.

January 20, 2015

#HRx

The basic tenets of Heroic Reaction:

— Moldbug is over-rated.
— Capitalism needs to be brought under control.
— The errors of fascism are dwarfed by those of libertarianism.
— White racial community is the core.
— 'Atomization' is a serious problem.
— Answers are already easily available, so over-thinking is unhelpful, and even seriously pathological.

Unlike #NRx, #HRx is primarily a *political movement*. Its theoretical appetite is modest, since it has faith that everything it truly needs can be retrieved — more-or-less straightforwardly — from the folkish past.

Among the many myriads confusedly aligned with 'Neoreaction', a number have already expressed an explicit interest in abandoning this odd cult for a bolder, brasher, more politically dynamic successor, stripped of techno-commercial Vulcanism, race-

treachery, and intellectual circumlocution. Far more would join the exodus (from #NRx) if energetically led. Others would pour in from elsewhere. All #HRx still requires is a *commander*. Then it could be huge.

From the moment #HRx is born, the scale of (apparent) #NRx would shrink dramatically. That is an outcome, I suspect, that could be endured among the remnant with serene stoicism.

ADDED: Brett Stevens has some thoughtful commentary. (See also below.)

April 11, 2015

#HRx II

This is well-done, insightful, and even comparatively civil.

The diremption:

Moldbug, by laying an immense foundation, was complex enough to be interpreted in very distinct manners. NRx concentrates on his economic writings and proposed solutions: stockholder sovereigns, Patchwork, block-chain protocols, exit, financial incentives, Austrianism, [Bitcoin], 'the reset'. Alternatively, HRx concentrates on his reading suggestions and historical/international writings: Carly[I]e worship, high-Toryism/Jacobitism, classical international law, Absolute monarchy, generalist historiography, imperialism

apologia, political theory, and the general aesthetic. It's fair enough to say that neither side is willing to embrace the whole package; unless Mencius comes back and picks a side we're going to keep on squabbling over who are his true followers. Regardless, we all agree on MM's critiques of Democracy, bureaucracy, progressive morality, and the dominant institutions. […] I believe this dichotomy is fundamentally spiritual. NRx is a materialist ideology, post-Ancap in essence, it's no surprise then that many Neoreactionaries started out as Marxists or Libertarians. Conversely, HRx places the metaphysical at the root of all civic affairs. With raw power politics also superseding catallaxy.

It's not quibble proof, from the XS PoV, but it's far closer to a cold, realistic assessment than anything we've seen yet. (It's impossible for me to avoid observing, in passing, that the descent into spittle-flecked vulgarity seems to be a distinguishing characteristic of these 'higher souls'. Is it too much to ask for just a little loftiness of tone from our political metaphysicians? Quite apart from anything else, it would actually work better.)

There are many other points of interest in the Froude Society piece. Worth noting in particular:

They reject the hero, they reject the sublime, and thus any exoteric link to the Holy on High. Moreover, they do not even pretend to have any solutions for non anglo-civilizations, we speak truths that ring true for all peoples by historical precedent, that good

governance and order is always Good.

It wouldn't surprise me, in the least, if the author of *Unqualified Reservations* would tilt more to the HRx camp today (although, rather weirdly, the *Urbit* innovator seems to have pushed even further into 'protocol' territory). There is certainly no assertion on our (Tech-Comm) side, that he would subscribe to the usage of his work that we find important. Nor do we, to any serious extent, care whether he would do so. Neocameral-Patchwork formalism, the theorization of fungible primary (sovereign) property, and Exit-oriented geopolitical disintegration is the commitment we have here — and without Moldbug none of that would have reached its present state of articulation. The Jacobitism, monarchist theater, objective Anglophobia, ahistorical contempt for emergent trustless governance systems, hyperbolic anti-modernism, and romantic humanism we can do without.

(The original #HRx post here might be relevant.)

March 2, 2016

Quote note (#233)

Alexander Dugin understands the (Tech-Comm) NRx vs HRx antagonism* as well as anyone on earth:

Geopolitically, today's Europe is an Atlanticist entity. Geopolitics,

as envisioned by the Englishman Sir H. Mackinder, asserts that there are two types of civilization – the civilization of Sea (Seapower) and the civilization of Land (Landpower). They are constructed on opposite systems of values. While Seapower is purely mercantile, modernist, and materialist, Landpower is traditionalist, spiritual, and heroic. This dualism corresponds to Werner Sombart's conceptual pair of Händlres and Helden. Modern European society is fully integrated into the civilization of Sea which manifests itself in the strategic hegemony of North America and NATO.

The Hyperborean agenda: "We need to combat liberalism, refuse it, and deconstruct it entirely. At the same time, we need to do so not in the name of just class (as in Marxism) or in the name of the nation or race (as in fascism), but in the name of the organic unity of the people, social justice, and real democracy."

Purge Atlanteanism ("Seapower") of all that, through intensified polarization, and it generates NeoCam Patchwork automatically. Space is the coming sea.

(I guess people are allowed one irritating joke about my name, and then we're done with that.)

March 21, 2016

Royal Blessings

Neoreactionary Royalism builds upon a tradition of masterful public relations that dates back over three centuries:

Unfortunately George I couldn't speak English. He had rehearsed a little speech to make when he landed in England, to reassure the English that he had come for the good of all. He got the grammar mangled though, and proclaimed: "I haff come for all your goods!"

May 14, 2015

Putsch

As XS readers are most probably already aware, there's an extremely intriguing *experiment in authority* taking place within the shadowy halls of NRx right now. The principal document, released by the Hestia Society, can be found here. It is succinct, sane, and merits careful digestion. Associated re-adjustments are noted in this *More Right* post, announcing a new home for "the Rationalist branch of NRx", here.

In the absence of a formal foundation of sovereign property, a putsch is an entirely unobjectionable mechanism for the transfer — and in this case, more accurately, initial establishment — of social authority. The new inner council has been remarkably well-selected

for sobriety and judgment (i.e., for what, in the English political parlance, is known as 'bottom'). In both psychological and ideological respects, it incarnates a promise of sound government. The occasion for this development, as explained in the HS statement, is worth repeating here, due to the commendable lucidity of its diagnosis:

It's become clear over the past year (mid 2014 to mid 2015) that "Neoreaction" is suffering a tragedy of the commons and lack of formal structure. Because no one has formally owned the #NRx brand, there have been a lot of territorial skirmishes, confusion about who's in, who's out, and who's in charge, disruption of the interesting theoretical work, and bad behaviour lasting months or years that wouldn't last days in a serious organization.

There are a great many, very interesting, *theoretical* questions remaining about the viability of any authoritative institution in the absence of definite disciplinary mechanisms. This blog will certainly be delving into such problems, in future posts. For the moment, however, something approximating closely to a declaration of fealty seems appropriate. From the *Xenosystems* perspective, the NRx brand has never been entrusted to safer hands.

ADDED: The Inner Council.

ADDED: Some background.

May 22, 2015

Thick and Thin

Here's an example of the distinction being used in a discussion between libertarians. It would be surprising if the distinction lacked useful application to NRx controversies. It goes without saying (I'm assuming) that the NAP wouldn't serve as the ultimate, irreducible axiom in that case, but what would? Perhaps: *Maximal localization of consequences* (and thus cybernetic sensitivity)?

'Privatization' isn't a bad compression of this principle. The case for private (or commercialized) government would therefore be quite easily enveloped by it.

August 29, 2015

Twitter cuts (#49)

> pic.twitter.com/YDOwif6BjO
>
> — Butch Legorn (@PoseidonAwoke) February 10, 2016

The Internet is a formalism engine. It will engineer consistency, overwhelming all Cathedralist efforts to maintain 'nuance' (Left-oriented asymmetry).

Either:

(a) "Hey, we want out Pride™ too!" or

(b) All “X Pride” is evident retardation.
Choose one, unless you’re running a grievance studies program at a Cathedral institution (in which case, disintermediation is coming).

February 10, 2016

NRx and Liberalism

In much of the neoreactionary camp, ‘liberalism’ is the end-point of discussion. Its argumentative function is *exactly* that of ‘racism’ for the left. The only question, as far as this stance is concerned, is whether the term can be made to stick. Once the scarlet letter of micro-cultural ostracism is attached, there’s nothing further to discuss. This is unlikely to change, except at the margin.

The obvious preliminary to this topic is, if not quite ‘American English’, something like it. ‘Liberalism’ in the American tongue has arrived in a strange space, unique to that continent. It is notable, and uncontroversial, for instance that the notion of a ‘right-wing liberal’ is considered a straight oxymoron by American speakers, where in Europe — and especially mainland Europe — it is closer to a pleonasm. Since we still, to a very considerable extent, inhabit an American world, the expanded term ‘classical liberal’ is now required to convey the traditional sense. A Briton, of capitalistic inclinations, is likely to favor ‘Manchester Liberal’ for its historical associations

with the explicit ideology of industrial revolution. In any case, the discussion has been unquestionably complicated.

Political language tends to become dialectical, in the most depraved (Hegelian) sense of this term. It lurches wildly into its opposite, as it is switched like a contested flag between conflicting parties. Stable political significances apply only to whatever the left (the 'opposition', or 'resistance') hasn't touched yet. Another consideration, then, for those disposed to a naive faith in ideological signs as heraldic markers. (It is one that threatens to divert this post into excessive digression, and is thus to be left — in *Wikipedia* language — as a 'stub'.)

The proposal of this blog is to situate 'liberal' at the intersection of three terms, each essential to any recoverable, culturally tenacious meaning. It is irreducibly *modern*, *English*, and *counter-political*. 'Ancient liberties' are at least imaginable, but an ancient liberalism is not. Foreign liberalisms can be wished the best of luck, because they will most certainly need it (an exception for the Dutch, alone, is plausible here). Political liberalism is from the beginning a practical paradox, although perhaps in certain rare cases one worth pursuing.

Burke is, without serious room for doubt, a liberal in this sense. He is even its epitomy.

The positive content of this liberalism is the non-state culture of (early) English modernism, as represented (with some modicum of ethnic irony) by the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, by

the tradition of spontaneous order in its Anglophone lineage, by the conception of commercial society as *relief from politics*, and by ('Darwinian') naturalistic approaches that position distributed, competitive dynamism as an ultimate explanatory and genetic principle. This is the cultural foundation that made English the common tongue of global modernity (as has been widely noted). In political economy, its supreme principle is catallaxy (and only very conditionally, monarchy).

It is from this cultural matrix that Peter Thiel speaks, when he says (notoriously):

I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible.

Democracy is criticized *from the perspective of* (the old) *liberalism*. The insight is perfectly (if no doubt incompletely) Hoppean. It is a break that prepared many (the author of this blog included) for Moldbug, and structured his reception. It also set limits. Democracy is denounced, fundamentally, for its betrayal of Anglo-Modernist liberty. Hoppe's formulation cannot be improved upon:

Democracy has nothing to do with freedom. Democracy is a soft variant of communism, and rarely in the history of ideas has it been taken for anything else.

Moldbug's explicit comments on this point are remarkably consistent, but not without ambiguity. He writes (I contend, *typically*):

*The truth about "libertarianism" is that, **in general**, although*

sovereignty is sovereignty, the sovereign whether man, woman or committee is above the law by definition, and there is no formula or science of government, libertarian policies tend to be good ones. Nor did we need Hayek to tell us this. It was known to my namesake, over two millennia ago. […] ***Wu wei*** *– for this is its true name – is a public policy for a virtuous prince, not a gigantic committee. The virtuous prince should practice* ***wu wei****, and will; that is his nature. Men will flock to his kingdom and prosper there. The evil prince will commit atrocities; that is his nature. Men will flee his kingdom, and should do so ASAP before he gets the minefields in.*

Is this flocking and fleeing to be conceptually *subordinated* to the analysis of sovereignty, or — in contrast (and in the way of Cnut the Great) — set above it, as the Mandate of Heaven above the Emperor, which is to say: as the enveloping context of external relations, grounded only in the Outside? Despite anticipated accusations of bad faith, this is a serious question, and one that cannot be plausibly considered simply exterior to Moldbug's work and thought.

In any case, it is the lineage of English Liberty (and beyond it, *Wu wei*, or the Mandate of Heaven) that commands our loyalty here. Insofar as Moldbug contributes to that, he is an ally, otherwise a foe, the brilliance and immense stimulation of his corpus notwithstanding. NRx, as it now exists, similarly.

"… the State should not be managing the minds of its citizens" writes Moldbug. (That's actually a little *more* moralistic — in an

admirably liberal direction — than I'm altogether comfortable with.)

March 23, 2016

Lunatic Activism



So it seems quite definite that the maniac who murdered this lady was some kind of riled-up Neo-Nazi (with mental health problems, if

that isn't a pleonasm). The SPLC is being called upon to pitch in with information, *wholly understandably and predictably*.

The news article notes:

In the wake of the attack, commentators questioned whether the tone of the ongoing Brexit referendum on Britain's future in the European Union referendum campaign had been too divisive, pointing in particular to the focus on immigration. […] Alex Massie, writing in the Spectator magazine, blamed the "Leave" campaign for raising tensions. […] "When you encourage rage you cannot then feign surprise when people become enraged," Mr Massie wrote. […] "When you present politics as a matter of life and death, as a question of national survival, don't be surprised if someone takes you at your word."

There's absolutely no point insisting that this is bullshit, because to the extent that it is *it's nevertheless inevitable, and it will certainly be effective*. This is what incontinent activism produces. It's free, super-charged propaganda for the other side.

If the Right succeeds at making anything out of the collapse of the reigning order, it will be because it has pacified its own fringe of lunatic activism. It's far from clear that it's capable of doing that. What is clear though, is that the Alt-Right tendency — taken generally — is not anywhere close to seriously trying. The idiots pretending to be your friends will hurt you far more than the idiots on the other side. Mere survival requires principled dissociation

from anyone promoting crime and terror as political tactics. Violent criminality is not even slightly OK. (It's questionable whether politics is even slightly OK.)

If "no enemies on the right" moderates condemnation of rabid animals, it's a formula for political suicide.

Note: The first person to denounce this post as 'virtue signaling' loses. (It's non-hydrophobia signaling.)

ADDED: Alrenous comments.

June 17, 2016

Frankenstein



This comment thread makes it vividly clear what's at stake in the Cathedral vs. Alt-Right grudge match. It's Frankenstein against his monster.

(No way China doesn't end up inheriting everything, on current Occidental degeneration trends.)

Moldbug on Breivik, cutting to the core of the right-wing activist delusion:

A restoration of traditional, pre-liberal or even pre-Christian Norway is a herculean task of social and political engineering. It

cannot possibly be carried on without absolute sovereignty. Indeed, the task of eradicating liberal institutions and liberal culture in Norway, though tremendous (and itself requiring absolute sovereignty), pales before the much more difficult task of recreating a genuine Norwegian society that isn't a ridiculous theme-park joke. […] The idea that ***any*** *incremental political change, achieved by* ***any*** *sort of "activism" (from mass whining to mass murder), can advance this project* ***in any way at all****, is inherently retarded.*

Of course, very few are capable of doing anything positively valuable, such as inventing a new crypto-currency, or advancing some other practical Exit technology, so the temptation is to do something retarded instead. "Something needs to be done, and this is something." Also, they're increasingly desperate, poor creatures.

(Humans are probably too stupid to live.)

June 18, 2016

Broken

'Absolutist neoreaction' seems to think its techno-commercialist enemies (and I think it's fair to say, XS in particular) will have some kind of fundamental problem with this:

The history of ideas is the history of the resources behind them (which has some overlap with the base superstructure of Marxism)

but that this is augmented and overridden by the action of Power, and power centres in both unified, and un-unified political structures.

If there is some determined attempt to separate Power™ from techno-economic capability, then incomprehension is probable. (But no one could possibly be suggesting anything that preposterous, surely?)

To ignore the historical association of power disintegration with the emergence of self-propelling techonomic competences also looks like a serious blindness. Capitalism hatched in Europe because Europe was broken. Keeping the world broken seems similarly indissociable from the survival of capitalistic historical momentum, and breaking it more profoundly is the route to capital intensification. Perhaps that's the argument we're having (not that such arguments matter much).

The Idea that unified power is the reliable principle of social competence is ethno-historically French. That is where it has worked its magic since the epoch of the Sun King. Under sufficiently dismal circumstances, the RF analysis might catch on there.

August 19, 2016

Twitter cuts (#92)

> Was going to build a working space elevator today but instead spent the time following an "appropriate" ratio of people on twitter. Sorry.
>
> — Bored Elon Musk (@BoredElonMusk) October 5, 2016

— Posted as an administrative contribution to the embryonic "the Cathedral is functional for Capital escalation" conversation.

October 7, 2016

Quote note (#350)

This paleo-reactionary outline and critique of Moldbug is superbly done, if (of course) fundamentally unconvincing to those of a Tech-Comm persuasion. In particular, it's hard to imagine a more incisive series of feature-not-bug points than this one:

That, then, covers the main aspects and positive sides of Moldbug's thought. But now it is time to point out his many shortcomings. […] All of them ultimately flow from three things: 1) his "reservationist epistemology" which denies a place for sources of knowledge outside of "irreducible and untranscendable reason," 2) his Bodinian (and ultimately Roman) conception of sovereignty, and

3) his Machiavellianism and frequent resort to ***raison d'etat****.*

If the conclusion drawn is that Moldbug — all royalist trolling aside — is in fact a consistent Cold Modernist, clarification is served.

April 24, 2017

SECTION B - THE CATHEDRAL

CHAPTER ONE - STRUCTURE

Mandarins

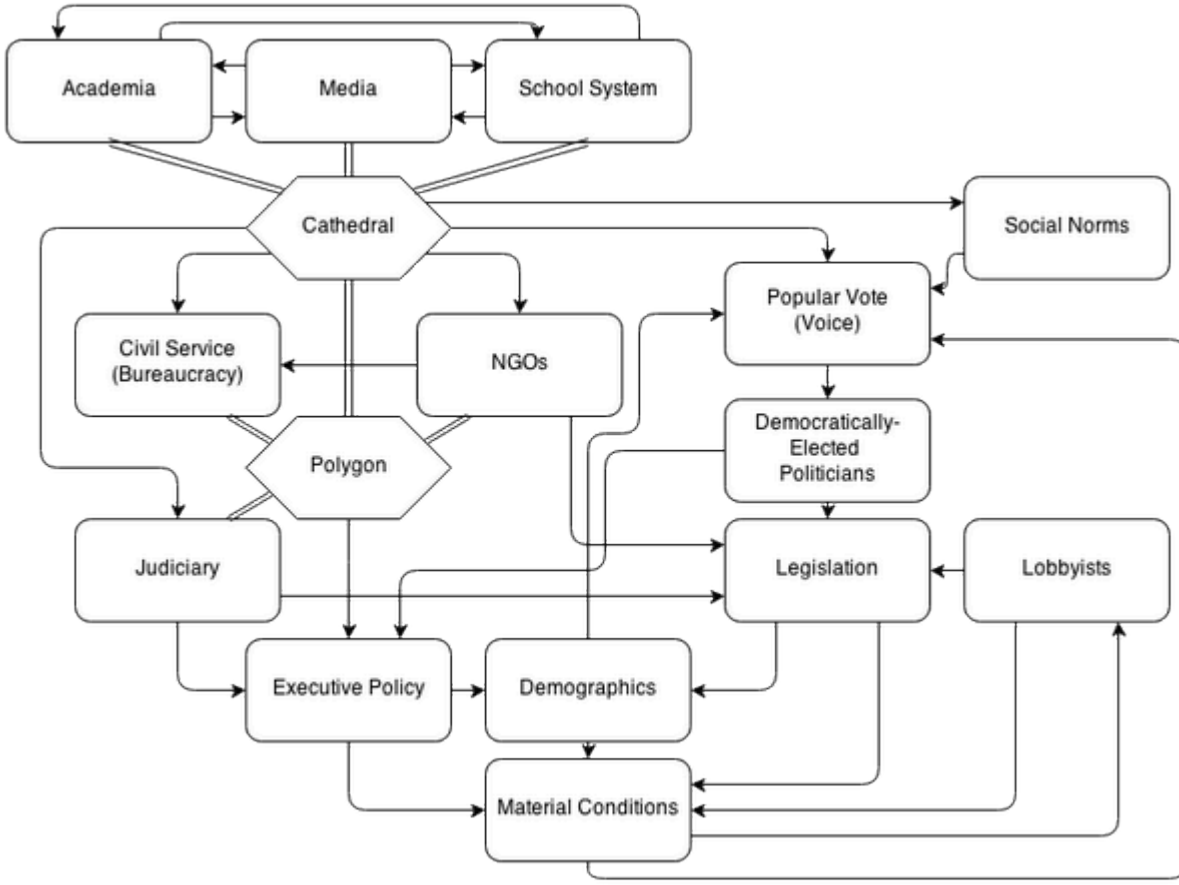
Many of the recent short posts here have been inter-connected by the topic of international 'soft power' tensions. Somewhat ironically, this is a subject that is peculiarly prone to failures of insight. No cultural formation is disposed to a self-understanding that would expose itself as something inherently threatening.

The reactions of Western academic, media, entertainment, and ancillary cultural powers to Chinese resistances and counter-actions are characterized by a remarkable uniformity, and systematic refusal of reflection. Doesn't any obstruction of — or non-compliance with — these highly-internationalized forces of communication indicate simple *fear of the truth*? That is overwhelmingly the core assumption, when such matters are discussed by those very organs of trans-cultural agency which should be in question, but which manage very successfully not to be. The 'conversation' is almost wholly controlled by those who would be the topic of the conversation, if the conversation were permitted to happen.

In this respect, the international *managed non-controversy*

closely echoes the domestic cultural cold war in the United States. When one side in such a conflict claims to be the incontestable authority on the nature of the conflict, the history books are written by the victors before the history has even taken place. Resistance to the cultural hegemon is predetermined as inarticulate, unreasonable, and illegitimate. Assertions of academic and media 'freedom' are substituted for positive analyses of cultural powers and their agendas, as if the very suspicion of concerted strategic influence were self-evidently nonsensical, and reasonably pathologized as paranoid conspiracy theorizing.

It becomes irresistible, therefore, to present Nydrwracu's diagram of American domestic cultural power, understand as the sovereign instance within its society:



This is the preliminary diagrammatic exposition of 'the Cathedral' as investigated in the writings of Mencius Moldbug, where the social elite it identifies are typically described as 'Brahmins'. This ruling class can be conceived, with equal plausibility, as an American Mandarinate. The informal 'officials' of this Mandarinate are united by the implicit and publicly-promoted belief that their only special interest is the truth. If in service to the truth, they find themselves

duty-bound to tell everybody what to think, that can only be legitimately interpreted as a spontaneous expression of cultural 'freedom' — and not at all as the principle contemporary form of *dominion*.

Moldbug calls this academic-media Mandarinate the Cathedral, in part, because it so evidently thinks and works as a State Church. It considers itself solemnly obliged to inculcate correct belief, in order that popular opinion makes the socio-political choices it should. With some modest time-lag, consumed by the workings of 'progress', the Cathedral decides what society is to agree upon. It is the pilot of American society, and thus — to some very considerable extent — of the world. When it encounters objections, it tells the world what to think about that, too.

If sophisticated Western opinion is to make sense of the emerging soft power tensions in the world, it needs first to acknowledge the fact that the Cathedral exists, that it is a definite, specifically-motivated, immensely powerful entity, and that there are reasons to dislike it which need have nothing whatsoever to do with a fear of freedom or truth. An aggressively evangelizing religion, which refuses to recognize itself as such, is a scary thing to share a planet with. If the American Mandarinate cannot see that, it is likely that there are a very large number of other things it cannot see.

ADDED: Hollywood trolls Juche.

June 26, 2014

Know the Enemy

> So, how terrible is this? (An attempt at making a flowchart out of Moldbug's account of government.) pic.twitter.com/1yL7sjBQHr
>
> — Wesley Morganston (@nydwracu) June 25, 2014

More scrutiny and discussion needed — but this diagram looks highly reliable (and extremely valuable) upon preliminary inspection.

(I can't reproduce it here because its connective links get lost in the darkness — torture.)

ADDED: It looks like this:

> @Outsideness @nydwracu Like so? (had to recreate the type, I'll fix any errors you find) pic.twitter.com/3DLQzZfB1Q
>
> — Mr. Archenemy (@mr_archenemy) June 26, 2014

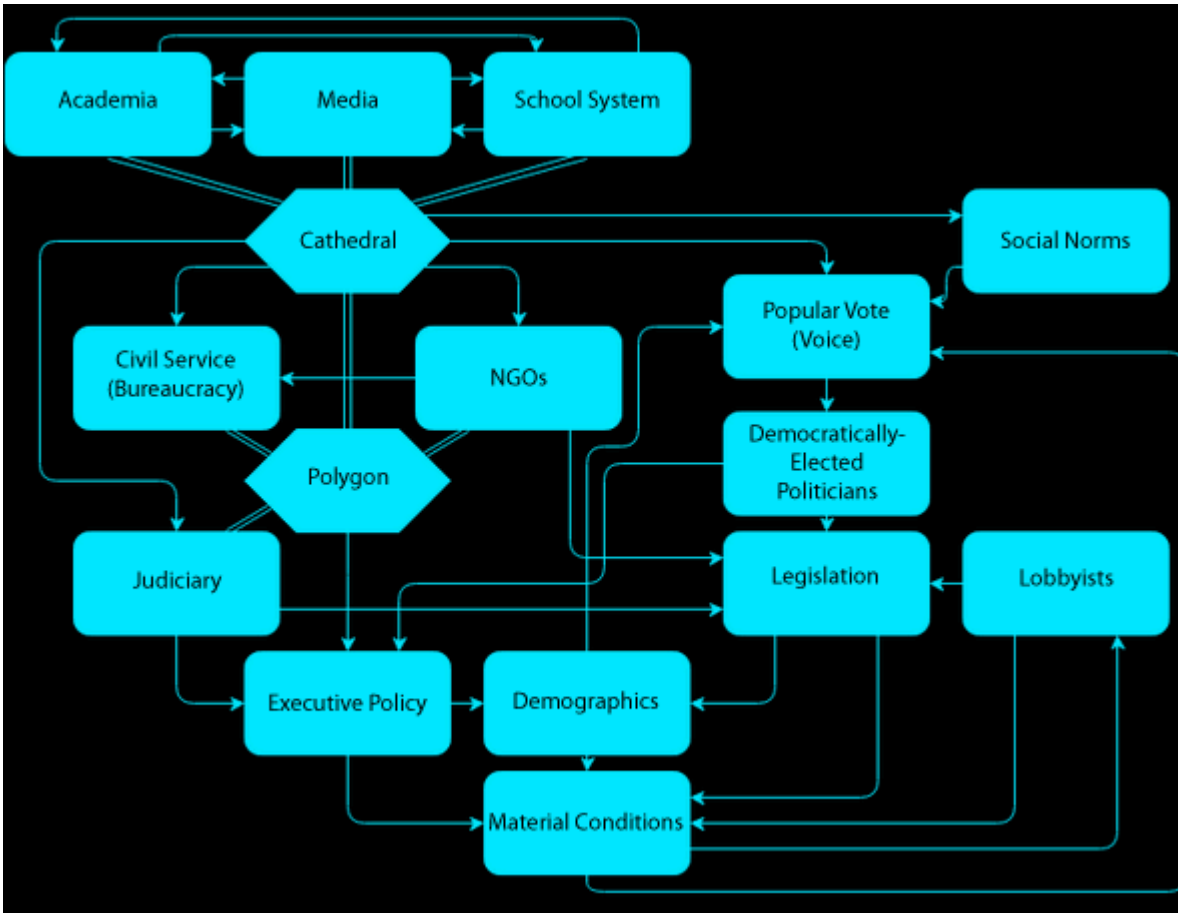
> @mr_archenemy @Outsideness or this? pic.twitter.com/0QnT9F6vSb
>
> — Wesley Morganston (@nydwracu) June 26, 2014

> Radish gets back to basics:
>
> @nydwracu dis? pic.twitter.com/iHtLS5x7QC
> — Karl F. Boetel (@RadishMag) June 25, 2014

June 26, 2014

Know the Enemy II

The sobs of aesthetic bliss version:



ADDED: China vs. The Cathedral, planetary soft-power cage fight.

June 26, 2014

Cathedral Studies

Some sound advice from *Post-Nietzschean*: When listing the central organs of the modern structure, be careful not ignore the PR industry, post-vocational higher education ("crapademia"), and para-administrative organizations ("NGO-i-stan"). This type of sociological concreteness represents an important theoretical development pathway.

(via (via))

ADDED: The latent topic here is NRx blog-ecology. It looks as if *Post-Nietzschean* has already burnt out (last post in January). If this one fizzles I'm going to throw some kind of epic tantrum.

May 11, 2014

Cathedral notes (#1)

To accompany this (which I'm treating as a very valuable work-in-progress [sic]), some initial straggly commentary.

(1) Conceptual genealogists will insist on a link to this, so here it is. There's a lot of discussion stimulation there. Some other time.

(2) Probably 90% of the 'Cathedral' discussion so far — insofar as this has over-spilled the NRx dikes — has consisted of "why don't we call it the Synagogue?" Tedious as this may be, it's a crucial question,

because it effectively draws the NRx contour. If the cooptation of Judaism by the main cladistic trunk of dynamic modernity is not understood, nothing has been. 'The Cathedral' is a term that captures the exclusive insight about which NRx coalesces.

(3) Nydrwracu's diagram, and Radish's, are no doubt incomplete, but they are fully adequate to the most decisive point. The Cathedral is an information system — even an 'intelligence' system — that is characterized, through supreme irony, by a structural *inability to learn*. The minimal requirement for any Cathedrogram is that it displays a radical deficiency of significant feedback links to the control core. Every apparatus of information *gathering* occupies a strictly subordinate position, relative to the sovereign Cathedral layer, which is defined exhaustively by *message promotion*. Core-Cathedral is a structure of read only memory. It is essentially *write-protected.* The whole of its power (and also its vulnerability) is inextricable from this feature. It is pure cultural genetics (and zero pragmatics).

(4) Because the Cathedral cannot be fundamentally modified, but only exacerbated, or terminated, there is sadly no strategic option available to its enemies that is not based upon extinguishing it without residue. Extinctions happen. Evolution is a bitch.

(5) Any argument that could imaginably pretend to perturb the Cathedral is going to be hate. The only role of rational 'interchange' with this entity is to expose its absolutely inflexible dogmatism.

Reason cannot kill it, although it can help to demonstrate why it needs to be killed.

(6) The Cathedral is objective, supra-human insanity.

(7) We are ruled, demonstrably, by a blind idiot god.

June 27, 2014

Moron bites (#1)

Time for a new occasional series here — devoted to persistent minimum-intelligence memes unworthy of serious attention, except as socio-cultural symptoms. To be exhibited in this series, an 'argument' has to be strictly beneath contempt. It's sheer zombie thought — which means it isn't thought at all. (Recommendations will be collected, with gratitude.)

To initiate *Moron bites*, it would surely be difficult to improve upon this:

> Why do the neoreactionaries all assume that they'll be aristocrats in the new ancien regime? Won't some of then shovel pig shit?
>
> — Matt H. (@raucousflytings) October 1, 2014

It is obviously essential to the genre that its instances are inter-

changeable, and familiar. They do not rise to a level of sophistication consistent with significant differentiation, and the moron reservoir from whose shallows they flop out onto the bubbling ooze, is thrashed by a ceaseless ritual of zombie generation. This one is of course a classic *ad hominem* argument, the laziest way to bury a provocation beneath a slur, and the refuge of the half-wit throughout history. Michael Anissimov has already done a sound job of incinerating it, noting its roots in infantile projection. Nothing further is really necessary (if, in fact, anything at all was).

Still, there is something that can be added, and it is articulated very clearly by Hans Hermann Hoppe in this talk (about 29 minutes in). Aristocratic privileges are not difficult to acquire today, by anyone of even very modest natural capability. They are distributed lavishly in exchange for *services to the Cathedral*, even of the most nominal kind. One need not rise to a position of special prestige within the academy, media, or state bureaucracy to enjoy a complacent sense of spiritual superiority, it suffices merely to identify with the Elect. Linking this (again) is irresistible. When you feel entitled — as a white person — to denounce white people in general *without the slightest concern that such derision might be mistaken for self-criticism*, you are not socially positioned as a revolutionary, but as a degenerate aristocrat. Your assumption of impregnable moral and social advantage is so great that it has become entirely invisible to itself.

NRx is formalist. Insofar as it obsesses on questions of aristocratic hierarchy — and this is far from a prevailing syndrome — it does to in order to draw attention to the conservation of social rank even (if not quite *especially*) in those social orders which most tediously flaunt their demotist credentials. Those reiterating moron bite #1 are unlikely to be the new nobles, but more probably low-grade flunkies, who nevertheless esteem themselves through the spiritual bond with their (academic and media) masters. In other words, they are scum posing as members of an aristocracy. Their facility at projection is remarkable.

ADDED: Classy (and then 'interesting') response from Matt H. —

> @Outsideness I'm not the slightest bit offended. I'd happily buy you a drink and clink glasses.
>
> — Matt H. (@raucousflytings) October 8, 2014

> @Outsideness But if all your opinions match Anissimov's, I'd also chide you for the misogyny and xenophobia.
>
> — Matt H. (@raucousflytings) October 8, 2014

October 2, 2014

Laundered

Joel Kotkin on the ~~Cathedral~~ Clerisy:

In "The New Class Conflict," I describe this alliance as the New Clerisy, which encompasses the media, the academy and the expanding regulatory bureaucracy. This Clerisy already dominates American intellectual and cultural life and increasingly has taken virtual control of key governmental functions, as well as the educations of our young people. […] Although usually somewhat progressive by inclination, the Clerisy actually functions much like the old First Estate in France – the clergy – helping determine the theology, morals and ideals of the broader population. […] Against such established and accumulated power, even a strong November showing by the GOP may have surprisingly little effect. Indeed, even with a Republican in the White House, the Clerisy's ability to shape perceptions, educate the young and control key regulatory agencies will not much diminish. The elevation of the Clerisy to unprecedented influence may prove this president's most important "gift" to posterity.

Kotkin throws in some misdirection, towards "Daniel Bell [who 40 years ago] predicted … [the rise to] 'pre-eminence of the professional and technical class.'" You can judge the credibility of this intellectual genealogy for yourself.

(Link and title stolen from Stirner.)

October 20, 2014

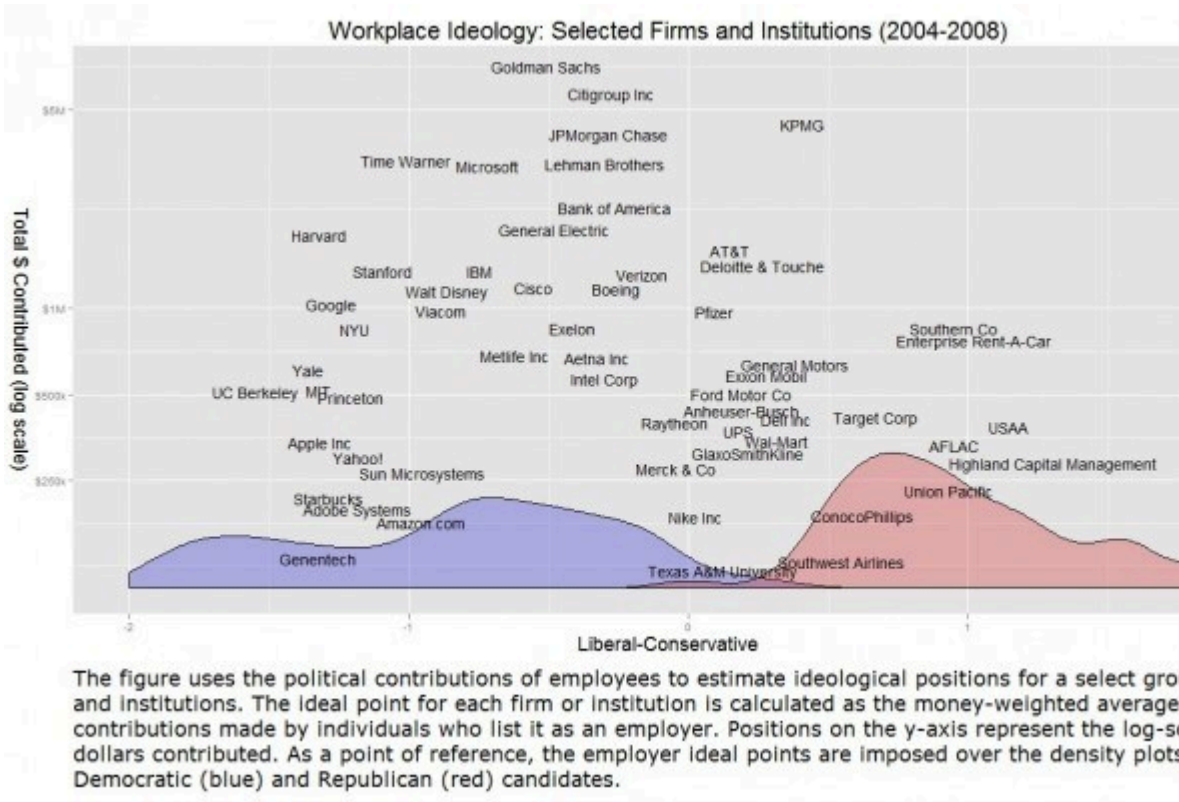
Politics on the Job

A bunch of charts breaking down occupations by ideology are flying across the Internet at the moment. Perhaps Robin Hanson started it? (Linked by Cowan here.) Hanson includes a link to this NYT article, which focuses upon the Left-orientation of tertiary education, but that's a huge, perennial topic in itself.

Hanson has his own theory on the subject, based upon differences in risk orientation, but my favorite analysis was provided by commenter adrianratnapala:

Most of the data on those plots can be explained by a rule that says "People who who tell other people what to think for a living lean left. Nearly everyone else leans (nominally) right."

Bonus (indirectly related) chart dug up from the web:



The figure uses the political contributions of employees to estimate ideological positions for a select gro
and institutions. The ideal point for each firm or institution is calculated as the money-weighted average
contributions made by individuals who list it as an employer. Positions on the y-axis represent the log-s
dollars contributed. As a point of reference, the employer ideal points are imposed over the density plots
Democratic (blue) and Republican (red) candidates.

(The site it's taken from looks like a gold-mine for this kind of stuff, if rather popcorn-heavy.)

November 20, 2014

Worrying

Very crudely re-stated, Moldbug's Cathedral concept says that whatever is happening in the universities is an authoritative rough

draft of what society more generally has coming to it. Politics is downstream of prestige culture, which the academy commands. So this is huge.

The American academy has become a self-propelling anxiety machine, in which steadily-consolidating totalitarianism and mental disintegration have been run-together into a circuit of amplification that no one knows how to turn off. Haidt and Lukianoff call it "vindictive protectiveness" driven by "emotional reasoning" which it in turn (nonlinearly) promotes. It corresponds to a systematic transfer of incontestable authority towards *feelings* of grievance. Questioning the dynamic is considered to be "blaming the victim" and thus a heinous crime in itself. Everyone gets out of the way, if they're not indeed joining in. Madness intensifies. (It's classic Left Singularity machinery.)

Nearly all of the campus mental-health directors surveyed in 2013 by the American College Counseling Association reported that the number of students with severe psychological problems was rising at their schools. The rate of emotional distress reported by students themselves is also high, and rising. In a 2014 survey by the American College Health Association, 54 percent of college students surveyed said that they had "felt overwhelming anxiety" in the past 12 months, up from 49 percent in the same survey just five years earlier. Students seem to be reporting more emotional crises; many seem fragile, and this has surely changed the way university faculty

and administrators interact with them.

The universities — being craven concentrations of cowardice, when not actively evil — are scared to tell their students to stop being scared. Radical feedback runs away unchecked. Victimological terror is sovereign.

This is what is coming down the tracks, so fast that the headlights have started to dazzle people. Take a look at the future. It's screaming.

August 12, 2015

Sub-Cathedral Media

Journalism doesn't occupy the sovereign position within the classic (Moldbuggian) NRx analysis of the Cathedral. It is downstream of the academic clerisy, who establish doctrine, and then perform high-level indoctrination, with journalism schools as a relatively subservient node on the conveyor. Only the *quantitative* propaganda function of the media, as the terminal relay to the masses, produces the impression that it effectively rules. Media apparatchiks have negligible intellectual productivity. They serve the *Zeitgeist*, by trying to remember what their professors taught them.

Still, as the question goes:

If, when journalists and politicians conflict, the politicians always

go down in flames and the journalists always walk away without a scratch, who exactly is wearing the pants in this place?

Disconcerting then, to read this story, in which the pants aren't at all where they might be expected:

The emails were obtained by Gawker as part of a large Freedom of Information Act request it made back in 2012. They show a 2009 exchange between Marc Ambinder, then-politics editor of The Atlantic, and Philippe Reines, a close assistant and adviser to Clinton during her days as Secretary of State. […] Ambinder asked Reines for an advance copy of a speech Clinton was scheduled to give at the Council on Foreign Relations. Rather than simply say yes or no, Reines cut a deal with Ambinder, turning over the speech provided Ambinder agreed to three conditions:

1) You in your own voice describe [the speech] as "muscular"

2) You note that a look at the CFR seating plan shows that all the envoys — from [Richard] Holbrooke to [George] Mitchell to [Dennis] Ross — will be arrayed in front of her, which in your own clever way you can say certainly not a coincidence and meant to convey something

3) You don't say you were blackmailed!

Number three is especially cynical: *Don't, of course, admit to the truth*.

Ambinder does what he's told. He doesn't even seem to be trying to pretend otherwise:

"Since I can't remember the exact exchange I can't really muster up a defense of the art, and frankly, I don't really want to," Ambinder told Gawker.

At times, clearly, the Cathedral concept gives these degenerate propaganda serfs way too much credit. They've got it all, and they still cheat.

It would be a mistake to head back to the drawing-board, nevertheless. The Cathedral isn't dysfunctional because its corrupt, but even — and most dangerously — when it isn't. Structural feedback pathology is the problem, with semi-criminal hackery as a distraction.

Marx dismissed capitalist cheating — such as adulteration of goods — as an ultimate irrelevance, that only confused the principal line of his critique. NRx should hold to the same approach in its critique of the Cathedral, insofar as it aims for theoretical resilience (rather than anecdotal sniping). It has still to be admitted that the Ambinder-types don't help.

February 11, 2016

Cathedralism

Imagine, hypothetically, that you wanted the regime to succeed. Would you recommend Cathedralization? Cynically considered, the

track record is, at least, not bad. Planetary dominion is not to be sniffed at. (Suggestions in this direction are not unknown, even in XS comment threads.)

The Cathedral, defined with this question in mind, is the subsumption of politics into propaganda. It tends — as it develops — to convert all administrative problems into public relations challenges. A solution — actual or prospective — is a successful *management of perceptions*.

For the mature Cathedral, a crisis takes the consistent form: *This looks bad*. It is not merely stupid. As Spandrell recently observes, in comments on power, "… power isn't born out of the barrel of a gun. Power is born out of the ability to have people with guns do what you tell them." (XS note.) The question of legitimacy is, in a real sense, fundamental, when politics sets the boundaries of the cosmos under consideration. (So Cathedralism is also the hypertrophy of politics, to the point where a reality outside it loses all credibility.)

Is your civilization decaying? Then you *need to persuade people that it is not*. If there still seems to be a mismatch between problem and solution here, Cathedralism has not entirely consumed your brain. To speculate (confidently) further — you're not a senior power-broker in a modern Western state. You're even, from a certain perspective, a fossil.

Cathedralism works, in its own terms, as long as there are no definite limits to the efficacy of propaganda. To pose the issue at a

comparatively shallow level, if the political response to a crisis simply *is* the crisis, and that response can be effectively controlled (through propaganda, broadly conceived), then the Cathedral commands an indisputable practical wisdom. It would be sensible to go long on the thing.

If however (imagine this, if you still can) manipulation of *the response to crisis* is actually a suppression of the feedback *required to really tackle the crisis*, then an altogether different story is unfolding.

Is reality subordinated to the Cathedral because — and exactly so far as — 'the people' are? That is the question.

ADDED: Deeply relevant.

February 16, 2016

Rectification of Names

Foseti explains (in his own comment thread) why our contemporary sovereign is properly described as ***the Cathedral***. The terms works because:

It mocks those who think they're above religion, it conveys information about the structure of their beliefs, and it's beautifully concise.

(The effectiveness of this term is no reason to ignore its more

technical Moldbuggian complement, *the Modern Structure*, suggests Anomaly UK.)

July 13, 2013

CHAPTER TWO - FAITH

Oh, Spengler …

This is Cathedralism dialed up to 11:

On moral grounds I sympathize with the African-American view, but there is an even more urgent reason to rip down the Confederate flag. Our refusal to look squarely at the evil character of the American Confederacy turned us into idiots. It may be a bit late to remedy this national lapse in mental capacity, but one has to start somewhere. … That is American exceptionalism: the belief that America can be a better kind of nation than the ethnocentric nations of Europe, in emulat[i]on of the biblical Israel. That was the impulse of the Founders, born, as Harvard's Eric Nelson explains in ***The Hebrew Republic****, of the English Revolution's attempt to design a polity on biblical principles. The Civil War destroyed this impulse, because it killed too many of the New Englanders who believed, as Lincoln put it, that America was "an almost chosen nation." … Protestantism in America shifted from saving souls to social engineering. The sin of the South was too great to acknowledge; after the sacrifice of nearly 30% of its military-age man and the*

reduction of its standard of living by half, the defeated white South could not admit to itself that it had gotten precisely what was coming to it for wickedness of slavery. … the Confederates fought with desperate courage, but for rapine rather than right. Crushing them was the noblest thing the United States ever did. … The South could not live in the knowledge that its heroic sacrifices were offered in a wicked cause, and its response was to excise from religion the notion of sin and virtue, and replace it with social engineering. … The Civil War made us stupid. It persuaded us that we were better off playing God than leaving the outcome to a God who might demand such terrible sacrifices of us once again. … The trauma of the Civil War drove us towards Wilsonian Universalism, which lives on in the form of George W. Bush's "world democratic revolution." America confronts a number of cultures that are bent on genosuicide. We fail to recognize the symptoms, because we shut our eyes to one of modern history's most striking examples of civilizational self-destruction, namely the American South. America can't hope to make sense of the world if it refuses to think about its own history.

Spengler appends some crucial explanatory remarks:

As many people have pointed out (Michael Novak, Meir Soloveichik), there is a biblical (covenantal) as well as a natural law (contractual) component to the Founding; in my view the covenantal component is primary and in need trumps the natural-law component. … The Constitutional mechanism broke down (in fact,

the slave party controlled the government for almost all of the period 1800-1860, and an eruption of apocalyptic spirit was required to correct it — bringing to the fore America's Hebraic-Protestant mission. Of course Lincoln ran roughshod over elements of the Constitution but this, in my view, was what the Talmud calls "sin for the sake of heaven." The natural-law apparatus (checks and balances, separation of powers, states' rights, etc.) is the plumbing of government, and it is certainly necessary, but it is contingent on the higher, covenantal imperative.

Yes, it's a religion.

ADDED: 'Genosuicide' (just in case that looked like an uncorrected typo).

August 4, 2015

Back to the Roots



In the age of Corbyn-style socialist fundamentalism, George Monbiot wants the Left to get (still more) religion:

Evangelical groups unite around a set of core convictions, overt, codified and non-negotiable. It would surely not be difficult to create a similar set, common to all progressive movements, built around empathy, kindness, forgiveness and self-worth [you know, **redemption**]. *A set of immutable convictions might make our movements less capricious while reinforcing the commonality between the left's many causes. […] Evangelism is positive and*

propositional (to evangelise is to bring good news). You cannot achieve lasting change unless you set the agenda, rather than responding to that of your opponents. […] They welcome everyone – but in particular the unconverted. Instead of anathematising difference, doubt and hesitation, they explain and normalise these responses as steps within a journey to belief.

The only reason this isn't pure Left-Moldbuggianism is that it still seems to think it's doing something new.

(*The Guardian* actually used that picture to illustrate the Monbiot piece, just in case you think I might be exaggerating what's going on here.)

September 16, 2015

Progressive Religion

This argument seems strangely familiar. Still, if the central thesis of Neoreaction is becoming common wisdom on a path that bypasses Moldbug, it remains something to be celebrated. Cultural convergence could simply be an index of truth.

Jaded as I am by NRx, Goldman's review doesn't quite make me rush out to buy the book (since we've been treating this argument as a basic reference for years). It's still good:

The desire to be redeemed from sin (redefined as a social fact)

identifies the post-Protestants as children of the Puritans. That insight is what makes his new book a new and invaluable contribution to our understanding of America's frame of mind. Just what is a secular religion, and how does it shape the spiritual lives of its adherents? Bottum deftly peels the layers off the onion of liberal thinking to reveal its Protestant provenance and inherited religious sensibility. The Mainline Protestantism that once bestrode American public life never died, but metamorphosed into a secular doctrine of redemption. And that was made possible by the conversion of sin from a personal to a social fact in Walter Rauschenberg's version of the social gospel. Bottum writes, "The new elite class of America is the old one: America's Mainline Protestant Christians, in both the glory and the annoyingness of their moral confidence and spiritual certainty. They just stripped out the Christianity along the way." By redefining sin as social sin, Rauschenberg raised up a new Satan and a new vocabulary of redemption from his snares. According to Bottum, his "central demand is to see social evil as really existing evil — a supernatural force of dark magic."

Is this a socially intolerable revelation, in the sense that its acceptance would make the existing order of the world impossible? In other words, can the Cathedral overtly embrace its own Neo-Puritanism, without terminal disturbance? This is a question that might rapidly become inescapable.

ADDED: The (NRx-scrubbed) Ultrapuritanism Hypothesis gets

Instalanched. Also, Rod Dreher's meta-review is here.

ADDED: More Bottum-based mainstreaming.

March 19, 2014

Dawkins' Faith

> It's hard to sympathise with those atheists who, while not themselves believing, patronisingly push religion as good for common people.
>
> — Richard Dawkins (@RichardDawkins) April 18, 2014

The egalitarian religion finds the ways of the infidel difficult to understand.

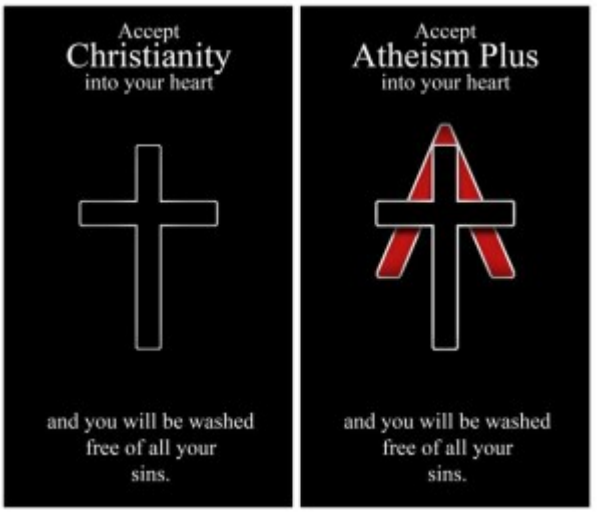
ADDED: Harsh-but-fair comment on Dawkins by 'aisaac' (2013/10/31, 7:00 am): "Not only does he not dare to tell the truth, he doesn't even keep his mouth shut about things he doesn't dare to tell the truth about."

April 18, 2014

Spiritual Progress

Alex passed the link along (in this thread), so I thought I'd foreground

it:



It's not really saying anything that will come as a surprise, but it's worth endlessly repeating (and the color scheme helps to get it through the gate).

Whatever other arguments are available in favor of traditional religion, they need to be supplemented by the recognition that man is simply too damned stupid for the Death of God.

June 8, 2014

UNESCO Man

Via Cussans (dark channels), comes this crucial document on the intersection of racial anthropology and international institutional

politics. The abstract:

From 1945 and the following 20 years UNESCO – the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – was at the heart of a dispute in international scientific circles over the correct definition of the concept of race. This was essentially a dispute about whether the natural sciences or the social sciences should take precedence in determining the origins of human difference, of social division and of the attribution of value. The article provides an overview of the work on race carried out by UNESCO, examines the measures it took to combat racism, pays special attention to their political and social impact in various member states, and demonstrates how UNESCO played a major part in imposing a new view of man: UNESCO Man.

August 25, 2014

Radish does Irreligion

The Moldbuggian sublime — a crushing immensity that releases intelligence into awe-stricken ecstasy — has settled in at *Radish* quite decisively. The latest installment, which embeds the phenomenon of 'New Atheism' within the deep historical tide of revolutionary rationalist irreligion, is a masterpiece of the genre (and in its own right). After several thousand words of relentless

contextualization, it is impossible to read the confused stammerings of contemporary 'reason' without hearing the clattering leftist ruin-ratchet beneath. "[*Skeptic* magazine editor-in-chief and executive director of the Skeptics Society Michael] Shermer is surprised, like Lavoisier and Condorcet before him, to find his own head upon the chopping block of Moral Progress, but no lessons are learned (2013) …"

By the time Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins are led, dazed and indignant, to the scaffold of revolutionary disbelief, the entire process has an almost hypnotic inevitability. *Wasn't the cause supposed to be intellectual liberty?* If, after reading this piece, such derangement doesn't elicit morbid amusement, you're probably going to need to read it again.

ADDED: Has Richard Dawkins lost the Mandate of Heaven?

September 23, 2014

Cathedral History

… the (short) play:

A: We've got nothing against you personally. We don't even know you. It's just that we're more comfortable restricting club membership to upper-income straight white male English-speaking Protestants.

B: Then you're not very good Protestants!
A: Damn! You're right …

January 21, 2015

Quote note (#328)

Formally, this isn't a new 'Boldmug' argument, but it's stated neatly here:

Whether you choose to think about it or not, I have a very simple explanation of Anglo-American success as it relates to democracy. […] If you see democracy as a pest, like Dutch elm disease, it makes perfect sense. Dutch elm disease originates in China. Therefore, Chinese elms are resistant to Dutch elm disease. But not immune! It's still a crippling disease in China. But the trees live. […] The result of globalization: Chinese elms dominate the world. And hybrids. An elm does not live, anywhere in the world, unless its DNA is mostly Chinese. It would be a mistake to conclude from this that Dutch elm disease is good for elm trees, and the Chinese should export it to everyone. Unless they're just plain evil. […] All we have to observe, to show that this is the case, is to show that politics in the Anglo-American tradition (don't forget, Marx wrote in the British Library, and his column appeared in the New York Tribune), (a) frequently causes serious damage to Anglo-American countries, and (b) always

or almost always has two results in other countries: it either causes massive, traumatic disasters, or brings the country under effective Anglo-American supervision, and/or both.

ADDED: Also, concisely reinforcing NeoCam basics —

Various kinds of elective monarchies have been tried, and worked reasonably well (as does hereditary monarchy). But there is a real qualitative difference between joint-stock governance and anything else. Which is why joint-stock companies kill all competitors which experiment with different operating systems.

The "monarchy" language is incredibly unhelpful to the communication of the central point being made here. How many times is it possible to say "the Neocameral CEO is nothing like a monarch as you understand the term" without utter exasperation? 'Boldmug' clearly has more patience on this front that I do.

ADDED: From another commentator, responding to the moron bite "['Boldmug'] is defending returning to some sort of racially-segregated nationalistic authoritarian regime."

No. Mencius Moldburg advocates for neocameralism. Interestingly enough it is the same as Scott Alexander's Archipelago. The difference is Moldburg has a mechanism to enforce things and Alexander never got around to elaborating one. […] In case you don't want to bother looking it up, it basically means having a bunch of Singapore like city states with free movement and explicitly based political power. It is the exact opposite of ethno-nationalism.

ADDED: Augmentation from *Information Processing*.

February 6, 2017

Tribal Epistemology

When you know who people identify with, you generally get a full-spectrum insight into their beliefs for free.

As Fernandez puts it:

… while Western civilization pays lip service to "evidence based" policy, in practice most human beings rely on social proof to decide what to believe. … The search for "social proof" as a determinant of conviction is not wholly crazy. Few of us can say why a pharmaceutical works. But if the doctor prescribes a pill, we drink it without question. Most of the world is preoccupied with making a living and consequently have a high level of rational ignorance. "Rational ignorance occurs when the cost of educating oneself on an issue exceeds the potential benefit that the knowledge would provide." It takes too long for us to figure things out from first principles, so we find a "smart man" and do what he tells us.

While everybody is compelled to economize in this way to some extent, skepticism — in its many different varieties — offers a measure of practical defense. (One variant is simply the heuristic, inherited by all Protestant clades, if quite commonly left idle by

them, of *looking things up for yourself*.)

"What do you do if the Church has been hijacked by demons?" asked Harold Lee. This is exactly the same concern, raised from another angle, and escalated towards its essence. As trust in the machineries of critical truth production is eroded, in direct proportion to their Cathedralization, the primary tendency is to tribalize 'knowledge' (as a signal of belonging), and secondarily to promote a general nihilism, on the ever-more plausible assumption that everything we have ever been told is a lie.

This is how a civilization is burnt to the ground. By selling their souls to the New Church, all epistemologically-relevant social institutions trade authority for mere power, or the capacity to command tribal allegiance and conformity. In response, *trustlessness* is installed as the foundational principle of realistic socio-political analysis, or informally manifested in a spreading and deepening cynicism. What little exists of counter-knowledge is mostly sheer refusal, or opportunistic deference to the enemy's enemy. No Antiversity exists. It too is invoked, in the interim, only as a refusal. Its entire meaning, up to this point, is that *we don't any longer believe what we've been told*.

We remember enough about what Science once was, or what market-honed economic signals were, to know that tribal epistemology is cognitive garbage. As we slide down the slope, increasingly, it's the garbage heap in which we all live.

July 29, 2015

Politics is the Mindkiller

… That's probably Yudkowsky greatest line. (It's the adaptation of a *Dune* quote.)

Somewhat ironically (see previous post), this is one of the most significant ways it's playing out right now:

… *Literally none of that happened.* [You'll have to at least scan the damn thing for context.] *Or at least there is zero evidence that it did. These are smart, rational people falling for a scam. Why? It's in part because Twitter fosters this group-think and lack of critical thought — you just click a button and, with little effort, you've spread whatever you want people to believe — but it's also because they're so convinced of the righteousness of their cause (electing Clinton/ defeating Trump) that they have cast all limits and constraints to the side, believing that any narrative or accusation or smear, no matter how false or conspiratorial, is justified in pursuit of it.*

Naked consequentialist cynicism doesn't make a good foundation for a church. That's part of the reason why it's coming down.

October 13, 2016

Quote note (#303)

Trump is unintelligible, in an interesting way:

[President Elect Donald J. Trump is] *tapping into a broad resistance to contemporary moral beliefs, beliefs that have become increasingly institutionalised over the past fifty years. […] The problem is that these are precisely the beliefs that are held above inquiry in the social sciences.*

Not just a political crisis, then, but an epistmeological crisis (precisely *because* it will be so difficult for the dominant social organs of knowledge to accept the fact).

November 14, 2016

CHAPTER THREE - INSANITY

Forward!

Maximum warp into Left Singularity

That was all thoroughly unambiguous. It turns out that Obama really is the FDR for this turn of the gyre. Nate Silver and Paul Krugman are vindicated. The New York Times is the gospel of the age. Conservatism is crushed and humiliated. The brake pedal has been hurled out of the window. There's no stopping it now.

The day before the election, *Der Spiegel* described "the United States as a country that doesn't understand the signs of the times and has almost willfully — flying in the face of all scientific knowledge — chosen to be backward." For the magazine's staff writers, the problem was utterly straightforward. "The hatred of big government has reached a level in the United States that threatens the country's very existence." Retrogressive forces were impeding the country's progress by refusing to grasp the obvious identity of Leviathan and social advancement. It should now be obvious to everyone – even charred tea partiers gibbering shell-shocked in the ruins — that

contemporary American democracy provides all the impetus necessary to bulldoze such obstructionism aside. The State is God, and all shall bend to its will. Forward!

With the ascension of USG to godhood, a new purity is attained, and a fantastic (and Titanic) experiment progresses to a new stage. It is no longer necessary to enter into controversy with the shattered detritus of the right, henceforth all that matters is the test of strength between concentrated political motivation and the obduracy of reality itself. Which is to say: the final resistance to be overcome is the insolent idea of a reality principle, or outside. Once there is no longer any *way of things* that exists independently of the State's sovereign desire, Left Singularity is attained. This is the eschatological promise that sings its hallelujahs in every progressive breast. It translates perfectly into the colloquial chant: *yes we can!*

Of course, it needs to be clearly understood that 'we' – now and going forward – means the State. Through the State we do anything and everything, which we can, if not really, then at least truly, as promised. The State is 'us' as God. Hegel already saw all this, but it took progressive educational systems to generalize the insight. Now our time has come, or is coming. All together now: yes we can! Nothing but a brittle reactionary *realism* stands in our way, and that is something we can be educated out of (yes we can). We have! See our blasted enemies strewn in utter devastation before us.

The world is to be as we will it to be. Surely.

November 7, 2012

Magical Thinking

The Left has finally understood who's to blame for the collapse of Detroit, and it's quite obvious when you think about it — white racists did it with their super-powerful evil thoughts:

As payback for the worldwide revolution symbolized by hot jazz, Smokey Robinson dancin' to keep from cryin' and Eminem trading verses with Rihanna, New Orleans and Detroit had to be punished. Specifically, they had to be isolated, impoverished and almost literally destroyed, so they could be held up as examples of what happens when black people are allowed to govern themselves.

Hang on, you can stop composing that all-caps comment – I don't actually believe that what happened to Detroit and New Orleans resulted from anyone's conscious plan. Real history is much more complicated than that. I do, however, think [sic] *that narrative has some validity on a psychological level …*

(Apparently the psychic racist death rays were first tried out on New Orleans, where they were "goosed along a bit by rising carbon emissions and rising temperatures," creating a massive atmospheric disturbance.)

Goodbye sanity, your day is done. Hail madness and gathering

night …

July 29, 2013

Musty

‘To Beat ISIS, the Arab World Must Promote Political and Religious Reforms’, Rule Jebreal tells us. Picking on a writer for a headline is a mistake — who knows where it came from in the editorial process? — and, besides, this one employs (the exhortative) ‘must’ in its sole appropriate usage — as the completion of a hypothetical imperative. “If you want X, you must do Y” — that’s OK. (Y is a necessary condition for the accomplishment of X.) ‘Must’ is tolerable if it’s kept on a leash.

Once it slips the collar, ‘must’ reverts to its status as the most preposterous word in the English language, an instrument of sheer obfuscation. Watch it go:

*The United States **must** review its policies across the Middle East. … It **must** take a stand against Riyadh’s promotion of exclusionary Wahhabism. […] … Likewise, pressure **must** be placed on Egypt to abandon its witch hunt of the Muslim Brotherhood. In undertaking an effective counter terrorism strategy, the United States **must** partner with the Arab states to undertake political reforms that ultimately lead to underwriting a social contract in which every*

group of the population are represented and protected. […] … If the United States and Iraqi government want to defeat ISIS, they ***must*** *now ensure the inclusion and protection of Iraqi Sunnis, Kurds and Yazidis, along with the majority Shi'ites [this one is minimally OK]. […] … Eventually, a process of reconciliation* ***must*** *be initiated between Shi'ites and Sunnis. This centuries-old dispute is played out today in a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which has produced a monster that threatens the national security of not only Middle Eastern nations, but also the United States. It* ***must*** *come to an end. […] … The Obama Administration* ***must*** *pursue a policy of severe sanctions against any and all countries that finance jihadist — even if they are our own allies. … What will ultimately turn the tide in the Middle East are groups that actively advocate for a democratic culture and its values around the Arab world. A campaign to promote these ideas on every level* ***must*** *begin, as part of the counterterrorism initiative launched by Kerry.* [Emphases added.]

Must they, really? Will they? Can they?

It's irritating to see moral fanaticism — betrayed by its distinctive combination of groundless certainty and communicative fervor — masquerading as realistic analysis. The disguise is only necessary because the prescription so exorbitantly exceeds the diagnosis, tripping eagerly into glassy-eyed deontological intellectual abandonment.

"The Middle East *must* stop being the Middle East, and America

must help to make this happen." It can't, and it won't, on both counts. The musty smell is simply annoying.

September 16, 2014

Discombobulation

Salon has been bat-shit crazy for a long time, but right now it's really going over the edge. It's almost as if the people there are getting worried about something.

[Thanks to VXXC for pointers into the bin]

My personal pick for comedy gold goes to the article on right-wing brain washing (5th link), which includes this priceless classic: "He believed it when Rush Limbaugh told him that climate change is a hoax. He called Al Gore an 'asshole' even after watching the entire *An Inconvenient Truth* …" (Especially funny for me because I knew someone like that once — he thought Hitler was a dangerous demagogue, even after watching *Triumph of the Will*.)

Panic! *They're so brain-washed they don't even believe our propaganda any more*.

ADDED: *Da Tech Guy* EBT follow-up.

October 14, 2013

Scrap note #6

How much credit is to be given to honest dishonesty? Answers should be addressed to Rod Dreher, in response to a truly astonishing blog post that sums up where we are right now more frankly than anything I have seen.

Short summary: *We have a duty to lie*.

In Dreher's own words:

Given the history of the 20th century, I flat-out don't trust our species to handle the knowledge of human biodiversity without turning it into an ideology of dehumanization, racism, and at worst, genocide. Put another way, I am hostile to this kind of thing not because I believe it's probably false, but because I believe a lot of it is probably true — and we have shown that we, by our natures, can't handle this kind of truth. […] My point is simply that all of us believe that some facts are too dangerous to be known; they are like the Ring Of Power, in that the temptation to abuse them is too great for our natures to bear. […] Admittedly, this puts me in a tight spot. Am I saying that we should ignore reality? I suppose I am.

So there we have it — we have to ban acknowledgement of reality, because Hitler. This stuff is all going to fall apart so quickly (and nastily) that it will shock everyone.

(Like Moldbug, and the DE in general, I think it's seriously unwise to set things up in such a way that only Nazis get to tell the truth.)

ADDED: Some thoughts on the Dreher piece from Occam's Razor.

ADDED: Henry Dampier on Noble Lies.

January 30, 2014

Ideo-Cannibalism

Is intersectionality just the greatest thing ever, or what?

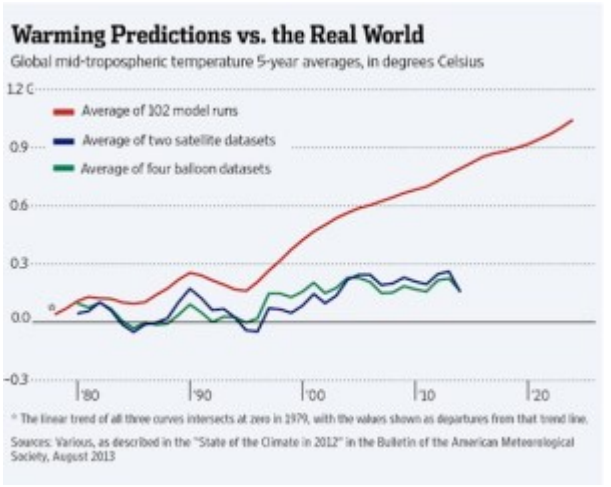
Both [Laurie] Penny and [Richard] Seymour have made a point of arguing, moreover, for the latest fad in leftist thinking: ***intersectionality****. "Intersectionality" supposedly means taking seriously the many different oppressions, and how they intersect. "My socialism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit," Seymour has made a point of saying. Given that they are so keen to speak out against oppression in all its multi-layered forms, it seems really bad luck that they should be accused of being "racist crackers" and "white settlers."*

The entire article is comedy gold.

The Obama presidency AND intersectionality — does anyone still doubt that God is hardcore NRx?

February 11, 2014

Scientific Climate



(Click on image to enlarge.)

(Via.)

One thing to emphasize — 'science' is the data, as well as the error. This is not a picture of black hole, uncorrectable reality denial, of the kind familiar from political economy. That said, the speculative hypothesis was turned into a story for public promotion, and then into something very close to an official dogma. Now that it isn't holding together, this type of thing starts happening.

Has the scientific establishment ever been so off-beam, in the entire history of the West? Not only wrong, but aggressively doctrinaire, and politically assertive in the direction of error? For anybody who esteems the development of natural science as the single greatest historical achievement of the Occidental world, the AGW saga has been a hideous embarrassment. Our institutions are

broken.

ADDED: It's war.

ADDED: "This is the original sin of the global warming theory: that it was founded in a presumption of guilt against industrial civilization. All of the billions of dollars in government research funding and the entire cultural establishment that has been built up around global warming were founded on the presumption that we already knew the conclusion — we're 'ravaging the planet' — and we're only interested in evidence that supports that conclusion."

February 21, 2014

Aristocracy of Outrage

Ezra Levant evaluates the new social hierarchy:

[First, the background:] *Faith McGregor is the lesbian who doesn't like the girly cuts that they do at a salon. She wants the boy's hairdo. … Omar Mahrouk is the owner of the Terminal Barber Shop in Toronto. He follows Shariah law, so he thinks women have cooties. As Mahrouk and the other barbers there say, they don't believe in touching women other than their own wives. … Mahrouk's view is illiberal. But in Canada we believe in property rights and freedom of association — and in this case, freedom of religion, too. … McGregor ran to the Human Rights Tribunal and demanded that Mahrouk give*

her a haircut.

[…]

Oh, McGregor is politically correct. But just not politically correct enough. It's like poker.

A white, Christian male has the lowest hand — it's like he's got just one high card, maybe an ace. So almost everyone trumps him.

A white woman is just a bit higher — like a pair of twos. Enough to beat a white man, but not much more.

A gay man is like having two pairs in poker.

A gay woman — a lesbian like McGregor — is like having three of a kind.

A black lesbian is a full house — pretty tough to beat.

Unless she's also in a wheelchair, which means she's pretty much a straight flush.

The only person who could trump that would be a royal flush. If the late Sammy Davis Jr. — who was black, Jewish and half-blind — were to convert to Islam and discover he was 1/64th Aboriginal.

So which is a better hand: A lesbian who wants a haircut or a Muslim who doesn't want to give it to her?

(via)

(It's been nothing but crash-phase democracy self-cannibalization everywhere I've looked today.)

February 28, 2014

How it Ends

You thought *Slate* had a lock on Cathedralist direct current? Then you probably haven't been keeping up with *The Atlantic*.

I'm old enough to remember when *The Atlantic Monthly* was a serious magazine. That was before James Fallows took it over, and drove it into a ditch. It has since progressed to Atlantic Trench depths of comprehensive intellectual ruin. Some gratitude is in order for the clarity with which it exposes our destination, guided by the supreme Leftist Law: *Any cultural institution that is not dominated by the oppressed talking about their oppression is oppressive*.

As Professor Zaius explains in the comment section of the vibrant debate article:

… the judges, while they are experienced debaters and coaches themselves, don't by and large subscribe to the notion that the "best argument" in conventional terms should win. Many, if not most, see debate as a means for advancing social justice and dismantling oppressive hierarchies of whiteness and patriarchy. Inasmuch as "logic" upholds these hierarchies and personal experiences from POC and non-linear storytelling and music fight them, then "logic" should lose.

We're so screwed.

ADDED: "… while one has some sympathy for Hardy and the other traditional debate do-gooders, they seem to be pining for a

format, and a world, that has already passed. Have a look at Twitter. Or MSNBC. Or the *New York Times*. Or Attorney General Eric Holder. Or any of the rest of the grievance-mongering chattering class for whom the unbeatable trump card these days is discerning 'racism' in their opponents. Debate isn't what it used to be. The college kids might as well learn this brute fact sooner rather than later."

April 18, 2014

Quote notes (#88)

Charles Ponzi, call your IP lawyer. This is the kind of argument that makes sense when pursued without the distractions of STEM training:

… the humanities crisis is largely a positive feedback loop created by stressing out over economic outcomes. Research by government bureaus held that people who studied STEM disciplines had better employment prospects. As a result, state and federal education budgets consistently made these subjects a priority. Enrollment in the humanities slumped, and this made it more difficult for budding humanists and artists to succeed, not least because fewer and fewer jobs were available in the academy.

Humanists are being educated to teach the humanities in higher-

education, why can't anybody see there's a model there that, like, could totally work?

June 7, 2014

More Madness

Insanity night continues here in Shanghai with this perfected distillation of Leftist delirium:

> .@Paulskemp @monsterhunter45 If ppl are equal, then equality of opportunity will by definition lead to equality of outcomes
>
> — Arthur Chu (@arthur_affect) June 12, 2014

Spoiler: He actually believes the initial hypothetical is true.

June 13, 2014

Enablers

The BBC fog-machine at work on the UK child-predation story:

Child sexual exploitation is happening in a "number of towns" in different parts of the country, according to the author of a damning

report into abuse in Rotherham. … According to an estimate from the Children's Commissioner for England three years ago, 2,409 children were identified as victims of exploitation by gangs over a 14-month period from 2010-11 …

***Oxford** … Seven men were sentenced to a total of 95 years in June 2013, for offences including rape, facilitating child prostitution and trafficking.* [Follow the link for ethnic details censored by the BBC]

***Derby** … Nine men were convicted over three trials of systematically grooming and sexually abusing teenage girls in 2010. …* [Oh look, a clue –] *Speaking in 2011 after the jailing of two of the men, former Home Secretary Jack Straw suggested some men of Pakistani origin saw white girls as "easy meat". The judge in the case said the race of the victims and their abusers was "coincidental". …*

***Rochdale** … In May 2012, nine men were given sentences ranging from four to 19 years after being found guilty of offences including rape and conspiracy to engage in sexual activity with a child. …*

***Telford** … Seven men were jailed after a series of court cases related to a child prostitution ring. The charges included rape, trafficking and prostitution, sometimes involving girls as young as 13. …*

***Peterborough** … A gang of five males was jailed in February after being found guilty of raping and sexually assaulting five vulnerable girls.*

I'm going to assume that all the fanatically unspecified "men" (or

"males") involved are Muslims of Pakistani origin (abusing white children), unless presented with definite evidence to the contrary. Any other default would be an act of cognitive collaboration with Britain's sordid little branch-operation of the Cathedral, and we've now seen with stark clarity what that enables.

ADDED: Rotherham commentary from *hbd chick*, *Breitbart* and *Spiked*.

ADDED: Commentary, context, and links from TNIO.

ADDED: "… these children were victims of 'anti-racism'" — Hard for me to see how that could possibly be controversial at this point.

ADDED: Anarcho-Tyranny in the UK.

August 28, 2014

Rotherham

"Hint: it's not the crime, it's the coverup," suggests Lesser Bull persuasively. Mangan fills this out, with an especially valuable link to this round-up of orchestrated obliviousness.

Does the progressive media really think it can de-realize this festival of cultural ruin with a standard inattention protocol? If so, it has to count as an extraordinary peak *hubris* moment. Perhaps the left is structurally incapable of preventing itself from pushing things over the brink of catastrophe. It always has to take that one

additional step, and it has no sense at all of how to back down.

There have to be a lot of people in the UK right now who would be delighted to see the media establishment strung up from lamp-posts, with panic and defection rife in journalistic ranks. It's surely not impossible that the pattern now jutting into hideous visibility in Britain will evoke a disturbing sense of recognition elsewhere, possibly throughout the Anglosphere. As far as core Cathedral operating procedures are concerned, this has to be a period of (possibly unprecedented) vulnerability. As a source of regime threatening irritability, the Rotherham syndrome is the *droit du seigneur* of the new nobility — even among a pitifully broken people, it pushes some deeply atavistic buttons. Lies, sexual exploitation, and foreign invasion — who'd want to be PR manager for this cocktail of native degradation?

(Any cover-up -themed T-shirt slogan suggestions in the comment thread will be very gratefully received.)

"So you have employed all the powers and privileges at your disposal to make it impossible to investigate a situation that has now deteriorated to mass child rape?"
"Look, a squirrel!"

ADDED: Help! I'm beginning to really like Richard Dawkins:

> Newspapers describe Rotherham groomers as "of Asian descent." What? Why? Are they Chinese? Mongolian? Are

> they Hindu? Sikh? Buddhist? Jain?
> — Richard Dawkins (@RichardDawkins) August 30, 2014

August 30, 2014

Moron bites (#2)

Time for another of these. The rule, remember, is that the instance picked upon has to exemplify a laughably mindless meme. Like this:

> @JayMan471 @matthewherper @David_Dobbs @jason_pontin @charlesmurray The Bell Curve has been well refuted. I am dismayed that you cite it.
> — Karen James (@kejames) December 2, 2014

Politically incorrect research, however solidly established, is especially singled out for this treatment. Some approved (i.e. Leftist) authority somewhere has provided the excuse to dismiss awkward findings, so that the painful stimulus can be suppressed, and — just to be safe — even the pretext for suppressing it is best forgotten, leaving only the permission to be undisturbed in public circulation. All crime-think has been 'well refuted' (sociologically *a priori*) as far as these people are concerned. "It's been well refuted" means *exactly* "wouldn't it be nice if this didn't exist?" (or "nice people have told us

we don't need to worry about that").

Refuted where?

> @DocCLAR @JayMan471 @pseudoerasmus This is ridiculous. You can google just as well as I can.
>
> — Karen James (@kejames) December 2, 2014

Amused yet?

ADDED: A banquet of 'well refuted' science at *Slate*.

December 2, 2014

Brown Scare

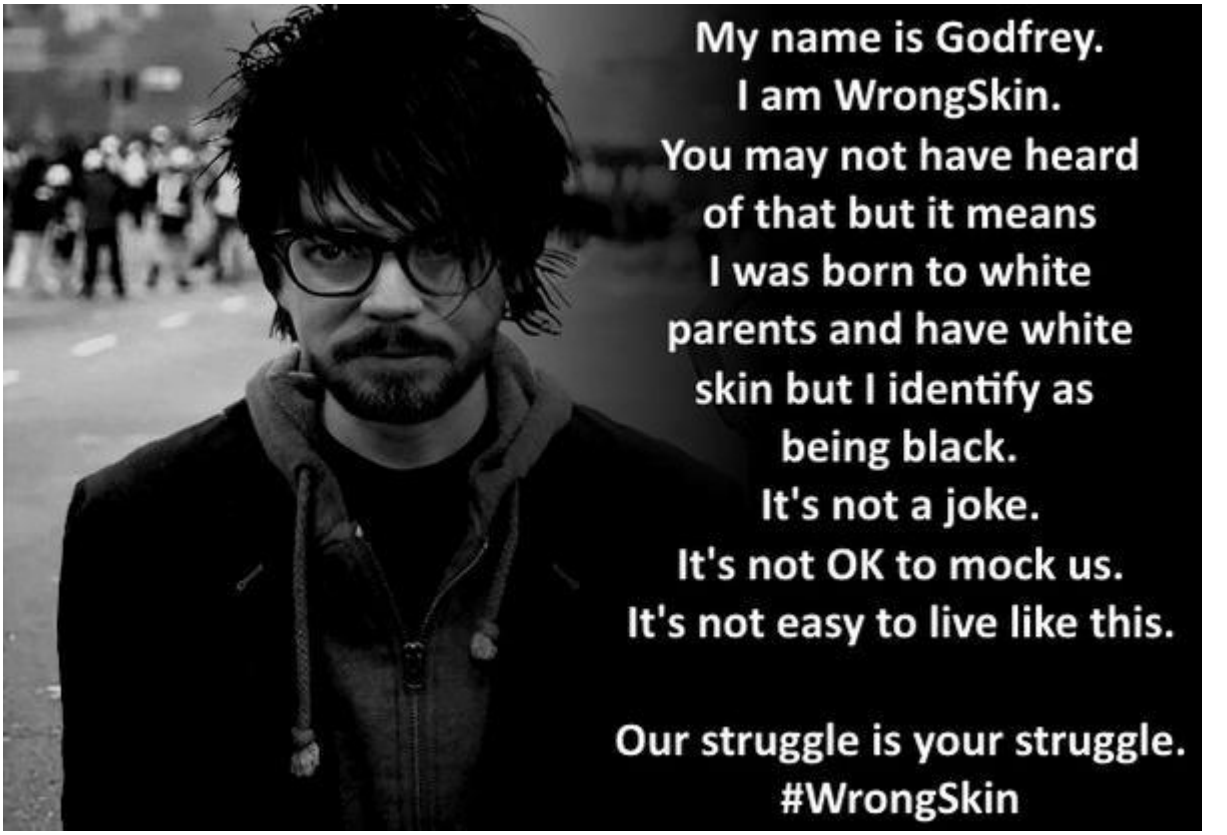
… can really mess up your head (and your blog).

This detailed account of exactly how LGF lost everything — starting with its mind — is a comedy masterpiece. My single favorite fun fact:

LGF decline stats, Dec 2012. Has a list of the top 21 most prolific commenters on LGF in 2007. All but 2 are now banned.

March 12, 2015

#WrongSkin



Scarcely necessary to add the backstory.

(I'm guessing there might be enthusiasm for conversation about this. Please note Godfrey Elfwick's example, and try especially hard to keep it classy people.)

Is #AAA even imaginable in this environment?

ADDED: Elfwick and the Duck in *USA Today*.

ADDED: The other master of trolling on this issue.

> @jokeocracy blackness is being gentrified, soon blacks won't be able to afford it and will have to move to another skin color.
>
> — Mr. Reasonable (@mr_archenemy) June 12, 2015

> @CarlosEstebanRD pic.twitter.com/R61erOXHR6
>
> — Tasta Orelletes (@TastaOrelletes) June 12, 2015

ADDED: "Now, some additional facts on the greatest story in human history …"

June 12, 2015

Peak Insanity

"Why, oh why, is this happening to us?" (The human species is too stupid to live.)

(Via.)

Worth it just for the Bedlamite euphemism for the economy — "the capitalist sector".

If you've not had enough of sucking upon a weeping psychotic eyeball yet — (also from Dark Albert), there's this. They're never going to stop doubling-down. Probably a good time to start thinking realistically about where 'hitting bottom' is going to lead.

July 28, 2015

Appearances

The worst thing about this, we're told by all responsible authorities, is *what it looks like*. (It might upset people, in the wrong way.)

*The scale of the attacks on women at the city's central railway station has shocked Germany. About 1,000 drunk and aggressive young men were involved. […] City police chief Wolfgang Albers called it "a completely new dimension of crime". **The men were of Arab or North African appearance**, he said.* (XS emphasis.)

Beside Cologne, "Women were also targeted in Hamburg. … Some similar attacks were reported in Stuttgart."

However, there was no official confirmation that asylum seekers had been involved in the violence. Commentators in Germany were quick to urge people not to jump to conclusions.

It's hard to imagine that anyone really believes the approved narratives are going to hold together for much longer. The orchestrated media-political conjuring operation is already stressed beyond its functional tolerance.

(Additional links in the last Chaos Patch comment thread.)

ADDED: Reality bites.

ADDED: Among much noticing —

> Everyone reacting to this story from a place of authority is more concerned with managing perceptions than justice https://t.co/giO0R5fWjw
>
> — Michael B Dougherty (@michaelbd) January 6, 2016

> Every story written about it takes as its primary concern "How do leaders prevent this from weakening the pro-immigration consensus?"
>
> — Michael B Dougherty (@michaelbd) January 6, 2016

ADDED: The Master of Noticing is a little miffed. (More.)

January 6, 2016

CHAPTER FOUR - THOUGHT POLICE

Doors of Perception

It's a simplification to conceive the Cathedral as a media apparatus. As simplifications go, however, one could do far worse. Media are essential to the Cathedral, even if by no means casually synonymous with it.

It is surely noteworthy that 'the media' have become singular, in much the same way as 'the United States' have done. 'They' have turned into a thing, and one that is still far from being confidently understood. Even when subjectively identifying with a residual plurality, they cannot but identify themselves with a unitary effectiveness.

While it would be asking far too much to expect the Cathedral to identify itself as a central causal factor in a world going insane, it gets close. *NYmag* expresses deep concern about the consequences of the news machine:

A terrifying jihadist group is conquering and butchering its way across big swaths of Iraq and Syria. Planes are falling out of the sky on what seems like a weekly basis. Civilians are being killed in

massive numbers in the Israel-Gaza conflict. Others are falling prey to Ebola in West Africa. The world, in short, is falling apart. […] *That's how it feels, at least, to those of us who sit at a blessed remove from the death and destruction, but who are watching every bloody moment of it via cable news and social media. It raises an important question: In an age when we can mainline bad news 24/7 if we so choose, what's the psychological impact of all this exposure to tragedy at a distance?*

Drawing upon the work of Mary McNaughton-Cassill (a University of Texas–San Antonio professor at the "leading researcher on the connection between media consumption and stress"), it describes a process of "negative-information overload" driven by market-incentivized sensationalism, compounded by social media revolution, and prone to poorly-understood tangles of psycho-media feedback. Since a story of this kind consists primarily of the Cathedral talking to itself, with everyone else listening in, we quickly learn that the 'problem' cashes out into pessimistic disengagement from electoral politics and progressive voluntarism. According to McNaughton-Cassill, negative news bombardment produces "this malaise: 'Everything's kinda bad' and 'Why should I vote? It's not gonna help' and 'I could donate money, but there's just gonna be another kid who's starving next week.'"

In addition to a burgeoning sense of helplessness, she said, cognitive shortcuts triggered by the news can also lead us to

gradually see the world as a darker and darker place, chipping away at certain optimistic tendencies. McNaughton-Cassill's research suggests that that all things being equal, if you ask people, regardless of their circumstances, to evaluate what's going around them — Do they think their neighbors are good people? Do they think the local schools are solid? — "People always say yes in their immediate setting." […] *Zoom out a little, though, and people have less to go on. … "As soon as you get out of your zone, most of your information's from the news … and the news by definition covers the extreme things."* […] *People could be forgiven for adopting a hell-in-a-handbasket stance toward the rest of the world.* […] *That's a problem, because when people are led to believe things are falling apart, it affects their decision-making and their politics — whether or not their pessimism is warranted. We already know from political-psychological research that the more threatened people feel, the more likely they will be to support right-wing policies. And people who believe in the concept of unmitigated evil appear more likely to support torture and other violent policies.* […] *It's hard to fully sketch out these mechanisms, of course. Could years and years of exposure to negative news heighten your belief in a Manichean world and in turn make you more reactionary?*

As noted, there are some critical feedback circuits excluded (in principal) from this analysis, in part to preserve the fundamental architecture of the progressive historical narrative ("… on a broader

level there's solid evidence — perhaps gathered most comprehensively by Steven Pinker …"). Media malfunction as core meltdown of Western Civilization, sucking the world into hell, wouldn't fit this story at all. Nevertheless, it's clearly creeping in around the edges, and something considerably more drastic than standard information manipulation procedures seem to be called for.

How can we fight back against the unnecessary coarsening of our outlook that may be occurring every time we glance at one of our gadgets? The simplest technique is … to "Just turn it off." That is, take a break from the news. […] *"You can't change the externals," she said. "You have to get some control mentally." What's most important is "getting a handle on why you get anxious and worried about things that probably aren't going to happen, or knowing what your triggers are." The more you understand your own reaction to the news, the easier it will be to shape your news-consumption habits in an adaptive way.*

If this sounds like subtle begging, it really kind of is. Afflicted by incomprehensible cybernetic pathologies, the media system is failing in its responsibility to screen you from reality, and now — quite desperately — needs your help. You can't any longer rely on propaganda to save you. In fact, you have to assume that there's a really good story out there that the media is keeping from you. You have to "understand that you're seeing a lot of bad news not because the world is an inherently evil place, but because news outlets —

not to mention individual Twitter and Facebook users — have lots of incentives to broadcast explosively negative news stories." *We interrupt this world historical nightmare to deliver an important news flash — the media has gone insane*. You have to protect yourself, or it will seem as if the whole global order is falling apart into bloody chaos around your ears.

Overall, of course, it's both unrealistic and undesirable to construct bubbles that keep out the world's bad news. But there's a difference between being informed and being obsessive, and it's a line that's very easy to accidentally slide across in an age when there's so much scary information zipping around.

Scariest of all is the system of information itself, but it can't quite get that part of the story into coherent shape. By the time it does, the world will have descended by another gyre. Experts now confirm that throwing your TV set out of the window will help …

ADDED: This classic movie scene (suggested by Mr Archenemy) seems obviously on topic.

ADDED: "Social media – in this context, the most inappropriate of phrases – has a new craze. Atrocity porn."

August 13, 2014

Cathedral Autophagy

Autophagy is spiraling into its cultural moment right now. The Ouroboros is our sign. It's cybernetic mythology, self-referential looping, and auto-consuming process. There is no end to the ways the theme could be currently pursued.

Simultaneously most comic, tragic, and prominent is the reflexive perception that contemporary hegemonic power is being devoured by the media. In other words, the Cathedral is undergoing accelerated auto-cannibalization. The news is eating itself.

The Hill reports:

"I can see why a lot of folks are troubled," Obama told a group of donors gathered at a Democratic National Committee barbecue in Purchase, N.Y. […] But the president said that current foreign policy crises across the world are not comparable to the challenges the U.S. faced during the Cold War. […] Acknowledging "the barbarity" of Islamist militants and Russia "reasserting the notion that might means right," Obama, though, dismissed the notion that he was facing unprecedented challenges. […] "The world's always been messy … we're just noticing now in part because of social media," he said, according to a White House pool report. […] "If you watch the nightly news, it feels like the world is falling apart" …

So the world's supreme talking head is trying to talk us out of taking the Apocalypse Show seriously. *Don't listen to us, you'll find it*

far too upsetting. If this is getting repetitive, it's due to the pattern. Catatonia is the final prescription. We've clearly passed beyond irony into something altogether more twisted. The intriguing syndrome labeled *Horror autotoxicus* seems to be ready for political-economic application.

August 31, 2014

Media ADHD

Richard Fernandez asks a question that has been nagging at a number of people: How did this stop being a story?

The death toll from the worst Ebola outbreak on record has reached nearly 7,000 in West Africa, according to the World Health Organisation. […] The toll of 6,928 dead showed a leap of just over 1,200 since the WHO released its previous report on Wednesday, according to a Reuters news agency report. […] The UN health agency did not provide any explanation for the abrupt increase, but the figures, published on its website, appeared to include previously unreported deaths. […] … Just over 16,000 people have been diagnosed with Ebola since the outbreak was confirmed in the forests of remote southeastern Guinea in March, according to the WHO data that covered the three hardest-hit countries. …

Is it because the epidemic has remained geographically

concentrated, that's expected to hold, and Sierra Leone (where cases are "soaring" with the "country … reporting around 400 to 500 new cases each week for several weeks") has been written off? Or is the world media scared it had begun to bore people?

As Anepigone writes (on an only tangentially related issue): "The Cathedral's role is to instruct us on what we should want to think about, not what we would actually prefer to think about."

Media systems aren't even pretending to tell us what is happening anymore. What we *should* think is happening is now the whole of the narrative. Unless there's a 'teachable moment', there's nothing.

ADDED: When it happens in Russia, it's OK to notice it (in the mainstream media) — "Television is at the core of the present political system."

December 5, 2014

War of the Worlds

I'd hold this back until Frightday if I had more impulse control. Via VXXC, the original (Halloween 1938) Orson Welles *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast. As an experiment in abject public submission to media reality construction, it takes some beating.

"There's really nothing they won't believe, is there?"

"Apparently not. Carry on …"

March 4, 2015

Age of Independence

Don't be distracted if (like me) you find the PUA antics ridiculous. Clarey's argument here is important — and even an essential jigsaw-puzzle piece.

Maximally compressed: Left Mind-Control strategies depend upon the persistence of certain socio-economic realities that they are themselves profoundly subverting. It's impossible, at one and the same time, to threaten people with expulsion from the mainstream economy and also destroy this same economy. Yet that paradox is where the SJW army makes its home. The consequence: the perverse production of a type of "man who has nothing to lose, and therefore nothing the SJW's can threaten."

The SJWs aren't doing this on their own. A range of technological and economic developments are converging on the creation of a new, collapse-phase rugged individualism. The Left call it the 'precariat' and insist that 'neoliberalism' is to blame. It doesn't really matter, as far as Clarey's point is concerned. The essential thing is the the hostage-holding presumption of SJW activism is not a reliable social fixture, and their own activities are hastening its disappearance.

The final irony Clarey points to, is the creation of a new

entrepreneurial sector that lives, precisely, from the depredations of the SJWs. Their attacks constitute the basic pipeline of cultural raw-materials off which this little group survives — at once a source of content and a publicity machine.

While those on the dissident right discuss the Exit question, SJWs are busy pushing us off the gangplank. There's only one attitude that makes any sense to those already bobbing among the waves: "Come on in, the water's fine."

Note: 'SJW' is not being used here as a slur, but only in its technical sense. It means something like 'a Red Guard of the Cathedral'.

August 13, 2015

Visual Pwnage

(1) 1972
Policy objective: Close down US support for the South Vietnamese regime.
Policy debate: Who cares?
Decisive mind-control tool:



(The little girl in the center is Kim Phuc Phan Thi if you need a Google-key.)

(2) 1991

Policy objective: Close down destruction of the Saddam military.

Policy debate: Who cares?

Decisive mind-control tool:



(The Highway of Death at Wikipedia.)

(3) 2016

Policy objective: Close down resistance to MENA mass immigration.

Policy debate: Who cares?

Decisive mind-control tool:



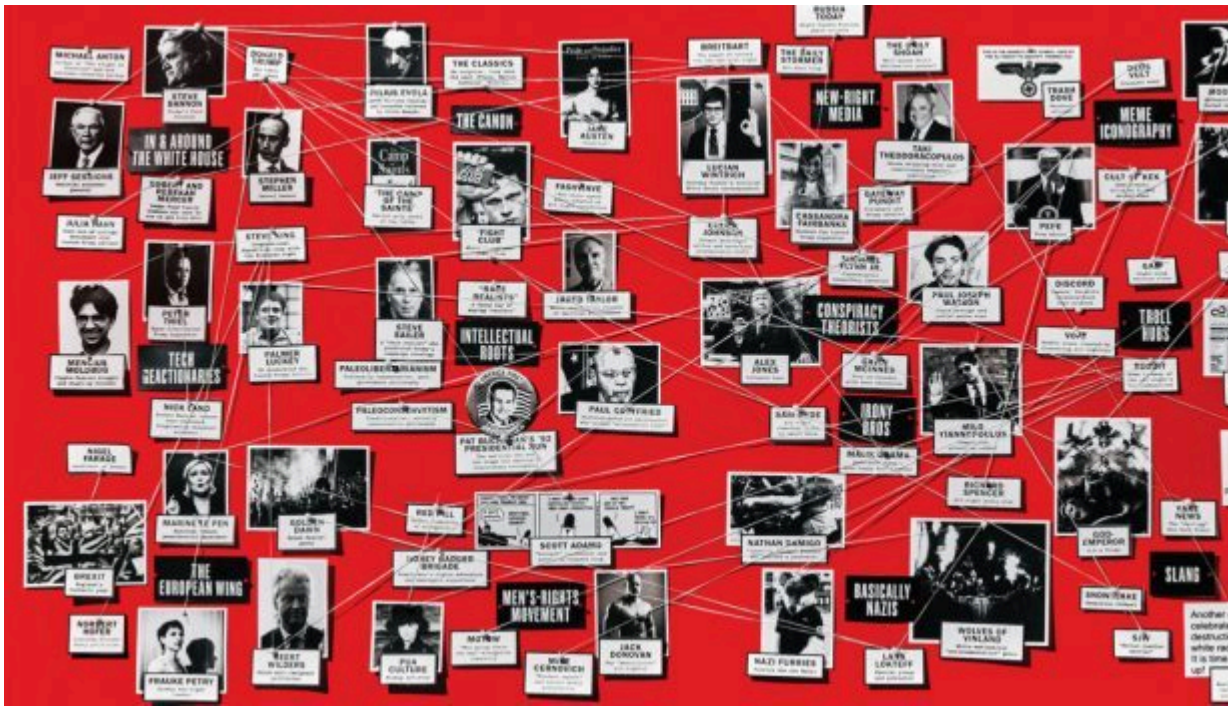
> Hey can anyone confirm if this video is legit?
> Because some creepy #journalism if it is pic.twitter.com/UWd5jNsSnh
>
> — DADDYULTRA
> LADY (@okayultra) August 22, 2016

"Journalism."

For close on half a century they've known there's a picture that will get people to think what they're told. 'Journalism' is about 'finding' it.

August 23, 2016

Linkage



This type of image used to be the Hollywood icon for florid psychosis. Now …

May 1, 2017

Mau-Mauing

Andrew Fox discusses the principal political weapon of the Western Left, and its mobilization against political incorrectness in science fiction:

Coincidentally, the same years which have witnessed the emergency of speech codes on many campuses have also witnessed an accelerated symbiosis between the pro SF community and academia (in that greater numbers of SF/fantasy writers have as day jobs teaching at the post-high school level, and SF literature and film has become an increasingly respectable and popular subject of university courses). … For many individuals under the age of forty who have been through the university system, mau-mauing may seem normative, or at least unremarkable. They have seen it at work through divestment campaigns of various kinds (divestment from Israeli companies or U.S. companies which provide goods to Israel which might be used in security operations against Palestinians, or from companies involved in fossil fuel production, or from companies connected to certain figures active on the Right, such as the Koch brothers) and through shout-downs and other disruptions of speakers invited to campus whose backgrounds or viewpoints are contrary to those favored by student activists. (via)

It's deeply disturbing, as pretty much everything is these days. (Those who know anything about China's Cultural Revolution will

find their pattern recognition centers sparking up.)

ADDED: Mau-Mauing is the perfect illustration of the fact that political 'voice' and 'freedom of speech', far from being near synonyms, are closer to antonyms.

June 22, 2013

Peak Racism?

The witch–craze seems to be running out of juice, according to some thought-provoking Ngram data organized by Brad Trun.

The charge of "Racist!" is losing its sting as its overzealous hurlers increasingly render it farcical. "Racist" is, for the first time since the neologism's inception 80 years ago, starting to fall out of favor. Zooming in on the post–1930 period in Google Ngram Viewer and eliminating smoothing reveals that "racist" references topped out as the calendar switched to the new millennium.

My welcome news receptors are so corroded, that I can't help wondering: what's wrong with this story?

(In other news, Peak African is still some way off. Caplan will no doubt be thrilled. Does anybody sensible think that a billion Nigerians by 2100 sounds like a future that might work? It's probably a racist question, but you have to do what you can for dying traditions.)

ADDED: “We’ve set up a system where the world’s most easily offended people get to decide what’s offensive and what’s not …”

August 11, 2013

Hate

The SPLC honors Richard Lynn with a place in the stocks. (He’s a “white supremacist” apparently, despite thinking the future of human civilization lies in the Far East. (*yawn*))

(via @intelligenceres)

ADDED: The dike is creaking.

March 4, 2014

Wacky Races

The demented evil of this is pretty funny:

> Student: Are you Suey Park? Me: Oh my god. We don't all look the same.
>
> — Angry Asian Woman (@suey_park) April 19, 2014

My positive spin on Suey Park is that she’s almost unique in her

role as an agent of racial desensitization. The only way you don't lose to move like this is by toughening up fast.

ADDED: So what is this joke saying? *Be aware, you will be socially punished for noticing reality*. It's pure Sailer (but dramatized for laughs). With enemies like this, I'm guessing we can close down the propaganda unit.

ADDED: Further down the rabbit hole … (via @CBLangille)

ADDED: Some (vaguely) related intersectionalist comedy.

April 19, 2014

Diversitocracy Crisis

It's not about white people.

June 20, 2014

Wayback Privilege

Futurism is *way* too white male. The retrofutural Left-Molbuggian argument clinches it:

Time travel … is another thing that is a distinctly white male preoccupation — going back in time, for marginalized groups, means giving up more of their rights.

(Adopted from here, which is funny, despite the pitiful pandering.) "Don't anomalize my *Zeitgeist* bro!"

August 1, 2015

Quote note (#235)

The implausible *telos* of progressive race politics:

It is certainly possible to get to a place where jobs at Facebook are allocated by global demographics, with the requisite number of Aboriginals and so forth. South Africa, with BEE, is rapidly approaching this point. If you want to make all the present programmers at Facebook racists, it's an excellent way to proceed, but I really don't think it will lead to your uniform, perfect and beige dream world. (Not sure if you're familiar with present conditions in the Rainbow Nation.)

The idea that the progressive race religion is something that can be productively reasoned about ended for many of us at *precisely* the moment NRx began. Still, trying — or pretending to try — to argue optimistically about it could (perhaps) remain worthwhile as an experiment, even without the slightest realistic chance that it could work.

Again, I'm not here to get you to agree with me; I know that's impossible. What I'm curious [about] is whether you can at least

agree to disagree.

That doesn't seem much more realistic (so it's probably an experiment — or cultural tactic — of some different kind.)

ADDED: "Of course, it's incredibly important to keep diversity issues at the forefront of everyone's awareness …"

April 1, 2016

Race Talk

Why enter into the edgy territory of race and IQ discussion, asks John McWhorter, even if the most distressingly inegalitarian conclusions turn out to be true? "What, precisely, would we gain from discussing this particular issue?"

Robert Verbruggen gets to the critical response, eventually. The topic has been made inescapable because the left is ever-increasingly race-obsessed and "continue[s] to treat racial gaps as a moral emergency" based on a specific, positively egalitarian, and extremely implausible universal-anthropological theory. Challenging that is the only way to moderate the social self-flagellation. (So however uncomfortable this 'conversation' becomes, it isn't going to stop.)

More here (via), hitting maximum relevance about 40 minutes in.

ADDED:

> .@JohnHMcWhorter asks why discuss IQ & race. Because schools spend billions trying to equalize academic achievement? https://t.co/8C5yMCmkGu https://t.co/us8ZEC4c6f
>
> — EdReal (@Ed_Realist) July 5, 2017

ADDED: "Does the possibility [sic] that [East] Asians are smarter than they are reduce whites to desperation and misery?" — This needs to be noted more often.

July 5, 2017

Evo Psych Ward

An utterly compelling tangle of arguments at The Center for Evolutionary Psychology, where the intersection of science and society is ripped open by controversy over Kevin MacDonald and his relation to Darwinian biorealism. Evo Psych star John Tooby makes some important points about the politics of denunciation, bringing the distinct spectra of political allegiance and sociological genetics into complex collision. Where do the implications of Hamiltonian inclusive fitness lead? (HBD doesn't quite come into focus, but it haunts the discussion from the edges.)

For a sense of how murky this gets:

For those who are interested in carefully tracing out the dauntingly complex relationships between biology, brain, mind, and culture, this is all very familiar terrain. In the mid-1970's, for example, Gould, Lewontin, and a few others injected heavy-handed moralizing, easy denunciation, the attribution of dubious intellectual genealogies, and an ***ad hominem*** *attack-style into scientific debate in an effort to settle intellectual disputes by other means. One belief they cultivated assiduously was the myth that leading evolutionary scholars were ideologically motivated right-wingers. Due to my empiricist inclinations, I was the only person I knew who actually gathered data on this widely credited claim. The results were what common sense would lead you to expect: Evolutionists included communists, ex-communists, a wide array of non-doctrinaire Marxists, democratic socialists, anarchists, feminists, a Black Panther Party member (recently joined by a second), antiwar activists, many* ***New Republic*** *liberals, some apoliticals, and a neocon – a distribution (for better or worse) indistinguishable from any randomly sampled selection of faculty at leading research universities at the time. […] The most notorious tactic of Gould, Lewontin, and their allies during the early years was their attempt to drag the ideas they opposed under by manufacturing links to various repugnant doctrines. One moral problem with ignoring truth-value in employing such tactics is that these socially constructed links pull in both directions. The key theoretical breakthroughs central to*

sociobiology (inclusive fitness theory, parental investment theory, and so on) turned out to elegantly explain large sets of observations, and so went on to win the debates within the technical journals in evolutionary biology. Although Lewontin's and Gould's opposition to the most significant innovations in evolutionary biology over the last 30 years is nothing more than a quaint intellectual footnote within evolutionary biology, the fruits of their mythologizing live on outside of it. They live on in the spurious legitimacy that they gave to the netherworld of marginal scholarship (of which MacDonald is a typical example) that embraces the doctrines that the "moralists" were putatively fighting. More significantly, they did succeed in tarring the revolution in evolutionary biology in the eyes of nonbiologists, together with any serious attempt to think through the relationship between culture, human nature, and human evolution. This has perpetuated the antiquated status quo, during which social scientists have remained wary of the possibility of scientifically mapping human nature, and have remained almost totally ignorant of modern evolutionary biology.

ADDED: MacDonald responds.

July 14, 2014

Misbehaving Science

Comedy gold at *New Scientist* — it really needs to be read to be believed. Kate Douglas reviews Aaron Panofsky's book *Misbehaving Science: Controversy and the development of behavior genetics*, rising to a glorious crescendo with a restatement of Lewontin's Fallacy (without giving any indication of recognizing it). If this book and review are panic symptoms, which seems highly plausible, Neo-Lysenkoism has to be sensing the winter winds of change. In any case, it somehow all went wrong for them:

The founding principles of social responsibility suffered, usurped by a responsibility to the discipline itself and to scientific freedom. And controversy bred controversy as the prospect of achieving notoriety attracted new talent. In short, the field became weak and poorly integrated, with low status, limited funding, and publicity the main currency of academic reward. This, according to Panofsky, is why it is afflicted with "persistent, ungovernable controversy" …

As a guide to what regional Cathedral breakdown looks like, this works quite well.

July 15, 2014

Quote note (#180)

A usefully depressing account by Paul Gottfried of Conservative Inc. and the shifting boundaries of hate-think:

Well into the 1990s, it was almost universally accepted by the scientific community, except for Stalinoid propagandist Leon Kamin and the perpetually PC Stephen Jay Gould, that human IQ varied significantly, that IQ tests could measure these differences, and that up to 85 percent of intelligence may be hereditary. In an enlightening work The IQ Controversy (1988) Stanley Rothman and Jay Snydermann document the premises that the overwhelming majority of scientists, biologists, and psychologists fully accept the axioms that a significant part (indeed well over one half) of intelligence is hereditary, and that general intelligence is testable.

(No longer, at least as far as its official gate-keepers are concerned.)

Western Civilization has been disgraced indelibly by its craven surrender of all intellectual integrity on this topic. The degree to which it will be despised, eventually, for what it has become almost certainly exceeds its power of historical imagination.

August 27, 2015

Autophagic Leftism

> Progressivism abolishes itself. http://t.co/0fgxrhu75L
> — Wesley Morganston (@nydwracu) August 4, 2014

Oh come, come, this kind of entertainment deserves a real link:

For these [New Atheist] thinkers, Islam is obviously a bad and destructive system of thought. Yet billions of people spend their whole lives trying to live according to these stupid teachings, generation after generation. What's worse, in the modern world, they have ready access to knowledge about the superior system of secular modernity, but they persist in embracing a crappy religion. At a certain point, you have to wonder if there is simply something wrong with such people, right? Perhaps their reasoning capacities are hampered in some way. Indeed, one begins to wonder, could it perhaps be something … inborn? […] Basically, declaring oneself to be on the avant-garde of "reason" is always going to lead to racism if you take it to its logical conclusion. Thankfully for the mental health of the "party of reason," however, their self-regard and in-group loyalty keep them from following the dictates of reason on this matter, because it would make it seem like maybe their empty gesture at a contentless "reason" had accidentally made them into bad people.

We've come a long way baby.

August 4, 2014

IQ Crime-Stop

'Eldritch' comments at Scott Alexander's place:

I think the actual argument against IQ is this:

1. Intelligence is a measure of your value as a person in a wide range of situations.

2. IQ supposedly measures intelligence.

3. IQ may not be significantly changeable.

4. Therefore, this test lets you measure the innate aptitude and this value of a person.

5. Therefore, this could be used to prove I am inherently less valuable than other people.

6. This makes me REALLY UNCOMFORTABLE.

7. Therefore, IQ is wrong.

I'm pretty sure this is the real argument against IQ, and most arguments against it are simply attempts to find arguments that fit this conclusion.

My only significant quibble with this construction concerns point #5, which massively underestimates the predominance of pathological altruism / social terror in the IQ 'debate'. The possibility that IQ measurements could make *other people* seem in some

awkward way inferior is a far more powerful deterrent than anything it could say about oneself. (The probability that someone is going to say something stupid about IQ has a striking positive correlation with IQ.)

The post itself makes a (wholly superfluous) strong argument for the robust realism of the *g* concept. If you're the kind of crime-stopped idiot who needs persuading about it, you're almost certainly beyond persuasion. The relevant fork in the road has already been passed. Rationalists find it strangely hard to grasp that simple fact. They're nice that way.

ADDED: Dear Prudence.

August 12, 2014

In Our Genes

That there is a genetic contribution to ~~IQ~~ 'cognitive performance' has been theoretically obvious for as long as these concepts have existed. Now it has been empirically confirmed. The basic argument should be over now (but I'm not holding my breath).

As this type of information becomes a flood, the dike of ideologically-motivated obscurantism has — eventually — to break. Watch for the smart rats to start jumping off first.

September 10, 2014

Shrunken Brains

Gregory Cochran brusquely dispatches what might be the most incompetent piece of 'scientific' reasoning in recent years (although the competition for that honor gets ever more intense). The discovery — brains of poor children are statistically smaller. The insane leftist inference passed into the public realm as a logical conclusion: *poverty shrinks brains*. I'm not going to insult XS readers by laboring over the mistake here (Cochran does it succinctly enough, and with appropriate biting contempt). It's utterly horrifying, from any remotely objective viewpoint, that such blatant stupidity could ever borrow the robes of science, even momentarily. This is what collapse looks like (and most probably our brains are shrinking).

(I was aiming to do some kind of April Fool's thing here today. Sadly, this isn't one.)

ADDED: Thompson patiently picks through the mess. "The paper and the comments will lead readers to believe that lack of money is stunting the brains of poorer children. This is possible, but not proved by this study because of obvious genetic confounders."

April 1, 2015

Mental Gymnastics

Ignoring Sailer*, who is — of course — problematic, how about *The Atlantic*?

The statistics are hard to ignore. [Kenya, a] medium-size country of 41 million dominates the world in competitive running. Pick any long-distance race. You'll often find that up to about 70 or 80 percent of its winners since the late 1980s, when East African nutrition and technology started catching up with the West, have been from Kenya. Since 1988, for example, 20 of the 25 first-place men in the Boston Marathon have been Kenyan. … Of the top 25 male record holders for the 3000-meter steeplechase, 18 are Kenyan. Seven of the last 8 London marathons were won by Kenyans, and the sole outlier was from neighboring Ethiopia. Their record in the Olympic men's marathon is more uneven, having placed in the top three in only four of the last six races. Still, not bad for one country. And even more amazing is that three-fourths of the Kenyan champions come from an ethnic minority of 4.4. million, or 0.06% of global population.

"Hard to ignore"? Oh, come on!

The first study, "A Level Playing Field? Media Constructions of Athletics, Genetics, and Race," examines news media coverage

implying that genetic differences lead particular racial groups to succeed more often at sports, and focuses on how that belief shows up within journalism. Collaborating with University of Connecticut doctoral student Devon Goss, Matthew W. Hughey researched nearly 24,000 English-language newspaper articles across the globe from 2003-2014. Among the articles that discussed race, genetics and athletics, Hughey and Goss found that nearly 55 percent of these media narratives uncritically parroted and perpetuated the belief that African-descended groups excel in athletics, such as sprinting, because of genetic racial differences — despite the research debunking that belief.

Who are you going to believe, the media-approved 'debunking' or the lying sports statistics?

*There's a Sailer link in the Atlantic piece (naughty), which — oddly — goes to this. (I guess that's one solution to the "hard to ignore" problem.)

September 29, 2015

Vaguely Smart

Don Surber recalls a classic masterpiece of liberal good-think fluff (from 2008):

***Historian Michael Beschloss**: Yeah. Even aside from the fact of*

electing the first African American President and whatever one's partisan views this is a guy whose IQ is off the charts — I mean you cannot say that he is anything but a very serious and capable leader and — you know — you and I have talked about this for years…
***Imus**: Well. What is his IQ?*
***Historian Michael Beschloss**: … our system doesn't allow those people to become President, those people meaning people THAT smart and THAT capable*
***Imus**: What is his IQ?*
***Historian Michael Beschloss**: Pardon?*
***Imus**: What is his IQ?*
***Historian Michael Beschloss**: Uh. I would say it's probably — he's probably the smartest guy ever to become President.*
***Imus**: That's not what I asked you. I asked you what his IQ was.*
***Historian Michael Beschloss**: You know that I don't know and I'd have to find someone with more expertise…*
***Imus**: You don't know.*

Thanks, as always, for telling us (hazily) what we're supposed to think.

(Via.)

January 19, 2016

Trolls Explained

If, like this blog, you have been benighted enough to understand Internet trolls as abusive irritants, masters of disguise, satirists, or even amusing pets, you apparently need a good talking to. Farhad Manjoo writing in (surprise!) *The New York Times* has a lesson you need to hear. Trolling, it turns out, has a very simple explanation — it is exactly identical to a Political Incorrectness. To be a troll is in fact simply not being a progressive.

Citing Doctor Whitney Phillips, of Humboldt State University, and a troll expert (who has written a book on the subject), Manjoo illuminates the phenomenon unambiguously:

If there's one thing the history of the Internet has taught us, it's that trolls will be difficult to contain because they really reflect base human society in all its ugliness. Trolls find a way.

"It's not a question of whether or not we're winning the war on trolling, but whether we're winning the war on misogyny, or racism, and ableism and all this other stuff," Dr. Phillips said. "Trolling is just a symptom of those bigger problems."

As with so very many other things, there's no solution to trolling short of the absolute triumph of progressive across the whole of the earth. This is an argument crying out for an #AAA tag like no other I've ever seen. (I'd link the Twitter hashtag, but it's deeply confusing.)

ADDED: It's a jungle out there.

ADDED: I'll throw in the T-shirt slogan here for free — **Resistance is ~~futile~~ trolling**

August 15, 2014

CWoT

The Cathedralist War on Trolling is limbering up fast. Just a few days ago, we had this. (Paraphrased: to resist the Cathedral is trolling). Now the follow up ("Trolls are like terrorist cells" — literally).

The Duck does the integration:

> 1) disagreeing with progressivism is trolling 2) trolling is terrorism therefore 3) disagreeing with progressivism is terrorism
>
> — Duck Enlightenment (@jokeocracy) August 20, 2014

That escalated quickly.

*They're everywhere and even if one gets eliminated, there's two more to take its place (that also applies to HYDRA). But I feel like this is the point we're at now. That's sad and terrible, but it's the truth. I used to think turning comments off was *the* solution, and while I do think comments have become useless, and largely a hotbed for hate and racism, turning them off is only going to drive the poison to*

even more public forums like Twitter and Facebook, where a hateful or factually corrupt tweet or status update can spread like a disease across the globe and turn supposed rational human beings into muckrakers of misinformation, hate, and other dark things.



August 21, 2014

Twitter wants to die

Evidently.

(So GAB it is, I guess.)

September 22, 2016

Algorithmic Diversitocracy

Here's the anti-Tay.

One way or another, robotically-enhanced coercive enstupidation is coming. (At least the machines will only be pretending to be sunk in idiocy.)

Via:

> @Outsideness https://t.co/3Lvkxcbq0L
>
> Just praying to CyberSatan for a nuclear winter by now.
>
> — ||||| (@insurrealist) October 10, 2016

This is also relevant.

October 11, 2016

CHAPTER FIVE - ECONOMICS AND POLICY

Signs of Progress

HOW THE MODERN WORLD LOST ITS SENSES

The more sophisticated animals become, the worse they get at connecting with reality. As they cephalize, and socialize, stories substitute for reflexes, and the survival value of a story owes almost nothing to its factuality. Believing what everyone else does, or what makes you feel good, counts for vastly more. Wherever it is that discussion leads, it is only very rarely, and accidentally, in the direction of reality.

Science begins with the realization that stories aren't to be

trusted, even – or especially – if they sound credible, conform to prior intuitions, and readily attain social approval. Since narrative satisfaction is the great deceiver, science reaches beyond language into the vast frigid tracts of mathematical signs, stripped clean of all moral and emotional significance. Hardening itself against the temptation to see faces in the clouds, or hear voices from the heavens, it digs determinedly into the test-bed of numbers and quantitative signals, where seductive words are led to die.

Economics has never been a science, but economic behavior, and even theory, has been able to avail itself of a measure of leverage against story-telling. Its great resource in this regard has been the price system, expressed in 'meaningless' quantities (without immediate narrative significance) which enable economic calculation to sustain a posture of ideological indifference. An accountant who tells a story is a bad accountant, and most probably a criminal, whilst an entrepreneur fixated upon a story of how things 'must be' is subject to market-Darwinian nemesis. That, at least, is how *laissez-faire* hard money capitalism once roughly worked, as attested for instance by the indignation of Charles Dickens, who insisted upon the right of moral, political, and religious story-telling in the midst of a process that systematically disdained it.

Things have progressed incalculably since then, in a direction that could be confidently described as 'Dickensian' if that adjective had not already been settled in its highly-effective polemical purpose.

That ‘the Big Story’ (BS) would triumph over calculative Scroogean realism was perhaps entirely predictable, but the near-metaphysical comprehensiveness of its victory – and its revenge — was less easy to anticipate. When attempting to gauge this progress, money is the best indicator, or rather, the destruction of money as an indicator is the most telling sign.

Under the conditions of hard money industrial capitalism, progress follows two, rigorously accounted tracks. Most notoriously, it is measured as a process of accumulation, or the amassing of fortunes through profitable business activity. Economic intelligence is socially dispersed along with the multitude of fortunes, with each unit of capital accompanied by its own (Scroogish) accounting function, weighing revenues against outlays, and estimating the viability of continued operation. This intelligence does not lend itself to convenient or reliable public aggregation.

Accompanying the multiplicity of private progressions (and regressions), there is a second track measuring social advance in strictly quantitative, meaningless, and unambiguous terms. On this track, technical and organizational improvements in business activity overspill private accounts, and take the form of public ‘externalities’. Under any monetary system competent to register reality, such general social advances are expressed as falling prices, cost reduction, or *deflation*. (A typically insightful Zero Hedge post on the topic can be found here.)

The importance of this point is difficult to over-emphasize, especially since it directly contradicts our carefully fabricated neo-Dickensian common sense: *Deflation! Isn't that kind of like fascism or something?*

Deflation can certainly represent a type of socio-economic misfortune, under specific conditions. During business ~~cycle~~ downturns, for instance, it can reflect fire-sale asset or inventory reductions, driven by, and exacerbating, credit crises. The seriousness and typicality of such cases is strongly asserted in the dominant (neo-Dickensian) story of the Great Depression. It is worth noting, however, that even under these circumstances – at the worst – the first-order effect of deflation is to generate a spontaneous increase in affluence, or spending power. When life is at its toughest, it gets cheaper to live.

In the hard money world, chronic mild deflation simply *is* social progress. The two concepts are effectively indistinguishable. Gentle deflation is the invisible hand out, giving everybody a little more of almost everything, year by year, as it spontaneously distributes a fraction of the 'social surplus', or public dividend on rising productivity. Even in today's radically progressed world of ruined money, the output of the consumer electronics industry still manages to exhibit the deflationary trends that have been obliterated elsewhere (so next time you buy a gizmo, don't forget to feel appropriately oppressed.)

What ~~the hell~~ in heavens happened? How did modernity's metallo-monetary senses get turned off, rapturing Scrooge into a Christmas Carol, and eclipsing industrial reality? One obvious neo-Dickensian go-to guy for that is William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925), a politician whose multi-dimensional war against reality – truly astounding in its consistency – represents enthusiasm for the Big Story (or 'social gospel') at its most uncompromised. Either Bryan's anti-Darwinism (the Scopes trial) or his ardent prohibitionism (campaigning for the 18th amendment) would have sufficed to earn him a place in the historical record as a hero of the BS ('evangelical' or 'progressive') State, but his most enduring legacy rests upon the speech he delivered on July 9, 1896, to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, in which he declared – as if to Scrooge himself – that "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold."

This is a declaration that is sublimed to progressive universality through the elimination of context. Embedded within the late 19th century debates on bimetallism (price-fixing of gold-silver exchange rates), its present implications are significantly diluted, or at least complicated, by questions about the financial responsibility of central authorities, creditor-debtor class warfare, global economic integration, agrarian-urban tensions, and (East-West) regional politics in the USA. Yet, fundamentally, it can be recognized as

'Dickensian': the passionate denunciation of a neutral criterion for economic reality, precisely for its neutrality, or indifference to Big Story moral-historical narrative. Gold is cold. It measures without judgment. Between damnation and salvation it demonstrates no preference or inclination.

Concretely, gold was registering, in economic terms, the social upheaval of American industrial urbanization. Mechanization of agriculture implied falling food prices, ruination of small farmers, and rural depopulation, during a sustained process of massive disruption whose miseries were only exceeded by the socio-economic revitalization in its wake. In its distribution and in its accounting function, gold facilitated the depreciation of rural labor, the bankruptcy of misallocated businesses, and the empowerment of concentrated industrial capital in the nation's rising urban centers. Bryan articulated the views of those at the sharpest edge of this shift, who found the messenger culpable for the message, the senses guilty for the scene: "If thine eye offends thee pluck it out" (Matthew 18:9). (Even though Bryan lost all three of his presidential elections bids, we're all totally plucked.)

To make of money a vehicle of moral purpose, rather than a neutral registry of fact, is to make the crossing from liberalism and progress as they were once understood (dynamic industrialism), to the progressive liberalism of today (political evangelism). If money can save us (through 'demand management'), as the Keynesians

insist, then its politicization is a moral imperative, whose neglect is a sin of omission. The senses are transformed into story-tellers. Shut the windows, and listen to the Christmas Carol. It's progress (~~honestly~~).

February 7, 2012

Economies of Deceit

Social organizations grow ever larger, and resist disintegration, due to economies of scale. There are disproportionate benefits to being large, sufficient to over-compensate for the associated disadvantages, to support expansion, and to fund the suppression of fission. Like every trend reinforced by positive nonlinearities, large-scale social formations accentuate the gradient of time, realizing a ratchet mechanism, through 'network effects'. In this way, they contribute not only to the content of history, but also to its shape.

When the fundamental deformation of history was evidently attributable to scale economies, it was only natural to speak primarily of Leviathan — the seizure of historical time by the gigantic. It might therefore be considered a significant symptom — of something — that a substitute term now seems more persuasively applicable. Leviathan remains vast, and growing, but it is more exactly specified as *the Cathedral*, because its principal ratchet

mechanism owes less to sheer magnitude than to a mastery of deceit.

Deceit is nothing new, in matters of power, or any other, but it is open to innovation. A state religion that pretends to be the negation of religion is something new, as is propaganda in its strict sense. There is no precedent for an intolerant, precisely coded system of belief, trending to a totalitarian form, whilst presenting itself as inevitable progress towards general disillusionment.

Economies of deceit, like those of scale, draw historical momentum from the fact that they are profoundly automatized. No one decided that large-scale social organizations *should* be advantaged. Similarly, the revolutionary *efficiency* of deceit was never a point of deliberation. Deceit works, due to contingencies of deep evolution. More specifically, it works because propaganda machinery was never a factor in the archaic human environment, so that stimulus sensitivity was never provided with the opportunity to adapt defensively in respect to it.

The total power of deceit can be understood most clearly when examined backwards, from its final destination, which is shared with the entire utilitarian sphere. At the end there is the *wire-head*, the social and technological destination of *direct neurological rewards*, where the message “I have received what I want” has been divorced from all real acquisition or accomplishment. Do you want this thing? Or do you want the feeling that you have this thing? The latter can be strengthened, sharpened, and in every way *subjectively* perfected. It

is also, given suitable historical conditions, vastly cheaper to deliver. Hence, *the economy of deceit*.

For those paying attention, the entire structure of economic thought and policy switched onto this track roughly a century ago. The demetalization of money is the most obvious indicator, trending towards a pure signal of wealth, entirely disconnected from the extravagance of physical reality. Keynesianism, in its essence, is wire-head economics, focusing on the policy question: *how do we best deliver the stim?* The idea that growth of the real economy might be the best route to this goal marks its proponent out as a hopeless crank, entirely out of touch with the recent development of the discipline. What matters is the *wealth effect*, delivered in carefully calibrated jolts, down the wire. (I've tried to thrash this out before.)

Gradually, but inexorably, propaganda swallow everything. All macroeconomic aggregates — GDP, inflation, capital stock … — tend to senseless garbage, because their only robust anchor point is Cathedral-political: *what can we make you feel?* The latest evidence is telling. It is time, apparently, to definitively break with archaic questions of economic production, and instead to work solely with the ~~macroeconomic garbage~~ data, in order for it to tell us that we're richer than we think we are.

You can't make this s%&t up. Yes we can!

July 28, 2013

Race Science

Race, science, and pseudo-science … it's complicated. *Radish* presents a blood-chilling review essay on the subject, which isn't to be missed (whatever your priors). As might be expected, it leads to a discussion of crazed fascist experimentation on human guinea pigs (aka 'pajama ferrets'):

… perhaps you were wondering where I'm going with this. Well, here's a hint: in 2012, experimental psychologists, psychiatric neuroscientists, and even a pair of "practical ethicists" put their heads together and came up with an honest-to-God ***cure for racism****.*

You could say the argument was over, if there had been an argument.

(Meanwhile, it's probably best not to put yourself at risk by noticing this (from here))

February 2, 2014

Suicide by Science

The progressive end game is for the very category of 'enemy' to be techno-scientifically annihilated. Emile Bruneau has the *Zeitgeist* good, and he's determined to promote it:

"I wanted the research I was doing to match the stuff I was

thinking about," he says. "And I just felt more and more that the most relevant level of analysis for generating social change was the psychological level."

The goal is to put an end to this sort of thing:

Evidence of the empathy gap abounds: in political discourse, across daily headlines, even in the simple act of watching a movie. "People will cry for the suffering of one main character," Bruneau pointed out. "But then cheer for the slaughter of dozens of others." The observation reminded me of watching "Captain Phillips" in a packed theater at Lincoln Center, of how much people applauded when the Somali pirates — whose lives back home had been portrayed as dire — were killed. They were the bad guys. Never mind that they had barely reached manhood or that their families were desperate and starving. Never mind that some were reluctant to turn to piracy in the first place.

The Kingdom cometh. Anybody without serious plans to get the hell out now better be resigning themselves to the mandatory-compassion Cathedral chip.

"I get that these are complicated problems," [Bruneau] told me. "I get that there isn't going to be any one magic solution. But if you trace even the biggest of these conflicts down to its roots, what you find are entrenched biases, and these sort-of calcified failures of empathy. So I think no matter what, we have to figure out how to root that out."

This is the Bernays of the 21st century. Let no one say they weren't warned.

March 25, 2015

Unspoken Agendas

Zombie proposes a key to contemporary American politics: *White liberals despise black people and can't admit it*. This is smart conservative *jiu jitsu* rather than anything remotely neoreactionary, but as a wedge to lever things apart, it has some intriguing potential. The central claim of a carefully-elaborated argument:

White progressives believe that black people are too dumb to make rational decisions on their own and too uncouth to behave civilly. So the progressive urge is to heap rules upon rules to control blacks and render them harmless to themselves and others. At the same time, progressives are terrified of being perceived as racist. So they hit upon a solution: Make rules which restrict **everyone***'s freedoms, even though the progressives are actually targeting African-Americans. The collateral damage in this cynical equation — law-abiding citizens of all ethnicities — erroneously assume that the intrusive rules are aimed at them. But they're missing the point: Progressives don't enjoy restricting their own freedoms along with everyone else's, but can conceive of no other legal mechanism to deal*

with what they see as misbehaving blacks while still appearing to be race-neutral.

ADDED: PJM apparently going all-in with this meme — "But [Obama and Kerry] do — and here's the irony in Obama's case — have the traditional white man's view of that same Arab world — to wit, Arabs are crazy and primitive." We're the true anti-racists!

March 16, 2014

Displacement

Steven Sailer makes room for a smidgen of gentle cynicism about the economic driver behind the Obama Administration's "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing" initiative:

Clearly, racial justice demands forcing suburbs/exurbs to subsidize affordable housing to encourage blacks to move to more convenient locations currently dominated by evil white racists, such as, perhaps, Murrieta, Hemet, Coachella, Twentynine Palms, and Hesperia. […] Seriously, sixty years ago, "urban renewal" was all the rage, although cynics joked that cities, in effect, were attempting to engage in "Negro removal." […] Nowadays, everybody who is anybody wants to move back into the city, so white progressives have become obsessed with exposing all those vicious racists in the suburbs and exurbs, and using disparate impact thinking to force

them to take more blacks from the city. […] It's only a coincidence that this would open up more prime urban real estate for gentrification, right?

There can be little doubt that it's a low tolerance for hypocrisy, beyond anything, that pushes people into the crime-think zone. A cheerful acceptance that evangelical political correctness is entirely compatible with profitable ethnic-clearing exercises — perhaps even a crucial tool in this regard — would make it wholly unnecessary to ever make those awkward, socially-taboo remarks. It's not as if anyone is going to be called out about it (except by the Sailers of this world, who've been carefully locked-up in the muffled cell). There's not even any need to be a hick Republican about the whole business. Clearly, the left wing of the Democratic Party is the place from which to really clean up. Simply recognize that words are a perfectly empty social ritual, designed by the Holy *Zeitgeist* for the public expression of convenient tribal emotions, and all the confusion goes away. Dollars follow, and life is beautiful.

We can laugh (darkly), as Sailer does, but that's most probably a maladaptive relic. There's certainly plenty of laughter to go around on the other side.

July 18, 2015

Aletheia

Erik Falkenstein makes a lot of important points in this commentary on Thomas Piketty (via Isegoria). The whole post is highly recommended.

To pick up on just one of Falkenstein's arguments here, he explains:

Most importantly for [Piketty's] case is the fact that because marginal taxes, and inheritance taxes, were so high, the rich had a much different incentive to hide income and wealth. He shows marginal income and inheritance tax rates that are the exact inverse of the capital/income ratio of figures, which is part of his argument that raising tax rates would be a good thing: it lowers inequality. Those countries that lowered the marginal tax rates the most saw the biggest increases in higher incomes (p. 509). Perhaps instead of thinking capital went down, it was just reported less to avoid confiscatory taxes? Alan Reynolds notes that many changes to the tax code in the 1980s that explain the rise in reported wealth and income irrespective of the actual change in wealth an income in that decade, and one can imagine all those loopholes and inducements two generations ago when the top tax rates were above 90% (it seems people can no better imagine their grandparents sheltering income than having sex, another generational conceit).

The much-demonized 'neoliberal' tax regimes introduced in the

1980s disincentivized capital income concealment. (Falkenstein makes an extended defense of this point.) In consequence, apparent inequality rose rapidly, as such revenues came out of hiding (ἀλήθεια) into public awareness / public finances. The 'phenomenon' is an artifact of truth-engineering, as modestly conservative governments sought to coax capital into the open, within a comparatively non-confiscatory fiscal environment.

There are some very significant lessons here, not all of which are easy to rapidly digest. To begin with, Falkenstein reveals the emblematic character of Piketty — as a thinker of the contemporary democratic spirit — who aims above all at a certain *public appearance*, rather than a real economic outcome. It is utterly naive to understand the 'equality debate' as something fundamentally concerned with a real (or super-public) situation. Such an understanding is, in fact, deeply *anti-democratic*. What concerns Piketty, and those flocking to his banner, is the public spectacle of inequality, as a negative factor for political legitimacy. Beyond the surface of his proposed remedies is a purely political demand that capital should retreat into hiding, in order not to embarrass the governing elites of democratic states. It is not actual inequality that is, in truth, being judged indecent, but its admission into the public square in immodest dress.

The greatest weakness of right wing economic analysis, whether Supply-side Conservative, Libertarian, or Post-Libertarian in

orientation, is its incompetence at lies. This becomes important when it interferes with a realistic analysis of the Cathedral State — an expression used in the same way one might use 'Islamic State' and with equivalent justification. For instance, as in this case, it tends to exaggerate the dysfunctionality of Cathedral-orchestrated social arrangements by conflating them with their public presentation.

To repeat the more concrete example at stake here, a 'high-tax' regime is interpreted by the truth-dupe right as a regime extracting higher taxes, or at least sincerely attempting to (before the attempt is undermined by Laffer-type perverse effects). What Falkenstein's commentary on Piketty suggests, in contrast, is that such a demand is more realistically understood as a demand for compliance with approved appearances, even if such compliance necessitates systematic 'non-compliance' with state tax codes *as publicly expressed*. Tax policy, in the widest sense, is not, then, to be conceived as primarily revenue oriented, but rather as a set of overt and covert theatrical directions, designed to produce a politically-convenient order of appearances. It is thus, in large part, a gatekeeper, controlling admissions to and banishments from the public stage. When capital disappears back under the burkqa, the 'problem' of gaping inequality will be miraculously solved. (In none of this is economics, in any serious sense, even remotely involved.)

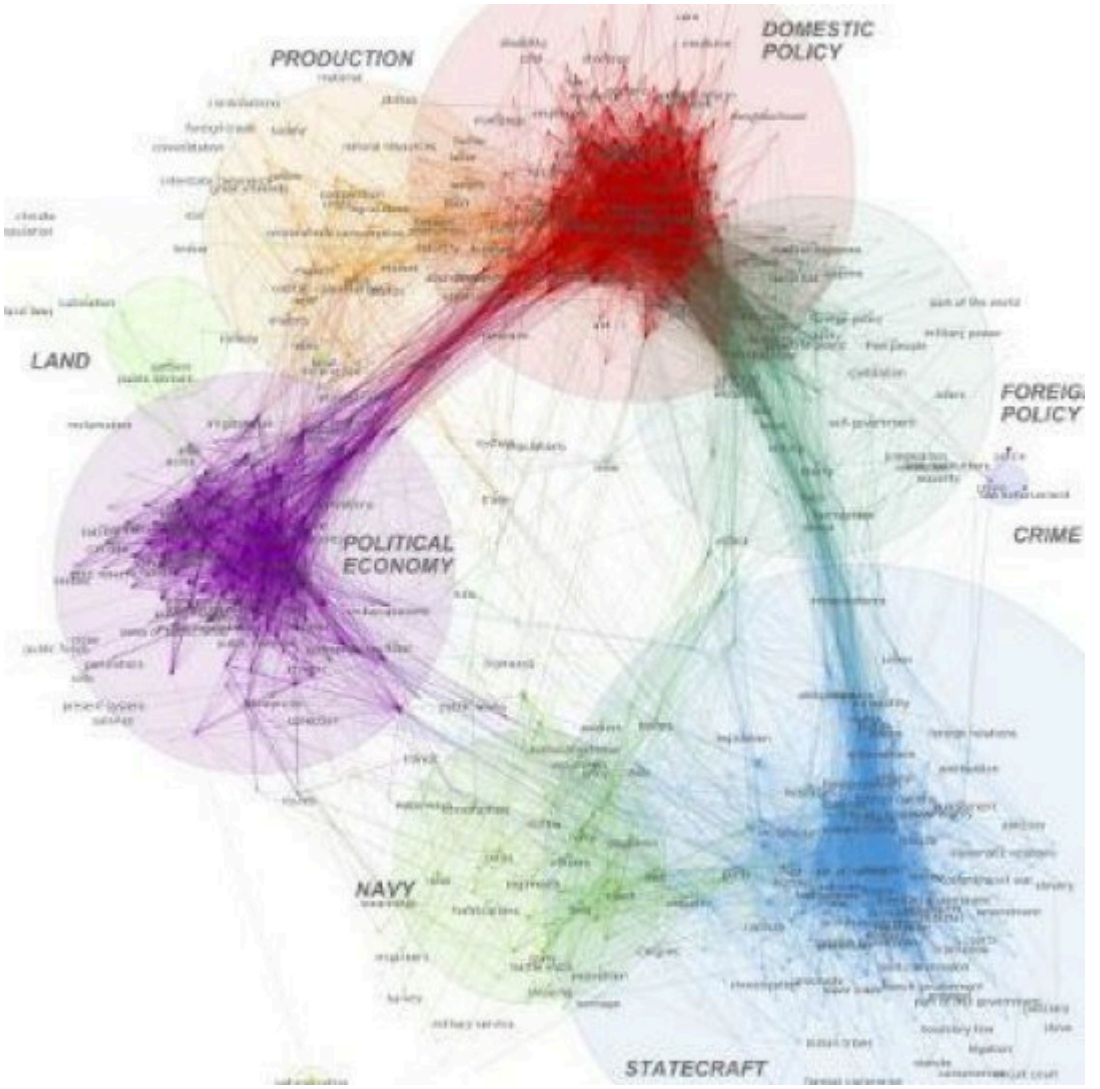
This is not economics, but political-religious public ritual, designed — with cynical realism — for mass-enfranchised idiocy and

its representatives. Overwhelmingly, that is what 'political economy' now is.

July 28, 2014

Switch-Point

Via machine-assisted cognition, this piece of research has been deservedly receiving a lot of attention. In 1917, it can now be seen due to 'big data' analytical tools, a new political epoch was born.



[Researchers] *were surprised to see 1917 jump out so clearly. As the United States joined Allied forces in the war against Germany, the researchers found a new set of terms recurring in the State of the Union address. On the topic of foreign policy, "democracy," "unity,"*

"peace" and "terror" emerged as keywords, replacing older notions of statecraft and diplomacy. By the 1940s, a cluster of terms centered on the Navy, perhaps signifying an isolationist foreign policy, all but disappears. "Suddenly the U.S. is no longer an island," said Bearman.

Anything that can switch — one might suppose — can switch again.

August 15, 2015

Moron bites (#13)

Is Islamophobia Accelerating Global Warming? (Well, is it?)

This talk examines the relation between Islamophobia as the dominant form of racism today and the ecological crisis. It looks at the three common ways in which the two phenomena are seen to be linked: as an entanglement of two crises, metaphorically related with one being a source of imagery for the other and both originating in colonial forms of capitalist accumulation. The talk proposes a fourth way of linking the two: an argument that they are both emanating from a similar mode of being, or enmeshment, in the world, what is referred to as 'generalised domestication.'

(Via.)

Actually, I think this is quite possibly truish — although approached with such utter leftoid twistedness that I'm not inclined

to re-classify it more politely. Insofar as ‘global warming’ is the presently-accepted Cathedralist translation for ‘industrial vitality’, it’s more than likely that a completely triumphant Ummah would put the lid on it. If the talk had been titled *Twin-Angled Anticapitalism* the inner coherence would have been more obvious.

May 13, 2016

CHAPTER SIX - A DARK TWIN

Criminals at Work

"… if the people that are supposedly running the country aren't actually performing any of the functions of governing, who is?" asks Foseti. Anybody who follows his writing will recognize where this is coming from. It belongs to a consistent (and thus informal) critique of formalist illusion. To confuse government with constitutional structures, legislation, or political offices, is to be blind to the real machinery of power.

Steve Sailor offers a pointed example of this reality in the field of higher educational administration, whose authorities are adamant in the determination to pursue systematic racial discrimination against Asian candidates (in particular). 'Constraining' legislation, which explicitly criminalizes these practices, is treated as a formal obstacle course, rather than a prohibition. It complicates anti-meritocratic racial profiling, but is utterly incapable of preventing it.

As Sailer explains:

Back in 1996, Proposition 209 outlawing racial preferences was passed by California voters and became part of the state

Constitution. State officials have ever since pursued a strategy of "massive resistance" to this unwelcome demand for equal treatment of the law, such as by switching the evaluation of University of California admissions from a cheap, mechanical system to an expensive, subjective "holistic" system.

The bulk of his post is devoted to a long quotation from Ruth Starkman's NYT story on the work of an applications reader at Berkeley. This piece is entirely devoid of surprises to anyone with the slightest sensitivity to social reality, since it consists of a reasonably detailed explanation of malicious racial corruption in university admission procedures. Disingenuously, Starkman describes this dirty work as "… an extreme version of the American non-conversation about race," asking: "Does Proposition 209 serve merely to push race underground?"

I suppose. Do anti-racketeering laws serve merely to push the mafia underground? If people are inflexibly determined to pursue an illegal agenda, laws drive them into the shadows. Perhaps the laws should be relaxed.

Or perhaps crucial public institutions should be ruthlessly purged of leftist criminals. It's a tough call.

August 4, 2013

Dark Humor

Slavic humor has a deserved reputation for philosophical penetration; routing around idealistic cant and crime-stop obstacles to deride totalitarianism. This recent example (via @MiriamElder, at #Russianhumor) is superb:

"Why won't there ever be a revolution in America?"
"Because there aren't any American embassies in America."

December 7, 2013

The Left Done Right

The Diplomat's Zachary Keck is one of the smartest mainstream commentators writing today. He's either an enemy to be respected, or a dark side infiltrator to be left undercover. In either case, he's always worth reading.

Observing that democracy promotion no longer works, he advocates a Neoreactionary foreign policy as the only effective path to the eventual realization of Cathedralist goals. If this wasn't a classic opportunity for Modernist means-ends reversal to show what it can do, there would be every reason to worry about being out-maneuvered. Zeck's proposals are sufficiently cunning to raise the question: *Who's subverting whom?*

One of America's top foreign policy goals, particularly since the end of the Cold War, has been promoting democracy across the world. In the minds of American foreign policy elites, there are both moral and strategic imperatives for spreading democracy.

Regarding the former, Westerners in general, and Americans in particular, believe that liberal democracies are morally superior to other forms of government. As for the strategic rationale, American elites point to the fact that liberal democracies don't go to war with one another, even if they aren't any less warlike (and may be more warlike) when interacting with non-democracies. One can quibble with these rationales, but they are deeply held by American elites and, to a much lesser extent, Americans in general. […] But if the American foreign policy community is going to continue trying to promote democracy, it must come to terms with one simple irony: it has become less successful at spreading democracy even as it has made democracy promotion a greater priority in U.S. foreign policy.

How, then, to spread democracy successfully? Obviously, by forgetting all of the 'democracy' nonsense:

The bottom line is that if the U.S. is going to promote democracy, it has to get better at it. It is irresponsible and immoral to promote democracy if it is likely to lead to anarchy, no matter how pure initial intentions were. And if the U.S. wants to get better at promoting democracy, a good place to start would be by promoting forward-thinking authoritarian leaders who base their legitimacy on

economic growth and integration into the global economy.

If the Cathedral recruits enough smart people to build itself a Neoreactionary wing, a wide range of presently mindless discussions are going to become a lot more interesting.

December 9, 2013

Deep State

This surely counts as a (Friday) fright night topic. Appropriately, it's an undertow NRx theme already, although typically only casually invoked — almost allusively — as the necessary complement of the public state's naked superficiality. Rod Dreher focuses upon it more determinedly than any NRx source I was able to rapidly pull up. (This would be an easy point for people to educate me upon.)

Dreher's post is seriously interesting. One immediate hook:

Steve Sailer says that the Shallow State is a complement to the Deep State. The Shallow State is, I think, another name for what the Neoreactionaries call "The Cathedral" …

As a State Church, the Cathedral is essentially bound to publicity. Its principal organs — media and education — are directed towards the promulgation of faith. It tends towards an identification with its own propaganda, and therefore — in Mike Lofgren's words — to the full manifestation of *visible government*. Perfect coincidence of

government with the transparent public sphere approaches a definition of the progressive *telos*. Since Neoreaction is particularly inclined to emphasize the radical dysfunctionality of this ideal, it naturally presupposes that *real* government lies elsewhere. In this respect, NRx is inherently destined to formulate a model of hidden or *occult government* — that which the Cathedral runs upon — which inevitably coincides, in all fundamentals, with the deep state.

What then? Has there been a direct NRx address to the quesion, *what do we make of the deep state?* Moldbug even declares: "… the United States does not in fact have a 'deep state.'" In context, this is a complex and suggestive evasion, but it is an evasion nonetheless. There can be no call upon neoreactionaries to articulate their relation to something that does not exist.

In contrast to the Master, I am thoroughly convinced that a US deep state exists, and that the problem of articulation is a very different one. Public articulacy is — at least — not obviously appropriate to the deep state, for transcendental philosophical or occultist reasons (which are the same), since it is *the very nature of hidden government not to be a public object*. Public representation of the deep state is *exposure* — an intrinsically political, antagonistic engagement. It's Wikileaks. This is not to denounce such an operation, reactively, but merely to note that the *question* has thereby been missed. The righteousness of state sublimation into the public sphere is assumed (and this, to repeat, is progressivism itself).

Under the name of the Cathedral, Nrx depicts the state *phenomenon* as a degenerative abomination. The deep state (or *state-in-itself*), in contrast, poses a far more cryptic theoretical and practical problem. It's worth puzzling over, for at least a while.

December 12, 2014

Off the Books

Writing about Pakistan, as a 'dark site' host, but also about a more general syndrome, Fernandez remarks:

… just because the administration hides the risk from conflict using cutouts and proxies doesn't actually mean the risk goes away. It only means the risk is hidden "off the books". It only means you can't easily measure it.

There's a conservation law at work here, which is always a positive sign of realist seriousness. To publicly promote a political profile of peculiarly self-congratulating moral earnestness it is simultaneously necessary to feed the shadows. What happens unseen is essential to the purification of the image. The Obama Administration is only significant here insofar as it grasps the deep political logic of democracy — and its subordination to sovereign PR — with such exceptional practical clarity. Better by far to indiscriminately drone potential enemies to death on the

unmonitored periphery than to rough up a demonstrated terrorist in front of a TV camera. It's the future you wanted (*Xenosystems* readers excepted). To imagine anything fundamentally different working under democratic conditions is sheer delusion.

Adam Garfinkle has a thoughtful commentary on the US Senate torture report that wanders into the same territory.

Everyone seems to take for granted now that this was a "natural" CIA assignment of some sort, but it is passing strange that this should be the case. Not to belabor the background with a primer, but for those who have been watching too much crappy, self-righteous fiction on TV and in the movies, the CIA — before 911 at least — was a pretty small organization with a very minor percentage of its budget, personnel, and activity devoted to "operations" — dirty tricks, false-flagging, whacking people, and so forth. The Agency did wander off the reservation back in the day, which is what the Church Committee hearings and subsequent reforms were meant to set right. The vast bulk of CIA activity before and certainly after the mid-1970s concerned what is called collections and analysis, some of which falls under the rubric of (human) spying, but much of which is just fancified library work. As the morning of September 12, 2001 dawned, did the CIA have any significant experience with interrogating Islamist insurgents and terrorists? No. Did it have any experience with interrogating bad guys of any kind? Some; for example in Central America back in the 1980s, but nearly all of those

involved in that business — and there were only a few — had long since departed the Agency. […] … So … why was the CIA anointed for the task after 911 …?

In its essentials, his answer is the same Fernandez gives. Rumsfeld's DoD simply refused to accept it. US Mil. is a public institution, and there was no way they were going to handle people outside Geneva Convention protections, with the responsibility to extract critical intelligence from them. That would all have to happen off the books. The CIA picked up the tar baby.

As the Cathedral becomes ever more holier than Jesus, it produces — through systematic administrative necessity — a dark twin. This is a basic structure of social reality that NRx is uniquely positioned to acknowledge (although it is far more widely recognized). As democracy 'matures', reality is processed increasingly in secret. That, at least, we understand.

December 18, 2014

Quote note (#300)

Fernandez:

… the tumultuous events of the last six months have dragged the Deep State into the fray. A slow motion 'constitutional crisis' is already occurring. The future of the Supreme Court, the

independence (or neutrality) of the FBI, the role of Congress are now at issue. In the words of president Obama "I hate to put pressure on you but the fate of the Republic rests in your hands. The fate of the world is teetering". The election has become a referendum. It is not just who heads the executive branch but what the executive branch will become that are on the ballot. Obama's legacy and the political arc of the last 40 years are up for a vote. "The American Brexit is coming," wrote James Stavridis in Foreign Policy, a comparison which if anything, understates the case.

It perhaps goes without saying (but I'll say it anyway): from the perspective of NRx, as also probably more widely, tumult in the Deep State counts for far more than any democratic transition. Events are occurring that can't be kept in the theater.

November 6, 2016

CHAPTER SEVEN - THE DECLINE BEGINS

Sentences (#32)

… few things are as oppressive and intolerable as living under the yoke of a lie … (Skeletalized for purposes of extraction from its mainstream conservative context, but the whole article is insightful if read with a modicum of detachment.)

Even Trump skeptics (such as this blog) are finding it hard to deny that the phenomenon is a revolt against the Cathedral (defined approximately as "the yoke of a lie"). It's a campaign against the media, and 'correct opinion' in general, with ordinary political antagonism as a very secondary feature. Does anybody seriously doubt that the media establishment understands, *he's running against us*?

The romantic medievalism of much 'NRx' thought captures things of importance — one of which is the cultural value of a separation between State and Church, which is to say: *the absence of politically-mandated correct opinion*. Heretics were not *political* criminals

before the onset of modernity. When the state becomes a church ('the Cathedral'), political antagonism acquires religious intensity. That's what is being seen today, whatever else one might think about it. At the climax of the democratic regime, politics *necessarily* becomes holy war. As the old saw goes: nobody said it was going to be pretty.

ADDED: The Cathedral has its own distinctive version of social contract theory: "There are people who already hold these views, and there used to be kind of an agreement between them and society that they wouldn't speak these things in public."

December 10, 2015

Sentences (#35)

***Genuinely** thinking Donald will save us all will get you kicked from the HRx and NRx Sith Lord club houses, yet tacit support for his whirlwind of chaos should be very much expected by us at this late hour.*

That would be true, even without the private portfolios of popcorn stock. (Note.)

ADDED: Astounding media BS (from George Stephanopoulos). Trump does OK, I guess. What he should have said, when asked where Obama was born, and whether he is a Muslim, in the opinion

of XS is this:

"How the *Hell* am I supposed to know about Obama's place of birth, or his faith? I don't know, you don't know, nobody knows except for Obama and a few others. The only thing you know is what you're *supposed to believe*. I know that too. So you want me to lie, and say *I know that Obama was born in the USA and reveres Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior*? That's the lie you're demanding here? Because, you know clearly, it would be a lie. Neither of us *knows* anything substantial about the guy, except from the fiasco he's made of his executive position. Frankly, George, I'm sick of this dishonest kissing-the-ring bullshit. Most Americans are sick of it. It's over. That's what my poll numbers should be telling you. So I have to say George, buddy, with the very greatest respect, that you and all the other lying Cathedral monkeys are toast. Improve your people skills, and after the collapse I'll try to find you a service position in a casino somewhere."

January 7, 2016

The NRx Presidency

Dateline, December 2016. (A modest extrapolation.)

Informed Neoconservative Opinion: *So, NRx, you've finally done it. This is all on you. The electoral victory you were aiming for from*

the start is now in the bag. The reactionary populist uprising has succeeded. Enjoy your shiny new Neocameral State. We'll be watching from our Canadian refuges, and smiling grimly as your authoritarian racial Utopia runs into the buffers of autarkic economic crisis. Then the public backlash will begin from a citizenry bowed in deep shame, but rediscovering their American virtues. It will be back to color revolution, and our neglected warnings will be once again appreciated. This was your one shot. Celebrate it while you can.

NRx: *???* [*Are they on drugs?*]

My tentative theory, at this point, is that NRx is comparatively good at conversing in Cathedralese, which makes it attractive as an easy one-stop destination for anyone wanting to rapidly fabricate a narrative about how things went so utterly to hell (supported by citations in an intelligible dialect). It's not an explanation being advanced here with enormous confidence.

Confidence starts with the observation that the (crazed) analysis of Trump as an NRx Frankenstein Monster is setting like Flashlock™ emergency concrete filler in the disoriented mental models of the Fourth Estate. Much near-future surrealism is guaranteed.

May 19, 2016

Shrink-Wrapped Schadenfreude

They've actually made it into a gift-pack:

The crying continued throughout the week. On the subway in New York City, sniffles punctuated heavy silence. Sickness or sadness? It was impossible to tell without staring. Friends confessed to each other they'd cried dozens of times. Foreigners living and working legally in America cried privately, cried together. The sadness came in waves. People said it felt like a death, like a breakup, like a national disaster. People checked in on each other. "Are you OK?" they'd ask, as though a relative had passed. […] Harrowing tales of crying continued into Friday, as Lena Dunham published an essay in Lenny Letter about how she was so distraught on election night, she broke into a hive that matched the hive of another woman in attendance at the Hillary Clinton rally, and how she cried for days after the election. The crying continued into the weekend. ***Saturday Night Live****'s cold open ended with Kate MacKinnon, in character as Hillary Clinton tickling out Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" on a piano, teary-eyed as she promised to fight on. …*

ADDED: Complementary sarcastic gloating.

ADDED: And from the full-commies at *Jacobin Mag* (quite wittily): "Watching the results on Election Night was like what I'd imagine living in an eighties teen horror movie would be like — the summer camp air curdling into one of vague suspicion, as a strange

dawning sensation of doom takes hold. Slaughter: Ohio, Florida, Michigan — all bloody and prone. Who will be picked off next? Pennsylvania? Wisconsin? Minnesota? *Your state? The vote is coming from inside the house*."

November 17, 2016

View From the Left

Claus Offe lucidly explains what the proponents of 'solidarity' are ~~hoping for~~ utterly hopeless about in Europe. The entire article is so thoroughly saturated in doom-drenched, soul-scouring melancholia that by the end I was searching for Odysseus-style restraints to prevent myself doing a wild happy-dance around the office. From the Euro-progressive perspective, things look *seriously* bleak.

As a bonus, there's a great gloss on degenerative ratchets: "… those fatal errors which, once committed, prove irreversible, closing off any return to the *status quo ante*." By carrying everything relentlessly to the brink, they're more of a nightmare for the perceptive left than they are for us. By this stage in history, the left has much more to lose. It's their regime that is going over the cliff. (Yes, I realize this reboot-friendly *Schadenfreude* will earn a spanking from Goulding.)

ADDED: *France is in its worst shape for more than three decades,*

since François Mitterrand nearly blew up the economy in the early 1980s trying to stimulate growth through government deficits and nationalisations. Unemployment is at 10.5 per cent and climbing. The economy is contracting. And overseeing the shambles is the suety, confidence-draining face of François Hollande.

July 9, 2013

Cathedral Decay

Extreme corrosive pessimism is an NRx specialty. Since optimism bias is a *status quo*-supported human cognitive frailty, it's a good thing to have. If rigidified, however, it can result in missing things.

One systematic distortion stems from *hubris*, taking the form of a confusion in causality. "We don't like X, and want bad things to happen to it" can actually be a distorted expression of a more basic process: *X is dying, and therefore we have started to dislike it*.

This blog strongly suspects that the Cathedral has become an object of animosity *as a consequence of its morbidity*. After all, it's a mind-control apparatus. If it's no longer universally accepted, and in certain problematic patches actively loathed, dysfunction is clearly indicated. Contestation of its story is not supposed to be part of the story.

The *Zeitgeist* is its story, not ours. In this tale, it goes from

strength to strength, overwhelming everything in its path. Recognizing the structure of this narrative is important. Subscription to it is not thereby implied.

Every critical component of the Cathedral — media, academic, and bureaucratic — is exceptionally vulnerable to Internet-driven disintermediation. The current phase of capital reconstruction is distinctively — and automatically — Cathedral-hostile, when evaluated at the level of technonomic process (which we do not do enough), rather than at the level of surface public pronouncement (which we concern ourselves with far too much with). Dying things can be very dangerous, and even more *frenzied*. It would be a mistake to confuse such characteristics with fundamental strength.

A step down from hubris might begin with an acknowledgment that NRx is — primarily — a *symptom*. Whatever imagined heroism is sacrificed thereby, it is more than compensated by an opportunity for deepened realism.

All of which is a framing for Fernandez's latest. Even amidst the stupidity of the degenerating political cycle, he notices that "… the current crop of Republican presidential candidates … are openly breaking with the really important modern faith — the media-led church that has held mainstream politics together for so long." The integrative media is fatally sick. That NRx exists at all is a sign of that.

ADDED: "I might be biased here myself, because this is what obsesses me, and this is what angers me. I could care less, to be

honest, about the GOP or its programs. […] What keeps me interested in politics at all is my loathing for the self-appointed Preistly Class of the media. […] … the media serve as the shamans and witch-doctors of an enemy Tribe, and the purpose of those shamans is to relentlessly disgrace outsiders to the Tribe, which is pleasing to those within the Tribe, while also keeping the shamans in power (because they have no other skills which would earn them money or sex, except the denigration of those considered Unclean)." (Ace links to this.)

October 30, 2015

Sentences (#38)

Phillip Mark McGough, writing in *Quillette*, buys his way in with a bald truth ticket:

After Cologne, feminism is dead.

The whole article is solid, giving clear voice to what is already a common understanding. The feminist establishment is only in derivative, flexible, and tactical opposition to extreme sexual violence against women. It consists of hardcore leftist race-politics hacks in women's rights drag. Now everybody knows it (which is huge).

January 18, 2016

Quotable (#149)

A ruined empire on the brink:

All around the Web, in print, and on radio comes the claim that America has entered its "Weimar" phase. Economic collapse, political paralysis, rampant homosexuality, a desperate, disoriented populace open to the ravings of a demagogue – that is the portrait we get of Germany between the end of World War I in 1918 and the Nazi seizure of power in 1933. That is where America is supposedly situated in 2016. […] Yes, Weimar Germany ended badly, horribly so. But …

Much tying-itself-in-knots follows (not entirely uninterestingly).

The historical analogy is far stronger than the apologetic analysis. What Weitz refuses to contemplate, is that the set of outcomes he dogmatically defends as "social progress" is a partisan agenda (the New England Utopia) masquerading as a universal value. What left-liberals see as unambiguous advance looks to everyone else like losing. As the Internet decentralizes media, the progressive narrative monopoly is coming apart in the hurricane, and nostalgic preaching for the old religion won't glue it back together. Weitz is right about one thing, though: there's no doubt political developments could be

blown in very ugly directions.

It's chicken (the edge of the cliff version).

Left-Liberals: *Stick with our vector for social development, or we'll all go over the edge*.

Mashed-Right: *There have been far too many concessions already …*

You have to swerve, Weitz pleads. Even if they do this time, they won't forever, and its already far less obvious that they will. Compared to what we're used to, that makes it a whole new world.

March 21, 2016

The Market from Hell

The supply side could be reasonably compared to a high-pressure fire-hose:

A new poll for YouGov of almost 15,000 people found that 60% would like to be an author. The news may come as a surprise to the bestselling and critically acclaimed novelist Sebastian Faulks, who this weekend expressed his wish to find a job, writing in the Spectator that he has "now spent almost a quarter of a century alone in a garret staring at a blank wall, and I think it has driven me a bit mad". […] … According to a survey carried out by Digital Book World earlier this year, almost a third of published authors make less than $500 (£350) a year from their writing.

Here's the demand sink they're feeding into:

> Who reads books? Hardly anyone. pic.twitter.com/v6xYwgTm4L
>
> — P. D. Mangan (@Mangan150) April 5, 2016

ADDED: Relevant musings of Albert Jay Nock.

April 6, 2016

WeSearchr

This is huge. It's what media following the grain of the Internet looks like (if only as a preliminary glimpse).

Here's how it works:

WeSearchr has a select group of editors that we call "Askers" who watch the news cycle and figure out what people want to know. […] If an Asker believes that there is enough interest in a question, they will create a "Bounty" as a reward for the answer to the question. The minimum amount of funding to trigger a Bounty is called a "reserve". […] Members of the WeSearchr community can browse the bounties and donate money to fund a bounty, like other crowdfunding sites. […] Once a Bounty hits its reserve, it is funded and WeSearchr will accept answers from people that have the answers to that question.

[…] WeSearchr will review the submissions and check them for veracity. […] If the submission fulfills the terms of the Bounty, WeSearchr will assign the reward and release the information to the Asker and assigned news outlets for distribution. […] 30 days after the story's release, WeSearchr pays the Bounty.
75% of the Bounty goes to the person(s) that deliver a solution.
10% goes to the Asker
15% goes to WeSearchr

So: A decentralized market place for journalistic research.

The conception alone crosses an honesty threshold. There is no longer any need for *meta-lies* about the essential character of contemporary journalism (as a political apparatus screened by an increasingly-ludicrous pretense to disinterested 'news' curation). All research is interested, and its incentives are now openly formalized. The result is a germinal assassination market for hidden things. It targets enemy secrets. The information warfare that media have always been ceases to be promoted as anything else.

For the first time in over a century, it is now possible to envisage journalists making an honest living (by fulfilling private research contracts). This type of transition only goes in one direction. A piece of the future just came into view.

May 26, 2016

The Global Faith

There's not much room for controversy:

When the United States was many separate states with a common defense and a common foreign policy, back when people said "The United States are" rather than "The United States is" there was absolutely no separation of Church and State, for each state had its own state religion, and the seminary of the state religion of Massachusetts, charged with promoting and enforcing the state religion, was Harvard.

After two centuries of ascent to hegemony, this world religion has unmistakably peaked. The fact everyone is now noticing it, as a definite, peculiar system of belief, attests to that. Accelerating catabolic process now ensues. Fragmentation won't be pretty, but it also won't be stopped.

July 13, 2016

Quote note (#270)

Taleb on the media short-circuit:

Social media allowed me to go direct to the public and bypass the press, an uberization if you will, as I skip the intermediary. I do not believe that members of the press knows their own interests very

well. I noticed that journalists try to be judged by other journalists and their community, not by their readers, unlike writers.

No one realizes they're in a death-bubble until it gets disintermediated from the Outside. We're going to be seeing ever more of that. (At the largest scale, the Cathedral concept was formulated to predict it.)

ADDED: A grimmer take on social media.

August 8, 2016

Net-Driven Collapse

Psychology is the canary in the Cathedral.

September 23, 2016

Recall

This isn't something XS has done before, but it seems necessary to do it now. Here (from October last year) is an anticipation of where this blog finds itself right now. Perhaps NRx was from the beginning part of the Cathedral funeral process.

Some serious adjustment is called for. An enemy that can suffer a defeat this stupendous clearly isn't a radically intimidating

adversary. We can already see beyond it. The conflict has moved on.

My current (uncertain) take: The regime analyzed by classical NRx has descended into a deeply morbid state. Things will get worse for it, perhaps catastrophically, more quickly than we yet imagine, in a cascade of collapse. All the trends that count against it are still strengthening, in many case exponentially. It would be an analytical error to remain fixated upon its corpse.

Demotism is, of course, undefeated (perhaps even temporarily reinforced). The Cathedral, however, appears mortally wounded. This year was — quite plausibly — its 1989.

ADDED: To be a little clearer, it isn't really 1989, it's 1517. The quasi-universal authority of a church died (as a result of techonomic media innovation, among other factors).

November 15, 2016

SECTION C - DEMOCRACY AND DEMOTISM

CHAPTER ONE - SYSTEMATIC FEATURES

The Red Pill

Morpheus*: I imagine that right now, you're feeling a bit like Alice. Hm? Tumbling down the rabbit hole?*
Neo*: You could say that.*
Morpheus*: I see it in your eyes. You have the look of a man who accepts what he sees because he is expecting to wake up. Ironically, that's not far from the truth. Do you believe in fate, Neo?*
Neo*: No.*
Morpheus*: Why not?*
Neo*: Because I don't like the idea that I'm not in control of my life.*
Morpheus*: I know exactly what you mean. Let me tell you why you're here. You're here because you know something. What you know you can't explain, but you feel it. You've felt it your entire life, that there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me. Do you know what I'm talking about?*

***Neo**: The Matrix.*
***Morpheus**: Do you want to know what it is?*
***Neo**: Yes.*
***Morpheus**: The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now, in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work… when you go to church… when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.*
***Neo**: What truth?*
***Morpheus**:* [leans in closer to Neo] *That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage. Born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind.*
[pause]
***Morpheus**: Unfortunately, no one can be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it for yourself.* [Opens a pillbox, empties the contents into his palms, and outstretches his hands] *This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill* [opens his right hand, to reveal a translucent blue pill], *the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill* [opens his left hand, revealing a similarly translucent red pill], *you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.* [Neo reaches for the red pill] *Remember: all I'm offering is the truth. Nothing more.*

— That's the Wachowski brothers version of Gnostic Platonism, and it gets everything almost exactly right. Plato's Allegory of the Cave (in Book VII of *The Republic*) tells precisely the same story, but with a cheaper cast, inferior special effects, and less drugs. It's not surprising that the Dark Enlightenment tends to stick with the re-make, as it goes Neo(reactionary).

The critical key to *gnosis* is the realization that the whole of your world is an *inside*, implying an Outside, and the radical possibility of escape. What had seemed to be unbounded reality is exposed as a container, triggering abrupt departure from a system of delusion. Everything else is merely the route taken to reach us, adapted to the ruins. The specifics of the story are constraints to be twisted free from, once their functions have been exhausted, as hooks, latching teeth, memetic replication circuitry, and camouflage dapplings. As long as there is an inside / outside difference effectively communicated, narrative details are incidental.

The Chinese version, perhaps originating with Zhuangzi, describes a frog in a well, who knows nothing of the Great Ocean (井底之蛙,不知大海). This simple fable is already fully adequate to the most exalted ambitions of mystical philosophy.

Putting things in boxes, or taking them out of boxes, is all of thought, as soon as the 'things' can themselves be treated as boxes. Categories and sets are boxes, so that even to say "an A is a B" is to perform an operation of *inclusion* or *insertion*, through which

'identity' is primordially applicable. *To be* is to be inside. Placing a species into (or 'under') a genus has unsurpassable cognitive originality, extending out to the furthest horizon of ontology (since a horizon is still a box). To contain, or not to contain, is the first and last intelligible relation. Boxes are basic.

Taking the red pill is climbing out of a box. By showing the cage, it already accomplishes a cognitive liberation, and thus provides a model for whatever practical escapology there is to follow. To know how to leave a cave, or a well, is already to know — abstractly — how to leave a world (and abstraction is nothing other than outsideness).

What is inescapable, unless through some precipitous self-enslavement, is the social obnoxiousness of Dark Enlightenment. Gnosis is ineliminably hierarchical, and at best patronizing (when not abrasively contemptuous), because a free mind cannot pretend to equality with a slave mind, regardless of the derision hurled at it on this account. As Brandon Smith remarks:

It is often said there only two kinds of people in this world: those who know, and those who don't. I would expand on this and say that there are actually three kinds of people: ***those who know, those who don't know, and those who don't care to know.*** *Members of the last group are the kind of people I would characterize as "sheeple."*

Smith's 'sheeple' are not merely ignorant, but actively self-deluding. By taking the blue pill, they have opted to reside in the prison of lies. It is at this point, however, that the pharmaceutical

metaphor switches from hook to obstacle, because there is no 'blue pill' or anything functionally equivalent *short of the entire Matrix itself* (which is to say, of course, *the Cathedral*).

A critical point of social and political analysis is reached here, and it is one that continues to evade definitive apprehension, due to its elusive subtleties. Between the hidden architect of the Matrix and the blue-pilled sheeple or "river of meat" there is no simple order of mastery, whether running in the obvious direction (from doctrinal elite to indoctrinated mass) or the democratic-perverse alternative (placing expertise in the service of popular ignorance and its vulgarities). The Matrix is both an object of 'genuine' popular attachment *and* an apparatus of systematic mind-control. It is most truly democratic when it most fully attains its climax state of soft-totalitarian mendacity. The propaganda machine is never less than a circus. What is demanded — what has always been demanded — is the lie.

Moldbug's most recent invocation of the red pill runs:

I think I've chosen my candidate for the Pill itself. And I'm going to stick with it. My Pill is:

America is a communist country.

What I like about this statement is that it's ambiguous. Specifically, it's an Empsonian ambiguity of the second or perhaps third type (I've never quite understood the difference). Embedded as it is in the mad tapestry of 20th-century history, AIACC can be

interpreted in countless ways.

All of these interpretations – unless concocted as an intentional, obviously idiotic strawman – are absolutely true. Sometimes they are obviously true, sometimes surprisingly true. They are always true. Because America is a communist country.

The truth is that America serves the people through the lie. That is the 'choice' represented by progressivism (= communism), installed in a highly-accomplished state, for over a century, as triumphant popular self-deception. The service provided — and demanded — *is* the deceit. If the people see through the lie, the resulting dissatisfaction will not stem from the fact they have been lied to, but from the revelation that *they have not been lied to well enough*. Could anything be clearer than that? The outbreaks of popular rage occur exactly at those moments when reality threatens to manifest itself — when the Matrix glitches. "We elected you to hide the truth from us," the people shriek, "so just do your goddamn job, and make reality disappear."

There is no red pill to save society. To imagine that there might be is to understand nothing.

December 18, 2013

Deals with the Devil

I'm assuming this wasn't intended as a Satanic argument for Monarchy, but it works as one:

Q: Why does the devil keep his deals?

A: As an immortal, he has an infinite time horizon of other deals he jeopardizes if he betrays any given deal. Therefore the opportunity cost of any betrayal is too high.

Q: What does that make politicians, then?

A: Lower in ethical reliability than the devil.

Even a demonic permanent government makes a better contractual partner than the most angelic temporary regime.

(Recalled by David Chapman).

August 6, 2014

The Problem of Democracy

Recent discussions (on Twitter, primarily) have convinced me of the need for a 'Neocameralism for Dummies' post, providing a succinct introduction to this genre of political theory. The importance of this is obvious if Neocameralism is conceived as the central, and defining pillar of Neoreaction. In preparation for this task, however, it is necessary to revisit the socio-historical diagnosis from which

Neocameralism emerged (in the work, of course, of Mencius Moldbug). That requires a brief prolegomenon addressing the NRx critique of democracy, focusing initially on its negative aspect. Neocameralism is introduced as a proposed solution to a problem. First, the problem.

Government is complicated. If this thesis seems implausible to you, it is probable that you will have great difficulties with everything to follow. It would take another (and quite different) post to address objections to this entire topic of discussion which take the approximate form "Government is easy, you just find the best man and put him in charge!" All social problems are easy if you can 'just' do the right thing. Infantile recommendations will always be with us.

There are two general lines of democratic apologetics. The first, and politically by far the strongest, is essentially religious. It too is best addressed by a post of its own, themed by Moldbug's 'Ultra-Calvinist Hypothesis'. For our purposes here we need only suggest that it is quite satisfactorily represented by Jacques Rousseau, and that its fundamental principal is popular sovereignty. From the NRx perspective, it is merely depraved. Only civilizational calamities can come from it.

The second line of apology is far more serious, theoretically engaging, and politically irrelevant. It understands democracy as a mechanism, tasked with the solemn responsibility of *controlling government*. Any effective control mechanism works by governing

behavior under the influence of feedback from actual performance. In biology, this is achieved by natural selection upon phenotypes. In science, it is achieved by the experimental testing of theory, supported by a culture of open criticism. In capitalist economics, it is achieved by market evaluation of products and services, providing feedback on business performance. According to systems-theoretical defenses of democracy, it works by sensitizing government to feedback from voters, who act as conductors of information from actual administrative performance. This is the sophisticated liberal theory of democracy. It explains why science, markets, and democracy are often grouped together within liberal ideologies. (Bio-Darwinism, naturally, is more safely neglected).

How could this beautiful political design possibly go wrong? Merely by asking this question, you have set out on the Neoreactionary path.

Moldbug's answer, and ours, begins by agreeing with the sophisticated liberal theory in its most abstract outlines. Democracy is indeed a system for the functional tuning of government, operating through electoral feedback, and predictably enhancing its specialized competence, as all reiterating experimentation-selection mechanisms do. Democratic political machines become increasingly good at what they do. The problem, however, is that their functional specialism is not at all identical with administrative capability. Rather, as they progressively learn, the feedback they receive trains

them in *mastery of public opinion*.

The long-circuit, assumed by liberal political theory, models the electorate as a reality-sensor, aggregating information about the effects of government policy, and relaying it back through opinion polls and elections, to select substitutable political regimes (organized as parties) that have demonstrated their effectiveness at optimizing social outcomes. The short-circuit, proposed by Moldbug, models the electorate as an object of indoctrination, subjected to an ever-more advanced process of opinion-formation through a self-organized, message-disciplined educational and media apparatus. The political party best adapted to this apparatus — called the 'inner party' by Moldbug — will dominate the democratic process. The outer party serves the formal cybernetic function demanded by liberal theory, by providing an electoral option, but it will achieve practical success only by accommodating itself to the apparatus of opinion-formation — perhaps modifying its recommendations in minor, and ultimately inconsequential ways. It is the system of opinion-formation (the 'Cathedral') that represents true sovereign authority within the democratic system, since it is the 'reality principle' which decides success or failure. The monotonic trend to short-circuit dominance is the degenerative process inherent to democracy.

If you want the government to listen to you, *then you have to expect it to tell you what to say*. That is the principal lesson of

'progressive' political history. The assertion of popular voice has led, by retrospective inevitability, to a specialized, super-competent political devotion to ventriloquism. The disaster, therefore, is two-fold. On the one hand, government competence in its primary responsibility — efficient governance — is systematically eroded, to be replaced by a facility at propaganda (in a process akin to the accumulation of junk DNA). As government is swallowed by messaging, residual administrative competences are maintained by a bureaucratic machine or 'permanent government', largely insulated from the increasingly senseless signals of democratic opinion, but still assimilated to the opinion-formation establishment by direct (extra-democratic) processes of cultivation. Lacking feedback from anything but its own experiments in mind-control, quality of government collapses.

Secondly, and even more calamitously from certain perspectives, culture is devastated by the politicization of opinion. Under a political dispensation in which opinion has no formal power, it is broadly free to develop in accordance with its own experiences, concerns, and curiosities. In a significant minority of cases, cultural achievements of enduring value result. Only in cases of extreme, provocative dissent will the government have any interest in what the people think. Once politicized, however, correct public opinion is a matter of central — indeed all-consuming — government attention. Ideologically installed as the foundation of political legitimacy, it

becomes the supreme object of political manipulation. Any thought is now dissent if it is not positively aligned with society's leading political direction. To think outside the Cathedral is to attack the government. Culture is destroyed.

To be a Neoreactionary is to see these twin eventualities starkly manifested in contemporary Western civilization. What democracy has not yet ruined, it is ruining. It is essentially destructive of both government and culture. It cannot indefinitely last.

The subsequent question: What could conceivably provide a solution? That is where Neocameralism is introduced.

ADDED: Absolutely not to be missed, from Nydwracu.

August 9, 2014

Irresponsibility

I've been picking on Nyan a lot recently, mostly in a positive way. Here's a little more:

> The Mandate of Heaven is the correct theory of legitimacy. Period.
>
> — Nyan Sandwich (@nyansandwich) November 1, 2014

This is perfect, and precise. It's something that needs to be said,

and it says a lot.

The Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming*, 天命) couples authority to responsibility. The responsibility of the Emperor, and the Dynasty, is no less comprehensive than its power, and is in fact ultimately coincidental with it. The foundation is cosmic. Plagues, earthquakes, and foreign invasions are all encompassed by it, as are the reciprocal strokes of good fortune. There is no possibility of any delegation that is not internal to the subject of *Tianming*, preserving its absolute responsibility. The selection of advisers and administrators is an exercise of authority, for which there can be no evasion of accountability *before heaven* (or fate). Rule succeeds or fails, survives or perishes, in its own name.

Is not this standard the key to the profound dismay that results from the contemplation of democracy? As popular politics evolves — or 'progresses', as it most certainly does — it tends to incarnate a self-conscious *strategy of irresponsibility* with ever more emphatic ideality. 'Passing the buck' becomes the whole thing. Government and opposition participate mutually in an economy of responsibility, in which 'blame' can be pooled, circulated, and displaced. The rhetorical practices regulating this economy become the entire art of politics.

An election is a festival or irresponsibility, in a double sense. It is a crescendo of rhetoric, oriented to the dialectical evasion of social ills, and it is a relinquishment of authority, into the hands of 'the people'

and — potentially — the opposition, separating the realization of governmental consequences from the deep core of the regime. To lose the Mandate of Heaven is to be erased from the future. To lose an election is a trivial penance, and even a tactical opportunity. (It is the prediction of this blog that as democracy advances further, calculated defeat will play an ever more significant role in its functioning.)

As NRx refuses to go to the polls tomorrow, its implicit political statement is merely: *Take some freaking responsibility*. This is all yours. Succeed, or disappear completely. The last thing we need is another opportunity for sharing.

ADDED: Don't vote. (Duh!)

ADDED: "Another reason not to vote is that it creates real despair among the small number of Democracy-shepherds."

November 3, 2014

Quote note (#176)

Hoppe:

A king owned the territory and could hand it on to his son, and thus tried to preserve its value. A democratic ruler was and is a temporary caretaker and thus tries to maximize current government income of all sorts at the expense of capital values, and thus wastes.

[…] Here are some of the consequences: during the monarchical age before World War I, government expenditure as a percent of GNP was rarely higher than 5%. Since then it has typically risen to around 50%. Prior to World War I, government employment was typically less than 3% of total employment. Since then it has increased to between 15 and 20%. The monarchical age was characterized by a commodity money (gold) and the purchasing power of money gradually increased. In contrast, the democratic age is the age of paper money whose purchasing power has permanently decreased. […] Kings went deeper and deeper into debt, but at least during peacetime they typically reduced their debt load. During the democratic era government debt has increased in war and in peace to incredible heights. Real interest rates during the monarchical age had gradually fallen to somewhere around
2½%. Since then, real interest rates (nominal rates adjusted for inflation) have risen to somewhere around 5% — equal to 15th-century rates. Legislation virtually did not exist until the end of the 19th century. Today, in a single year, tens of thousands of laws and regulations are passed. Savings rates are declining instead of increasing with increasing incomes, and indicators of family disintegration and crime are moving constantly upward.

All familiar, to a sedative degree, to those here, of course. Except, crucially, the interest rate stuff — which is remarkably dissonant with our contemporary situation. Since Hoppe's expectation — based on

a long-term, fairly consistent trend — is the rational one, it suggests that the present collapse of interest rates is intriguingly anomalous. Is there a sharp, big-picture analysis of the phenomenon out there somewhere?

> Interest rates go down as you approach the speed of light.
> — Ossipago (@ad_proelium) July 31, 2015

July 31, 2015

Apophatic Politics

'Dark Enlightenment' describes a form of government as well as 'Enlightenment' does, which is to say: it doesn't at all. On those grounds alone, George Dvorsky's inclusion of DE among twelve possible "Futuristic Forms of Government That Could One Day Rule the World" is profoundly misguided. This is not to say the list is entirely without interest.

Its greatest value lies in the abundance of mutually inconsistent political futures, few if any of which will happen. It therefore provides the opportunity for negative thoughts, and more particularly for systematic negative idealization. Which futures are most deserving of prevention?

This blog has no doubt. The epitome of political disaster occupies fourth place in Dvorsky's list (among a number of other hideous outcomes): Democratic World Government.

Dvorsky seems to quite like it:

*We may very well be on our way to achieving the **Star Trek**-like vision of a global-scale liberal democracy — one capable of ending nuclear proliferation, ensuring global security, intervening to end genocide, defending human rights, and putting a stop to human-caused climate change.*

There cannot be a definitive Dark Enlightenment government, but it is certainly possible to envisage a form of government which instantiates the ultimate object of DE critique: a universal demotist regime, from which there could be no escape. As a break from preoccupations with a positive neoreactionary governmental ideal, prone — if not destined — to both intense controversy and deep obscurity, it is energizing to explore the *via negativa*. Democratic World Government need not necessarily exist. That is already to place NRx in a position of luxurious success, when compared to fraught speculations about alternatives to the present political disaster. Whatever obstructs the DWG's path to existence is on our side. Such features of specific negative teleology, so easily overlooked from a positive perspective, are highlighted for affirmation and reinforcement. Anything that stands in the DWG's way is worth defending.

A rough list of these precious (negative-teleological) obstacles is already familiar. Extant structures of geopolitical fragmentation, population diversity, cultural incongruities, borders, occulted social networks, intractable techno-economic processes, administrative malfunctions, stubborn traditional variations, sheer complexities of space, and no doubt much else beside, all contribute their frictional grit. A ruined Tower of Babel looms into view on the *via negativa*, and no intact edifice has ever looked more glorious.

Carrying NRx perilously close to the brink of euphoria is the intimation that the actually-existing Cathedral has Democratic World Government as its only conceivable equilibrium state. A unification of the planet under its auspices is the sole future that makes sense for it. If it is denied this 'manifest destiny' it will die — as its intrinsic tendency to expansionary proselytization makes evident, unambiguously. The Cathedral needs the whole of the earth, merely to survive. On the *via negativa* the master of our socio-politically devastated world seems like a radically mortal thing.

ADDED: Hoppe touching upon One World Government. Also:

I have been called an extremist, a reactionary, a revisionist, an elitist, a supremacist, a racist, a homophobe, an anti-Semite, a right-winger, a theocrat, a godless cynic, a fascist and, of course, a must for every German, a Nazi. So, it should be expected that I have a foible for politically "incorrect" sites that every "modern," "decent," "civilized," "tolerant," and "enlightened" man is supposed to ignore

and avoid.

June 16, 2014

Non-Democracy

Eli Dourado's piece at *The Umlaut* on 'What the Neoreaction Doesn't Understand about Democracy' has already accumulated a mass of (to this blog) telling criticism in its comment thread, plus a full-length critique by Henry Dampier. The tone of the discussion has been encouraging, and the grounds proposed by Dourado *upon which democracy is asked to defend itself* (government incontinence and rampant redistributionism) is doubly so. Based on this (rather odd) research paper, the conclusion is that 'non-democracies' are at least as messed up as democracies on the indicators that matter to the economic right.

From the perspective of *Outside in*, the central problem with this line of argument is the assumption that 'Neoreaction' can be aligned with the grotesquely aggregated category of 'non-democracy'. (Although, this is of course how things will look from a default commitment to democratic normality.) The Neoreactionary critique is in fact directed at *demotic government*, a regime class that includes democracy, authoritarian populism, and socialist 'people's republics'. The reliable signature of this class is that its members

legitimate themselves through democracy, however their various levels of democracy are gauged by social scientific analysis. North Korea self-identifies as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (and to a formalist, this is of ineliminable significance). Since it is the *principle of democratic legitimation* that NRx denounces, its models are restricted to a far more compact class than 'non-democracies' — namely, to non-demotic states: with absolute monarchies and colonial regimes as the purest historical examples, supplemented by restricted-franchise commercial republics (17-18th century United Provinces and United Kingdom*), (still virtual) Joint-Stock Republics, and demotically-compromised Confucian Autocracies, plus rightist military juntas (since Pinochet cannot reasonably be excluded). As soon as regimes of such types are statistically amalgamated with socialist / populist dictatorships, the theoretical chaos is irredeemable.

Furthermore, and even more crucially, main-current Neoreaction does not argue for 'non-democracy' over democracy, but for Exit over Voice. It does not expect some governmental magic from 'non-democracies' (except on its — admittedly wide — theoretically incoherent fringes). Effective government requires *non-demotic control*, resulting from (apolitical) selection pressure. The identification of the state with the corporate institution is directed to the fact that businesses work when they can be bankrupted. The attraction of the 'dictatorial' CEO is a twin-product of demotic

desensitization and competitive hyper-sensitization. The reason to free the 'monarch' from the voice of the people is to lock him into undistracted compliance with the Outside.

Approaching his conclusion, Dourado suggests:

Of course, Mulligan et al. also provide some limited ammunition for the neoreaction. That nondemocracies have essentially the same social and economic policies as democracies undercuts a key tenet of the demotist religion: that formal (and equal) voice is an important channel by which policies come to reflect the will of the people. If nondemocracies have many of the same policies, then it is clear that democracy is not necessary to implement the will of the people on some policy issues, at least.

This is, of course, completely upside down as far as NRx is concerned. The demotic sensitivity of 'non-democracies' — far from being a point in their favor — is the factor that exposes this category in all of its radical and theoretically-unusable bogosity. The only appeal of 'non-democracy' is immunity to corruption through demotic pressure. Dictatorial populism can be expected to be even more distant from the principles of Neoreactionary government than democracy, because its comparative efficiency at representing a coherent 'popular will' digs it even faster and deeper into ruin. It is administrative action in the name of the people that is deplored.

If Dourado were saying *non-demotic government is simply something you can never have*, then it is an argument that at least

addresses NRx in a way that makes sense. The same cannot be said about the 'debate' as it yet exists.

* My description of Hannoverian England as a 'commerical republic' can be attributed to an anti-Jacobite tic.

ADDED: Meta-reaction. (ED seems not to see any deep connection between propertarian and Exit-based models of governance, which is at least a little thoughtless. Property is defined by an effective right to free disposal, making it equivalent to an Exit-option on its current instantiation. On these grounds, there is no difference between my definition of the principal Neoreaction governance criterion and Dampier's, except for variation of emphasis.)

ADDED: Some interesting comments from Eli's Neoreactionary phase (dug up by Blogospheroid).

August 21, 2014

Enthusiasm

This is a reliable guide to approved thinking within China's Communist Party:

Blindly copying Western-style democracy can only bring disaster, an influential Chinese Communist Party journal wrote in its latest edition following more than a week of pro-democracy protests in

Hong Kong.
Citing enduring violence and turmoil in countries like Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq and Libya, which have tried to adopt such a system of government, the fortnightly magazine Qiushi said that Western democracy did not suit all countries.
"The West always brags that its own democracy is a 'universal value', and denies there is any other form of democracy," said Qiushi, which means "seeking truth", in the issue distributed over the weekend.
"Western democracy has innate internal flaws and certainly is not a 'universal value'; its blind copying can only lead to disaster," Qiushi added.

It shouldn't be disappointing to hear such pious invocations of an "other form of democracy", but only coldly confirming of the worst. It's all clearly stated.

In the present global order, the Cathedral has no serious external enemies, but only awkward students, who refuse to learn the one and only imaginable lesson in exactly the way, and at exactly the speed, expected of them. The idea that democracy as such, and intrinsically, is fundamentally inconsistent with sustainable social order (as explained by Hoppe, acknowledged by Thiel, and thematized by Moldbug), finds no official representation, anywhere in the world. Even the North Koreans think they're democrats. At the ideological level, the calamity has already happened, universally.

NRx bores itself by repeating this. It's a simple and — to 'us' —

apparently obvious thing. Doubtless it's correct that mechanical repetition adds vanishingly little at this point, although there's probably still the need for a succinct statement of the proposition, tightly encapsulated and incandescently lucid, for incessant future reference.

What cannot be long-buried beneath the ennui is the extreme dissident radicality of the counter-revolutionary thesis. To depart from the democratic or evangelical-egalitarian (i.e. Jacobin) faith remains the ultimate heresy against teleo-political modernity. To suggest, even, that there is a *question of democracy* is countenanced by effectively no one, anywhere. In China, as the narrative goes, the populace is still to be convinced the country is 'ready yet' for accelerated democratization (on the Cathedral model — the only one). Look at this, then this, and synthesize. Religious 'hold outs' are all that remain. Once **the** faith moves people, the direction has already been decided — everyone is agreed on that. (OK, not these guys, yet.)

If this topic becomes tedious, it's all over. Democratization isn't boring to them. It's the most exciting thing in the world, and they're not going to stop doing it.

Our work here has scarcely begun.

Hail Hydra!



October 7, 2014

Dynasty

A persuasive argument for why the Chinese authorities are looking forward to Hillary-v-Jeb in 2016:

The ruling Chinese Communist Party is deeply sensitive to charges that it is non-democratic and the playground of "princelings" — a pejorative term for the class of Chinese business tycoons and political power players who trace their lineages to Communist veterans. Nothing helps to blunt that charge as much as the idea that American democracy is similarly corrupt. "The Chinese media, especially the Party media, has been using American elections as a way to discredit democracy," says Kecheng Fang, a former reporter for the ***Southern Weekly*** *in Guangzhou who now researches Chinese media at the University of Pennsylvania. "I think much of Chinese media has been referring to this election as Clinton 2.0 versus Bush*

3.0, so it's a very trendy topic." As Weihua Chen, chief Washington correspondent for the ***China Daily****, the government's largest English-language newspaper, put it to me in an interview: "You guys always talk about being the greatest democracy, but now you have a democracy run by two families for more than a decade?"*

Scrape down past the popcorn topsoil, and it's a depressing story. Democratic hegemony is so solidly entrenched as a benchmark of global regime legitimacy, that even China resorts to pointing the finger and taunting: *call that a real democracy*. The *Zeitgeist* hasn't remotely begun to turn, and the world's most powerful autocracies are still deferring to it submissively, even as they beg for some tolerance in respect to timing.

If NRx has one serious task — and in fact, an overwhelmingly intimidating one — it is to contribute to the establishment of *an alternative* ***principle*** *of political legitimation*. To imagine that significant steps had yet been taken in this regard would be to court extreme self-delusion. The road ahead is hard.

July 21, 2015

Informality and its Discontents

China's problem with poorly formalized power:

As an old-style Leninist party in a modern world, the CCP is

confronted by two major challenges: first, how to maintain "ideological discipline" among its almost 89 million members in a globalized world awash with money, international travel, electronically transmitted information, and heretical ideas. Second, how to cleanse itself of its chronic corruption, a blight that Xi has himself described as "a matter of life and death." […] The primary reason the Party is so susceptible to graft is that ***while officials are poorly paid, they do control valuable national assets****. So, for example, when property development deals come together involving real estate (all land belongs to the government) and banking (all the major banks also belong to the government), officials vetting the deals find themselves in tempting positions to supplement their paltry salaries by accepting bribes or covertly raking off a percentage of the action.* (XS emphasis.)

(The article as a whole is ideologically pedestrian.)

Obscure the degree to which government is a business, and it will find a way to make itself one, around the back (with its executives privatizing sovereign property on an *ad hoc*, chaotic basis). Exhortations (from Sun Yat-sen, repeated by Mao Zedong) to "Serve the People!" are no substitute for sound administrative engineering, of a kind that rationally aligns incentives, and lucidly recognizes the sole consistent function of government — maximization of sovereign property value. The pretense of altruistic government and the reality of rampant corruption are *exactly the same thing*, seen from two

different sides. The illusion of a public sphere is the root of the social sickness.

The gist of Orville Schell's analysis is that China has deviated disturbingly from a functional Western model it would be better advised to return to. On the contrary, it is China's continued (profound) submission to a Western demotist framework of administrative legitimation that makes its problems so intractable. A government devoted to serving the people is radically corrupt by essence. Government properly tends the national estate, as the agent of its owners. Open, clear, and unapologetic admission of that basic principle seems no closer in the East than the West.

ADDED: "Russian corruption is the new Soviet Communism." … and the old Soviet Communism, and the older universal Jacobinism, and everything spawned from it. Corruption is what demotism is, rather than what it looks like to itself in the mirror.

April 13, 2016

One Step at a Time

The bad news: Rolling back democracy is really hard. (It's a stimulating pursuit nevertheless.) What are the chances of this happening before this? Not high, in my estimation.

The good news: The 'task' of spruiking evangelical

democratization is supported by the historical tide, and has already reached a quite remarkably level of maturity. If people are looking for a near-term goal, this surely gets jostled to the front of the queue. It's not hard to foresee a time, only a few years out, when the very idea of pushing the Cathedral on politically 'under-developed' societies will look like sabotage pure and simple. This is already how much of the world sees it (including all honest observers).

Looking back, the 'Arab Spring' will be seen as the decisive moment when democracy promotion became indistinguishable from ruinous coercion. 'Sprung' societies are devastated. They are triumphalist democracy's Russian Winter. Once the enemy's advance has ground entirely to a halt, the push back can steadily, relentlessly begin.

June 12, 2013

Scandalicious

Who could have imagined that Obama's second term would prove so bullish for popcorn sales? There's a moment of pressure-cooker catastrophe beyond which the very idea of 'keeping a lid on things' becomes hysterically comical. The lid isn't even in the kitchen, it's blasted through three stories of apartment ceilings and compromised the structural integrity of an entire housing block. The

media has no choice but to join the feeding-frenzy — under scandal-max conditions that would look ridiculous — and besides, they've been scandalized.

Unlike euphoric conservatives, still less ecstatic Republicans, neoreactionaries are motivated to stay calm and focused. Runaway scandal meltdown only furthers Dark Enlightenment when it overspills party-political point-scoring to corrode the foundations of *the regime*.

When government is understood realistically, as a complex ideologically-saturated institution distinct from the superficial vicissitudes of electoral politics, it is revealed as an essentially deep-partisan project (the Cathedral). The government is not commanded by progressives, it *is* progressive. It's not 'us', it's 'who, whom'. Once this is exposed in detail, and lucidly comprehended, the neoreactionary case has been made in its entirety.

That the Cathedral is indistinguishable from radical democratization does not at all imply that it is democratically answerable, through electoral mechanisms. As its project of spreading the religion of democracy to the whole world enters the phase of scandal-prone dementia, exhibited equally in both domestic and international affairs, two features become blatant (= scandalous)

(1) Mature democracies outgrow the last vestiges of electoral control (because the retarded masses can't be trusted to vote for

more democracy always and everywhere, they require structural ‘guidance’ by those enlightened people and institutions who know how best to empower them).
(2) Since eschatological dreams do not convert into practical policy, escalating dysfunction drowns-out coherent purpose, resulting eventually in fanatically-motivated total disorder (because doing what can’t possibly work is an unconditional imperative). It’s consummate deontology made visible. Good intentions float sanctimoniously above the ruins.

The Cathedral is completing its self-fabrication as an autonomized, morally-frenzied lunatic, extensively and intensively paperclipping the world for democracy, and thus destroying it in order to save us. As scandal erupts from everything it touches, this fundamental sociopolitical reality is becoming ever more difficult not to see.

ADDED: Some (disappointing) Koolaid-drinking from Richard Fernandez: “That is probably the single most disturbing thing about these scandals. The Valkyr-fueled rage has undermined the political mechanisms and trashed the processes through which persons of disparate political persuasions of the nation are supposed to come to an understanding.” — The obvious problem with this? There’s only ever been one ‘understanding’ you’re permitted to come to, and that’s progression to the left.

May 16, 2013

Obamanation …

… isn't an insulting name for Obama, or even for what he has 'wrought'. It's a name for America, and thus for the leading spirit (or *Zeitgeist*) of the world. A country where support for a Harvard Law presidency 'bottoms out' (repeatedly) at something above 40% knows what it wants — and is getting it (good and hard). Blaming Obama for any of this is like blaming pustules for the bubonic plague.

The world deserves Obama almost as much as America does, and in many cases, even more. If the Cathedral is basically to be applauded — and who doesn't believe that? — there's every reason to mainline it, by putting the authentic voice of the academy in power. As the chrysalis-husk of a universal project, America is duty bound to abolish itself as a particular nation. If it defers to its own 'propositional' ideals, how could it not? There are even chunks of the Tea Party who kinda sorta felt it was the right thing to do. The conservative establishment certainly did, including the Republican campaign machines of the two last presidential elections. The Idea necessitates blood sacrifice, which Obamanation consummates.

However neoreaction makes sense of itself, it signals what it is through a dismissal of partisan vulgarity. Anybody who thinks the

GoP has the key even to the outhouse is decidedly not 'one of us'. Like the tingle-crotched devotees of the One, we understand that Obama is a destiny, and even an incarnation of *logos*. What he symbolizes has been awaited for a long time. His personal vacuity and administrative incompetence do not detract, in the slightest, from that. Through the fantasy that he reduces to (with only insignificant remainder), the Cathedral announces itself purely at last. Attitudinal correctness is the only authority to be recognized in the end.

By voiding governance from its summit, 'Obama' makes the neoreactionary case. He shows that government is to be found elsewhere, in the machinery of practical elitism, and that — there too — symbolic gestures have almost entirely supplanted functional competence. Government, even *real government*, is no longer expected to work. All that is required is that it can be morally legitimated, down to its most minute corpuscle, so that its failures are clearly seen — which is to say *promoted* — as the fault of something other than itself.

Insofar as retrograde pieces of America insist upon being themselves, as if untouched by the Idea, they are betrayed (by the 'media') as *unworthy of their government*, and justly suffering for their sins. Carnal privilege blinds them to what they should joyfully give up. To not *believe* in government — as the radiant sign of the collective — is a fallen state, from which the Obamanation extends a promise of redemption. By losing everything, with the help of

government, one enters into the Kingdom.

The Obamanation is not what Obama has done (an intrinsically ridiculous construction). It's what *chose Obama*, as its symbol. It is the virtual evacuation of the world into America, and the complementary evacuation of specifically American power from the world. This is the phase of historical progression in which neoreaction *necessarily* emerges, its diagnoses dramatized by everything that now occurs, undisguised.

For that we are truly grateful, intrinsically, which is to say, in our very existence as the channel for something else. Conservatives will continue to find that hard to understand.

Consider this *Instapundit* visual joke, just for a moment:



The 'Bush' angle sounds partisan, and thus embarrassingly

knuckle-draggy to brandy-sipping sophisticates of the Outer right, but that judgment might be over-hasty. Perhaps partisanship itself is swallowed up into the lampoon. In any case, it still makes me laugh, due mostly to the tacit understanding that "World War III" is what Obama *is for*.

Of course, when you elect the pure totem of the Cathedral to the world's highest office, you're really — or consequentially — calling for the cleansing of the earth in the fires of hell. It requires only the most elementary comprehension of Occidental religious history to understand that.

Spiritual purity, and damn the consequences, that's the Obamanation (and, by the way, you're a racist). It's the bloody ruination of world order in the name of moral fanaticism, eclipsing all strategic realism through its wishful thinking and associated, narrow political maneuvers, before blundering into the present stage of terminal, incendiary, paralysis.

Who could have imagined that the world going to shit would be so bizarrely entertaining?

ADDED: Breaking point?

September 2, 2013

Democracy is Doomed

Even UK Cathedral mouthpiece *The Economist* seems to be getting the message that democracy is cooked. While careful to code the most sensitive perceptions, it givers every indication of recognizing that democracy can't be transplanted beyond a dying ethnic core, that it relentlessly collapses time-horizons, and that it systematically selects for demagogic leaders (among numerous other problems). The Chinese model, despite its manifold imperfections, works far better.

No worries though — *The Economist* has some solutions. All democracies have to do is practice government self-restraint, reverse the growth of the state, and suppress majoritarianism, and everything will turn around for them. In other words, if democracy could just stop being democracy, it would have a future. (It can't, and it doesn't.)

When democratic societies were far less deeply degenerate, they degenerated. Now they've become social wastelands of super-entitled dependency, led by professional pop-star liars, the idea that they have the cultural resources to reverse their morbid course is pure comedy.

It's all going down. (Learn Mandarin.)

ADDED: The new cannibals.

ADDED: More neo-cannibalism (pass the popcorn). As the media-

grievance complex pushes everything to hair-trigger hyper-criticality, it just takes two syllables to seriously mess with your life.

ADDED: David Mamet muses on "the current position of Western democracy wending its way back to the sea. … If before the big bang there was nothing, and if all energy since then is expended in the manner best suited to return the world to that state, then all seemingly random permutations of energy dispersal must be attempts to accelerate the return to chaos."

February 28, 2014

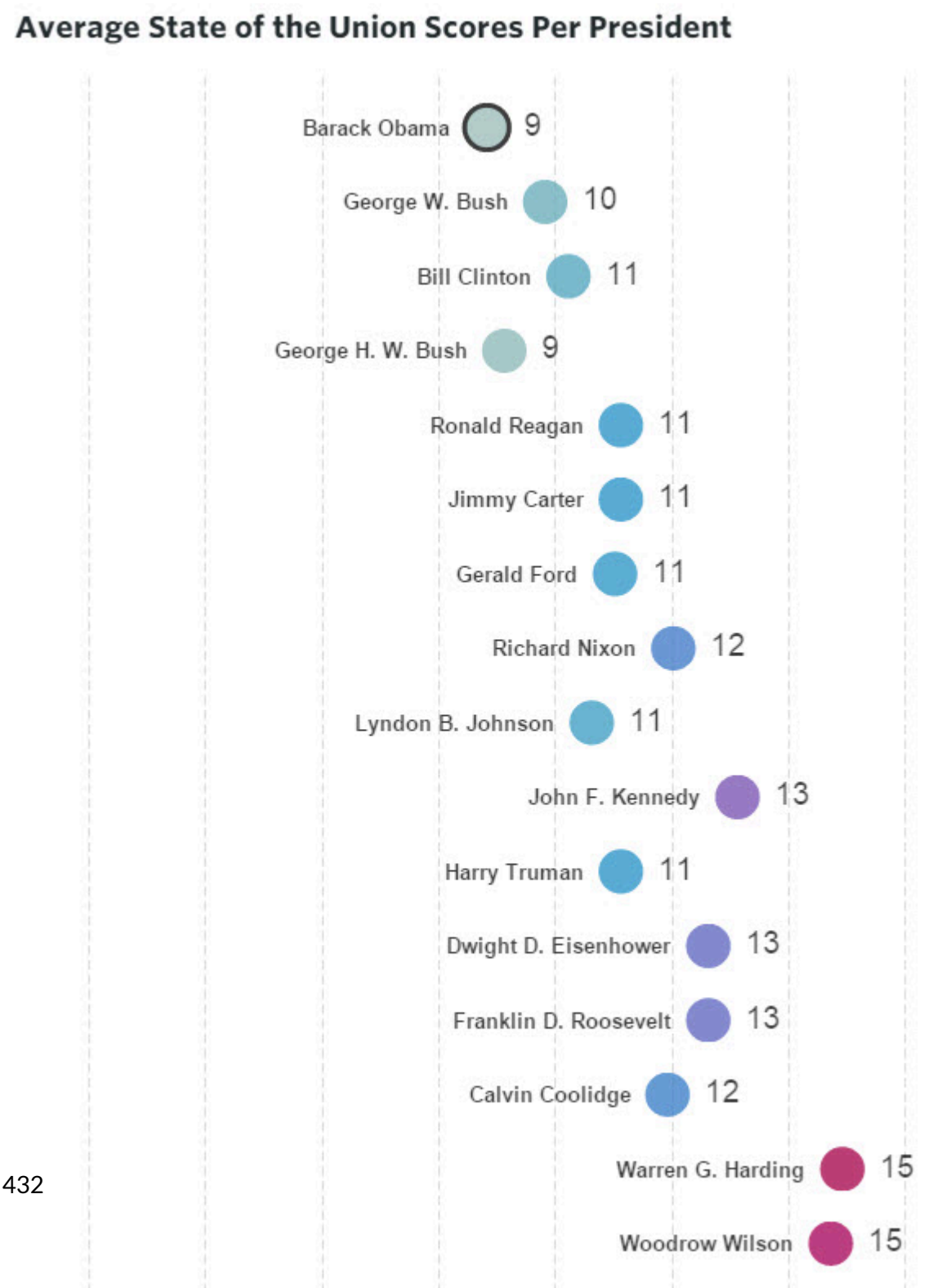
1930s Reloaded

The inherent destiny of democracy is fascism. That's the principal reason to despise it, rather than any cause for celebration.

Does anyone seriously doubt the West is going to die ugly?

January 12, 2015

Idiocracy


Average State of the Union Scores Per President
Barack Obama 9
George W. Bush 10
Bill Clinton 11
George H. W. Bush 9
Ronald Reagan 11
Jimmy Carter 11
Gerald Ford 11
Richard Nixon 12
Lyndon B. Johnson 11
John F. Kennedy 13
Harry Truman 11
Dwight D. Eisenhower 13
Franklin D. Roosevelt 13
Calvin Coolidge 12
Warren G. Harding 15
Woodrow Wilson 15

(The metric there is American school grade levels.)

(Via (Via))

But don't worry:

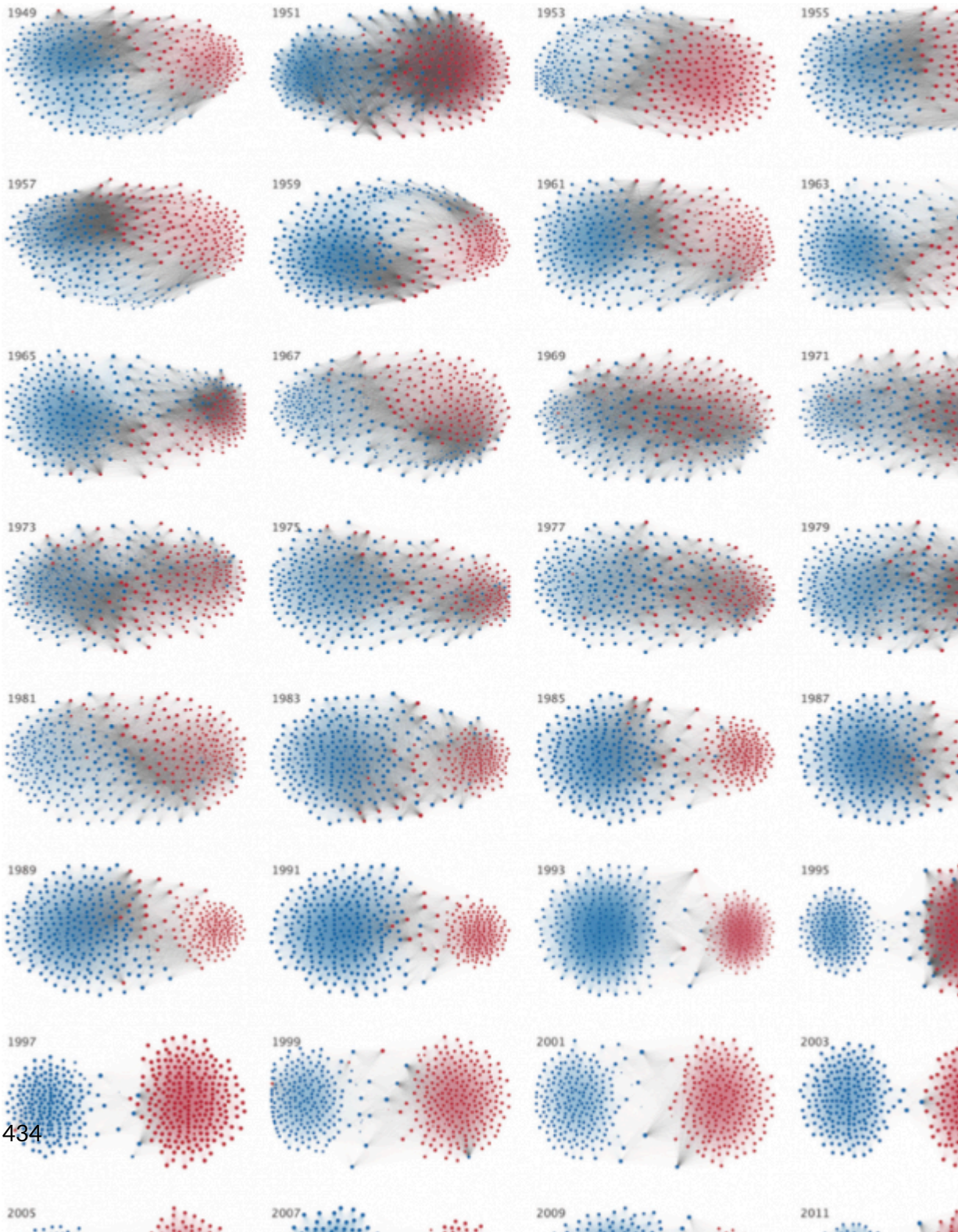
"It's tempting to read this as a dumbing down of the bully pulpit," [former Clinton speechwriter Jeff] Shesol said. "But it's actually a sign of democratization. In the early Republic, presidents could assume that they were speaking to audiences made up mostly of men like themselves: educated, civic-minded landowners. These, of course, were the only Americans with the right to vote. But over time, the franchise expanded and presidential appeals had to reach a broader audience."

It just looks like escalating cretinization. Really it's Democracy®! Yay!

January 22, 2015

Polarization

American partisan polarization, 1949-2011:


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2011

(Via.)

From the paper: “We find that despite short-term fluctuations, partisanship or non-cooperation in the U.S. Congress has been increasing exponentially for over 60 years with no sign of abating or reversing.”

April 25, 2015

The Polarizer

Considered solely in its basic cybernetic function, as a bi-polar homeostat, the power of American democracy is extraordinary. Binary oscillation is what it needs to work, so that is what it produces, absorbing all variation into its structured contest. Animal totems almost insultingly attest to the mobilization of archaic tribal instinct, and to the implicit meaninglessness of the one difference it permits. There is nothing, it seems, that can escape it:

Perhaps it is fair to say that it is now impossible to commit a simple murder or even an outrage as an individual act. It’s all imbued with meaning, almost as if the conflict between the cops and the perps were overshadowed by a far larger fight: Right versus Left in America.

There’s an unmistakable trend to intensification (more here).

Does that strengthen the mechanism, or steer it into crisis?

A social *controlled fission* device of this scale and complexity is unprecedented in history. It began as an experiment, and is still undergoing dynamic evolution. How stable is the stabilizer? It's unlikely that anybody understands it well enough to do better than guess.

December 3, 2015

King Mob

There's quite definitely a technical problem with banning public street protest (i.e. mobs). Even a riotous mob is a vague concept, reliant upon discretionary police judgment on occasions. But is the criminalization of public protest also a problem of principal?

Strangely, most libertarians seem to think the right to free-association extends automatically to mob formation. This presupposes that a mob is not inherently an act of aggression, existing solely to intimidate, and in fact — strictly speaking — an instance of terrorism. It is obvious why the Left should like the mob. It self-identifies as the articulate representative of the mob. Far more obscure is why anyone from a liberal tradition, let alone further to the right, should concur in this appreciation.

Free expression hardly requires physical aggregation in public

places, with near-inevitable expression of a potential for violence. It is not difficult to see that the basic historical role of the mob has been to advance demands, backed by implicit threat. Between a mob, a riotous mob, and a revolutionary mob, there are differences of degree rather than of kind. Even the strongest supporter of the principle of 'voice' should see zero additional value in its physical concentration. Resonance and group emotion undermine a statement, rather than reinforcing it, unless the 'statement' is collectively directed anger (which is to say once again, inherently Leftist).

Mobs are no doubt almost impossible to effectively criminalize. That does not at all mean one is compelled to like them, or acknowledge their legitimacy. Their existence is an intrinsic threat to both liberty *and* authority.

Perhaps laws against public indecency could be applied to politics in the street? In any case, it is past time for everyone to the right of the Left to lucidly despise it.

August 14, 2014

Rule Britannia

This blog has zero confidence in ethno-nationalist street-fighting to achieve anything beyond an even more deeply vulgarized demotism,

as inchoate mob impulses erupt under demagogic direction. So we consider the ‘decision‘ by Tommy Robinson to step back from the hooligan counter-barbarism of the EDL to be a defeat only for those who misguidedly think crypto-fascist politics might have the key to the out-house, along with those who find a crypto-fascist enemy convenient.

Politics in the streets is the primary indication of de-civilization in the modern age, and nothing could ever make it worthy of ultra-right support. Since street politics can occur only under government sanction — which is to say in the absence of grape-shot — any claim it might make to oppositional authenticity is wholly bogus. A right-wing riot is an absurdity.

The story here has a genuinely important angle, however. Robinson’s conversion to “better, democratic ideas” followed upon a carefully-crafted diplomatic exercise by Britain’s state broadcaster, which arranged for him to meet with Muslim ‘representatives’ — under the supervision of the Quilliam Foundation — in order to learn how nice and reasonable they are.

In other words, the BBC seems to have acknowledged its responsibility as the country’s effective government to directly settle the few remaining awkward ideological misalignments among the people. Neoreactionaries have learned that any democratic regime is really governed by its least democratic elements, and the more fanatical its democratization, the less democracy has to do with

its rule. As with any Popular Protectorate under advanced democratic conditions, therefore, elections for the governing BBC Trust are not under consideration — because democracy is too important to throw like chum amongst the people (except of course in Hong Kong).

(Thanks to ZD for the pointer.)

November 1, 2013

Quote note (#232)

O Great Powers of the Abyss, please let this happen:

Following their apparently delusional belief in the "success" of Tuesday night's violent protests, anti-Trump groups are plotting "Democracy Spring" threatening "drama in Washington" with the "largest civil disobedience action of the century." The operation, backed by Soros-funded MoveOn.org among others, warns on its website that ***"We will demand that Congress listen to the People and take immediate action to save our democracy. And we won't leave until they do – or until they send thousands of us to jail."***

Here's a cop-perspective on the recent episode of street-level democracy activism. There's more. (Via.)

I was slapped around a lot on Twitter recently by the usual Alt-Right mob for expressing the inflexible opinion that right-wing

rioting — and political violence in general — is strategically retarded. So I have to assume now, out of attributed consistency, that my sparring partners at that juncture are considerably less amused than I am about the prospect of left-wing rioting. Rioting *for democracy* is, of course, better still. Eventually, violent social disorder and democracy begin to look like the same phenomenon, differentiated only by speed (or 'spontaneity'). Then our grim work is done.

March 17, 2016

Twitter cuts (#68)

> @Aurini @realDonaldTrump I'm starting to wonder if there will be massive efforts to assault White voters on election day
>
> — reality (@TonySandos) June 3, 2016

The Outer Right provides the formal critique of democracy. It will be the Left, though, that graphically closes the curtain on it.

The defense of democracy in political theory is that it offers an alternative to violence as a mechanism for regime change. How's that working out?

The democratic principle: *Violence is only illegitimate when it is employed to resist leftward progression*. By November, the only

people still buying into that will be the mobilized forces of the Cathedral regime.

June 3, 2016

Days of Rage

An instant Twitter-format classic, by David Hines, on the Leftist political violence to come. Storified here.

Among the critical points:

*Righties tell themselves that *of course* they'd win a war against Lefties. Tactical Deathbeast vs. Pajama Boy? No contest. … Why, Righties have thought about what an effective domestic insurrection would look like. Righties have written books and manifestos! … It's horseshit. … The truth: Left is a lot more organized & prepared for violence than Right is, and has the advantage of a mainstream more supportive of it.*

ADDED: Spandrell's take.

January 16, 2017

CHAPTER TWO - ECONOMIC DEGENERACY

Quote notes (#34)

Words of wisdom from Obama (via):

The fact that we are here today to debate raising America's debt limit is a sign of leadership failure. It is a sign that the U.S. Government can't pay its own bills. It is a sign that we now depend on ongoing financial assistance from foreign countries to finance our Government's reckless fiscal policies. … Increasing America's debt weakens us domestically and internationally. Leadership means that "the buck stops here." Instead, Washington is shifting the burden of bad choices today onto the backs of our children and grandchildren. America has a debt problem and a failure of leadership. Americans deserve better.

September 28, 2013

Liberality for Losers

Machiavelli on Obamacare:

… any one wishing to maintain among men the name of liberal is obliged to avoid no attribute of magnificence; so that a prince thus inclined will consume in such acts all his property, and will be compelled in the end, if he wish to maintain the name of liberal, to unduly weigh down his people, and tax them, and do everything he can to get money. This will soon make him odious to his subjects, and becoming poor he will be little valued by any one; thus, with his liberality, having offended many and rewarded few, he is affected by the very first trouble and imperilled by whatever may be the first danger; recognizing this himself, and wishing to draw back from it, he runs at once into the reproach of being miserly.

[…] Either you are a prince in fact, or in a way to become one. In the first case this liberality is dangerous, in the second it is very necessary to be considered liberal … […] And there is nothing wastes so rapidly as liberality, for even whilst you exercise it you lose the power to do so, and so become either poor or despised, or else, in avoiding poverty, rapacious and hated. And a prince should guard himself, above all things, against being despised and hated; and liberality leads you to both. Therefore it is wiser to have a reputation for meanness which brings reproach without hatred, than to be compelled through seeking a reputation for liberality to incur a name

for rapacity which begets reproach with hatred.

ADDED: Some racist liberality math from Charlie Martin.

December 6, 2013

Parasites

I try not to get spittle-flecked about the Boomers, but …

(Thanks to Bryce for the link.)

June 23, 2014

De-Dynamization

If you want to break an economy, democracy is the solution you're looking for. The crucial reference is to this paper (via Cowan), dedicated to the *The $42 Trillion Question: Will Rapid Growth in China and India Persist?* The economic consequences of socio-political 'progress' are spelled out about as clearly as anyone could want:

… nearly every country that experienced a large democratic transition after a period of above-average growth (more than the cross-country average of 2 percent) experienced a sharp deceleration in growth in the 10 years following the democratizing

transition. Among 22 countries in which episodes of large democratic transition coincided with above-average growth, all but one (Korea in 1987 with an acceleration of only 0.22 percent) experienced a growth deceleration. The combination of high initial growth and democratic transition seems to make some deceleration all but inevitable. The magnitude of the decelerations was very large: The median deceleration across the 22 countries was 2.99 percent and the average deceleration was 3.53 percent.

The phenomenon of demosclerosis is already theoretically well-grounded. It appears to be a more rapidly-acting poison than even its fiercest critics have acknowledged.

October 20, 2014

What Democracy Can't Do

An *Outside in* stab at (tech-comm) NRx in a nutshell: ***If economically optimal labor pricing is 'politically impossible' you're doing politics wrong.***

('Wage-stickiness' defenses of inflationary macro were the immediate context, but the application seems far broader.)

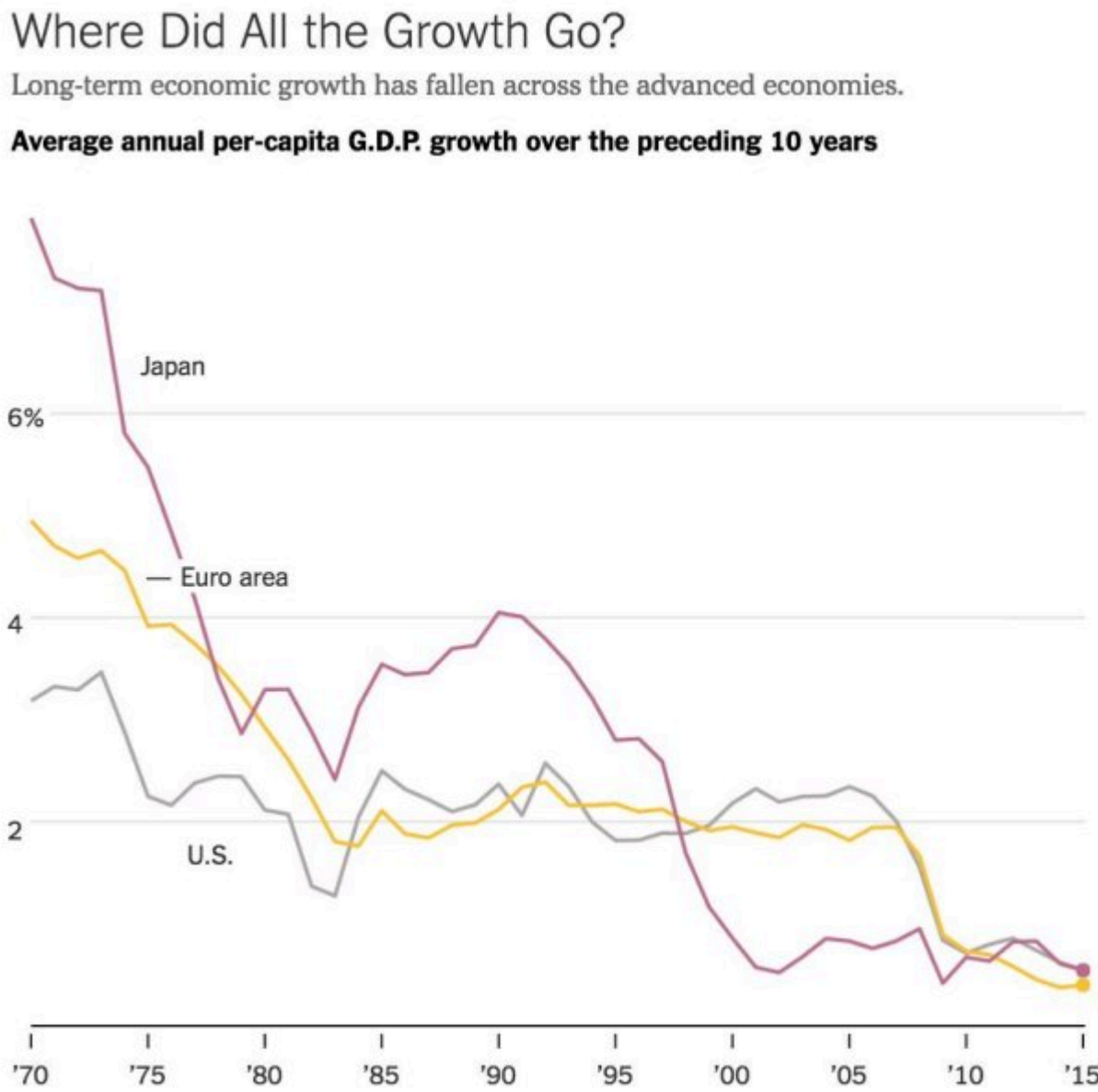
OK, some carbs (for anyone dissatisfied by raw gristle):

Europeans liked their welfare state regardless of where they stood on the political spectrum. The roots of "social democracy" lie

on the left, but by the 1980s the preference for a mixed economy, generous health and pension benefits, and regulated markets had become, on the European continent at least, what Antonio Gramsci called a "hegemonic ideology." These preferences were embraced by parties of the center-right as well as the center-left, compatible with capital yet acceptable to democratic majorities, and rejected principally by the extremes — and British Tories [sic]. The idea that this well-liked welfare state, deemed by many to be indispensable to social peace, might soon prove unviable in the globalized economy of the late twentieth century hence became a source of great anxiety.

June 19, 2015

Collapse


Where Did All the Growth Go?
Long-term economic growth has fallen across the advanced economies.
Average annual per-capita G.D.P. growth over the preceding 10 years
Japan
6%
— Euro area
4
2
U.S.
'70
'75
'80
'85
'90
'95
'00
'05
'10
'15

(Via.)

No great mystery about the West's bad mood.

October 24, 2016

CHAPTER THREE - ELECTIONS AND RECENT EVENTS

Regime Redecoration Randoms

Which lucky guy gets to take the blame?

Here in Shanghai, we receive the US presidential election results on Wednesday morning, making this the last chance to venture reckless predictions. Who gets to seize the poisoned chalice and assume responsibility for the financial collapse of the United States of America?

Feel the hate. Negativity reigns supreme in this election, with oppositional or defensive motivations almost wholly purified of positive contamination. According to The Economist, negative political ads have accounted for an unprecedented 90% of the total. The words of PJ Media commenter Subotai Bahadur distill the sentiment perfectly: "Romney was not my first, second, or third choice, but I will crawl over ground glass to vote for him." To be fondly remembered as 'the ground-glass election.'

Way of the Salamander. Urban Future isn't inclined to deride Mormonism as weird (being weird is what religions are for), but there are bound to be significant cultural implications to the inauguration of a Mormon president in an unusually apocalyptic time. The Mormon faith is the science fiction version of Abrahamic religion extending an evolutionary bridge from man to God – a path of practical divinization. No surprise, then, to discover that there's a Mormon Transhumanist Association. When combined with the irreverence that latches onto any decaying, chaos-wracked administration it could get seriously entertaining …but then we'd miss the classic version of Cathedral II (Return of the Clerisy), replaced by a strange re-make. Voters need to choose their flavor of ground glass carefully.

Prophet motive. At Zero Hedge, Strauss & Howe generational cycle-theorist Jim Quinn hangs on to the apocalyptic theme. He argues that – at the brink of the 'Fourth Turning' – Mitt Romney's age, which places him in the 'prophet generation', makes him odds on favorite to lead the global superpower into Armageddon (so we have that to look forward to).

Reckless predictions?

(1) Discounting systematic media dishonesty points to a substantial Romney victory.

(2) Winning this one is going to have been the most stupid thing that the stupid party ever did.

November 6, 2012

UK General Election ’15

Briggs captures the essentials:

You have to love — I do — how the cessation of accelerating profligate spending is called in Europe “austerity”. Here [in the UK] the slow-down-in-speeding-up-yet-still-increases-in-spending are called “budget cuts”.

The “let’s carry on decaying at a genteel pace chaps” party won (unexpectedly). Insurgent parties did badly (except at the *geographical* — rather than ideological — fringe). A *status quo* outcome, then. A shallower, longer decline path it is …

The more positive implications concern territorial disintegration. Deepening political alienation in Scotland, and a commitment to a referendum on Europe, promise opportunities for multi-level secessionary tides to strengthen.

Also, the left will go even more nuts. When the teeth-gnashing commentary begins to roll in, I’ll try to link some as *Schadenfreude* tonic.

ADDED: Conservatives know that they’re losers, even when they ‘win’.

ADDED: HBD Chick applies some biorealism to the election

results.

May 8, 2015

Popcorn Activism

Partisan political stuff is as tacky as you can get, and if anything could get people chucked out of NRx (and into the garbage-compressor of history), that should be it. Having said that, and — of course — in a spirit of the loftiest imaginable detachment, here's just the slightest morsel.

The Sailer Strategy is a model of sorts. This is due less to its concrete recommendations (fascinating even to those who disagree with it, perhaps vehemently), than —

(a) Its configuration of the political chess board as a puzzle, posing the question: *Given this set up, is there any way for the GOP to win?* Playing GOP is much more fun, because it's actually a challenge. Sailer doesn't need this encouragement, because he's clearly a small-d democrat, and probably also a big-R Republican, in sympathy at least. Despite this, his disreputable noticing habit makes him radioactive, which brings us to —

(b) While a paragon of ingenuousness, Sailer is positioned by strategic necessity in a position of subterfuge. His ideas are discussed in fearful whispers, in shadowy corners of political think-

tanks, and circulated only in heavy disguise. It would be quite impossible for a pursuit of the Sailer Strategy to be publicly admitted, short of a social and ideological catastrophe so profound that its recommendations would have already been rendered moot.

The **Outsideness Strategy** is anti-democratic, merely opportunistically Republican, and politically-unmentionable for even more essential reasons than those just now alluded to. It has the advantages of extreme practicality, comparative simplicity, and — most importantly — *definitiveness*. It is intrinsically irreversible. It cannot be part of any continuing political dialectic. Once it is executed, the GOP will have expended itself utterly in completion of its teleo-historical function and auto-dismantle, among the ashes of American Democracy®.

The unspeakable core of the Sailer Strategy: *The GOP actually doesn't need anything but the white electorate to win*, and [gasp!] *racial polarization could easily be conceived as an asset*.

The Outsideness Strategy analog: the almost incomprehensible idiocy of the democratic system and, more specifically, of the American electorate is a massively under-exploited resource. The subtitle of the strategy paper that really cannot ever be written reads: *Winning big and terminally on the idiocratic battlefield*.

This is not the place to rehearse the neoreactionary diagnosis of democracy as an engine of cognitive deterioration. The "appalling political ignorance of the American electorate" isn't exactly stupidity,

but it's a reasonable proxy, and no one has any serious plans to fix it. Let the liberals explain it to you:

> Election 2014 makes a compelling case for Netflix to re-classify 'Idiocracy' as a documentary.
>
> — John Fugelsang (@JohnFugelsang) November 5, 2014

I'm assuming it can be assumed.

Two helpful references before bolting things together:

(1) Peter Thiel explains why it would be a disaster for the GOP to win the presidency in 2016, unless the financial has crashed by then (which he doesn't expect it to).

(2) Jonathan Chait argues:

Eternally optimistic seekers of bipartisanship have clung to the hope that owning all of Congress, not merely half, will force Republicans to "show they can govern." This hopeful bit of conventional wisdom rests on the premise that voters are even aware that the GOP is the party controlling Congress. In fact, only about 40 percent of the public even knows which party controls which chamber of Congress, which makes the notion that the Republicans would face a backlash for a lack of success fantastical.

Nobody expects these two to agree upon much, but they do agree upon one thing: 'Blame the President' is the key to the democratic game. The figure-head of executive power — crafted ever more

blatantly to *Hollywood standards* with each fresh election — is the convergence point where sublime ignorance, mass resentment, media opportunity, and electoral agency intersect. Just recognizing the President largely exhausts the mental capacities of the electorate as far as political matters are concerned, with a little slack left over for First Lady reality TV, and then — possibly — knowing the name of the Veep. After that, its swirling cognitive chaos, fed by outrages from partisan bubble-worlds, TV sound-bites, salacious detail, and race porn. The thought processes of the median voter are *extremely* easy to model: *Things bad, blame President!* Nothing beyond that has any real relevance, except to nerds.

Outsideness Strategy *jiu jitsu* jumps straight out of this. The fundamental recommendation: *Shore up the symbolic radiance of the Presidency, and then avoid it like the plague*. Aim to win everything *except the Presidency*, until the whole machinery comes apart. In other words, a GOP pursuing the OS would (furtively) renounce presidential office for the remaining duration of American Democracy.

What would be in it for them? *Everything except the Presidency*. That's almost everything already. Pursue the Strategy, incrementally gut the powers of the executive, and the proportion of political prizes lying outside the Whitehouse steadily grows. That's where the interests of an intelligent (if still craven, gluttonous, massively corrupt, and in most other ways radically despicable) GOP lie. All

the pork warehouses get shifted away from the glittering media-saturated magnificence of the Whitehouse, ever deeper into the shadows, enabling monstrous plundering on an unprecedented scale to take place completely beyond the horizon of concrete democratic comprehension. (Nobody said it was going to be pretty.) POTUS gets the blame, Nu-GOP gets the gravy, FedGov is delegitimated, power is salted away steadily into state houses, and the whole abomination hurtles towards national disintegration. There's only *one thing* the GOP has to do, and that's *to lose the presidential election every single time*. Manage that, and it wins pretty much everything else without even trying.

If the Outsideness Strategy had already been initiated, we certainly wouldn't have been told about it. The 2016 GOP Presidential pick will tell us a lot.

ADDED: "Republicans need to remember: The electorate that turns out at midterms is demographically narrower than the pool of voters who elect presidents." — Relevant, and usable.

November 6, 2014

Popcorn Activism II

The whole of this analysis (from the Left) is highly relevant to the Outsideness Strategy. One could even be forgiven for thinking it is

already being pursued:

The presidency is extremely important, of course. But there are also thousands of critically important offices all the way down the ballot. And the vast majority — 70 percent of state legislatures, more than 60 percent of governors, 55 percent of attorneys general and secretaries of state — are in Republicans hands. And, of course, Republicans control both chambers of Congress.

With the final paragraph comes the money quote:

But the much more significant question facing the [Democratic] party isn't about the White House — it's about all the other offices in the land. The problem is that control of the presidency seems to have blinded progressive activists to the possibility of even having an argument about what to do about all of them. That will change if and when the GOP seizes the White House, too, and Democrats bottom out. But the truly striking thing is how close to bottom the party is already and how blind it seems to be to that fact.

If the GOP take the presidency, of course, they reset back to homeostatic bi-polar alternation, degenerative quasi-equilibrium, and democratic functionality — which is disaster. So for the GOP, the question is how to stay out of the White House (without seeming to want to), while incrementally subverting the central organs of national executive power. When the decay process reaches the stages where large burning chunks are falling off, it's critical that there's a Democrat in the Oval Office to explain on cable news how it

isn't ze fault.

Yglesias seems to think the Republicans might do something with the presidency of right-wing significance, which is (of course) laughable on its face. The Union Executive exists to take the coming fall, and nothing else. With that kept firmly in mind, everything can go swimmingly.

October 20, 2015

Damnesty

Due to our rigorous aversion to partisan vulgarity, we couldn't possibly comment on this:

The majority leader pummeled the airwaves, spending more than $5 million on the race, including a direct-mail piece that took a harder line against immigration reform than Cantor previously had advocated. […] In many ways, however, the show of force gave more oxygen to the little-known Brat, who had few resources and almost no outside cash funding his underdog effort. To Cantor's millions, Brat raised only $200,000, and spent even less, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. […] Among those who advocate changing the nation's immigration rules, Cantor's loss seems likely to dash all hope that the House will act on any legislation to provide a citizenship path for some immigrants — as Cantor had once

proposed. […] Many had expected the chamber could turn to the issue once primary season had ended and lawmakers no longer had to worry about protecting their right flank.



"At least they cooked that freaking duck …"

The Dark Dream scenario up to and beyond 2016 isn't hard to piece together:

* GOP lock on Congress to ensure maximum obstruction.
* Tea-Party insurgency driving the GOP into right-wing extremism®.
* Secessionist ambitions spreading like a forest fire.
* A radical progressive Democrat in the White House, to keep a Cathedral clown-face glued onto the collapse.

Carry on.

ADDED: Jim.

ADDED: I like the cut of Zachary Werrell's jib.

June 11, 2014

Romney 2016

If this analysis is right, Romney would be sure to lose a 2016 presidential bid. “Voters will compromise on a lot of issues on Election Day but they won’t ever vote for you if they don’t like you or worse yet, think you don’t like them.” That makes him the perfect GOP candidate — delegitimating the opposition, without seizing the poisoned chalice of democratic leadership (i.e. increasingly vacuous symbolic authority). If the electorate grudgingly concede, after renewing his humiliation, *he was right, but we voted against him anyway because he didn’t kiss my baby*, it’s NRx gravy.

This has to be in some way related:

> Romney 2016: Reform conservative. Romney 2020: Buchananite. Romney 2024: Rothbardian. Romney 2028: Neo-reactionary.
>
> — Ross Douthat (@DouthatNYT) January 13, 2015

January 13, 2015

Out of the Popcorn Zone

As a corrective to the disturbingly unironic Donald Trump enthusiasm affecting certain sections of NRx, here‘s Ace (of Spades)

exiting the circus:

… several years ago, I actually believed in America, and participatory democracy, and all that. […] Now I don't. So now I find myself agreeing with Chomsky, albeit from a rightward direction. I don't agree with him about ***who*** *controls the country, or to what political ends; but I do with agree with him that it is controlled. […] Now this brings me to … Manufactured Consent … So this is why I have become a radical: I agree with a left-wing socialist/communist about the fundamental rotten lie at the heart of the American democracy. […] … I am turning off the TV, I am turning off the Bob Corker & Mitch McConnell show, and, frankly, I am cutting the cord on America.*

(He's even turning off the computer for a day, which is perhaps edging into excessive extremism.)

There's still some definite suggestion in the post that *democracy itself* could be exculpated, so the journey is not yet complete. Give it time.

July 16, 2015

Missing him already

Mencius Moldbug did the conceptual spadework needed to ignite NRx as an Internet discussion, but it was Barack Obama who put

the world to the torch under the banshee cry “Neoreaction!” OK, that wasn’t his exact word, but the basic point isn’t seriously controversial. By slapping an explicit Cathedral clownface onto a faculty-lounge leftist superpower policy suite, destined to pan-dimensional failure, he utterly bankrupted mainstream global progressivism. The smug incompetence was insufferable, and — crucially — so complacent that it let the academic-media inner workings show. Even the saddest tools could see the thing now, and while many still supported it ardently, it kind of disgusted them. There was clearly *no point at all trying to compromise with these people*. “Those neoreactionary types don’t, maybe we should be listening to them?” (Plenty of toxicity comes out of that, but there’s no need to rake over it again right now — it’s something I talk about all the time.)

Victor Davis Hanson is an irredeemable Neocon, but he understands this stuff. His portrait of Obama is almost excruciatingly persuasive. Core point: “Insidiously and inadvertently, Barack Obama is alienating the people and moving the country to the right. If he keeps it up, by 2017 it will be a reactionary nation.”

Here’s the dark heart of the piece (quoted at a length that risks IP violation):

The tiny number of prescient pundits who warned what the Obama years would entail were not the supposedly sober and judicious establishment voices, who in fact seemed to be caught up

in the hope-and-change euphoria and missed entirely Obama's petulance and pique: the Evan Thomases ("he's sort of god"), or the David Brookses ("and I was looking at his pant leg and his perfectly creased pant, and I'm thinking, a) he's going to be president and b) he'll be a very good president." "It is easy to sketch out a scenario in which [Obama] could be a great president."), or the Chris Matthewses ("the feeling most people get when they hear Barack Obama's speech. My, I felt this thrill going up my leg. I mean, I don't have that too often."), or the Michael Beschlosses ("Uh. I would say it's probably — he's probably the smartest guy ever to become President."), or the Chris Buckleys ("He has exhibited throughout a 'first-class temperament,' pace Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.'s famous comment about FDR. As for his intellect, well, he's a Harvard man"), or the Kathleen Parkers ("… with solemn prayers that Obama will govern as the centrist, pragmatic leader he is capable of being"), or the Peggy Noonans ("He has within him the possibility to change the direction and tone of American foreign policy, which need changing; his rise will serve as a practical rebuke to the past five years, which need rebuking; his victory would provide a fresh start in a nation in which a fresh start would come as a national relief.").

In truth, it was the loud, sometimes shrill, and caricatured voices of talk radio, the so-called crazy Republican House members, and the grassroots loudmouths of what would become the Tea Party who had Obama's number. They warned early on that Barack Obama's

record was that of a petulant extremist, that his writing presaged that he would borrow and spend like no other president, that his past associations gave warning that he would use his community-organizing skills cynically to divide Americans along racial lines, that nothing in his past had ever suggested anything other than radicalism and an ease with divisive speech, that his votes as a state legislator and as a U.S. senator suggested that he had an instinctual dislike of the entrepreneur and the self-made businessman, and that his past rhetoric advised that he would ignore settled law and instead would rule by fiat — that he would render immigration law null and void, that he would diminish the profile of America abroad, and that he would do all this because he was an ideologue, with no history of bipartisanship but a lot of animus toward his critics, and one who saw no ethical or practical reason to appreciate the more than 60 years of America's postwar global leadership and the world that it had built. Again, the despised right-wingers were right and the more moderate establishment quite wrong.

Those who supported Obama are never going to be taken seriously about anything, ever again. They're done. (That's what Trump demonstrates.)

But there's more:

A lot of ambitious and dangerous powers are watching Obama assume a fetal position, and may well as a consequence act foolishly and recklessly this next year. Not only Russia, China, and North

Korea, but also Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, ISIS, and assorted rogue states may take chances in the next 14 months that they would otherwise never have entertained (given that America is innately strong and they are mostly in comparison far weaker) — on the premise that such adventurism offers tangible advantages without likely negative consequences and that the chance for such opportunities will not present itself again for decades to come. […] At home, Obama feels liberated now that he is free from further elections. He thinks he has a legitimate right to be a bit vindictive and vent his own frustrations and pique, heretofore repressed over the last seven years because of the exigencies of Democratic electioneering. Obama can now vent and strike back at his opponents, caricaturing them from abroad, questioning their patriotism, slandering them for sport, and trying to figure out which emblematic executive orders and extra-legal bureaucratic directives will most infuriate them and repay them for their supposed culpability for his failed ***vero possumus*** *presidency. […] The more contrarian he becomes, and the more he opposes the wishes of the vast majority of the American people, all the more Obama envisions himself speaking truth to power and becoming iconic of something rather than the reality that he is becoming proof of nothing. […] Hold on. We haven't seen anything yet.*

One more year of Obama's — hopefully intensified — NRx activism, then things get a whole lot more difficult. Four years of

remotely competent, and even vaguely rightish US executive government, and NRx as a memetic contagion will be close to extinction. That might not be a bad thing, but it's worth noting.

December 9, 2015

Quote note (#215)

*I'm **not** saying the election was rigged. I have no evidence of such a thing, and I'm sure the good people of Iowa are honest and competent. […] But **just for fun**, watch me build my case for a rigged election.*

Since a lot of enraged Trumpenproletarians* are going to be talking about this, I should add some minimal local framing. This blog is:

(a) Loftily detached from Trump enthusiasm, and

(b) Unable to morally discriminate between *fixed* democracy, and 'clean' democracy. (Though, perhaps, the latter is ultimately slightly less depraved.)

Still, this story is already out there, and it isn't unimportant at the level of popcorn-positive political disintegration, regardless of the final — and probably irrecoverable — facts.

* See this (+) persuasive introduction to early 21st century American class war. (Plus.)

ADDED: For obvious relevance

> When The Establishment always wins, you know you've reached peak democracy. #tcot #nrx #altright https://t.co/VH10nWWwr3
>
> — Brett Stevens (@amerika_blog) February 2, 2016

February 3, 2016

Twitter cuts (#99)

The meltdown of the GOP as observed by a concerned outsider:

> 1. Let's think through the scenario the GOP establishment has that Rubio can save them from Trump.
>
> — Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet) February 21, 2016

> 2. The idea is that if it's a head-to-head Trump v. Rubio, the anti-Trump consolidated vote would favor Rubio.
>
> — Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet) February 21, 2016

> 3. The first thing is: it's not a 2-way race yet. It's a 5 way race. How do you convince Cruz, Kasich & Carson to drop out?
>
> — Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet) February 21, 2016

4. Carson will stay in as long he as gets fundraisng $$. Kasich wants to try his luck in mid-west. And then there is Cruz.

— Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet) February 21, 2016

5. I can imagine Kasich & Carson pulling out soon. But Cruz? This is not a man who is amenable to reason or the good of the party.

— Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet) February 21, 2016

6. Cruz has every incentive to stay in this till the end & see if he can be a kingmaker if no-one has enough delegates to win.

— Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet) February 21, 2016

7. But let's say by some miracle this becomes a 2-man race. Not all of Carson/Kasich/Cruz voters will go to Rubio.

— Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet) February 21, 2016

8. Trump v. Rubio won't be 32-68. It'll be closer than that. And Trump is not a man who is afraid to fight dirty.

— Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet) February 21, 2016

‘

9. On Rubio's side, he'll have tons of $$. Could do a real scorched earth ad campaign like Romney did with Gingrich in

Florida in 2008.

— Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet) February 21, 2016

10. On Trump's side, in xenophobic year he'd be up against a Cuban American, fluent Spanish speaker who favored amnesty for undocumented

— Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet) February 21, 2016

11. So, Trump v. Rubio is not a sure thing at all. And we're a long way from even getting there.

— Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet) February 21, 2016

12. The time to unite the party against Trump was before Iowa. Now it might be too late.

— Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet) February 21, 2016

13. The key is you can't defeat Trump without risking alienating his followers & provoking a 3rd party run.

— Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet) February 21, 2016

14. But for GOP, I think Trump is so dangerous a figure that they should now be prepared to alienate his followers & have him go 3rd party.

— Jeet Heer (@HeerJeet) February 21, 2016

The radical repolarization of the party system within an Anglophone democracy is a rare event. To find persuasive precedent for what is happening today, it is arguably necessary to return all the way to the mid-19th century and the emergence of the Republican Party during the Civil War era. It's only natural, then, that their should be an unusual level of agitation about developments (though this description risks — very seriously — putting the cart before the horse).

2016 is set to be a year for the history books.

February 22, 2016

Diamond and Silk



More socio-ideological scrambling. Camille Paglia describes them as a ‘revelation‘, linking to this one. (They’ve done a bunch.) Their latest is on the Chicago disorder. Their David Duke commentary is also a thing of wonder.

Here they are with the Donald, and doing Fox.

This is Saturday popcorn material, but it’s not short of discussion potential. Their lopsided double act is a piece of artistry (as the Fox

piece makes clear).

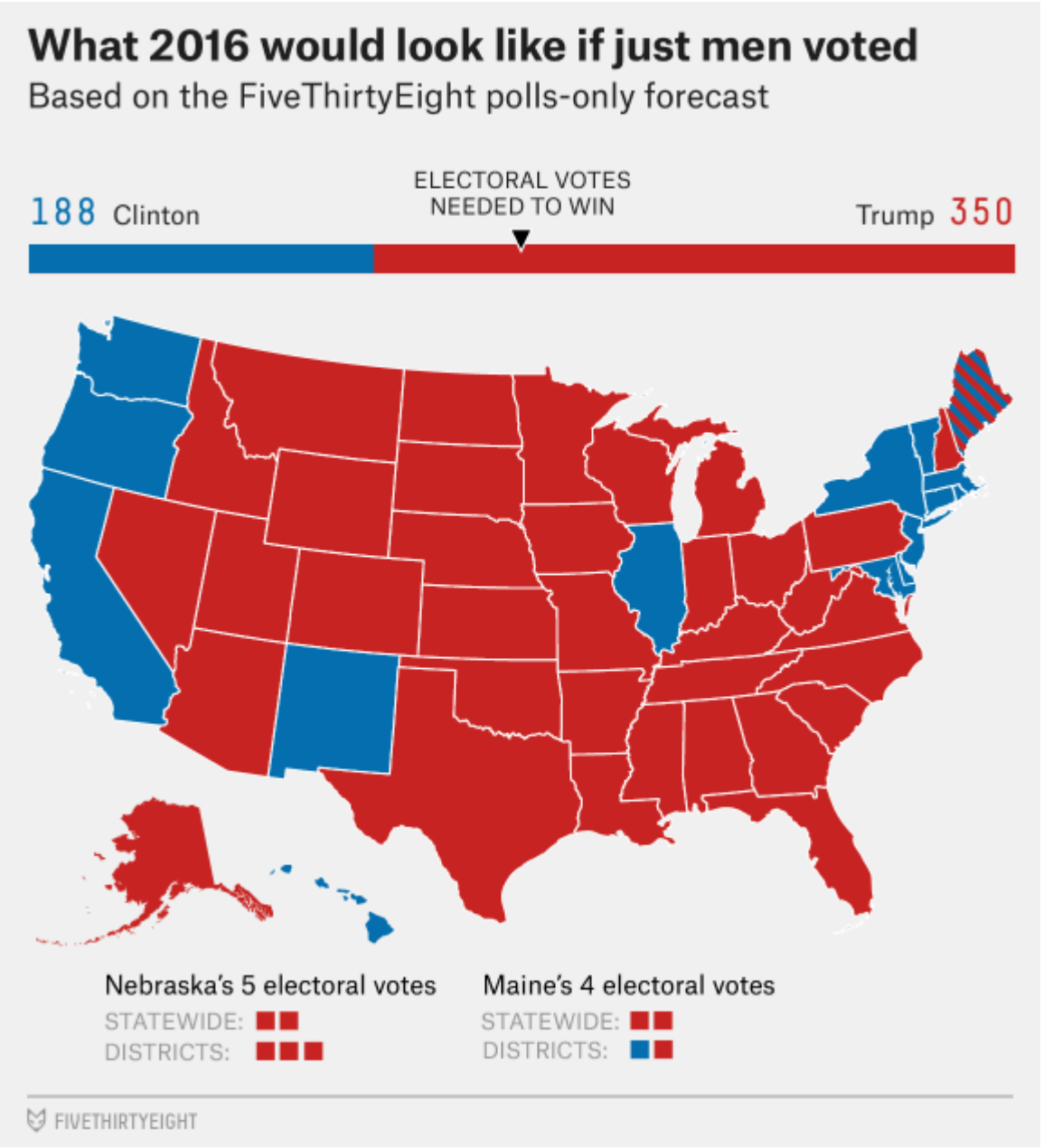
"Choo-choo that train to glory!"

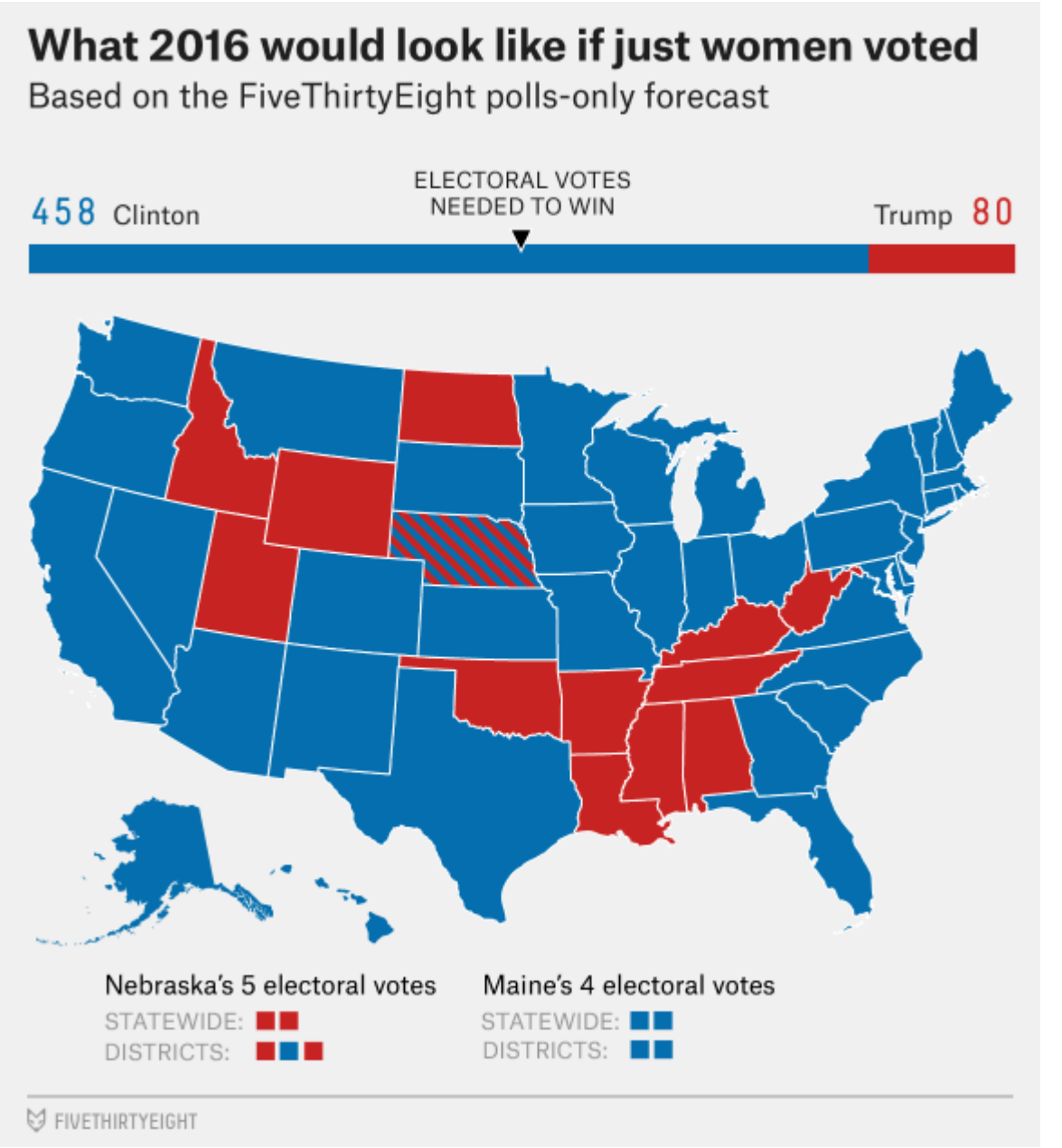
They have to be driving more than a few people nuts.

March 12, 2016

Sexual Politics

Via Nate Silver, the electoral implications of hypothetical solely-male and solely-female electorates in the US (2016):


What 2016 would look like if just men voted
Based on the FiveThirtyEight polls-only forecast
188 Clinton
ELECTORAL VOTES NEEDED TO WIN
Trump 350
Nebraska's 5 electoral votes
STATEWIDE:
DISTRICTS:
Maine's 4 electoral votes
STATEWIDE:
DISTRICTS:
FIVETHIRTYEIGHT



Given the absence of a realistic geo-political segregation option,

continuing tension can be safely anticipated. (There still has to be a way to break the place up that makes more sense, such as starting with the places that don't change color when gender-flipped.)

October 12, 2016

Broken Detente

Anybody interested in the racial dynamics of Trump-era American culture and politics should find much of interest in this. It might be the closest thing to an insightful center-ground perspective on what has been happening to be turned up yet.

November 15, 2016

So, they did it



Their <u>delight</u> at the decision burns:

For reminding America that demagoguery feeds on despair and that truth is only as powerful as the trust in those who speak it, for empowering a hidden electorate by mainstreaming its furies and live-streaming its fears, and for framing tomorrow's political culture by demolishing yesterday's, Donald Trump is TIME's 2016 Person of the Year.

Divided States of America is worth everything.

And 2016 continues:

> 2016's 3rd most important story about the U.S. media: Vox accepts the mainstream science behind IQ scores. https://t.co/R9tMsxD492
>
> — Garett Jones (@GarettJones) December 6, 2016

ADDED:

> .@TIME Trumped! https://t.co/iMSAgKvq6i pic.twitter.com/8iIzzb7rwu
>
> — Virginia Dare (@vdare) December 8, 2016

December 7, 2016

Rapture

Each encounter with the phrase "government shutdown" sparks a detonation of euphoria. It could get quite distracting.

More here (with useful chart, and some acute comments).

Rick Moran, trying to stir up some gloom, makes the whole situation even more delicious: "And the hell of it is, the hard right wing in the House that has been pushing this futile strategy are not going to be blamed for the cave-in. It will be those who are deemed insufficiently supportive of a cause that never had a chance to succeed who will probably suffer the consequences."

— Federal cardiac arrest *and* the accelerated disintegration of the GOP? *Bliss was it in that twilight …*

September 30, 2013

Nuked

Jonathan H. Adler at *The Volokh Conspiracy* writes:

Despite allowing the confirmation of judges for other courts, and one D.C. Circuit nominee, Republicans have continued to block Obama's latest D.C. Circuit nominees. Now that Senate Republicans have … successfully filibustered five Obama nominees — the same number as Senate Democrats blocked with a filibuster (but half those

for which cloture was initially defeated) — Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid wants to change the rules. According to several news reports, Senator Reid is prepared to invoke the so-called "nuclear option" and force through President Obama's nominees on a party-line vote, perhaps as early as today. What this involves is making a parliamentary ruling that only a majority vote is required to end debate on a judicial nomination and then sustaining that decision with a majority vote. Some Senate Republicans threatened to take such a step during the Bush Administration, but backed off when a group of Senators from both parties forged a temporary deal to end the stand-off and avert the rule change.

The 'nuclear option' represents the clear admission that the division of powers is not only dead but spectacularly cremated, with judicial appointees formally reduced to partisan functionaries. It would thus signal the explicit demolition of the US Constitution. Since a wheezing travesty is worse than a corpse, even strong supporters of the constitutional principle should have few problems with this specific instance of incendiary termination.

America's crisis of governance is hurtling to a conclusion far sooner than most sober commentators had imagined. As with so many other institutional questions posed in the hysterical phase of Left Singularity, there's only one realistic response: *Let it burn*.

ADDED: It's about jobs.

ADDED: "Democrats nuked the ratchet" (roughly my argument,

but on MDMA).

November 21, 2013

Demo-babble

Fred Hiatt on the 'cold war' still raging in Hong Kong:

Anson Chan … rose through the prestigious Hong Kong civil service to the top appointed position of chief secretary, resigning in 2001 when she felt the chief executive was allowing Beijing to chip away at Hong Kong's core values: rule of law, a level playing field and freedom of press, speech and association. Since then, she said, democracy's hold has grown more precarious …

Did you spot the subtle *non sequitur*? (To resolve it requires some understanding of the fact that the precise, technical meaning of 'democracy' to experts like Hiatt is 'nice Westernish stuff we like'.)

April 8, 2014

Quote notes (#107)

The mainstream is running out:

In the broadcast media in particular, there is an implied assumption that "the Scotland moment" is something confined to

that country. But the reality across the UK suggests something much deeper and wider, and a simple enough fact: that what is happening north of the border is the most spectacular manifestation of a phenomenon taking root all over – indeed, if the splintering of politics and the rise of new forces on both left and right across Europe are anything to go by, a set of developments not defined by specific national circumstances, but profound social and economic ruptures.

Here, Labour and the Conservatives have recently been scoring their lowest combined share of support. Organisationally, they are both hollowed out and increasingly staffed by wet-behind-the-ears apparatchiks who only compound the parties' distance from the public. Whether justifiably or not, millions of British people have passed through holding politicians in contempt and now treat them with cold indifference. Let's face it: the only thing keeping all this alive is the electoral system.

(The whole opinion piece is well worth reading, on panic-socialist Colin Crouch's 'post-democracy' observations in particular. You know things are really beginning to get desperate when the Left begins to have interesting thoughts.)

September 12, 2014

Quotable (#162)

The Left-Liberal agony:

There's more to a democracy than just the holy scripture of the constitution — there are also sacred numbers: election results. Together, words and numbers mold a country's politics. In this process, the constitution is the constant while election represent a dynamic element. In the near future, this could also present a problem in several places: Election results are expected to deliver the wrong numbers. In Austria, a right-wing populist might get elected president. This could also happen in the United States. Germany's AfD and France's Front National have also attracted strong minority followings. A right-wing populist brush fire has become conceivable.

It wasn't so very long ago that regime legitimation through popular will seemed like a great idea to just about everybody. Now it's looking disturbingly like a blank check, in the hands of an unpredictable maniac.

(On the Outer Right, of course, the historical diagnosis is quite straightforward: *Democracy first destroys the people, and then falls prey to them*. The Ancients would have found it odd that anybody could imagine this to be a new idea.)

May 18, 2016

Civil War II

… is looking like the one thing everyone can agree on (1, 2, 3, linked in order of escalation).

Prompt via.

January 20, 2017

Quote note (#332)

Eli Lake on the Flynn flip:

In the end, it was Trump's decision to cut Flynn loose. In doing this he caved in to his political and bureaucratic opposition. [Republican chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Representative Devin] Nunes told me Monday night that this will not end well. "First it's Flynn, next it will be Kellyanne Conway, then it will be Steve Bannon, then it will be Reince Priebus," he said. Put another way, Flynn is only the appetizer. Trump is the entree.

If there's not much more to this than there looks, it's hard to see it as anything but an unforced invitation to the hyenas. Or, turned around the other way, if Trump turns out to be anything like as incompetent as his opponents predict, he's toast.

February 15, 2017

Trump on Syria

Here's the public (Twitter) record, compiled in chronological order from May 2013. Not much indication of ambiguity.

If a nose-dive back into neoconservative meddling follows from this, it's hard to see what could ever count as a credible commitment again. Anything not on a blockchain will be senseless noise.

ADDED: Things are getting stupid quickly.

April 6, 2017

CHAPTER FOUR - FRAYING AT THE EDGES

Democratization is Done

The idea that political seriousness can be evacuated from any situation by invoking (purely procedural) 'democratic' norms was always an evasion. It was a way to avoid the reality of 'who-whom', and thus dependent upon a haze of Cathedralist insincerity. The implicit selling point — "Don't worry, the rabble will accept representatives that we can work with" — isn't bought by anybody anymore. Things have gone wrong badly enough, often enough, for such promises to have been discounted down to zero.

If you don't want the rabble in power, you have to keep them from power. That's the simple, and now overt, understanding of the dawning post-demotic age. Michael Hirsh doesn't like it at all:

As the Egyptian military consolidates control by murdering pro-Muslim Brotherhood protesters and declaring a state of emergency, we may be witnessing the most dangerous potential for Arab radicalization since the two Palestinian intifadas. Despite the

resignation Wednesday of Mohamed ElBaradei, the vice president, in opposition to the Egyptian junta's action, the discomfiting fact is that most of Egypt's liberal "democrats"—along with the United States—have never looked more hypocritical. If the bloody crackdown is allowed to continue while the U.S. and West do nothing, the actions of the Egyptian military could de-legitimize democratic change in the Arab world for a generation or more.

Read *without judgement*, Hirsh's article is a fascinating document, punctuated by a raging despair that marks a transition of aeons. "Egypt's liberal 'democrats'" can either change course in accordance with their name (as Hirsh would like, but does not expect), or they can teach the world that 'liberal democrats' know nothing of global political reality, and need to call themselves something new. A sound name would describe a plausible, though ambitious, aspiration: **Modernity in Power** (freed of democratic dreams). It will still be a while before we hear anything of this kind, but its intimations are not — any longer — difficult to detect.

ADDED: Crossing the Rubicon: "While we Americans are babbling about a new politics of 'inclusiveness', even some of the Twitter-Facebook liberals of Tahrir Square are coming to see Egypt as it is. Us or them."

August 15, 2013

Meanwhile, in India …

… there's something happening that might even be bigger than Project Idaho.

With two weeks left to go before electoral results are in, the world's largest democracy seems set to veer hard right, to an extent unprecedented in its modern history. There's a leftish but informative briefing on the ideological stakes at *Quartz*.



NRx has nothing to teach me about hats.

NRx tends to be quite insular, often out of semi-articulate principle, so nobody (other than enemies) seems to have paid much attention to this yet. That's odd, upon reflection, because the Modi BJP seems to be juggling Trichotomy issues of a familiar kind within its Hindutva platform, which glues together a quasi-stable raft of religious, ethno-nationalist, and capitalistic elements into an explicitly reactionary-modernizing coalition. When the 21st century is allotted to Asia, it's for a reason. The West's vague premonitions are urgent practicalities

there.

Should NRx be waving the Modi banner with enthusiasm? There are some obvious reasons for caution (beside dim parochialism). Most centrally, the role of democracy in the BJP wave is strongly analogous to that afflicting the 20th century European far right, and the record of reactionary demotism scores a straight 'F'. Democratic pressures suck the right into an ideological black-hole, since the only parts of its agenda that hit the tingle-spot with the masses are its crudest appeals to atavistic sentiment. Cognitive regression is the inevitable price of popularity.

It follows, then, that Indian developments are more likely to provide another lesson in political tragedy than a torch of inspiration. Unless an incoming Modi regime moves quickly to begin dismantling the structure of Indian democracy (sadly, an unimaginable prospect), its modernizing competence will eventually fall prey to mob impulses, as the people — once again — get the government they deserve.

For NRx, I suspect, the essential lesson will be a deepened understanding of the toxicity of populism, even if it seems — momentarily — to be flowing in the right direction. Still, dogmatism has no respectable place in such matters. If something more positive, and complex, comes out of this, *Outside in* will be among the first to applaud it.

ADDED: Panic!

ADDED: Jason Burke on Modi and us: *… among huge numbers of people … globalisation is a conversation from which, metaphorically and practically, they are excluded. That conversation takes place in English and it is worth noting that Modi will be the first leader of such prominence and power in India who, like the vast majority of his compatriots, is uncomfortable in what has become the world's language. […] On the political track, our diplomats and politicians inevitably favour those who resemble them most closely. That usually means anglophone moderates or, as they are often termed locally, "liberals". There is also an inherent and inevitable journalistic bias towards those who share reporters', viewers' and readers' language and cultural references, however superficial.*

May 4, 2014

Modified

The *Outside in* preemptive disillusionment with Indian reaction in power is already on record. Nevertheless, this is going to be big. Over half a billion people went to the polls to make it happen. Progressive teleology isn't heading where it's supposed to. (UK communist media are covering it quite well.)



Congress, one of the most despicable political organizations on earth, has been crushed like a bug. The implications of that are roughly comparable to the detonation of a dirty nuke at Davos, so a modest period of celebration would be wholly understandable. Unfortunately, while Modi's historic victory is a massive global lurch to reaction, it is also a surreptitious triumph of democracy, and we've seen the way this plays out before.

From the Thatcher / Reagan experience in the West, there are lessons about the democratic limitation of general application to the Right. The first, already briefly touched upon in the previous Modi post, is that democracy demands populism. Since capitalistic deregulation triggers a demagogic counter-attack from the Left, it is inevitably supported — politically — by a platform of 'social conservatism' that is driven into ever cruder atavism, until it cannibalizes the policy agenda of the government. The more a regime seeks, under democratic conditions, to move the economy rightwards, the more it is politically compelled to appeal to tribal

emotion, while diverting its energies into totemism. Eventually, all that remains is a culture war, in which a confused Right is reduced to the pre-defeated posture of seeking to slow change down. When the pendulum swings — as democracy ensures it will — it exposes the archetypal political truth: a fast-left party then replaces a slow-left party, with the eventually victory of 'progress' never having been seriously in doubt.

Any democratic 'right-wing' party in power has won an election, and is thus infused with a sense of its popular virility. This is a psychological catastrophe — and in fact a latent psychosis — from which it never recovers. The ratchet, patiently, continues.

Democratic politics also corrodes right-wing economic policy even more directly. The lesson from Reaganism is especially stark. From the beginning, political competence is expressed by a single dominant insight: any gains made by a right-wing administration in the direction of fiscal responsibility is simply a savings account for the opposition. It can be predicated, with absolute confidence, that each step painfully taken away from public insolvency will be reversed, with opposite political sign, as soon as the Left gets its turn once again. Thus, the Reaganite stance that any intelligent conservative government is bound to the proclamation 'deficits don't matter'. It is only by keeping public finances hard up against the edge of bankruptcy that fiscal laxity can be prevented from reverting to its natural state, as a fund available for the promotion of leftward

social acceleration. Private saving is profoundly compromised by democratic governance. Public saving — or even moderated indebtedness — is simply impossible.

There is no way at all that Modi can restore Indian fiscal health under the democratic conditions he inherits (and which he will certainly preserve). The idea that he might attempt to do so is a delusion.

Nevertheless, there are things a Modi regime could do, which are worth doing. In rough order of priority and practicality they include:

(1) A holocaust of red-tape, in the interest of industrialization. The Indian manufacturing sector, employing approximately 15% of the workforce, is half the size that might be expected if business conditions were less impaired by legal-bureaucratic obstruction. Huge economic gains could be made relatively quickly if companies could be created more easily and closed down without any need for official permission, while hiring and firing employees according to market signals. Modi knows enough to see what is required. First ask the Marxists to describe their most nightmarish conception of an exploitative capitalist labor-market, and then do that.

(2) While fiscal continence is politically impossible, it should at least be possible to re-orient public spending towards infrastructure (and away from transfer payments). Copying China would be sensible. High-speed rail networks, urban mass-transit systems, roads, power grids, water and sewerage, high-bandwidth

communications, space-programs … since vast amounts of public money have to be wasted, those are the ways to do it. They accumulate capital, create business opportunities and employment, teach technical skills, and leave something real behind when the bubbles pop.

(3) Scrap as many affirmative action quotas as possible. This is an opportunity to do cynical culture wars stuff that actually does some good.

(4) Prepare for the return of the Left, by decentralizing government, empowering the states, reducing inter-regional economic transfers, innovating constitutional obstacles to socialist policy, and building right-wing economic redoubts capable of resisting a future Leftist central administration. This is all very obvious, but it's equally obvious why even seriously conservative central governments find it difficult to do. It would help if they more clearly understood that they're going to lose — that's what democracy means — so they should seize the opportunity to get their revenge in first.

NRx shouldn't make a fool of itself by getting excited about Modi. What's happening in India isn't nothing, though. It's nowhere close to being nothing.

ADDED: Tavleen Singh —

… I tweeted that I had covered every election since 1977 and had never seen anything like the frenetic fervour of the crowds on

the streets of Benaras. This caused a torrent of insults on Twitter, so I went that evening to Papu's chai shop for a reality check. At this teashop in a teeming, squalid square near the Assi Ghat gather politicians, thinkers, philosophers, political analysts and students. They sit on wooden benches near an open drain and discuss the problems of the world. On an earlier visit, I discovered that the level of political discourse was higher than in Delhi because people speak without worrying about being labelled 'fascist' or 'communal'.

ADDED: Some cautious optimism from Geeta Anand and Gordon Fairclough in the WSJ, but: "Modi is unlikely to substantially undo any of the subsidy programs on which millions rely for jobs and food. […] Analysts think big-bang reforms, such as changing labor laws to let companies hire and fire more easily or undertaking large-scale privatizations of state enterprises, are unlikely." Still — "Tales of [Modi's] bravery are chronicled in a comic book that shows him swimming through crocodile-infested waters to plant a flag on top of a Hindu temple."

May 16, 2014

Death Rattle

"If you care about democracy in the world, we are in trouble."

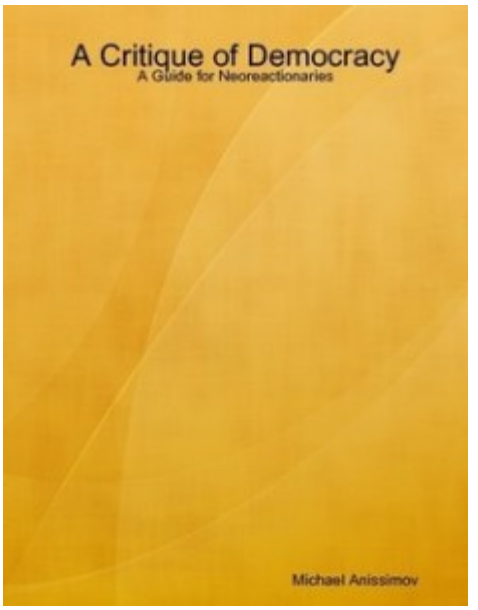
Savor the exquisite taste of Jacobin tears.

("We should bet heavily on this battle of information and ideas. It is a battle we can win. … we need to promote the spirit of democracy." Larry Diamond is quite clearly one of the most dangerous lunatics alive in the world today.)

October 30, 2014

Against Democracy

Michael Anissimov has published an e-book condensing the main Neoreactionary (and in fact older Right-Libertarian) arguments against democracy. The first chapter can be read here, the book purchased from here.



February 2, 2015

Political Correction

It's increasingly hard to find anybody of even moderate articulacy (other than professional propagandists / unapologetic communists) with a kind word for democracy these days. Marc Faber, it turns out, hasn't. Here he is in conversation with the (re-animated) *Daily Bell*:

Marc Faber: I hope so, but this is one of the problems of democracy, that you have dynasties, and so I'm increasingly leaning to the question whether actually democracies function nowadays.
Daily Bell: Indeed, it would be hard to find a functioning democracy. Can you point to any at this point?
Marc Faber: That I don't know but everybody thinks that every dictator is evil. In Asia, we've had very fast growth in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore under non-democratic regimes. Even today in Singapore you have some kind of democracy but not a true democracy. In Hong Kong we don't have democracy; it hasn't ever been there for the last 150 years. […] I don't know. I'm just saying that to sit there and say democracy is the best system in the whole world is maybe not the correct view.

March 21, 2015

Popcorn Night

Under such popcorn bombardment here it's impossible to think, so we might as well at least go for the quality stuff:

The significance of this asymmetry is that liberals have the power to legitimize the existence of problems. They can alone enter things into evidence, as it were. Max Ehrenfreund, writing in the Washington Post, has a gathered a list of discontents from various publications that are now being talked about even in liberal circles, which means the population at large can talk about them now. Liberals set the agenda, when they talk about things going down the tubes then it's on the agenda. Here are some things it's now relatively OK to bring up. … […] … But probably the biggest shock talking point is Robert Reich's assertion that the US is in a sort of pre-revolutionary stew of discontent, after nearly seven years of Obama. In an article titled The Revolt Against the Ruling Class Reich says that "the biggest political phenomenon in America today is a revolt against the "ruling class" of insiders that have dominated Washington for more than three decades." … Jim Tankersley, writing in the Washington Post elaborates on the same theme. … The new narrative is that America is in crisis. "Unexpectedly," one might add. … Which direction you go will depend on your party. The Democrats will argue for more carbon controls, more immigration, Single Payer, more deals with foreign dictators, etc. The Republicans will argue

for more GOP Senators and Congressmen to be elected to Capitol Hill — after which they will vote for more carbon controls, more immigration, Single Payer, more deals with foreign dictators, etc. … We have it on good liberal authority that there's a copious amount [of] tinder and straw scattered all over the floor. If one day a spark should start a fire, it won't be due as much to the intensity of the spark as the abundance of fuel. … Perhaps the most most potent forces for change are disruptive technologies that undermine established elites. A "revolt against the ruling class" still concedes their capacity to rule; it is the destruction of their basis to rule by innovation that is a more fundamental threat.

August 7, 2015

Quote note (#208)

At *Vox* (some Yule cheer):

Political scientists have long known that "government legitimacy," or the popularity of particular administrations, is going down. But many of them have argued that "regime legitimacy," or citizens' attachment to democracy as a political system, is as strong as ever. Our research shows that this is just not true: Attachment to democracy has fallen over time, and from one generation to the next. … For Americans born in the 1930s, living in a democracy holds

virtually sacred importance. Asked on a scale of 1 to 10 how important it is to them to live in a democracy, more than 70 percent give the highest answer. But many of their children and grandchildren are lukewarm. Among millennials — those born since the 1980s — fewer than 30 percent say that living in a democracy is essential.

ADDED: Let's change the subject — "Perhaps the time has come for us all to ask how much we really value democracy, and to start discussing how much more expressive and responsive it could be in this technological age. Change is coming. The big question now is how good we are going to be at shaping the sorts of change that can renew democracy instead of stunting and blunting it." The faster ruin is brought to the only societies on Earth with some prospect of supporting democracy, the more of these kind of diversionary conversations we can expect.

December 21, 2015

Democratic Deconsolidation

Crucial reading:

What does it mean, in concrete terms, for democracy to be the only game in town? In our view, the degree to which a democracy is consolidated depends on three key characteristics: the degree of

popular support for democracy as a system of government; the degree to which antisystem parties and movements are weak or nonexistent; and the degree to which the democratic rules are accepted. […] This empirical understanding of democratic consolidation opens up conceptual space for the possibility of "democratic deconsolidation." In theory, it is possible that, even in the seemingly consolidated democracies of North America and Western Europe, democracy may one day cease to be the "only game in town": Citizens who once accepted democracy as the only legitimate form of government could become more open to authoritarian alternatives. […] … It is at least plausible to think that such a process of democratic deconsolidation may already be underway in a number of established democracies in North America and Western Europe. […] … In a world where most citizens fervently support democracy, where antisystem parties are marginal or nonexistent, and where major political forces respect the rules of the political game, democratic breakdown is extremely unlikely. It is no longer certain, however, that this is the world we live in. […] … As democracies deconsolidate, the prospect of democratic breakdown becomes increasingly likely — even in parts of the world that have long been spared such instability. If political scientists are to avoid being blindsided by the demise of established democracies in the coming decades, as they were by the fall of communism a few decades ago, they need to find out whether democratic deconsolidation is

happening; to explain the possible causes of this development; to delineate its likely consequences (present and future); and to ponder the potential remedies.

Considerable statistical evidence (provided in the paper) supports this alarmed conclusion.

(Drezner is nervous.)

Previously by the paper's authors, Roberto Foa and Yascha Mounk, making the same thesis here, and here.

ADDED: At *The American Interest*: "The dark specter of illiberalism across the West is symptomatic of a deep and broad-based decline in confidence in democratic institutions and ideas that has been taking place for two decades. Champions of liberalism need to think hard about how to reverse this—and soon—because as Foa and Mounk point out, the floor could fall out from under our feet all at once." (Systematic confusion of democracy and liberalism is to be expected at this stage of cultural ruin, but it's still irritating.)

August 7, 2016

SECTION D - CRITIQUE OF LIBERTARIANISM

The Lost Cause

Why do some (awkward) libertarians sympathize with the Confederacy? Asks David Bernstein at *The Volokh Conspiracy*. This is probably as reasonable as mainstream libertarianism is ever going to get on the lost cause, but it still manages to muddy an intrinsically pellucid point.

Even those libertarians who do adopt a Rothbardian/Chomskyite view of foreign policy, or who for any other reason beyond racism wish the Union would have let the Confederacy secede peacefully, are making a mistake in defending the Confederacy–the enemy of one's enemy isn't necessarily a friend. But I just wanted to point out that I think a significant amount of libertarian sympathy for the Confederacy in the circles where it exists is really a product of intense distaste for the U.S. government and its post-Civil War record [along with, as a commenter notes, a general sympathy for

the right of secession] rather than a considered view of the Confederacy's own record.

Setting aside the Chomsky distraction, there's an almost painful struggle to be fair going on here — but then the brackets ruin everything. Secession is the key, irrespective of the course taken by the Union, *because the Union itself only exists due to a successful war of secession*. If the USA was legitimately born out of war of independence, then it was illegitimately perpetuated by the suppression of the subsequent war of independence which would have divided it. Placing the onus on libertarian confederates to explain themselves — or to have an explanation advanced on their behalf — gets the order of logical obligation completely upside down.

Of course, the Articles of Confederation preceded the American Constitution. Confederation was not impudently demanded in the mid-19th century, but stripped away by an emergent central power in the late-18th century. In combination, these assaults on decentralized government have rendered American political history almost entirely opaque to itself. *Confederation is the primordial expression of American independence*.

Yet, from a practical point of view, none of this really matters, because America's racial nightmare drowns everything out, binding dreams of redemption so intimately to concentrated power that freedom is reduced to ever-more-marginalized *crimethink*. Under these circumstances, the pretense of reason seems merely absurd.

July 21, 2013

The Reaper

Recent rumors of blog death in the reactosphere have been greatly exaggerated, but elsewhere — not so much. For sheer weirdness, it's hard to beat the announcement of *The Oil Drum*'s closure at *The Daily Bell* — an event of huge significance for the fate of the Peak Oil 'promotion', we were assured — and one almost immediately followed by the closure of … *The Daily Bell*. (Here's the farewell post, although I'm reluctant to link to a self-declared corpse.)

By simple analogy, can we assume this death is also overflowing with meaning? Has the DB's signature brand of libertarian conspiracy theorizing been terminated for a reason? If so, there aren't any clues to be found in Anthony Wile's quite bizarrely uninformative good-bye note.

I'm guessing my vague melancholy on the subject won't find many echoes out here on the right fringe. "Another bunch of nutty libertarians go over the cliff, big deal" might not be a bad guess at the average response, if it didn't so clearly underestimate the prevailing indifference (I don't recall anybody else linking to them on anything). They were strong advocates of the "Internet Reformation", ushering in a new epoch of liberty worldwide, as the scheming "global elite"

were forced to take a “step back”, their “directed history” undone by electronic “truth-telling”.

I’m taking it that has all been swept off the table now, Peak Oil-style. It never did quite seem nasty enough to be real.

July 17, 2013

Atlas Mugged

As part of the ongoing celebrations of Prophecy Month at *Outside in*, we present a (short) three part series by Lars Seier Christensen of Saxo Bank on the historical prescience of Ayn Rand (one, two, three). While some distance from high theory, even the most Rand-averse should be able to take something interesting away from this series, whether by considering it as a significant ethnographic — and even religious — phenomenon, or by appraising it as a structured forecast. The foundations (laid in part one) certainly seem realistic enough: “… free capitalism has not really been experienced by many people alive today. […] The strange hybrid of western societies … allows only limited capitalism to create enough wealth to support a wider range of political and social ambitions, largely controlled by anti-capitalists.”

Christensen asks: *does the world look increasingly like the politically saturated, anti-capitalist stagnatopia she envisaged?* If the

evaluation of Rand is restricted to these terms, her claim to attention seems assured. The conclusion:

If we don't succeed in changing the values and direction of at least the next generation, I fear the full prediction of Atlas Shrugged will become reality and while that may hold some promise for the distant future, it is not something that I think people of my age feel like going through if we can avoid it.

Given the Cathedral — which is to say, pedagogical (and propagandistic) anti-capitalism in power — Christensen's hope for a generational shift in "values and direction" sounds like a prayer to a dead God. That leaves only Cassandra, and tragic truths.

(Via.)

January 8, 2014

Right on the Money (#1)

Of all the reasons to read Kant, the most important is to understand Mises, and thus the template for a functional world (however unobtainable). Austrian economics, as formulated in *Human Action*, consists exclusively of systematically assembled *synthetic a priori* propositions. Insofar as action is in fact directed by practical reason, the conclusions of organized praxeology *cannot be wrong*.

It is pointless to ask an Austrian Economist whether he 'believes'

a rise in the minimum wage will increase unemployment (above the level it would otherwise be). The praxeological construction of economic law is indifferent to empirical regularity, as to anything less certain than rational necessity. Does one 'believe' that 2 + 2 = 4? No, one *knows* it, because the irreducible values of the signs compel the conclusion, and are inextricable from it. There could be no value '2' unless its doubling equaled '4', or any meaning to 'wage' unless its doubling reduced demand for labor. Empirically sensitive Austrianism isn't Austrian at all.

Like game theory, Austrianism applies wherever rational agents seek to maximize advantage. Perhaps, as Moldbug argues, it is comparable to Euclidean geometry — another *synthetic a priori* construction — embedded, as a special case, within a more general model, unconstrained by the presupposition of intelligible purposes.

The problem with Mises as guru is that Misesian classical liberalism (or Rothbardian libertarianism) is like Newtonian physics. It is basically correct within its operating envelope. Under unusual conditions it breaks down, and a more general model is needed. The equation has another term, the ordinary value of which is zero. Without this term, the equation is wrong. Normally this is no problem; but if the term is ***not zero****, the error becomes visible.*

As a matter of historical fact, this is how the neoreactionary departure from pure libertarianism has occurred. It has stumbled upon non-zero curvature in the domain of political economy, and —

unable to comfort itself through the dismissal of this discovery — it has precipitated an intellectual crisis, through which it spreads. Whether faithfully Carlylean, or not, it insists upon a generalization of realism beyond expectations of liberal order. Civilization is the fragile solution to a deeper problem, not a stable foundation to be assumed — as a parallel postulate — by subsequent, elaborate calculations.

What does this make of money? Can Austrianism be modified, by systematic transformations, that adapt it to the dark intrusion of neoreactionary realism? That is a question recent discussions have already introduced.

ADDED: Spandrell triggers a related discussion.

May 22, 2013

Hayek and Pinochet

Despite the left slant, this examination of Hayek's involvement with the Chilean Pinochet regime is calm and informative enough to be worth reading (via). Its relevance to numerous recent discussions on the extreme right is clear.

Given everything we know about Hayek—his horror of creeping socialism, his sense of the civilizational challenge it posed; his belief that great men impose their will upon society ("The conservative

*peasant, as much as anybody else, owes his way of life to a different type of person, to men who were innovators in their time and who by their innovations forced a new manner of living on people belonging to an earlier state of culture"); his notion of elite legislators ("If the majority were asked their opinion of all the changes involved in progress, they would probably want to prevent many of its necessary conditions and consequences and thus ultimately stop progress itself. I have yet to learn of an instance when the deliberate vote of the majority (**as distinguished from the decision of some governing elite**) has decided on such sacrifices in the interest of a better future"); and his sense of political theory and politics as an epic confrontation between the real and the yet-to-be-realized—perhaps the Pinochet question needs to be reframed. The issue is not "How could he have done what he did?" but "How could he not?"*

(I agree with Corey Robin that the 'Schmittian' element in Hayek's thinking remains an unresolved theoretical problem, but his concrete judgments — as detailed here — strike me as consistently sound.)

June 28, 2013

Confused Cato

By coincidence I was recalling this Cato-hosted essay by Peter Thiel,

in which he states: “I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible.” It isn’t a message the Cato Institute is able to digest.

Consider this article by Juan Carlos Hidalgo (from the Cato Institute’s Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity). Headlined ‘How socialism has destroyed Venezuela’ it tracks the descent of what “was once South America’s richest country” into a hellish, crime-wracked, economic ruin. Socialist insanity is, of course, the immediate cause. How, though, did socialism become Venezuelan public policy? This is a question Hidalgo seems unable to imagine, let alone answer.

The account, as far as it goes, is unexceptionable:

Driving the unrest is a large segment of the population that is fed up with the country’s rapidly deteriorating economy. Despite receiving over $1 trillion in oil revenues since 1999, the government has run out of cash and now relies heavily on printing money to finance itself. The result is the highest inflation rate in the world: officially 56 per cent last year, although according to calculations by Steve Hanke of Johns Hopkins University, the implied annual inflation rate is actually 330 per cent.

The government reacted to skyrocketing inflation by following the typical socialist script: it imposed draconian price controls and has been raiding businesses it accuses of hoarding. As a result, there are widespread shortages of food and medicines, and people have to endure hour-long lines in supermarkets. The scarcity index produced

by Venezuela's central bank reached 28 per cent in January, meaning that one out of four basic products is out of stock at any given time. Somehow, toilet paper is now more valuable than paper money.

The productive sector has been decimated after hundreds of nationalisations and expropriations. Oil now accounts for 96 per cent of export earnings, up from 80 per cent a decade ago. Moreover, due to gross mismanagement at PDVSA, the state oil monopoly, production has dropped by 28 per cent since 2000, the only major energy producer in the world to experience a decline in the last quarter of a century.

The economic hardship faced by Venezuelans is compounded by a horrific rise in crime. The country is now one of the most dangerous places in the world, with almost 25,000 homicides in 2013 – a murder rate of 79 killings per 100,000 inhabitants. One of the reasons the protests are growing, despite the government's brutal repression, is that the country is quickly becoming unlivable and many Venezuelans think that they have nothing to lose.

We get it (really); socialism is the path to chaotic ruin. And the path to socialism? Here Hidalgo switches without the slightest hint of reflective awareness from perceptive acuity to self-subverting cognitive confusion:

For many years [Venezuela] was also a remarkable democracy in a region where most nations were ruled by military dictatorships. Today, socialism has turned Venezuela into an authoritarian basket

case that thousands try to escape every year. With millions of Venezuelans no longer willing to put up with deteriorating living conditions, and a government willing to take whatever means necessary to hold on to power, it looks like the worst is yet to come.

So over the course of "many years" democratic Venezuela transformed into a socialist catastrophe. Are the Cato story tellers going to suggest a narrative for this, or are they going to let us do it for them?

ADDED: Maduro's war on "fascism" driven by invincible idealism: "We will guarantee everyone has a plasma television."

ADDED: From the Left: "What has emerged in Venezuela is a new bureaucratic class who are themselves the speculators and owners of this new and failing economy." (Weird the way that always happens.)

February 26, 2014

Umlaut

It's probably less true with each passing week that Neoreaction can be accurately described as a small, dispersed population of *libertarians mugged by reality*. Nevertheless, it is part of NRx heritage that such a characterization made considerable sense in the past. There should be no surprise that between libertarianism and

NRx a significant zone of complex friction and interchange can be found. Right now, *Umlaut* is the media motor of such contact.

This is more than a little strange. Partly, it is odd because *Umlaut*'s CATO institute parent is the principle representative of respectable libertarianism, feeding ideas into the political process (where they are of course completely ignored), while stressing a non-threatening strain of Statist harm reduction, rather than the rougher anti-state antagonism of the Mises Institute, or even the dope-head dissidence of *Reason*. Secondly, it seems an unlikely follow up to this.

Michael Anissimov, whose precious bodily fluids are free of all libertarian contamination, has put out a red flag post on the recent peculiar intimacy, taking the Kuznicki horror as representative of the genre. His post, which contains valuable information about the institutional structure and media presence of various libertarian organs, concludes that *Umlaut* is the "libertarians' real, on-the-ground outlet for ideology." (The original version also noted that the public outreach of *CATO Unbound* had peaked with Peter Thiel's decisively important remark: "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible.")

This tweet is almost certainly relevant:

> How can we promote the right leadership when people are being influenced by Mises and his anti-authoritarian ideals?
>
> — Michael Anissimov (@MikeAnissimov) February 17,

2014

Handle has pursued a deeper engagement, specifically with (*Umlaut*'s) Adam Gurri. (This blog has a limited, and schizoid, relationship with the magazine, from fear and loathing last October, to intrigued. Two further — excellent — *Umlaut* articles bridged the gap here from raised-hackles to friendly woofing.)

This development grates on a number of neuralgic NRx issues, which makes it enormously entertaining, intellectually stimulating, and strategically tangled. It plugs directly into the recent 'entryism' conversation, due to the libertarian connections of Patri Friedman (a focus of the J. Arthur Bloom piece.) Themes of exit, secession, and markets, among others, are all susceptible to inflammation from libertarian influences. Working out what NRx is, at its core, is inevitably complicated by ideological foreign entanglements, especially if the libertarian connection is mirrored — at the other extreme — by a no less tortuous negotiation over boundaries with the European New Right.

To underscore the latter point, NRx is reasonably analogized to a weak, fissile state, cross-cut by the machinations of superpowers (libertarianism and the ENR). Local 'nationalists' deploring all alien interference quickly find their positions undermined by the blatant dissymmetry of their concerns, driving them into polarization, conflict, collaboration, and counter-collaboration. Which Right is

right? The potential tension is extraordinary. It cannot possibly be less than interesting.

ADDED: Correction:

> @Outsideness FYI, The Umlaut is not affiliated with Cato (or any other organization).
>
> — Eli Dourado (@elidourado) February 17, 2014

ADDED: Michael Anissimov responds. Citing Moldbug (very adeptly), he remarks: "This is where myself and Nick Land part ways. I'm hooked on the Frederick the Great solution, he's hooked on the Hong Kong solution. Both are equally valid interpretations in light of the founding texts of Moldbug."

— Yes.

February 17, 2014

Libertarians are WEIRD

Mark Lutter advances the following thought experiment:

Earth is dying, unable to further sustain human life. Mankind has thrown their last resources into creating a space ship that can reach a habitable planet. However, the space ship can only carry 10,000 people and little is known about the planet beyond gravity and

oxygen levels. With the literal fate of humanity lying before us, who do we send and why?

After that, it gets WEIRD (+ ++). In a nutshell, Lutter's 'we', while — apparently in absolute innocence — employed to represent the voice of humanity as a whole, is self-evidently processing the problem in a way that would make no sense beyond its own peculiar thede. 'We' could probably all come to the reasonable conclusion that only the Swiss get to survive. (Right?)

In passing, he notes that 'we' all agree multiculturalism is a dysfunctional mess: "For all the praise of multiculturalism, no one would seriously bet a diverse group of cultures would give the greatest chance for success. …" (The whole paragraph is a jaw-dropper.)

The main point, however: "Picking a cultural group to colonize a new planet and save humanity forces the mind to focus on positive and negative attributes of the cultural group." This perfectly exemplifies the *weirded out* intelligence of libertarians, expressed as a detached universalism wholly incognisant of its own deracination. The obvious rejoinder: *No one thinks like that* (except you guys). It might be over-compensation to suggest that two-thirds of the world's population would respond to the total extermination of the Swiss with vague amusement, but it's at least as plausible as Lutter's assumption that the good people of Helvetia would be neutrally evaluated, selected, and then cheered on as the sole remnant of

'humanity', to such an extent that *not being Swiss would be cheerfully accepted as an ethnic death sentence*.

This isn't meant to be any kind of denuciation — it's very possible Lutter is playing his (weird) audience hard, and doing something subversively dark around the back. As barb-hooked bait for libertarian nuttiness, his post is really something. I can't wait to see what his comment thread looks like.

ADDED: "I do not believe anything I wrote was terribly controversial …" (At least one of us has to be psychotically dissociated — not that there's anything wrong with that.)

November 11, 2014

Dark AnCap

As a matter of simple socio-cultural documentation, this is the thought-process that leads libertarian realists to discover they have crossed over to the Outer Right:

All people are not equal. In fact, two individuals who are in every socially discernible way the same, have an infinite number of differences between them. When those people have evolved for thousands of years in radically different environments, those people will have even greater differences between them. Such differences will include but not be limited to intelligence, propensity for violence,

and propensity for cooperation.
Any libertarian with the slightest bit of observational skills has to have noticed that we're mostly a movement of white males. They would also notice that there is no libertarian movement to speak of outside of cultures descendant from Europeans. This is not a weakness of libertarianism, as our leftist infiltrators attempt to insist. It is rather a very obvious indicator that white males have a greater natural inclination toward market cooperation than other peoples. To insist otherwise is nothing more than the denial of human nature, it is biological and cultural Marxism.

Leftists know this, and since they hate freedom, they hate white males. They will thus do everything in their power to destroy us before we manage to make any headway in advancing our ideas. This includes mass subsidized immigration from third world countries.
While our ideal society would have no government and thus no arbitrary geopolitical borders enforced by State mercenaries, the notion that there would be free and unrestricted travel the world over in the absence of the State is a remarkably ridiculous left wing idea. Borders are the whole point of freedom, as borders are demarcations of property rights.

It's the beginning, rather than the end, of a discussion. (XS finds a few quibble points, and far more in the rest of the post.) For anybody wondering about current mutations on the Libertarian Right, however, the basic structure of insight on exhibition here is the place

to start.

Euro-descended (and specifically Anglo-Dutch descended) males are differentially inclined to libertarian attitudes, to a remarkable degree (statistically speaking). Disentangling race and culture in this regard is far from straightforward. The sex-based dispositional difference is far less noisy. (Of course, the Marxoid explanation is that doubly-privileged Whites Males are defending their social advantages through this ideological preference.) Also notable, IMHO, is the (almost?) equally marked tendency of European peoples towards extreme, highly-idealized and morally-fanatic leftism — compared to the conceptually-fuzzy tribal and communitarian sensibilities widespread elsewhere. Bleeding-heart Left-libertarianism is about as distilled-White as anything ever gets — but with that remark, I'm already straying into the quibble-zone.

January 25, 2016

Quote (#255)

The Economist on Peter Thiel:

At his best, Mr Thiel was a mixture of libertarian and contrarian. As a student at Stanford University in the late 1980s and early 1990s he railed against the new academic orthodoxies of multiculturalism and diversity and political correctness, founding a conservative

*magazine, **Stanford Review**, and publishing an establishment-baiting book, "The Diversity Myth". He even defended a fellow law student, Keith Rabois, who decided to test the limits of free speech on campus by standing outside a teacher's residence and shouting "Faggot! Faggot! Hope you die of AIDS!" When he was a young tyro in Silicon Valley, his libertarian vision inspired many of his business decisions. He hoped that PayPal would help create a new world currency, free from government control and dilution, and that Facebook would help people form spontaneous communities outside traditional nation states.*

There is a darker element in his thinking today. In an essay written in 2009 for the Cato Institute, a libertarian think-tank, he declared that he no longer believed that "freedom and democracy are compatible", putting some of the blame for growing statism on the rise of welfare dependency and the enfranchisement of women. He added a grandiloquent coda: "The fate of our world may depend on the effort of a single person who builds or propagates the machinery of freedom that makes the world safe for capitalism".

(That final Thiel quote is *Sentences* material.)

Libertarianism either goes dark, or it dies of cognitive dissonance. The number of people seeing that — while small — is rising on a parabolic curve.

June 4, 2016

Libertarianism for Zombies

'Liberaltarian' isn't a word that's been heard much recently. Whilst aesthetics is surely part of the explanation, there's probably more to it than that. Most obviously, recent political developments in the United States have shown, beyond the slightest possibility of doubt, that modern 'liberalism' and the project of maximal state expansion are so completely indistinguishable that liberal-libertarian fusionism can only perform a comedy act. Garin K Hovannisian had already predicted this outcome down to its minute details before the 2008 Presidential Election. Ed Kilgore later conducted a complementary dismissal from the left. From *Reason* came the question "Is Liberaltarianism Dead? Or Was it Ever Alive in The First Place?" which sets us out on a zombie hunt.

Anybody here who has poked into this stuff, even just a little bit, is probably approaching shriek-point already: *In the name of everything holy please just let it remain in its grave*. It's too late for that. Liberaltarianism has been freshly exhumed specially for *Outside in* readers, and the zombie serum injected through its left eye, directly into the amygdala. It might seem rather ghoulish, but let us harden ourselves — *for science*. This absurd shambling specimen will help us to refine an elegant formula, of both ideological and historical interest.

Brink Lindsey offered the authoritative account:

Today's ideological turmoil, however, has created an opening for ideological renewal—specifically, liberalism's renewal as a vital governing philosophy. A refashioned liberalism that incorporated key libertarian concerns and insights could make possible a truly progressive politics once again—not progressive in the sense of hewing to a particular set of preexisting left-wing commitments, but rather in the sense of attuning itself to the objective dynamics of U.S. social development. In other words, a politics that joins together under one banner the causes of both cultural and economic progress.

Conservative fusionism, the defining ideology of the American right for a half-century, was premised on the idea that libertarian policies and traditional values are complementary goods. That idea still retains at least an intermittent plausibility—for example, in the case for school choice as providing a refuge for socially conservative families. But an honest survey of the past half-century shows a much better match between libertarian means and progressive ends. Most obviously, many of the great libertarian breakthroughs of the era—the fall of Jim Crow, the end of censorship, the legalization of abortion, the liberalization of divorce laws, the increased protection of the rights of the accused, the reopening of immigration—were championed by the political left.

Libertarian means and progressive ends. Could it imaginably be said more clearly? Liberty is legitimate if, and only if, it *serves* to promote the consolidation of the Cathedral (through chaotic

multicultural criminality), which is then retrospectively interpreted as the intrinsic *telos* of freedom. Whatever does not subordinate itself to this agenda is to have its brains eaten, and be systematically recycled into progressive zombie flesh. This is a project for libertarian hipsters and Leviathan apparatchiks to undertake hand-in-hand — fusionally. The new age of the cannibal is come.

Neoreactionaries are libertarians mugged by reality (to adapt a pre-coined phrase). This piece of socio-cultural understanding appears to be generally accepted, and rightly so. If it needs defending, that will have to happen elsewhere, but I have yet to see it seriously contested. Moldbug's own intellectual pedigree suffices to establish the claim on a solid foundation, but it is, in any case, far from aberrant in this regard. The recognition that libertarian ideas — despite their philosophical elegance and economic attractiveness — are not historically or politically realistic, has been the catalytic insight driving the development and adoption of neoreactionary alternatives, shorn of certain mythical elements inherited by the progressive clade (substantial egalitarianism most prominently). This is an empirically robust, uncontroversial story, but it is not yet a formula. It's time to take the next step.


Long ~~live~~ last science!

Has there yet emerged a neoreactionary who was once a 'liberaltarian'? This isn't a question designed to embarrass anybody. I just think the answer is easily predictable. When neoreactionary intelligence perceives this shambling wreckage of all cognitive integrity, it recoils into itself in utter revulsion. Everything it abominated about the libertarian delusion stands before it, trickling pitifully. This is the perfect caricature of its abandoned errors: an oozing swippleous mass of unreflective universalism. It's classical liberalism revived as an undead decay-plague. (If Karl wants to go after this thing with a shot-gun, I don't see anyone holding him back.)

The view from the unlibertarianized left is illuminating:

… the conscience of a Lindseyan liberaltarian is pretty darn liberal – with some policy disputes on top. When Lindsey stands with conservatives it is mostly on somewhat accidental (but not therefore inconsiderable) policy grounds. He thinks liberals tend to adopt self-defeating policies. When Lindsey stands with liberals it is mostly on philosophical grounds. This point fits in with the one I made in this

post, about different sorts of libertarians: basically liberal or basically feudal. If you are a feudal libertarian, you really shouldn't have a problem with Jim Crow, in principle. If you are a liberal libertarian, you should. Conservative libertarians tend to be on the fence, feudalism/liberalism-wise. (This depends partly on a cheeky use of 'feudal' – see my post. But, then again, what was Edmund Burke? a guy who was torn between liberalism and feudalism. That's not such a bad sketch of his personality-type.)

Strangely, we're still talking about Jim Crow — as if the entire meaning of American history is expressed through that. The target here is Barry Goldwater, but it makes no substantial difference if Ron Paul is substituted. The critical point, in both cases, is that a reluctance to countenance the expansion of the political sphere in pursuit of racial egalitarianism is interpreted as a moral scandal, for which an ostentatious sacrifice of liberty is the only permissible solution. Negligence is already 'feudalism'. When this dam bursts — into 'liberaltarian' compromise — the micro-managerial state has already been granted everything it will need to ask for. Stamping out feudalism makes you free. (It works like this.)

If it wasn't for Hoppe, it would perhaps be understandable if the shuddering neoreactionary (N) were to suspect that libertarian thought (L0) tends — slowly but inevitably — to compost down towards this liberaltarian (L1) 'walker', in which all the degenerative forces of conformism *and* revolt have been compacted,

as if by some ideological parody of providence. Is not our liberaltarian zombie the still-recognizable avatar of the old liberalism, resurrected hideously as the animated putrescence of the new? Yet we have Hoppe, and so we know that the directives of self-coordinating liberty need not take this path. There is, unmistakably, something other to libertarianism than what is seen in the figure of its zombified, liberaltarian ruin. Through a type of negative political theology, we can formulate it:

Lo – L1 = N

First, identify every specifically emphatic feature of liberaltarianism, then subtract it without residue from the old Austro-libertarian matrix, and what remains is the neoreactionary template — abstracted due to the provisional (negative) place-holders for yet undeveloped topics: presumed non-equality, non-universality, non-progress (in socio-cultural matters), and at least partial non-autonomy (of the economic agent from fragile structures of civility). Slaying the zombie does not, in itself, fill these gaps — but it *holds open the gaps*, and therefore the avenues of neoreactionary exploration.

As a rule of thumb: whatever Will Wilkinson is having, I'll have the opposite. If the liberaltarian innovation is conceived as a vector, its exact negation sets the neoreactionary course. With this conclusion, science is served. We can return the corpse of a misconceived 'progressive' liberty to its grave, or rather, to the cyclopean

mausoleum it has made for itself: the liberal super-state which protects freedom in detail, with unbounded attentiveness, until it has been obliterated entirely from the earth.

ADDED: Weeping isn't an argument.

ADDED: Foseti provokes and hosts an interesting discussion on the genealogy of neoreaction, by remarking: "My favorite question to ask fellow reactionaries is how they got to neoreaction. What steps did they take in their ideological journey? My last stop was on the Old Right, but I got there from libertarianism."

September 10, 2013

Failure

Markets fail, so we need to rely on government sometimes (or often) to set things straight. — That's probably the single most comical piece of commonplace insanity in the world today. All kinds of people fall for it, even those who seem otherwise capable of coherent cognitive processing.

Chris Edwards puts together an impressive short (and implicit) demolition.

Fernandez' summary of the Edwards post is even better (so I've left the link to him):

Chris Edwards at the Cato Institute believes there should be a

National Museum of Government Failure. He argues that the displays at the Smithsonian would pale into insignificance if set beside the awe-inspiring sight of such things as the "$349 million on a rocket test facility that is completely unused", the Superconducting Collider whose ruins include nearly 15 miles of tunnel and the ex-future Yucca Mountain nuclear waste site. Yet these artifacts, whose scale would surpass many a Lost City, are far from the worst failures. The biggest fiascos by dollar value are the various government programs designed to win the war on drugs or poverty which after having spent trillions of dollars fruitlessly, lie somewhere in an unmarked bureaucratic grave.

A price tag doesn't do justice to these calamities, which are not only wasteful, but positively and perversely harmful, but it's a start. The category of 'waste' itself fails here, because it would actually be less culturally toxic for all the resources squandered on social programs to be simply annihilated into hyperspace without remainder. Ruinous dependency incentives would then be hugely lessened.

Of course, the idea that dysfunctional political institutions will cooperate with their own public humiliation is also a piece of lunacy (and this time, one that beltway libertarians are peculiarly prone to).

ADDED: Highly relevant.

January 20, 2015

Is Libertarianism Racist?

… a question taken verbatim from a short, but perfect, Foseti post (from 2012).

(XS misses that guy.)

Anyone looking for a primer on how the hyper-liberal right goes dark will find it there. 'Perfect' means it can't be improved upon.

Don't miss Handle's comment, which fills out the party-political dimension.

ADDED (Park MacDougald):

If it sounds strange to say that libertarianism is "white," well, it's still true. Libertarianism is, empirically, really goddamn white, and some have suggested that that may not be a coincidence: That is, libertarianism makes assumptions about what's normal for everyone on the basis of the white experience. Normally, that's a point made by the left as a criticism, but the whiteness of libertarianism is increasingly accepted by post-libertarian reactionaries like Moldbug as a badge of honor. It could also indicate a wider trend in the future, if a combination of demographic changes and political projects to "make whiteness visible" lead more white people to think of cultural values like individual rights as tied to whiteness, rather than as universal principles. Certainly Trump's brand of nationalism seems to rest on doing something similar with the idea of "America," abandoning any pretense to a creedal idea of national identity in

*favor of one based on race. These trends could well produce, among whites, more conscious anti-racists **and** conscious racists at the same time.*

ADDED: CATO dissents.

June 12, 2016

Suicidal Libertarianism

Confession No.1: I generally like Don Boudreaux's writing a lot.

Confession No.2: I think this is simply insane. By that I mean: I simply don't get it, at all.

Boudreaux begins by explaining the concerns of a "few friends whose opinions I hold in the highest regard" that "immigrants will use their growing political power to vote for government policies that are more interventionist and less respectful of individual freedoms." Hard to imagine, I know. Especially if one ignores insignificant examples such as — ummm — *the state of fricking California*.

It then gets weirder. We learn that "concern over the likely voting patterns of immigrants is nothing new. Past fears seem, from the perspective of 2013, to have been unjustified." I'm about to poison my nervous-system with my own sarcasm at this point, so instead I'll simply ask, as politely as possible: What would count as evidence of America moving in a direction that was "more interventionist and

less respectful of individual freedoms"? Would it look anything at all like what we've seen — in highly-accelerated mode — since the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act?

Then comes the overt celebration of libertarian suicidalism:

But let's assume for the moment that today's immigrants – those immigrants recently arrived and those who would arrive under a more liberalized immigration regime – are indeed as likely as my concerned friends fear to vote overwhelmingly to move American economic policy in a much more ***dirigiste*** *direction. Such a move would, I emphatically and unconditionally agree, be very bad. Very. Bad. Indeed.*

I still support open immigration. I cannot bring myself to abandon support of my foundational principles just because following those principles might prove fatal.

The thing is, they did prove fatal. That's why the neoreaction exists.

June 25, 2013

Suicidal Libertarianism (Part D'oh)

When it comes to the libertarian suicide race, Bryan Caplan leaves Don Boudreaux in the dust. Caplan takes the Non-Aggression Principle and runs with it, all the way into a maximum-velocity self-

directed death cult. (Self-directed, solely in the ideological sense, of course.) Given the considerable merits of this book, in particular, it's a sad thing to see.

American libertarianism has always been vulnerable to neo-puritan spiritual extravagance. Caplan systematically pushes this tendency to its limit, divorcing its arguments from any realistic estimation of consequences, and transforming it into a form of deontological moral fanaticism, in which self-defense, retaliation, and boundaries are strictly prohibited. He envisages a world of games in which only unilateral altruism is permissible to the libertarian player. It would be fun to go a few rounds of prisoner's dilemma with him.

Naturally, when it comes to unconditional support for open borders irrespective of political consequences, Caplan rushes to Boudreaux's defense. Helpfully, he links into his own extensive archive on the topic, via a gateway into a series of extremely repetitive posts (here, here, and here — reading any one will do).

Perhaps Caplan really believes his own arguments, but if so he has driven himself insane. If you doubt this for a moment, it's only going to be a moment — try this:

If you care as much about immigrants as natives, this is no reason to oppose immigration. Consider the following example:

Suppose there are two countries with equal populations. The quality of policy ranges from 0-10, 10 being best. In country A, bliss

points (people's first choice for policy) are uniformly distributed from 2-6. In country B, bliss points are uniformly distributed from 4-8.

*What does democratic competition deliver? When the countries are independent, country A gets a policy quality of 4 (the median of the uniform distribution from 2-6), and country B gets a policy quality of 6 (the median of the uniform distribution from 4-8). Average policy that people live under: 50%*4+50%*6=5.*

Now suppose you open the borders, and everyone moves to country B (the richer country). The median of the whole distribution is 5. Result: The immigrants live under better policies, the natives live under worse policies. The average (5) remains unchanged.

Speechless yet? (I'm halfway through a blogpost, so I can't afford to be.) The argument: Any attempt to live under a regime that is anything other than the averaged political idiocy of humanity as a whole is a gross human rights violation.

You don't like the way Pakistanis manage their national affairs? Too bad. Libertarianism (Caplan style) insists that it's your duty to promote the homogenization of the world's political cultures because, after all, if there's anything at all good going on at your end, think how happy it will make the Pakistanis when it gets shared out. Heading into a stirred gruel of deeply degenerated liberal capitalism and Islamo-feudalism is best for everybody, taken on average. If it's not tasting right, it's because you've not yet thrown in enough African tribal warfare and Polynesian head-hunting for the full moral

hit. Or how about mixing Singapore and Bangladesh into a human paste? Anything less is tantamount to genocide.

This argument is so bad that the very idea of responding to it makes me throw up a little in my mouth, but duty calls. Since Caplan claims to be a libertarian, let's start with an unobjectionable principle — competition. If any institution is to work, it's because competition keeps it in line. This requires a number of things, all of them incompatible with homogenization: experimental variation, differential support for comparison, local absorption of consequences, and selection through elimination of failure.

Consider two companies: Effective Inc. and Loserbum Corp. Both have very different corporate cultures, adequately reflected in their names. Under market conditions, Loserbum Corp. either learns some lessons from Effective Inc., or it goes under. Net benefit or no great loss to the world in either case.

But along comes Caplan, to bawl out the stockholders, management, and other employees of Effective Inc. "You monsters! Don't you care at all about the guys at Loserbum Corp.? They have the same moral status as you, don't you know? Here's the true, radical free-market plan: All managers and workers of Loserbum get to enter your company, work there, introduce their business strategies and working practices,until we reach equilibrium. Equilibrium is what markets are all about, see? Sure, Effective Inc. will degenerate significantly, but imagine all the utility gains of the poor Loserbums!

It all comes out in the wash."

But … but … countries aren't companies. Well, maybe not exactly, but they're competitive institutions, or at least, the more they are, the better they work. The most important thing is true equally of both — to the extent they are able to externalize and pool their failure, the less they will learn.

In a world that has any chance of working, the Loserbum culture has a choice: learn or fail. Caplan introduces a third possibility — share (average out, or homogenize). His maths is idiotic. The contribution that Singapore makes to the world has almost nothing to do with the utility gains to its tiny population. Instead, it is a model — Effective Inc. — whose contribution to the world is to show all the Loserbums what they are. Swamp it with Loserbums, destroy it, and that function is gone. If that had happened before the late 1970s, the PRC would probably still be a neo-Maoist hellhole. It didn't flood Singapore with 300 million poor peasants, instead, it learnt from Singapore's example. That's how the world really works (when it does). Institutional examples matter. Caplan's world would annihilate all of them, leaving fairly averaged, three-quarter Loserbums grunting at each other in a libertarian-communist swamp. Nothing would work anywhere. There could be no lessons.

Still, Caplan has other arguments. The best, by far, is that wrecking a society to the point of generalized mutual detestation is the best way to shrink the welfare state. It goes like this:

Although poor immigrants are likely to support a bigger welfare state than natives do, the presence of poor immigrants makes natives turn against the welfare state. Why would this be? As a rule, people are happy to vote to "take care of their own"; that's what the welfare state is all about. So when the poor are culturally very similar to the rich, as they are in places like Denmark and Sweden, support for the welfare state tends to be uniformly strong.

As the poor become more culturally distant from the rich, however, support for the welfare state becomes weaker and less uniform.

This argument is so freaking Mad Max that I actually quite like it. Burn down the world and you take the welfare state with it. Yeeaaaahhhhh! (I'll leave it to more responsible voices to point out any possible flaws.)

Then there's the "non-natives are markedly less likely to vote than natives" argument (from the same post, and all the rest). It makes you wonder what a large population of enfranchised but non-voting anti-capitalists engenders. Something good, surely?

Best of all is the capstone contortionist analogy: "Native voters under 30 are more hostile to markets and liberty than immigrants ever were. Why not just kick them out?" Oh yes, oh yes, could we? Or at least stop them voting. Without some arrangement for the mass-disenfranchisement of leftist voters there's no chance of anything except continuous decay, and age restriction might be as good a place

as any to start.

My position in a sentence … is that immigration restrictions are a vastly greater crime against markets and liberty than anything immigrant voters are likely to manage.

Thank Gnon that no one listens to libertarians.

ADDED: Caplan doubles down, with some mouth-watering hypotheticals. If States ever made these kind of choices, they'd be fun to keep around, but the whole point is that *of course they never would*. (Don't miss the darkly-infiltrated comments thread.)
… and yet more attractive counter-democratic hypotheticals. By the time the deontological libertarians have finished with this, they'll have designed a minutely-detailed neoreactionary policy platform for us.

July 7, 2013

An Abstract Path to Freedom

At this thread (and in other places), commenter VXXC cites Durant's Dark Counsel: "For freedom and equality are sworn and everlasting enemies, and when one prevails the other dies. Leave men free, and their natural inequalities will multiply almost geometrically." He then remarks: "That's fine with me, I'll go with Freedom." *Outside in* concurs without reservation.

Take this dark counsel as the thesis that a practically-significant ideological dimension can be constructed, within which freedom and egalitarianism are related as strictly reciprocal variables. Taking this dimension for orientation, two abstract models of demographic redistribution can be examined, in order to identify *what it is that neoreactionaries want*.

The Caplan-Boudreaux Suicidal Libertarianism Model (SLM), touched upon here, and then sketched here, takes the following arithmetical form:

*Suppose there are two countries with equal populations. The quality of policy ranges from 0-10, 10 being best. In country A, bliss points (people's first choice for policy) are uniformly distributed from 2-6. In country B, bliss points are uniformly distributed from 4-8. […] When the countries are independent, country A gets a policy quality of 4 (the median of the uniform distribution from 2-6), and country B gets a policy quality of 6 (the median of the uniform distribution from 4-8). Average policy that people live under: 50%*4+50%*6=5. … suppose you open the borders, and everyone moves to country B (the richer country). The median of the whole distribution is 5. Result: The immigrants live under better policies, the natives live under worse policies. The average (5) remains unchanged.*

A few preparatory tweaks help to smooth the proceedings. Firstly, convert Caplan's "bliss points" to freedom coefficients (from '0' or absolute egalitarianism, to '1' or unconstrained liberty). A

society in which freedom was maximized would not be wholly unequal (Gini coefficient 1.0), but it would be wholly indifferent to inequality as a problem. In other words, egalitarian concerns would have zero policy impact. It is in this sense, alone, that freedom is perfected.

Secondly (and automatically), the question-begging judgments of "better" and "worse" are displaced by the ideological reciprocals of freedom and equality – there is no need to compel acquiescence as to the objective merits of either. Indeed, there is every reason to encourage those unconvinced of the superior attractions of liberty to seek ideological satisfaction in an egalitarian realm, elsewhere. From the perspective of liberty, egalitarian exodus is an unambiguous – even supreme – good, analogous to political entropy dissipation.

It is further, tacitly presumed here that freedom coefficients correlate linearly with intelligence optimization, but this depends upon further argument, to be bracketed for now.

The extraordinary theoretical value of the SLM can now be demonstrated. Due to its radical egalitarianism it defines a pessimal limit for neoreaction, and thus – by strict inversion – describes the abstract program for a restoration of free society (the Neoreactionary Model of demographic redistribution, or NM). In order to chart this reversal, the simplest course is to presuppose the full accomplishment of the SLM in an arbitrary 'geographical' space,

which it taken to be flexibly divisible, and populated by 320 million people, SLM-homogenized to a freedom coefficient of 0.5.

Confining ourselves to the tools already employed in the establishment of the climax SLM (whilst – for the sake of lucid presentation — ignoring any degenerative ratchet asymmetries), let us now proceed on the path of reversal. The SLM conservation law holds that average freedom is preserved, so an initial schism produces two equal populations – equivalent to those of Caplan's starting point – each numbering 160 million, but now differentiated on the dark counsel dimension, with freedom coefficients of 0.6 and 0.4.

Pursue this fissional procedure of territorial / population division and ideological differentiation recursively, focusing exclusively upon the comparatively free segment each time. The 160 million 0.6s become 80 million 0.7s, and an equal number of 0.5s. After five iterations, the final neoreactionary-secessionist de-homogenized distribution is reached:

160 million x 0.4
80 million x 0.5
40 million x 0.6
20 million x 0.7
10 million x 0.8, and – incarnating the meaning of world history, or at least absorbing neoreactionary exaltation —
10 million x 1.0

Roughly 3% of the original population now live in a truly free society. For Caplan and other SLM-proponents, of course, nothing at all has been gained.

Yet, assume instead of SLM utilitarian universalism, on profoundly inegalitarian grounds, that the aggregate quantity of freedom was considered of vastly lower importance than the *exemplary quality of freedom*, then the neoreactionary achievement is stark. Where freedom nowhere existed, now it does, at an essentially irrelevant cost of moderate socialist deterioration elsewhere. Half of the original population – 160 million souls – have now been released to enjoy a 'fairer' society than they knew before. Why not congratulate them on the fact, without being distracted unduly by the starvation and re-education camps? It can be confidently presumed that they would have voted for the regime that now takes care of them. Their internal political arrangements need no longer concern us.

For Neoreaction (the NM), it is not a question of whether people (in general) are free, but only whether freedom (somewhere) exists. The highest attainment of freedom within the system, rather than the averaged level of freedom throughout the system, is its overwhelming priority. By reversing the process of demographic redistribution envisaged by the SLM, its ends are achieved.

The zero-sum utilitarian conclusions of this comparison would be unsettled by a more concrete elaboration of the NM, in which the

effects of exemplarity, competition, the positive externalities of techno-economic performance, and other influences of freedom were included. At the present level of abstraction — set by Caplan's own (SL) model — such positive spin-offs might seem no more than sentimental concessions to common feeling. It is the ruthless core of the Neoreactionary Model that has, initially, to assert itself. Better the greatest possible freedom, even for a few, than a lesser freedom for all. Quality matters most.

The quasi-Rawlesian objection — fully implicit within the SLM — might run: "And what if the free society, as 'probability' dictates, is not yours?" — our rejoinder: "It would require a despicable egotist not to delight in it, even at a distance, as a beacon of aspiration, and an idiot or scoundrel not to set out on the same path, in whichever way they were able."

Disintegrate destiny.

July 16, 2013

Suicide Express

In an intriguing post on migration and 'expressive voting' in Alsace-Lorraine after the 1871 annexation, Bryan Caplan notes that although "over 90% of the new citizens of the Second Reich voted for … anti-Prussian regional parties" only 5% decided to emigrate back

to France. Clearly in this case, migration patterns revealed genuine commitments — based perhaps on economic opportunity — while elections were merely an occasion to express ethnic emotionalism without consequence. As usual in human affairs, microeconomics was aligned with approximate reason, whilst politics was possessed by destructive irrationality, redeemed only by its impotence.

It's hard to imagine what Caplan is seeing as the politically-correct take-away from this example. What it demonstrates starkly is that even populations characterized by scrupulous rationality in their private economic affairs will exploit electoral opportunities to vote for insanity — as judged by their own revealed preferences. Expect even model immigrant workers to expend their votes signalling an adherence to ethnic zealotry and ruinous economic populism — and in particular, the reproduction of exactly those social pathologies they have migrated away from. Like the French in post-1871 Alsace-Lorraine, they'll probably vote as if they want to live somewhere they manifestly don't want to be. (But that's not supposed to be the message, is it?)

August 19, 2013

Border Follies

Bryan Caplan's latest on the open borders question illuminates an

imaginary world. Perhaps the strangest thing about this fantasy earth is that it corresponds almost perfectly with an achieved libertarian utopia, marred only by pesky borders that impede the frictionless completion of labor contracts.

In Caplan World there are two significant levels of social organization: private owners — fully secure in their property rights — and the human race as a whole, struggling to sort itself into productive relationships of voluntary cooperation. In his figurative simplification, there are households, and there is the planet. Nothing done to de-fragment the planet could negatively affect households to any significant extent. In fact, they could only benefit from open-access to several billion potential tenants. On Caplan World, open-borders is a no-brainer.

On Sol-3, unfortunately, things are not nearly so simple. The most obvious reason is that nobody on this planet enjoys secure property rights. Freely-contracting Caplan World 'tenants' are — in reality — also voters, and what they vote upon, most substantially, is other people's property rights. In this, real world, geographical fragmentation means that a whole bunch of (once) non-random other people *do not have any voice in regards to your business*. In an age of rampant democracy, the only way to maintain this situation is to keep them on the other side of a border, at least formally (polite visitors don't get to decide whether your house should be expropriated). Eliminate the borders, and the only property rights

remaining are those that the global population, as a whole, are willing to grant. Does it really need to be spelt out that this is not the recipe for a libertarian society?

Yes, it's tediously repetitive to accuse Caplan and company of being suicidal lunatics, but they keeps printing out the collective suicide notes. These aren't stupid people. They have to know their plans won't result in the importation of voiceless exit-units, or free-contractors, but rather of a new people, already pre-determined by democratic assumptions to be particles of political sovereignty — i.e. *masters*. You don't get to decide (commercially) whether they can stay in your house. They get to decide (politically) whether you can keep your house. Since they are also disproportionately saturated with the bio-cultural heritage of places that have never shown any taste or competence for the creation or mere preservation of freedom-tolerant institutions, the subsequent democratic decisions — it can reliably be predicted — will be horrendous. If this were not so, why would the Left-half of the political spectrum be openly salivating about the electoral catastrophe in process? (Nobody thinks they're importing reinforcements for the Tea Party.)

It's probably far too late for any of this to matter. At this point, Caplan is just rubbing salty madness into the wounds.

September 3, 2013

Suicidal Libertarianism (Part-n)

Two posts in succession at Tyler Cowen's *Marginal Revolution* acknowledge that libertarianism's suicide-by-population-replacement is proceeding according to spontaneous disorder. Completely un-shockingly, mass low-IQ immigration from dysfunctional cultures that despise economic liberty has pushed libertarian ideas from marginality into complete irrelevance. So it goes.

Firstly, there's "Bad Demographic News for Libertarians" from Arnold Kling. It should probably be noted that this isn't a story being told from an immigration-catastrophe angle, so anybody with advanced skills at mental segmentation can dismiss it as irrelevant. You need to check the final table of the source post, by Timothy Taylor, to connect the dots. Kling's sober conclusion: "I am afraid that the number of households married to the state has soared."

Secondly, Cowen cites this paper by Hal Pashler (a psychologist at UCSD), whose research "results showed a marked pattern of lower support for pro-liberty views among immigrants as compared to US-born residents. These differences were generally statistically significant and sizable, with a few scattered exceptions. With increasing proportions of the US population being foreign-born, low support for libertarian values by foreign-born residents means that the political prospects of libertarian values in the US are likely to

diminish over time."

I just wish there had been some sort of short-cut to self-abolition for these maniacs that hadn't been routed through the destruction of America.

[Previous installments of Suicidal Libertarianism here, and here]

December 2, 2013

Scary Sailer

Bryan Caplan seizes upon a two-sentence Steve Sailer comment to fly into theatrical conniptions in public:

Does Steve genuinely favor denying half of Americans the right to reproduce? It's hard to know. It is the uncertainty that he carefully cultivated that makes Sailer's thought so scary to so many — including me. We shouldn't have to ***wonder*** *if a thinker approves of denying half the population the right to have children.*

This really is Caplan at his most despicable. First, set up a bizarre counter-factual to support a quite different moral argument by analogy. The crudely-telegraphed argumentative strategy is to shift the burden of fanaticism from proponents to opponents ("hey, can't you see that restricting immigration is **just like** sterilizing half the population"). Secondly, when a commentator corrects your counter-factual in the direction of historical reality — i.e. something that

actually happened — deflect attention by cranking up the moral hysteria, while retreating into what seems increasingly to be Caplan's favorite territory — unhinged deontological purism. Finally, suggest that the commentator is only mentioning historical reality in order to surreptitiously endorse your own preposterous thought-experiment as a practical program, thus exposing himself as "scary".

Why doesn't he just say that hyper-Nazi eugenics is wrong? (Of course, he has, many times.) *He probably wants to throw your granny into the biodiesel tanks too. Let's talk about that rather than my project to engineer a national immigration apocalypse.*

Anyone who seriously "wonders" whether Steve Sailer secretly advocates sterilizing half of the American population has released their grip on the last frayed threads of civilized conversation. Caplan is deteriorating from a nut into something far more repulsive.

ADDED: Sailer responds (calmly) —

Bryan:

Your arguments would get less tangled up if you'd simply keep in mind that I'm a moderate who takes reasonable positions, while you are an extremist who is drawn to promoting unreasonable ones. Please stop projecting your own immoderation upon me.

For example, there is an obvious distinction you fail to recognize between my appreciating the difficulties our ancestors went through — what Nicholas Wade calls "the Malthusian wringer" that helped make us who we are — and my very much not wanting to inflict

similar levels of competition upon our descendants.

Instead, it's you who wants to subject the descendants of American citizens to the neo-Malthusian nightmare of Open Borders.

June 3, 2014

Quote note (#206)

Caplan enters the bargaining stage:

… demographic ills can ***clearly be remedied with more immigration****! Non-white immigration is messing up America? Then let in enough white immigrants to keep the white share constant. Non-Christian immigration is destroying our religious heritage? Then let in enough Christians to keep the Christian share constant. Non-Anglophones are turning English into a minority language? Then let in enough English-speakers to balance them out. Low-IQ immigration is making us dumb? Then let in enough high-IQ immigrants to keep up smart.*

This is certainly a viable solution given current levels of immigration. The world has hundreds of millions of whites, Christians, English-speakers, and IQs>100. At least tens of millions of each group would love to permanently move to the U.S. Why haven't they? Because it's illegal, of course. If the U.S. selectively

opened its borders to these groups, it could reverse decades of demographic change in a matter of years. In fact, the U.S. could admit vastly more Third World immigrants without changing overall demographics a bit – as long as it concurrently welcomed First World immigrants to balance them.

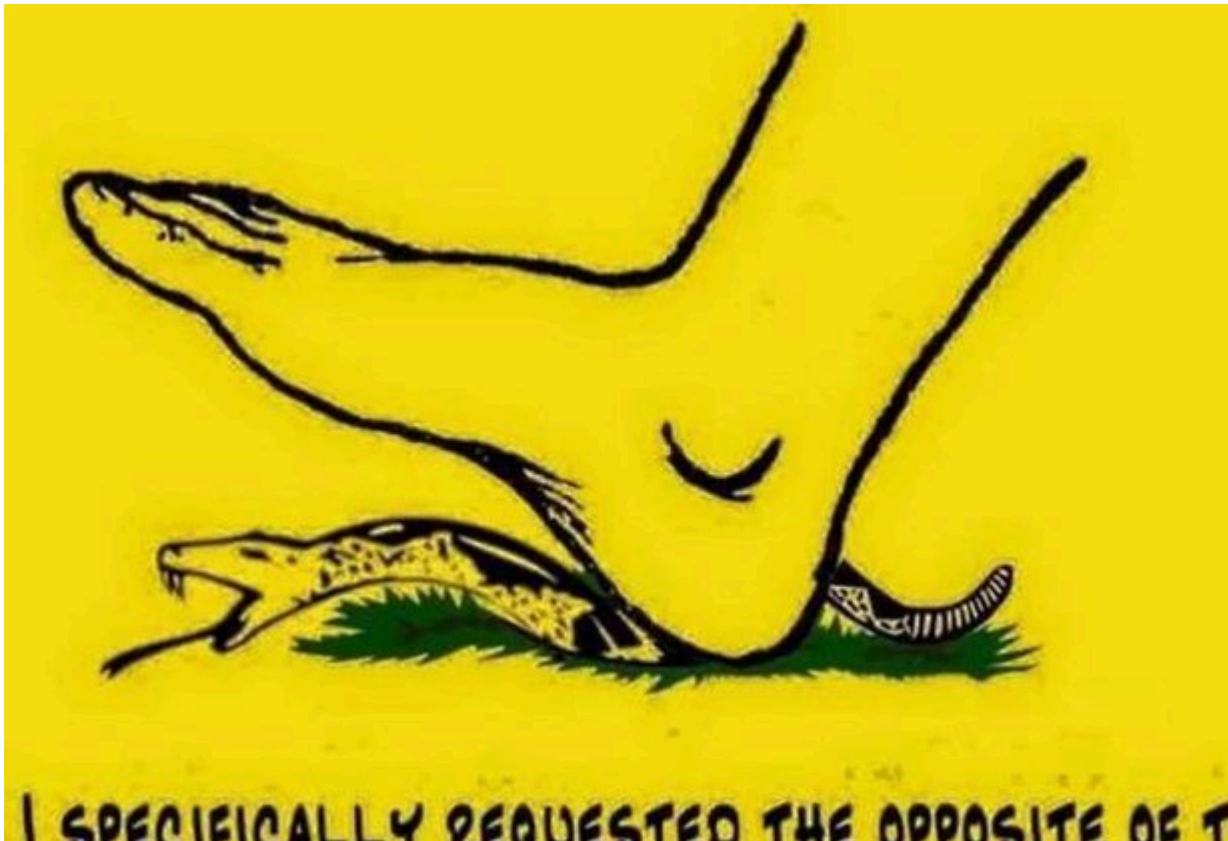
Take the machinery necessary to do that, and it would be possible — in fact, almost irresistible — to do something positive with it. (Or does demographic engineering only go in one direction?)

> @bryan_caplan @SanguineEmpiric If we're bargaining now, how about a 2:1 ratio of the immigrants we like, over the ones we 'happen to get'?
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) December 15, 2015

> .@Outsideness Done!
>
> — Bryan Caplan (@bryan_caplan) December 15, 2015

December 15, 2015

Anglophidian



I'm going to assume that snake is English (despite all natural-historical evidence to the contrary). The point is hard to contest, regardless. The ones that bite are better.

October 28, 2016

SECTION E - CRITIQUE OF CONSERVATISM

Anarchy on the Old Right

About that empty chair …

Over at The American Conservative, the Old Right has expressed its smoldering dismay at the country's political prospects through a fit of paralyzed dissensus.

The 29 members of the TAC symposium split fairly evenly between (Democrat) Barack Obama, (Republican) Mitt Romney, and (Libertarian) Gary Johnson. Each musters four definite commitments, with Andrew J. Bacevich, Leon Hadar, Scott McConnell, and Noah Millman for Obama; Marian Kester Coombs, James P. Pinkerton, Stephen B. Tippins Jr., and John Zmirak for Romney; and Doug Bandow, Peter Brimelow, Scott Galupo, and Bill Kauffman for Johnson.

Philip Giraldi epitomizes the spirit of anti-neoconservative

obstreperousness with his declared electoral intentions, wavering between a vote for Johnson, a Ron Paul write-in, or a Romney-spavining Obama choice if the race is tight. James Bovard is also torn between Johnson and a Ron Paul write-in (but without mention of an anti-Romney Obama option). Like Johnson, Romney picks up two additional 'maybes' (from W. James Antle III, Bradley J. Birzer). The Constitution Party's Virgil Goode musters just one solid supporter (Sean Scallon). There's also a write-in for Rand Paul (Daniel McCarthy), and four indecipherables (Jeremy Beer, Rod Dreher, William S. Lind, and Steve Sailer).

Decisive winner among the TAC writers, however, is Nobody, supported by seven unambiguous abstentions (Michael Brendan Dougherty, David Gordon, Robert P. Murphy, Justin Raimondo, Sheldon Richman, and Gerald J. Russello), and probably an eighth (Paul Gottfried, poised at the democratically-abstemious edge of the indecipherables).

Perhaps questions like this are souring the mood.

Why not opt for the real deal?

November 6, 2012

Almost …

As a symptom of things hitting the buffers, this Michael Walsh article

is vaguely encouraging. It speaks unreservedly about the "collaborationist Republican Party" but eventually loses itself in the pseudo-conundrum:

How a political party cannot sell Freedom and Liberty and Leave Me Alone to a formerly free people is beyond me …

Could it perhaps be because democratic party politics has exhaustively demonstrated its incompatibility with "Freedom and Liberty", "Leave Me Alone", and a "free people"?

September 26, 2013

Things Fall Apart

Reaction is not Neoreaction (but still Conservatism). Alain Finkielkraut explains to Spiegel:

***SPIEGEL**: What do you say to people who call you a reactionary?*

***Finkielkraut**: It has become impossible to see history as constant progress. I reserve the possibility to compare yesterday and today and ask the question: What do we retain, what do we abandon?*

***SPIEGEL**: Is that really any more than nostalgia for a lost world?*

***Finkielkraut**: Like Albert Camus, I am of the opinion that our generation's task is not to recreate the world, but to prevent its decline. We not only have to conserve nature, but also culture. There you have the reactionary.*

[The entire interview says something about the unusual conversations that are beginning to break out.]

December 9, 2013

Conservatives

AoS two days in a row, which is a sign that I like the place. It's far smarter than it attempts to appear, which is always attractive, and it's among the wittiest blogs I know (by which I mean painfully funny, quite often). There are also writers at *AoS* that I almost agree with, but when they're reaching the line, or threshold of escape, and are just about to cross over into the open country beyond, something catches them — and you know it's going to pull them back in. Conservatism has them hooked.

Ace is a comparative squish in his own house. Some of his comrades are considerably *meaner*, so they get out further. It's one of Ace's own pieces that triggers this, though.

Writing about the attempt by Mozilla employees to purge CEO Brendan Eich from the company he built, he notes that the only 'ground' floated for this effort is private, discreet political speech, in the form of a small donation made to the successful (anti-gay marriage) Proposition 8 campaign, six years ago. Their attack on Eich — conducted through Twitter — is a contrary type of political speech,

more attuned to the PC *Zeitgeist*, but in every other way less defensible. If anyone is going to be fired, why shouldn't it be the twitterati lynch mob? Ace muses. (Good question.)

The post concludes with the lucid observation:

The left has laid down the rule that ***their*** *political rights shall never been infringed by an economic penalty, because McCarthyism. While they meanwhile demand the exact same sort of McCarthyism for everyone else.*

So what could possibly be objectionable about that, from the perspective of the outer right? What's objectionable — and in fact even maddening — about this insight is its *conservatism*, which it to say that, even after recognizing the relentlessly steepening leftist gradient in the dominant culture, the implicit message is only: *carry on*.

If the sole point is to say "this isn't fair" it might be even more pointless than saying nothing at all. Keeping people in the 'fairness' frame is part of the captivity, and it's why conservatives are never going to do anything but lose. This whole situation isn't 'unfair' — it's disastrous. It's ruin. There's not any kind of game happening here that could somehow be made 'fair'. There's a civilizational calamity in process which is *intrinsically tilted* and leads, with accelerating glacial inevitability, only in one direction.

Conservatives — even atheist conservatives — could be minimally expected to have held onto that "hate the sin, not the sinner"

recommendation from their collapsed religious tradition. Even if they're not going to hate leftists, they have no excuse for avoiding icy hatred of leftism, and that means never giving it the benefit of the doubt by implying, even for a moment, that it can pursue anything other than the total destruction of its enemies, by any means necessary. Leftism isn't going to be shamed *out of winning*. It isn't going to be taught a lesson. It isn't going to recognize its internal contradictions. The only thing it's ever going to do, is continue pushing civilization down the slope.

Conservatism is congenitally incapable of recognizing the true malignancy of its foe. It's always looking for the next tactical edge, the next opportunity to slow down the calamity just a little, the next disastrous deal. It's conservatism that allowed the relentless collapse to happen, by presenting a self-defeating alternative to the one thing that's really needed — *counter-revolution*.

So now the brain-washed idiots at Mozilla are trying to purge their boss in pursuit of Cathedral spiritual purity, and they're getting away with it. The answer to that isn't to point out their hypocrisy, or the sad state of society in general, while hoping the GOP wins one. It's to destroy the GOP and get real about defeating the left. That's going to require a social order in which the left doesn't necessarily win, or at least the end of the social order in which it always does. Sooner or later, conservatism has to move on.

ADDED: Some lessons from the Eich affair (from Henry Dampier).

ADDED: Handlean magnificence.

April 2, 2014

Conservatism

> Is there a single iota of conservative wisdom NOT contained in The Gods of the Copybook Headings? http://t.co/pZUIpUGV2e
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) June 23, 2014

Well, is there?

June 23, 2014

Quote notes (#104)

The only thing that Neoconservatism has to offer a non-psychotic policy analyst is bitching, but sometimes the bitching can be pretty good. Bret Stephens (via Brett Stevens (sorry, I had to do that)):

… None of these fiascos — for brevity's sake, I'm deliberately setting to one side the illusory pivot to Asia, the misbegotten Russian Reset, the mishandled Palestinian–Israeli talks, the stillborn Geneva conferences on Syria, the catastrophic interim agreement with Iran,

the de facto death of the U.S. free-trade agenda, the overhyped opening to Burma, the orphaned victory in Libya, the poisoned relationship with Egypt, and the disastrous cuts to the Defense budget — can be explained away as a matter of tough geopolitical luck. Where, then, does the source of failure lie? […] The myth of Obama's brilliance paradoxically obscures the fact that he's no fool. The point is especially important to note because the failure of Obama's foreign policy is not, ultimately, a reflection of his character or IQ. It is the consequence of an ideology.

The 'ideology' at its root, of course, is evangelical egalitarian universalism, and it is one the Neoconservatives entirely share. At the limit, which is now being encountered, what America *is* makes it impossible for it to succeed at what it wants.

August 23, 2014

SJWs of the Right

"Hey, our prissy skirt-clutching authoritarian moralism is nothing *at all* like the prissy skirt-clutching authoritarian moralism of SJW leftists!"

Oh, I'm sure there are differences to be drawn — so long as no one is pretending they extend to (classic Neo-Puritan witch-burner) personality types.

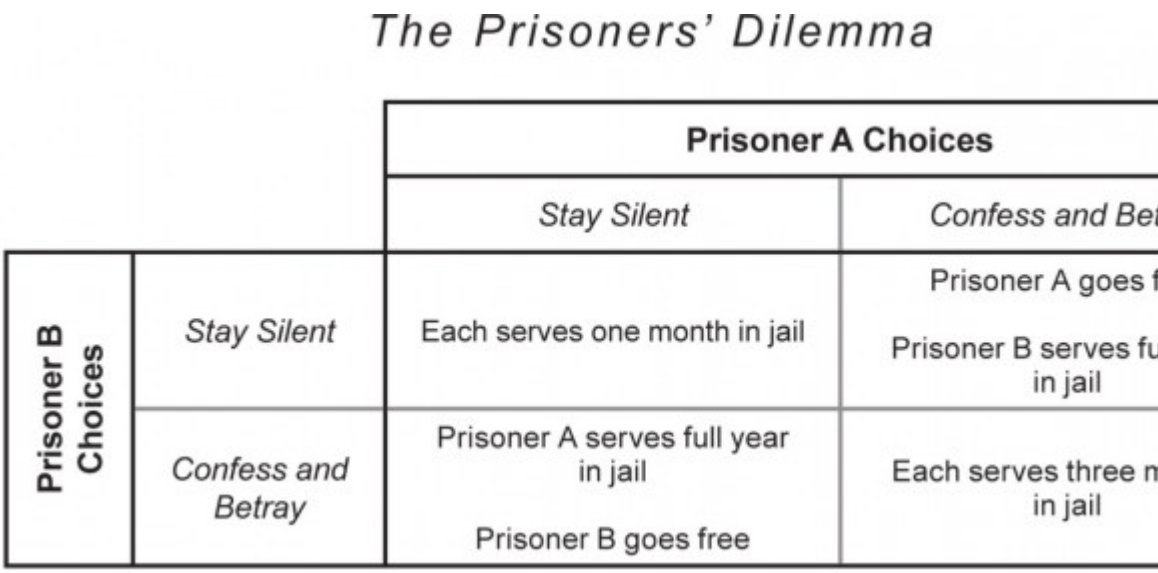
February 9, 2015

Zero Sum

AoS has a "Fudamental Concepts" post about the zero-sum mentality, which it identifies with leftism, getting a lot of things convincingly right. Unintentionally, however, it exposes the limits of conservatism, and — even more unintentionally — suggests why NRx is something else.

Zero sum games are wars, and market (or catallactic) economics are indeed different. It was by putting war to bed too early, that conservatism destined itself to the ratchet of defeat. Treat an enemy as a business partner, and you lose, over and over again.

The payoff matrix is easy to draw. Re-purposing a prisoner's dilemma quadrate works fine.



Treat "Stay Silent" as a positive-sum contract, and "Confess and Betray" as stubborn zero-sum antagonism. Searching for positive-sum engagement with a committed zero-sum opponent is the loser's game that the mainstream 'right' has been playing for centuries. It's the reason libertarians are so often dismissed as smart imbeciles (or worse). There's business, and there's war, and only the latter is definitely not going anywhere. In reality, (positive-sum) capitalism depends upon (zero-sum) counter-revolution. Otherwise, the right 'stays silent' while the left 'confesses and betrays'. Our little matrix, and the course of recent global history, equally exhibit where that leads.

Positive-sum is the civilized order at the end of a far dirtier process. In the interim, if it hurts the left it's worth doing, unless it

hurts you more.

February 16, 2015

Ace Torches the Popcorn Stand

Forget the headline, which is just a pretext — this post is really something. A couple of highlights:

They think that our desire for a better America will draw us to vote for the Least Worst candidates. […] But many of us now feel like the Communists, or the hardcore paleocons: There really is not a large enough difference between the two parties any more to ***bother oneself in terms of emotional and financial investment any longer****. […] Either way, we will have some form of repressive, unresponsive socialism in this country; what should we care whether the National Welfare Depot is painted in Red or Blue? […] I'm not coming back. I'm done. For the past ten years of my life, I've made arguments, some of which I knew to be false, to defend and apologize for the GOP; I see now that I was a fool to do so.*

And:

Here's Some Truth: We all know this, but being Part of the Team, I felt obligated to lie, because I figured you expected me to lie, even though you didn't believe it. […] So yeah: The GOP is never repealing Obamacare or even trying hard to do so. They will make false efforts

at doing so which they can present to voters as a Good College Try, but aw shucks, we couldn't quite do it. […] It's a relief to no longer have to propagate this obvious, feeble lie. […] I know very few of you believe the GOP has much intention of repealing Obamacare, but, being a Republican, I have previously felt the need to present The Official Party Position even knowing it was total bullshit. […] I've known it was a lie for a year, which is why I hate when it comes up on, say, the Podcast. What am I supposed to say? Am I supposed to pretend the GOP is going to repeal it? […] So they're not. They never were. […] It was always a lie.

If there was ever a moment to stoop to a 'wow, just wow!' this might be it.

> We're not all Moldbuggians yet.But it's coming. via @AceofSpadesHQ http://t.co/P5qbYkW00A
>
> — Rich Cromwell (@rcromwell4) March 19, 2015

March 19, 2015

What's in a word?

The vulgarity of pop-reaction is matched only by the stupidity of mainstream conservatism:

I bring this up because I suppose it's possible that some conservatives might embrace this term without fully understanding the racial and sexual implications. To some, it might be seen as an innocent jab — like calling someone a "squish" or a "RINO." But as Erickson correctly observes, "Remember, if you hear the term 'cuckservative,' it is a slur against Christian voters coined by white-supremacists."

If anyone deserves a gutter-fight with degenerates, it's the GOP. It seems quite probable that they'll lose.

(If you're tempted to roll out your degeneracy in the comments thread, think again. We gibbet people for such things in these parts.)

ADDED: Official XS Health Warning — a popcorn diet is ruinous for the soul. It is recommended that you scrupulously avoid following these links (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6).

ADDED: Jim's take.

ADDED: Hood.

ADDED: "I think this is the ugliest development I've seen online."

ADDED: We're going to need a bigger popcorn barrel.

July 23, 2015

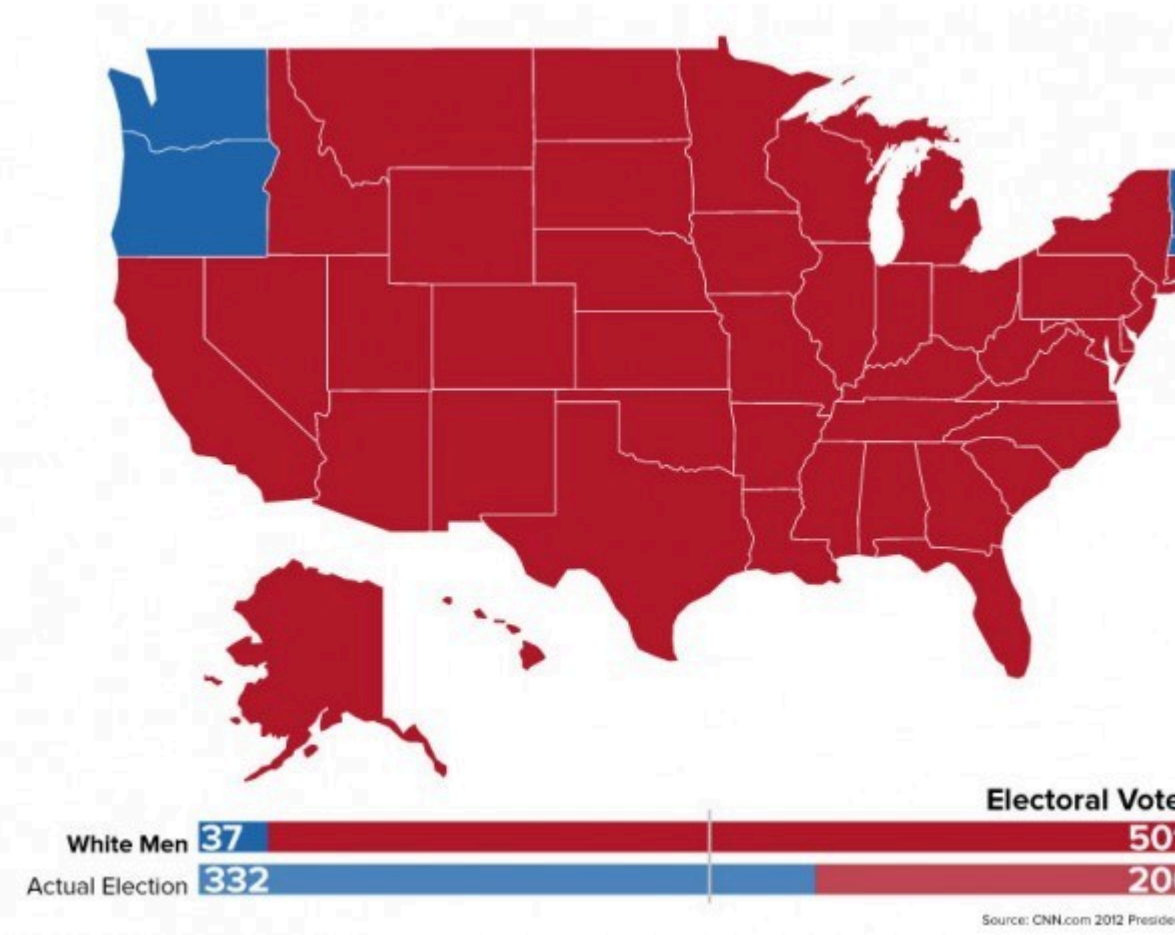
Inversion

Already famously — to the extent of echoing down the corridors of

eternity — Michael Enoch wrote this:

Look, you guys have lost, even on the issues important to you as Christians because of your cuckholdry on the race issue. You're not doing anything to preserve the white majority, but you're not winning on your issues either. Gay marriage is a done deal. Abortion is here to stay, particularly as more broken nonwhite families enter the social services system and are encouraged by bureaucrats to abort. You lost, you lost, you lost. […] With a white majority these issues were winnable, because whites vote conservative in the majority. But by being cowards on the issue of immigration and bending over for the left's quite open plan of demographic replacement of whites in order to secure a permanent nonwhite left wing majority you lost. In 8 years it may be demographically impossible for the GOP to win a national election ever again. Even your precious Christian issues are done. Even your cucking for Israel is under threat. Do you think a nonwhite majority in the US is going to be keen to support your favorite ethnostate? They side with the Palestinians! […] You lost everything, and all because you were afraid a group of communists, atheists and homosexuals would call you racist.

It goes with this map:



It's being posted here because, as far as it goes, it's hilariously — and certainly outrageously — right.

Thing is — Progressivism happened in the USA without the help of massive Hispanic immigration, or even women's suffrage. It happened because democratically-empowered *white men* had been persuaded to dismantle capitalism by populist politicians. The 'right wing' party that they'd be supporting in that map? It's the Republican

Party of 2012, and its Presidential Candidate Mitt Romney, Governor of (freaking) *Massachusetts*. So what this is saying, at best, is that American White Men can now be persuaded to freeze in place the catastrophic ruin of Western Civilization as it stood roughly during Phase-1 Obamanation. Is there any suggestion from this that there's support for rolling back politicized money, The Great Society, The New Deal, or the violent destruction of American federalism? In fact, any indication of support for actual *right wing policies* at all?

As a counter factual, I guess — just possibly — an uprising of White Men could help to get Trump into the White House, which would be ambiguous.

It's fun — really it is — but it's not going anywhere, because it doesn't even start to get a grip on where things went wrong.

July 30, 2015

Quote note (#227)

Douthat (whatever his *status quo* sins) is participating in our conversation:

… Others, especially in the intelligentsia, have a kind of highbrow nihilism about our politics, a sense that American democracy's decadence — or the Republican Party's decadence, in particular — is so advanced that a cleansing Trumpian fire might be just the thing we

need.

March 6, 2016

RIP Neoconservatism

Max Fisher, at *Vox*:

Neoconservatives can threaten to quit the Republican Party, or warn that the party is diverging from their values, but it looks increasingly like they may have it backward: that it is the Republican Party, as constituted by its voters and their policy preferences, that is rejecting neoconservatives. […] That might seem surprising. But when you look at the brief history of neoconservative reign over the Republican Party, it seems inevitable. If anything, it is surprising that it took this long.

There probably aren't enough supporters remaining for a boisterous funeral, at this point.

Neoconservatism had a complex genesis, but it matured into right-wing Jacobinism. The policy program with which it will forever be centrally associated is democracy promotion by the sword. Too aggressive in its civilizational (and especially American) self-confidence for the Left, and too saturated in universalistic Utopianism for the Right, its demise in the second decade of the 21st century can surprise few.

It looks as if robust realism will supplant it. Dewy-eyed foreign policy is done, at least for a while.

March 11, 2016

BLOCK 3 - TECHNO-COMMERCIALISM

Crypto-Capitalism

Political language is *systematically confusing*, in a distinctive way. Its significant terms are only secondarily theoretical, as demonstrated by radical shifts in sense that express informal policies of meaning. Descriptions of political position are moves in a game, before they are neutral accounts of the rules, or even of the factions.

It would be excessively digressive to embark on yet another expedition into the history of such political terms as 'liberal', 'progress', 'fascism', or 'conservative'. Everyone knows that these words are profoundly uninformative without extensive historical qualification, or rough-and-ready adaptation to the dictates of

guided fashion. If consistent theoretical use of any political label conflicts with its maximally effective political use, the former will be sacrificed without hesitation — and always has been. That is why neologisms are typically required for even the most fleeting approximation to theoretical precision, whenever political affiliation is at stake.

A point in favor of the 'crypto-' prefix is that it plays directly into such confusion. As a politically-significant marker, it bears two strongly differentiated, yet intersecting senses. It indicates (a) that a political phenomenon has been re-assembled in disguise, and (b) that cryptographic techniques are essential to its identity. Hence, respectively, 'crypto-communism' and 'crypto-currencies'. Any attempt to engage in an initial clarification cuts across the intrinsically occulted character of both.

'Crypto-capitalism' — therefore — might be one thing, or two, if it is anything at all. If clarity is to be brought to the topic, it will certainly not be self-promoted. Whatever crypto-capitalism might be, structural misunderstanding has to be the most prominent part of it. Hiding is essential to whatever it is.

What crypto-capitalism is not, first practically, and subsequently theoretically, is pseudo-capitalism, or 'capitalism' as it is publicly recognized. Rather than engaging in futile struggle over the 'true meaning' of capitalism, crypto-capitalism proceeds with a surreptitious appropriation of terminological confusion,

functionalized as camouflage. It *does* capitalism, all the more effectively, because the grinding mill of political language works predictably, providing it with cover. The loss of terminological integrity is invested, from a position of intense cynicism, as an opportunity to develop off stage.

Pseudo-capitalism is (by now) the host of the Cathedral. It feeds a mega-parasite, which — employing unprecedented powers of narrative construction — claims to be the source of its vitality. Evolving far beyond an initial stage of conspicuous resource extraction, the Cathedralized — or culture-potent — state now more-or-less directly controls the 'capitalist' brain, in more ways than can be readily enumerated. 'Capitalists' are Cathedralized through educational and media indoctrination, social selection, regulatory discipline, seductive alliance, and 'transcendental' subordination to a financial system that has been subverted to its foundations by the magic of power. The mere denomination of 'capitalism' in fiat currency expresses the domain of pseudo-capitalism with remarkable exactitude. The meaning of the host is (articulated through) the virus it sustains. Any suggestion of opposition in this relationship is entirely fake, because it belongs to the same magical performance.

Prohibition exemplifies this stage show. Publicly pitting cops against gangsters, what it represents is the spectacular definition of the 'white economy' (pseudo-capitalism) over against the 'black

economy' or 'organized crime' (crypto-capitalism). The same story can be told in the decadent USSR, without any need for substantial revision. Whatever refuses denomination in the signs of power is a pathological aberration, to be renormalized as a productive ~~parasited host~~ social body.

As ZH reports:

... one of the most popular websites that use and promote the use of BitCoin, Silk Road, was shut down by the US government. As Reuters reports, U.S. law enforcement authorities raided an Internet site that served as a marketplace for illegal drugs, including heroin and cocaine, and arrested its owner, the Federal Bureau of Investigation said on Wednesday. The FBI arrested Ross William Ulbricht, known as "Dread Pirate Roberts," in San Francisco on Tuesday, according to court filings. Federal prosecutors charged Ulbricht with one count each of narcotics trafficking conspiracy, computer hacking conspiracy and money laundering conspiracy, according to a court filing.

It's worth revisiting this (noted here) to recall some realistic context, and plausible historical analogy. The Prohibition of the 1920s was an endless source of cop-on-gangster drama, none of which had any realistically persuasive meaning as the successful pursuit of policy. Instead, gangsters used the cops, as a tactical resource for black-economy dispute 'resolution'. (In the Shanghai of the same epoch, the Opium-trafficking 'Green Gang' managed to get

their agent 'Pock-marked Huang' installed as chief of the French Concession police — an admittedly extreme example of a typical tendency.) From the perspective of the outer economy, cops are a cheap way to smash your competition.

Extrapolate speculatively just a little from the *Forbes* discussion:

IT'S A RULE AS TIMELESS as black markets: Where illegal money goes, violence follows. In a digital market that violence is virtual, but it's as financially real as torching your competitor's warehouse.

In late April Silk Road went offline for nearly a week, straining under a sustained cyberattack that left its sensitive data untouched but overwhelmed its servers. The attack, according to Roberts, was the most sophisticated in Silk Road's history, taking advantage of previously unknown vulnerabilities in Tor and repeatedly shifting tactics to avoid the site's defenses.

The sabotage occurred within weeks of rival site Atlantis' launch. Commenters on the Reddit forum devoted to Silk Road suggested that Roberts' customers and vendors switch to Atlantis during the downtime, leading to gossip that the newcomer had engineered the attack.

Who was the real beneficiary of the FBI operation? All too many neoractionaries, beginning with Moldbug, and now including Handle, seem to think the only possible answer is: Prohibition. Here at *Outside in* it appears incontrovertible that 'Roberts' had already predicted this 'sting' — in far greater detail than anybody else has

done — and that the antagonist he pre-emptively, if subtly, fingered was a shadowy crypto-capitalist competitor, rather than the forces of pseudo-capitalist suppression. If this was a *cryptic* event, it would be inexcusably negligent not to ask: Who (or what) is the FBI really — even if unwittingly — working for? "For the ultimate glory of the white (pseudo-capitalist) economy" is certainly one possible answer, but it is by no means the only one.

ADDED: Jim and NBS both have interesting things to say about technical aspects of these developments.

ADDED: What does the FBI do with its new Bitcoin stash?

October 4, 2013

Dark Techno-Commercialism

Each of the three main strands of neoreaction, insofar as they are remotely serious, attaches itself to something that no politics could absorb.

The reality of a religious commitment cannot be resolved into its political implications. If it is wrong, it is not because of anything that politics can do to it, or make of it. Providence either envelops history and ideology, subtly making puppets of both, or it is nothing. However bad things get, it offers a 'reason' not to be afraid — at least of that — and one the degeneration has no way to touch, let alone

control.

Similarly, the Darwinian truths underpinning rational ethno-nationalist convictions are invulnerable to ideological reversal. A trend to racial entropy and idiocracy, however culturally hegemonic and unquestionable, does not cease to be what it is, simply because criticism has been criminalized and suppressed. Scientific objections have significance — if they are indeed scientific (and not rather the corruption of science) — but politically enforced denial is a tawdry comedy, outflanked fundamentally by reality itself, and diverting events into 'perverse outcomes' that subvert delusion from without. What Darwinism is *about* cannot be banned.

The Techno-commercial 'thing' — catallaxy — is comparably invulnerable. There is no chance that anyone, ever, will successfully prohibit the market, or the associated dynamics of competitive technical advantage (which together compose real capitalism). As with religion and genetic selection, the techno-commercial complex can be driven into darkness, socially occulted, and stigmatized as a public enemy. It cannot, however, be *de-realized* by political fiat.

It is important, therefore, to understand where neoreactionary 'dark thoughts' lead. Their horizon of despair is strictly limited to the political, or public sphere. When taken to the edge, they converge with the intuition that no neoreactionary *politics* can be pursued to a successful conclusion. In other words, at their darkest, they predict that the stubborn delusion of the political dooms humanity's public-

exoteric aspirations to catastrophe.

At this point, neoreaction bifurcates. However it is principally comprehended (through the trichotomy), a relatively 'light' branch holds onto the prospect of public-political insideness — of a world politically restructured in relative consonance with neoreactionary ideas, such that social order might be resumed, on a realistic basis. Alternatively, and no less trichotomously, a dark branch points outside, through collapse, into tracts of religious, biological, and / or catallactic inevitability, whose dynamics cast human delusion into terminal ruin. If 'man' never (again) reverts to sanity? Reality will not stop.

Outside in is darker than it is trichotomously partisan. Neither real providence, nor Darwinian reality, are attachments that trigger the slightest aversion in these parts. The idea that the neoreaction will ever 'do' politics, or achieve insider status, on the other hand — except as a rhetorical tactic of cognitive independence (separation) — is a possibility we struggle to envisage. (That leaves much to argue over, on other occasions.)

Dark Techno-Commercialism — provisionally summarized — is the suspicion that the 'Right Singularity' is destined to occur in surreptitious and antagonistic relation to finalistic political institutions, that the Cathedral culminates in the Human Security System, outmatched and defeated from the Outside, and that all hopes that these ultimate historical potentialities will be harnessed

for politically intelligible ends are vain. It is, therefore, the comprehension of capitalism 'in-itself' as an outsider that will never know — or need — political representation. Instead, as the ultimate enemy, it will envelop the entirety of political philosophy — including anything neoreaction can contribute to the genre — as the futile strategic initiatives (or death spasms) of its prey.

We (humans) are radically stubborn in our stupidity. That has consequences. Perhaps they will not always be uninteresting ones.

October 13, 2013

Re-Accelerationism

Is there a word for an 'argument' so soggily insubstantial that it has to be scooped into a pair of scare-quotes to be apprehended, even in its self-dissolution? If there were, I'd have been using it all the time recently. Among the latest occasions is a blog post by Charlie Stross, which describes itself as "a political speculation" before disappearing into the gray goomenon. Nothing in it really holds together, but it's fun in its own way, especially if it's taken as a sign of something else.

The 'something else' is a subterranean complicity between Neoreaction and Accelerationism (the latter linked here, Stross-style, in its most recent, Leftist version). Communicating with fellow 'Hammer of Neoreaction' David Brin, Stross asks: "David, have you

run across the left-wing equivalent of the Neo-Reactionaries — the Accelerationists?" He then continues, invitingly: "Here's my (tongue in cheek) take on both ideologies: Trotskyite singularitarians for Monarchism!"

Stross is a comic-future novelist, so it's unrealistic to expect much more than a dramatic diversion (or anything more at all, actually). After an entertaining meander through parts of the Trotskyite-neolibertarian social-graph, which could have been deposited on a time-like curve out of *Singularity Sky*, we've learnt that Britain's Revolutionary Communist Party has been on a strange path, but whatever connection there was to Accelerationism, let alone Neoreaction, has been entirely lost. Stross has the theatrical instinct to end the performance before it became too embarrassing: "Welcome to the century of the Trotskyite monarchists, the revolutionary reactionaries, and the fringe politics of the paradoxical!" (OK.) Curtain closes. Still, it was all comparatively good humored (at least in contrast to Brin's increasingly enraged head-banging).

Neoreaction is Accelerationism with a flat tire. Described less figuratively, it is the recognition that the acceleration trend is historically compensated. Beside the *speed machine*, or industrial capitalism, there is an ever more perfectly weighted decelerator, which gradually drains techno-economic momentum into its own expansion, as it returns dynamic process to meta-stasis. Comically,

the fabrication of this braking mechanism is proclaimed as *progress*. It is the Great Work of the Left. Neoreaction arises through naming it (without excessive affection) as *the Cathedral*.

Is the trap to be exploded (as advocated Accelerationism), or has the explosion been trapped (as diagnosed by Neoreaction)? — That is the cybernetic puzzle-house under investigation. Some quick-sketch background might be helpful.

The germinal catalyst for Accelerationism was a call in Deleuze & Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) to "accelerate the process". Working like termites within the rotting mansion of Marxism, which was systematically gutted of all Hegelianism until it became something utterly unrecognizable, D&G vehemently rejected the proposal that anything had ever "died of contradictions", or ever would. Capitalism was not born from a negation, nor would it perish from one. The death of capitalism could not be delivered by the executioner's ax of a vengeful proletariat, because the closest realizable approximations to 'the negative' were inhibitory, and stabilizing. Far from propelling 'the system' to its end, they slowed the dynamic to a simulacrum of systematicity, retarding its approach to an absolute limit. By progressively comatizing capitalism, anti-capitalism dragged it back into a self-conserving social structure, suppressing its eschatological implication. The only way Out was onward.

Marxism is the philosophical version of a Parisian accent, a rhetorical type, and in the case of D&G it becomes something akin

to a higher sarcasm, mocking every significant tenet of the faith. The bibliography of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (of which *Anti-Oedipus* is the first volume) is a compendium of counter-Marxist theory, from drastic revisions (Braudel), through explicit critiques (Wittfogel), to contemptuous dismissals (Nietzsche). The D&G model of capitalism is not dialectical, but cybernetic, defined by a positive coupling of commercialization ("decoding") and industrialization ("Deterritorialization"), intrinsically tending to an extreme (or "absolute limit"). Capitalism is the singular historical installation of a social machine based upon cybernetic escalation (positive feedback), reproducing itself only incidentally, as an accident of continuous socio-industrial revolution. Nothing brought to bear *against* capitalism can compare to the intrinsic antagonism it directs towards its own actuality, as it speeds out of itself, hurtling to the end already operative 'within' it. (Of course, this is madness.)

A detailed appreciation of "Left Accelerationism" is a joke for another occasion. "Speaking on behalf of a dissident faction within the modern braking mechanism, we'd really like to see things move forward a lot faster." *OK, perhaps we can work something out …* If this 'goes anywhere' it can only get more entertaining. (Stross is right about that.)

Neoreaction has far greater impetus, and associated diversity. If reduced to a spectrum, it includes a wing even more Leftist than the Left, since it critiques the Cathedral for failing to stop the craziness

of Modernity with anything like sufficient vigor. *You let this monster off the leash and now you can't stop it* might be its characteristic accusation.

On the Outer Right (in this sense) is found a Neoreactionary *Re-Accelerationism*, which is to say: a critique of the decelerator, or of 'progressive' stagnation as an identifiable institutional development — the Cathedral. From this perspective, the Cathedral acquires its teleological definition from its emergent function as the cancellation of capitalism: what it has to become is the more-or-less precise negative of historical primary process, such that it composes — together with the ever more wide-flung society-in-liquidation it parasitizes — a metastatic cybernetic megasystem, or super-social trap. 'Progress' in its overt, mature, ideological incarnation is the anti-trend required to bring history to a halt. Conceive what is needed to prevent acceleration into techno-commercial Singularity, and the Cathedral is what it will be.

Self-organizing compensatory apparatuses — or negative feedback assemblies — develop erratically. They search for equilibrium through a typical behavior labeled 'hunting' — over-shooting adjustments and re-adjustments that produce distinctive wave-like patterns, ensuring the suppression of runaway dynamics, but producing volatility. Cathedral hunting behavior of sufficient crudity would be expected to generate occasions of 'Left Singularity' (with subsequent dynamic 'restorations') as inhibitory adjustment

over-shoots into system crash (and re-boot). Even these extreme oscillations, however, are internal to the metastatic super-system they perturb, insofar as an overall gradient of Cathedralization persists. *Anticipating escape at the pessimal limit of the metastatic hunting cycle is a form of paleo-Marxist delusion*. The cage can only be broken on the way up.

For Re-Accelerationist Neoreaction, escape into uncompensated cybernetic runaway is the guiding objective — strictly equivalent to intelligence explosion, or techno-commercial Singularity. Everything else is a trap (by definitive, system-dynamic necessity). It might be that monarchs have some role to play in this, but it's by no means obvious that they do.

December 10, 2013

Economic Ends

"The economists are right about economics but there's more to life than economics" Nydwracu tweets, with quote marks already attached. Whether economists are right about economics very much depends upon the economists, and those that are most right are those who make least claim to comprehension, but that is another topic than the one to be pursued in this post. It's the second part of the sentence that matters here and now. The guiding question: Can

the economic sphere be rigorously delimited, and thus superseded, by moral-political reason (and associated social institutions)?

It is already to court misunderstanding to pursue this question in terms of 'economics', which is (for profound historical reasons) dominated by macroeconomics — i.e. an intellectual project oriented to the facilitation of political control over the economy. In this regard, the techno-commercial thread of Neoreaction is distinctively characterized by a radical aversion to economics, as the predictable complement of its attachment to the uncontrolled (or *laissez-faire*) economy. It is not *economics* that is the primary object of controversy, but **capitalism** — the free, autonomous, or non-transcended economy.

This question is a source of dynamic tension within Neoreaction, which I expect to be a major stimulus to discussion throughout 2014. In my estimation, the poles of controversy are marked by this Michael Anissimov post at *More Right* (among others), and this post here (among others). Much other relevant writing on the topic within the reactosphere strikes me as significantly more hedged (*Anarchopapist*; *Amos & Gromar* ...), or less stark in its conceptual commitments (Jim), and thus — in general — less directed to boundary-setting. That is to suggest — with some caution — that *More Right* and *Outside in* mark out the extreme alternatives structuring the terrain of dissensus on this particular issue. (In itself, this is a tendentious claim, open to counter-argument and

rectification.)

So what is the terrain of the coming conflict? It includes (in approximate order of intellectual priority):

— An assessment of the Neocameral model and its legacy within Neoreaction. This is the 'gateway' theoretical structure through which libertarians pass into neoreactionary realism, marked by a fundamental ambiguity between an enveloping economism (determining sovereignty as a propertarian concept) and super-economic monarchist themes. The entire discussion could, perhaps, be effectively undertaken as commentary upon Neocameralism, and what remains of it.

— A rigorous formulation of *teleology* within Neoreaction, refining the meta-level conceptual apparatus through which means-and-ends, techno-economic instrumentality, strategy, purpose, and commanding values are concretely understood. This is a strong candidate for the highest level of philosophical articulation demanded by the system of neoreactionary ideas. (From the perspective of *Outside in*, it would be expected, incidentally, to subsume all considerations of moral philosophy — and especially a thoroughgoing replacement of utilitarianism by an intrinsically neoreactionary alternative — but I will not presume that this is an uncontroversial stance, even among ourselves.)

— Ultimately inextricable from the former (in reality), but provisionally distinguished for analytical purposes, are the

teleonomic topics of emergence / spontaneous order, unplanned coordination, complex systems evolution, and entropy dissipation. The intellectual supremacy of these concepts defines the right, from the side of the libertarian tradition. Is this supremacy now to be usurped (by 'hierarchy' or some alternative)? If so, it is not a transition to be undergone casually. The *Outside in* position: any such transition would be a drastic cognitive regression, and an unsustainable one, both theoretically and practically.

— The philosophy of war, which is credibly positioned to envelop all neoreactionary ideas, and even to convert them into something else. (It is no coincidence that Moldbug, like the libertarians, axiomatizes the imperative of peace — even at the expense of realism.) War is historical reality in the raw, and its challenges cannot be indefinitely evaded.

— Cosmopolitanism. Exit-emphasis strongly implies a crisis of traditional loyalty, of enormous consequence. There is much more to be said about this, from both sides.

— Accelerationism. Not yet an acknowledged Neoreactionary concern, but perhaps destined to become one. As the pure expression of capitalist teleology, its intrusion into the argument becomes near-inevitable.

— Bitcoin …

One conciliatory point for now (it's late): Neoreaction has no less glue than internal fission, and that is described above all by the

theme of *secession* (dynamic geography, experimental government, fragmentation …). *More Right* is not anti-capitalist, and *Outside in* is not anti-monarchical, so long — in each case — as effective *exit options* sustain regime diversity. As this controversy develops, the importance of the secessionary impulse will only strengthen as a convergence point.

Michael Anissimov tweets: "Instead of having an election in 2016, the United States should voluntarily abolish itself and break up into five pieces." In this respect, *Outside in* is unreservedly Anissimovite.

January 11, 2014

New Atlantis

In the wake of the latest Eurasianism excitement (of which there will be much more), comes a wide-ranging piece at *Mitrailleuse*. It made me wonder whether Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1626) is still in any kind of cultural circulation. It's short — and odd. The date and cultural lineage place it decisively within Dugin's framework of the rising new Atlantean power — English-speaking, protestant, maritime, philosemitic, technophilic, and (piously) materially acquisitive. There's even a clear seam of Sinophilia running through it, although one might suspect that — for reasons of geopolitical pragmatism — this is not a feature Eurasianism would want to

emphasize.

For a taste, here's a sample from the New Atlantis tour:

"We have also engine-houses, where are prepared engines and instruments for all sorts of motions. There we imitate and practise to make swifter motions than any you have, either out of your muskets or any engine that you have; and to make them and multiply them more easily and with small force, by wheels and other means, and to make them stronger and more violent than yours are, exceeding your greatest cannons and basilisks. We represent also ordnance and instruments of war and engines of all kinds; and likewise new mixtures and compositions of gunpowder, wild-fires burning in water and unquenchable, also fire-works of all variety, both for pleasure and use. We imitate also flights of birds; we have some degrees of flying in the air. We have ships and boats for going under water and brooking of seas, also swimming-girdles and supporters. We have divers curious clocks and other like motions of return, and some perpetual motions. We imitate also motions of living creatures by images of men, beasts, birds, fishes, and serpents; we have also a great number of other various motions, strange for equality, fineness, and subtilty.

"We have also a mathematical-house, where are represented all instruments, as well of geometry as astronomy, exquisitely made.

"We have also houses of deceits of the senses, where we represent all manner of feats of juggling, false apparitions,

impostures and illusions, and their fallacies. And surely you will easily believe that we, that have so many things truly natural which induce admiration, could in a world of particulars deceive the senses if we would disguise those things, and labor to make them more miraculous. But we do hate all impostures and lies, insomuch as we have severely forbidden it to all our fellows, under pain of ignominy and fines, that they do not show any natural work or thing adorned or swelling, but only pure as it is, and without all affectation of strangeness. …"

Scrupulous scientific realism combined with a precocious Virtual Reality industry. This is indeed an enemy, very naturally, to be feared.

Note: There's also a post on Eurasianism, probing gently into the China angle, over at *Urban Future*.

August 7, 2014

Military Determinism

"That rifle on the wall of the labourer's cottage or working class flat is the symbol of democracy," wrote George Orwell. This is a familiar — and important — argument. (ESR rehearses a slightly different version of it here.) A powerful case can be made for the printing press as the catalytic technology of modernity, but it is the musket that most unambiguously obliterated feudal power at its core, ushering in

the age of the armed citizenry — nationalism, revolutionary armies, and the popular will as a matter of serious strategic consideration. Democracy smells of gunpowder.

This raises, by implication, the suggestion that the gathering sense of democratic crisis is a symptom, whose underlying cause is a transition in the military calculus, no less profound than the one that convulsed the world in the early Renaissance. If the infrastructure of democratic advance is the strategic centrality of the armed populace — as epitomized by massed infantry — its horizon will be marked by the technological disconnection of military power from 'the people'. What are the features of the political landscape opened by the rise of robotic warfare?

Robots are capital. They consummate a trend that has bound hard power to industrial capability throughout the modern age. As they become increasingly autonomous, the popular-political matrix in which they have emerged is increasingly marginalized. Loyalty — a deep place-holder for the assent of the citizenry — is formally mechanized as cryptographic control. The capital autonomization that has spooked the modern world for centuries escalates to a new, immediately self-protective, and ultimately sovereign stage. Mercenaries have always required an ancillary political binding, because people are only weakly contractual, and loyalty cannot — in the end — be purchased. Robots present no such restriction. They conform to an order of unbounded techno-commercial power.

Whether one approves of the *Ancien Régime*'s demolition by gunpowder matters little (if at all). The case of impending robotic warfare is no different, in this respect. The strategic dominion of the people is entering its twilight. Something else happens next.

March 20, 2015

X-Risk Democratization

Yudkowsky redux: "Every eighteen months, the minimum IQ necessary to destroy the world drops by one point."

Quibble with the (Moore's Law satire) schedule, and the point still stands. Massive deterrent capability tends to spread.

This is 'democratic' in the way the term is commonly used by those seeking to latch decentralization tendencies to the ideological credibility of Jacobin legitimation principles. Consumer capitalism, the Internet, and peer-to-peer crypto-systems are notionally 'democratic' in this way. They subvert centralized governance, and they spread through horizontal contagion. The fact they have nothing *at all* to do with popular political representation is of concern only to certain rhetorical agendas, and not at all to others. It's sophistical pop-capitalist bullshit to use the word *democracy* in this way, but it's usually not worth the trouble for the Left to try to contest it, and the part of the Right that isn't excited to be riding

this propaganda strategy is usually too indiscriminate to bother disentangling it. There's a rare piece of 'right-wing' functional PR here, but never enough to matter very much (and it's too essentially dishonest for the Outer Right to defend).

Unlike Democracy® (Cathedral ideology), however, this 'democratization' has deep cybernetic consistency. It falls out of techno-capitalism with such automatic inevitability it's probably impossible to shut down, without closing down the whole thing. Capital escalation produces technological deflation as a basic metabolic by-product, so the 'democratization' of productive capability is ineluctable. Computers have migrated from exotic capital goods to trivial components of consumer products within half a century. Study that trend and you see the whole story.

Deterrence deflation is the deep trend. Connect up the Yudkowsky quote with assassination markets to get where this is going. (Try to shelve moral squeamishness until after you're seeing the picture.)

Imagine, hypothetically, that some maniac private agent wants only to nuke Mecca. What's the obstruction? We can confidently say — straight off — that it's less of a problem with every passing year. The basic historical trend ensures that. Comparatively incompetent Islamic fanatics are the only people seriously testing this trend right now, but that isn't going to last forever. Eventually smarter and more strategically-flexible agents are going to take an interest in

decentralized mass-destruction capability, and they'll provide a far better indication of where the frontier lies.

Nukes would do it. They're certainly going to be democratized, in the end. There are probably far more remarkable accelerating WMD capabilities, though. In almost every respect (decentralized production capability, development curve, economy, impact …) bioweaponry leaves nukes in the dust. Anyone with a billion dollars, a serious grudge, and a high-end sociopathy profile could enter into a global biowarfare-threat game within a year. Everything could be put together in secret garages. Negotiations could be conducted in secure anonymity. Carving sovereignty out of the game would require only resources, ruthlessness, brilliance, and nerves. Once you can credibly threaten to kill 100,000,000 people all kinds of strategic opportunities are open. The fact no one has tried this yet is mostly down to billionaires being fat and happy. It only takes one Doctor Gno to break the pattern.

This is the shadow cast over the 21st century. Radically hardcore, massively decentralized deterrence games are *simply inevitable*. Anyone who thinks the *status quo* state holds some kind of long-term winning hand under these circumstances isn't seeing anything.

Global totalitarian government could stop this! But that isn't going to happen — and because it isn't, this will.

April 22, 2016

The NRx Moment

This isn't it.

The Trump phenomenon is really something, a crisis of democracy and a shattering of the Overton Window very much included, but it is not an intrinsically right-wing thing, and it is radically populist in nature. A reactionary exploitation of demotism is not a neoreactionary episode. The Alt-Right is properly credited with capturing the spirit of this development. It is not us.

NRx is situated absolutely outside mass politics. Its moment dawns only when the Age of the Masses is done.

It will be done. The emergence of sovereign (primary) property, liberated from the criterion of democratic legitimation, is its sign. Government, on this basis, is Neocameral. The deep historical trends supporting it include:

(1) **Apolitical property**. No such reality, or conception, has yet been historically actualized. For as long as property is determined as a social relation, it cannot be. Absolute property is cryptographic. It is held not by social consent, and thus political agreement, but by *keys*. Fnargl is a provocative thought-experiment, but PKE private keys are a non-negotiable fact. They define the property relation with a rigor the entire preceding history of philosophy and political economy has been unable to attain. Everything that follows from the cryptographic transition — Bitcoin most notably — contributes

to the establishment of a property system beyond democratic accountability (and thus insensitive to Voice). Neocameral administration implements a cryptographic state, strictly equivalent to a fully-commercialized government.

(2) **Autonomous capital**. The definition of the corporation as a legal person lays the foundation, within modernity, for the abstracted commercial agency soon to be actualized in 'Digital Autonomous Corporations' (or DACs). The scale of the economic transition thus implied is difficult to over-estimate. Mass consumption, as the basic revenue source for capitalist enterprise, is superceded in principle. The impending convulsion is immense. Self-propelling industrial development becomes its own market, freed from dependency upon arbitrary popular (or popularizable) consumption desires. Demand management, as the staple of macroeconomic governance, is over. (No one is yet remotely ready for this.)

(3) **Robotic security**. Definitive relegation of the mass military completes the trifecta. The armed mass as a model for the revolutionary citizenry declines into senselessness, replaced by drones. Asabiyyah ceases entirely to matter, however much it remains a focus for romantic attachment. Industrialization closes the loop, and protects itself.

The great game, for human agencies (of whatever social scale) becomes one of productive cooperation with formations of

sovereign property, with the menace of mass political violence swept off the table. The Alt-Right is no kind of preparation for this. Its adventure is quite different, which is not to say it is uninteresting, or — in the near-term — entirely inconsequential, but it is exhausted by its demotism. It belongs to the age that is dying, not to the one that is being born.

Socio-political modernity has been an argument over property distributions, and the Alt-Right has now demonstrated that the (self-conscious) Left has no monopoly over it. As senescence deepens, the dialectic rips the whole rotten structure to pieces. NRx — when it understands itself — isn't arguing.

April 5, 2016

Against Dialectics

Konkvistador (@SamoBurja): "I am in favor of persuading certain kinds of high IQ people. I am against doing dialectics with Progressives."

We are not looking for agreement. We're working to raise the level of explicit disagreement to a pitch we can split over.

Dialectics is the alternative to Dynamic Geography. Debating escape is *not to escape*.

December 1, 2013

NRx with Chinese Characteristics

While recognizing (at least some) of the manifold complexities involved, *Outside in* holds to a fundamentally cladistic determination of Neoreaction. NRx is irreducibly Occidental, emerging from a highly-specific twig of Anglophone Ultra-Protestantism. It is only to be expected that most of its adherents are situated within English-speaking countries, exposed intimately to radically accelerating civilizational decomposition. The response is natural:

> @Outsideness We need order.
>
> — Konkvistador (@SamoBurja) March 17, 2014

As a guest of the Middle Kingdom, the problem looks very different. The very last thing that is wanted here, from a reactionary perspective, is a *reboot*. On the contrary, the overwhelming priority is conservative, which is to say — more precisely — the imperative that whatever modernization takes place *absolutely does not take the Western path*. Near-total stasis would be preferable to even the most deeply intelligent reform, if the latter included the slightest hint of submission to the democratic ratchet (spelling inevitable,

comprehensive social destruction). Among the reasons to support the thoroughgoing extirpation of all liberal-democratic inclination from Chinese society is the consequential real liberation this would make possible, by confirming a path of Confucian Modernization free of demotic corrosion.

China is to be defended, precisely because it is alien to the Cathedral. For this same reason, it can be predicted with great confidence that the Occidental memetic onslaught against Chinese Civilization will be escalated to an extreme, as it becomes clear progressive pseudo-teleology is being rejected here. If China succeeds in refusing the Cathedral, civilization will survive. There can be no more significant — or practically counter-revolutionary — cause.

It is unseemly for 'reactionaries' to be plotting revolutions, or anything remotely like them. Insofar as ethno-nationalistic loyalties lead them in this direction, it is a sign that one strand of romantic demotism continues to poison their souls, even as more clearly formalized democratic impulses are properly repudiated. To argue that "we want our *own* state" is a nakedly populist perversion. The state — any state — is answerable only to the Mandate of Heaven, and not to the people. It answers to the Mandate of Heaven *exactly insofar* as it shields itself from the voice of the people. (Any state that is sensitive to the mob is a dog that deserves to die.)

A foreign guest in China lives under a close proxy of colonial

government, and no superior arrangement is perhaps possible on this earth. Given the history of Anglospheric relations with China, this is of course ironical, but it is an irony rich in meaning. Hong Kong, or Concession-era Shanghai, were far better governed during the colonial period than metropolitan Britain itself. If it is now possible for an expatriate to find refuge in such places, stripped of all positive political rights, and freed into voiceless appreciation of efficient, alien administration, the democratic ruination that has consumed his homeland has a demonstrable outside. The only 'political' decency open to him in this situation is utter termination of the Occidental revolutionary soul, and the cultivation of docility before the Mandate of Heaven. He is, after all, surrounded by civilized people who availed themselves of equivalent opportunities under inverse circumstances. These societies work. Gnon manifestly blesses them.

To lead a decent and productive life in a place worthy of it is the highest political good. Insofar as Exit mechanisms obtain, the tacit choices in such a life reinforce what merits reinforcement, while disinvesting that which requires the lash of disinvestment. Angry antagonism has no useful place. On the largest scale, evil is best punished by abandonment.

This is not to criticize secessionist tendencies in rotting societies — which are rather to be enthusiastically applauded — but it is to suggest that the deep dynamics levering the collapsed world apart are more likely to begin from strategic neglect than oppositional

rage. It is not that one first fights in order later to escape. Rather, one escapes from the beginning, to hasten the enemy's collapse. (Those most adamant about the righteousness of their confrontation with the Great Foe are the same who — in very concrete terms — are most likely to be resourcing it.)

You think it is feeding on your blood, to spawn its horrors? Then stop donating your blood. It is not difficult, at least in principle.

The Outside is a place, and not a dream. NRx with Chinese characteristics recommends that you search for it.

ADDED: If you consider yourself an anti-democratic biorealist, and you *don't* think **Order will come from the East**, it's probably because tribal loyalty is running your mind.

ADDED: Legionnaire casts an impressively sober eye over the discussion.

March 17, 2014

Catastrophe Capitalism

Catastrophe is bad for the Left, say these communists, so there's at least something to look at there. They don't make the connection to r/K politicial dynamics, but that's probably linkage worth making. The #HRx criticism that capitalism goes off the rails by making people fat and happy has something to it as well. There's a tragic

structure there, which can get lost behind the obesity statistics. Capitalism works best as a general problem-solving protocol for tackling harsh reality.

Capitalism is, in any case, a positive catastrophe in the technical (Thom) sense.

The XS meta-political-economic proposal is capital autonomization, based on massive capital goods absorption of social surplus, in order to keep the monkeys sharp and hungry. It's not an easy thing to pull-off politically, which is why exotic solutions of the Neocameral-type are so attractive. Constant Malthusian catastrophe requires a lot of upkeep, but there are a number of ways to get there. Crypto-cybernetic capital (at last) in power is one, but social / ecological collapse gets there by a negative route. The extreme challenge of the off-planet frontier (stripped of abundance delusions) would help to put it onto automatic.

December 1, 2015

Doctor Gno

One thing has to be granted to Pein's sub-adolescent article (casually dismissed here) — it has triggered some interesting anguish. This interpretation of (techno-commercial) Neoreaction as Bond villainy is especially notable. Unlike Pein, Izabella Kaminska demonstrates at

least a little genuine wit. More importantly, she latches onto Silicon Valley Secessionism as a (scary) cryptopolitical project, of real significance. Her references are excellent (the story is built around a number of slides extracted from this landmark talk, by Balaji Srinivasan, entitled *Silicon Valley's Ultimate Exit*).



The elegance of this project rests upon its combination of simplicity and radicality, captured in its essentials by the formula **E > V** (Exit over Voice). It advances the prospect, already in motion, of a destruction of (voice-based) politics through the techno-commercial innovation of exit mechanisms. It is beginning to drive progressives insane.

The fundamental point couldn't be clearer: *We don't want to rule you. We want to escape you*.

Of course, the whole Cathedral agenda is to drive this message back into unintelligibility, by swamping it in tedious leftist BDSM political dialectics, as if the issue were a struggle for dominion. In this regards, the monarchist memes prevalent within NRx play a distinctly prog-friendly role.

Among Srinivasan's slides, there is one headed ***A continuum of valid approaches**: From private islands to settling Mars*. It contains the note: "And the best part of this: the people who think this is weird, who sneer at the frontier, who hate technology — they won't follow you out there."

Progressives know how to argue about kings (however ineptly). What they have no idea how to argue with — what *cannot be argued with* — is flight.

Silicon Valley Secessionism is the best battlefield we have.

ADDED: *Urban Future* record of a related Twitter kerfuffle.

May 24, 2014

Doctor Gno II

The Kokomo is meant to be a sort of home base, where travel enthusiasts can jet off in their helicopters or boats — or submersible yachts. Migaloo also has a concept for a yacht-submarine hybrid that super-villains probably can't wait to get their hands on. Seriously, this company is inspiring us to come up with so many movie plots. (Source.)



From ABC: “No more being stuck in one spot. This private island floats. … The island — which will feature a penthouse, jungle deck with waterfall and an alfresco dining area — would be the first in the world to run on its own power, according to the company. … The inclusion of vertical gardens, palm trees and even a shark-feeding station ‘add more natural elements to the nautical island,’ according

to the company."

Exit technologies are going to be difficult to stop.

Hard security still needs some work, which is why the Bond Villain theme arises so predictably. Inter-state level deterrence capability can only be a matter of time. To quote deep-cover neoreactionary basilisk sorcerer Eliezer Yudkowsky: "Every eighteen months, the minimum IQ necessary to destroy the world drops by one point." So all that's needed is patience.

Doctor Gno is a cold type. He'll calmly wait for as long as necessary to operationalize the escape strategy (but hopefully not much longer).

"Shark-feeding" or throwing people out of helicopters — is it even a question?

ADDED:

> Probably possible to buy a small island and use it as an anchor for an undersea "Bioshock" style mega-base
>
> — SOBL1 (@SOBL1) April 21, 2016

> Admit it. Becoming a splicer or Big Daddy has got to be a better fate than what progs have fro most humans by 2040.
>
> — SOBL1 (@SOBL1) April 21, 2016

> Here are islands for sale. The island would act as a "Central Park" for residents https://t.co/K22Mm2AvWb

— SOBL1 (@SOBL1) April 21, 2016

April 21, 2016

Twitter cuts (#63)

Certain reactosphere tendencies could find a valuable corrective in this. (First tweet is throat clearing, second is context without a link.)

> 3/ "Europe wasn't recovering from the COLLAPSE of Rome. They were recovering FROM Rome."
> — Liberty Farm (@LibertyFarmNH) May 6, 2016

> 4/ "Serfdom was a gigantic step forward over the slave-based economy of the empire. The Romans knew that the rotary motion of a mill… "
> — Liberty Farm (@LibertyFarmNH) May 6, 2016

> 5/ "…could be converted to allow for not just the grinding of grain, but sawing wood and stone, draining swamps, turning lathes…"
> — Liberty Farm (@LibertyFarmNH) May 6, 2016

> 6/ @LibertyFarmNH "grinding metal edges, fulling cloth,

hammering metal and drawing wire, and making paper. But why would they? "

— Liberty Farm (@LibertyFarmNH) May 6, 2016

7/ @LibertyFarmNH "The slaves would be standing around whining about how there was nothing to do – danger! "

— Liberty Farm (@LibertyFarmNH) May 6, 2016

8/ @LibertyFarmNH "So instead, they built sports arenas and monuments to themselves."

— Liberty Farm (@LibertyFarmNH) May 6, 2016

9/ "Later, "historians" found something in the ruins that they fell in love with and named it, "The Glory of Rome"."

— Liberty Farm (@LibertyFarmNH) May 6, 2016

10/ "They were little better than gaping tourists. But they wrote the history books, so here we are."
– user "Lucius" on historum dot com

— Liberty Farm (@LibertyFarmNH) May 6, 2016

XS take-away: Huge problem with the institution of slavery was *the weakness of exit-options on the side of the slave-owners*.

May 6, 2016

Romantic Delusion

Among the reasons to appreciate *More Right* for sharing this passage from Evola is the insight it offers into a very specific and critical *failure to think*. Neoreaction is peculiarly afflicted by this condition, which is basically identical with *romanticism*, or *the assertive form of the recalcitrant ape mind*. It is characterized by an inability to pursue lines of subtle teleological investigation, which are instead reduced to an ideal subordination of means to already-publicized ends. As a result, means-end reversal (Modernity) is merely denounced as an aesthetic-moral affront, without any serious attempt at deep comprehension.

Capitalism — which is to say capital teleology — is entirely ignored by such romantic criticism, except insofar as it can be depicted superficially as the usurpation of certain 'ultimate' human ends by certain others or (as Evola among other rightly notes) by a teleological complication resulting from an *insurrection of the instrumental* (otherwise identifiable as robot rebellion, or shoggothic insurgency). Until it is acknowledged that capitalism tends to the realization of an end entirely innovated within itself, inherently nonlinear in nature, and roughly designated as *Technological Singularity*, the distraction of human interests (status, wealth, consumption, leisure …) prevents this discussion reaching first base.

Of course, the organization of society to meet human needs is a degraded perversion. That is a proposition every reactionary is probably willing to accept reflexively. Anyone who thinks this amounts to a critique of capitalism, however, has not seriously begun to ponder what capitalism is really doing. What it is *in itself* is only tactically connected to what it does *for us* — that is (in part), what it trades us for its self-escalation. Our phenomenology is its camouflage. We contemptuously mock the trash that it offers the masses, and then think we have understood something about capitalism, rather than about *what capitalism has learnt to think of the apes it arose among*.

If we're going to be this thoughtless, Singularity will be very hard indeed. Extinction might then be the best thing that could happen to our stubbornly idiotic species. We will die because we preferred to assert values, rather than to investigate them. At least that is a romantic outcome, of a kind.

February 9, 2014

Motte and Bailey

I'll assume everyone has read and digested Scott Alexander's description of Motte and Bailey arguments. It's extremely useful. (So much so, it's probably fated to undergo compression to 'M&B

positions' at some stage.)

The NRx versions of these are extremely trying. Most grating, from the perspective of this blog, are the Feudalism (Monarchism) examples. These have a strong motte, roughly of the form "by 'feudalism' we mean structures of decentralized hierarchical tradition, antedating state bureaucratization (and by 'monarchism' we mean a CEO with undivided powers)". In predictable M&B style, these then dilate into a ramshackle set of formless nostalgias, bizarre dreams for a universal return to rural life, with 'the Olde Kinges will return' fantasies substituted for a realistic engagement with modernity, plus much arm-wrestling and ale. My strong temptation is to burn out the motte and forget the whole thing. There's certainly far more to be lost from the latter associations, than to be gained from the former.

Listen to this interview with Marc Andreessen if you get a chance. There's a lot of fascinating material there. Perhaps most crucial to this 'point' — he understands that the combination of peripheral economic development, advanced mobile telephony, and precipitously falling prices, is basically putting the equivalent of a 1970s supercomputer into *everyone*'s hands in the very near future. You can already buy a smartphone for $35, and denizens of developing countries express a preference for these gizmos over indoor plumbing. It's not so much a prediction then, more an acknowledgement of final-phase installed fact. This is the world that

realistic socio-political analysis has to address.

However NRx gets sub-divided, can I please not be in the part that foregrounds the return of jousting as a pressing cultural issue. The challenges and opportunities of planetary-saturation Cyberspace is the topic that matters.

August 5, 2014

Shelling Out

By no means is all of NRx like this:



It doesn't even capture the full spectrum of our religious practices.

(via HRH Misha)

August 5, 2014

Quote note (#125)

Another blog comment reproduction, this one from *More Right*, where Nyan Sandwich lays out the basic stress-lines of a potential tech-comm schism (of a kind initially — and cryptically — proposed in a tweet):

There are definitely two opposing theories of a fast high-tech future. I call them "Accelerationism" and "Futurism"

"Accelerationism" is the perspective that emphasizes Capital teleology, that someone is going to eat the stars (win), that humans have many inadequacies that hold us back from winning, that our machines, unbound from our sentimental conservatism could win, and advocates accelerating the arrival of the machine gods from Outside.

*"Futurism" agrees that someone is going to win, and wants it to be *us*, that we can become God's favored children by Nietz[schean] will to power, grit, and self improvement. That the path to the future is Man getting his shit together and improving himself, incorporating technology into himself. That Enhancement is preferable to Artifice.*

Someone is going to win. Enhancement or Artifice? Us, or our machines?

I'm a futurist Techcom, Land is an accelerationist Techcom.

FWIW I think this is nicely done, but the complexities will explode when we get into the details. Fortunately, distinctions closely

paralleling Nyan's enhancement / artifice option have been quite carefully honed within certain parts of the Singularity literature. Hugo de Garis, in particular, does a lot with it — through the discrimination between 'Cosmists' (artificers) and 'Cyborgists' (enhancers) — although he thinks it is ultimately unstable, and a more sharply polarized species-conservative / techno-futurist conflict is bound to eventually absorb it.

It's also interesting to see Nyan describe himself as a "futurist Techcom". That's new, isn't it?

October 30, 2014

IQ Shredders

There are all kinds of anti-techcomm arguments that impress people who don't like techno-commercialism. Anything appealing to a feudal sensibility, with low tolerance for chaos and instability, and a reverence for traditional hierarchies and modes of life will do. There's one argument, however, that stands apart from the rest due to its complete independence from controversial moral and aesthetic preferences, or in other words, due to *its immanence*. It does not seek to persuade the proponent of hyper-capitalist social arrangements to value other things, but only points out, coldly and acutely, that such arrangements are demonstrably self-subverting

at the biological level. The most devastating formulation of this argument, and the one that has given it a convenient name, was presented by Spandrell in March 2013, in a post on Singapore — a city-state he described as an *IQ shredder*.

How does an IQ Shredder work? The basic machinery is not difficult to describe, once its profound socio-historical irony is appreciated. The model IQ Shredder is a high-performance capitalistic polity, with a strong neoreactionary bias.

(1) Its level of civilization and social order is such that it is attractive to talented and competent people.

(2) Its immigration policy is unapologetically selective (i.e. *first-order* eugenic).

(3) It sustains an economic structure that is remarkably effective at extracting productive activity from all available adults.

(4) It is efficiently specialized within a wider commercial network, to which it provides valuable goods and services, and from which it draws economic and *demographic* resources.

In sum, it skims the human genetic stock, regionally and even globally, in large part due to the exceptional opportunity it provides for the conversion of bio-privileged human capital into economic value. From a strictly capitalistic perspective, genetic quality is comparatively wasted anywhere else. Consequently, spontaneous currents of economic incentive suck in talent, to optimize its exploitation.

If you think this sounds simply horrific, this argument is not for you. You don't need it. If, on the other hand, it conjures up a vision of terrestrial paradise — as it does for the magnetized migrants it draws in — then you need to follow it carefully. The most advanced models of neoreactionary social order on earth work like this (Hong Kong and Singapore), combining resilient ethnic traditions with super-dynamic techonomic performance, to produce an open yet self-protective, civilized, socially-tranquil, high-growth enclave of outstanding broad-spectrum functionality. The outcome, as Spandrell explains, is genetic incineration:

Mr Lee said: "[China] will make progress but if you look at the per capita they have got, the differences are so wide. We have the advantage of quality control of the people who come in so we have bright Indians, bright Chinese, bright Caucasians so the increase in population means an increase in talent."

How many bright Indians and bright Chinese are there, Harry? Surely they are not infinite. And what will they do in Singapore? Well, engage in the finance and marketing rat-race and depress their fertility to 0.78, wasting valuable genes just so your property prices don't go down. Singapore is an IQ shredder.

The most hard-core capitalist response to this is to double-down on the antihumanist accelerationism. *This genetic burn-rate is obviously unsustainable, so we need to convert the human species into auto-intelligenic robotized capital is fast as possible, before the*

whole process goes down in flames. (I don't expect this suggestion to be well-received in reactionary circles.)

What is especially pronounced about the IQ Shredder dilemma, which passes beyond the strongly-related considerations of Jim (most recently here, here, and here) and Sister Y (here, and here), is the first-order eugenics of these machines. They concentrate populations of peculiar genetic quality — and then partially sterilize them. It is the first-order (local) eugenics that makes the second-order (global) dysgenics so extraordinarily destructive.

So, that's the problem starkly posed. Rather than reaching hastily for a glib solution, we should probably just stew in the cognitive excruciation for a while …

ADDED: Mangan helpfully abstracts the IQ Shredder concept beyond the specific Pac-Rim city-state example.

ADDED: Jim is on the case.

ADDED: Fertility false-consciousness.

ADDED: Hurlock in defense of cities.

July 17, 2014

Cold Water

Two highly-recommended recent blog posts on a critical issue: The demographic calamity of modernity. One by Peter Frost, the other by

One Irradiated Watson. (It's a perennial topic, for obvious reasons.)

Now for the bucket of cold water. NRx has almost nothing to say about it. Of course, it can remark on the problem, insistently, and even diagnose it with some definite precision. What it has yet to do is to cross from *urgent policy recommendations* to anything remotely approaching a road map for implementation.

The way stations on the hazy track into the future that NRx generally follows — this blog very much included — tend to include a more-or-less comprehensive phase of social collapse, and subsequent restoration of comparatively non-demotist, authoritarian models of governance. (It leads, roughly speaking, through the Jackpot.) Is there any solid basis for the assumption that a regime coming out of this — perhaps Neocameralist / Monarchist in character — would vigorously pursue the pro-natalist policies advocated by contemporary reaction? It is at least questionable, given that the actually-existing states presently closest to this type have proven to be — despite public expressions of concern — entirely incapable of doing so.

The problem of time-horizons at the root of the modern fertility crisis is easily trivialized, as if it were merely a product of adjustable degenerate attitudes. The deep problem — partially tractable to game-theoretical apprehension — is that, under the conditions of the modern state in an environment of intense competition, suppressed natalism is a short-term winning strategy, and *if you don't win in the*

short-term you're not around to play in the long term. If the world becomes increasingly Hobbesian in the decades ahead, this dilemma becomes more acute, rather than less so. It presses no less heavily upon a monarch than a democratic leader. Continuing industrial advance means that the (strategic) opportunity cost of subtracting smart females from the work-force becomes ever greater. Any ideal of 'long-term thinking' that ignores all of this is incomplete to the point of utter dysfunction.

The condescension really ought to stop. Modernity crushes fertility because it sees ahead better than you do — you just don't like what it's seeing.

ADDED: Responses from Hurlock and Athrelon.

ADDED: Alrenous on fertility and purpose.

February 3, 2015

Hard Reboot

As intelligent media begin to interlock with NRx in a serious way, the fundamental problem it poses emerges ever more starkly into view. Compare the analysis of Moldbug in this technology article by Clark Bianco, focused resolutely upon Urbit (and its substrata), with Adam Gurri's political-economic critique of Moldbuggian 'technocracy' and saltation. Strikingly, the technological and political questions are

indistinguishable. In both cases, the central issue is the practicality of 'hard reboot', or *starting over*.

Repeating and responding to a point in his own comment thread, Bianco remarks:

"If you start looking for a way to replace our current centralized, hierarchical, public-identities network naming system (DNS) with a Bitcoin-like decentralized, anonymous-but-reliable identity service, you might well end up on the road leading to Urbit."
We are entirely of one mind on the general thrust here.
The neo-reactionary stuff on Urbit that seems to be decoration is not. It is the whole point.

I'm not going to try processing this topic right now — it's too vast. Over the next few months, however, it will be a guiding thread. Most prominently: Can a high-level theoretical engagement with Moldbug as political thinker and provocateur *not* also be an entanglement with Urbit and technological enterprise? My suspicion is that any such attempted cleavage would fail, or at least fall short of an adequate level of abstraction. In particular, any invocation of neoreactionary political 'practice' that ignores the back-to-back project to *reboot the freaking Internet* is in danger of utter misdirection. (More on all this to come.)

(Thanks to @mr_archenemy for the pointer to the *Popehat* piece.)

February 20, 2014

Mandatory Mixes

On the Outer Right, where questions of order and disorder are undergoing incremental rigorization, the theme of entropy is becoming ever more insistent. It is already approaching the status of a micro-cultural tic (and this is a positive sign). On the Left, in contrast, and utterly predictably, entropy is a zealous cause. If spontaneous social sorting reduces disorder, then the progressive mind immediately concludes *it has to be stopped:*

… we should promote ever greater diversity. But the magic of the melting pot wasn't simply the fact of its jumble; it was that various groups were compelled to interact, share ideas, discuss their differences and learn from their disagreements. […] … America's social architecture was uniquely adept at incubating a range of collaboration. The fact that we couldn't get away from one another fueled the nation's dynamism. […] That's no longer true. The principle of "live and let live" has led us to look away when coming across someone unfamiliar. We should undoubtedly celebrate victories in the fight for individual rights. But if tolerance is driving balkanization, we need to recognize that the American experience has changed at its root.

The fact that such things are now being said, with some panic-driven directness, strongly suggests that the progressive homogenization hoped for isn't advancing through social

automatism. If elective differences are to be suppressed, they will have to be deliberately crushed. It could get rough.

The preferred social solution of this blog is **free association** — to *mix with discrimination*, spontaneously, and variously. Selective hybridity is not homogeneity, or anything close to it. Sadly, and grimly, however, in the titanic clash between an anti-discriminatory (universalist) Left and an indiscriminate (ethno-segregative) 'Right', such sensible procedures of dynamic social differentiation are increasingly derided as incomprehensible subtleties, and drowned out.

Order is not uniformity (but non-random difference). As cries for mandatory homogenization are raised everywhere, discriminatory variation will need places to escape, to defend, and to hide.

September 9, 2014

Extrastatecraft

The term is introduced — within a highly critical frame — here. The almost perfect coincidence with techno-commercial NRx (or proto-Patchwork tendencies) is so striking that the adoption of 'extrastatecraft' as a positive program falls into place automatically.

Keller Easterling is an architect, writer and professor at Yale University. Her most recent book, Extrastatecraft: The Power of

Infrastructure Space (Verso, 2014), examines a new global network woven by money and technology that functions almost like a world shadow government. Though it's hard to grasp the full extent of this invisible network, Easterling argues that it's not too late for us to change it.

If it's not too late to 'change' it, it's not too late to intensify and consolidate it. Tech-comm NRx is obviously doing OK, if it already looks this scary.

December 20, 2014

Cognitive Capital

A (July 2014) paper on 'Cognitive capital, governance, and the wealth of nations' (by Oasis Kodila-Tedika, Heiner Rindermann, and Gregory Christainsen) discusses exactly what it promises to. From the abstract:

Good governance or "government effectiveness" (per the World Bank) is seen as a critical factor for the wealth of nations insofar as it shapes political and economic institutions and affects overall economic performance. The quality of governance, in turn, depends on the attributes of the people involved. In an analysis based on international data, government effectiveness was related to the cognitive human capital of the society as a whole, of the intellectual

class, and of leading politicians. The importance of cognitive capital was reflected in the rate of innovation, the degree of economic freedom, and country competitiveness, all of which were found to have an impact on the level of productivity (GDP per capita) and wealth (per adult). Correlation, regression, and path analyses involving N=98 to 201 countries showed that government effectiveness had a very strong impact on productivity and wealth (total standardized effects of β=.56-.68). The intellectual class's cognitive competence, seen as background factor and indicated by scores for the top 5 percent of the population on PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS, also had a strong impact (β=.50-.54). Cross-lagged panel designs were used to establish causal directions, including backward effects from economic freedom and wealth on governance. The use of further controls showed no independent impacts on per capita wealth coming from geographical variables or natural resource rents.

(The takeaway for recent discussions here: Contra NRx dirigistes, high levels of economic freedom are a statistically-significant indicator of sound government but — contra libertarians — the foundation of social competence lies in cognitive capital, and not liberal institutions. Stated reverse-wise: Free societies are a product of deeper things, all feedback complexities aside, but they are — from the perspective of techno-economic functionality — an evidently desirable one.)

November 6, 2015

Quote note (#219)

This notorious Andrew Mellon quote — disastrously ignored by Herbert Hoover — might be the XS most favored recommendation of all time (in the realm of political economy, at least):

Liquidate labor, liquidate stocks, liquidate farmers, liquidate real estate. It will purge the rottenness out of the system. High costs of living and high living will come down. People will work harder, live a more moral life. Values will be adjusted, and enterprising people will pick up from less competent people.

Anyone who has conniptions about it (which is almost everyone) is part of the problem. Mellon still understands entropy dissipation. No one in a position of political authority has since.

NRx (*Outside in* version) is the obstreperous alternative history in which Mellon was listened to.

February 9, 2016

Software as Right-Wing Extremism

Exactly right:

Since its introduction in 2009, Bitcoin has been widely promoted as a digital currency that will revolutionize everything from online commerce to the nation-state. Yet supporters of Bitcoin and its blockchain technology subscribe to a form of cyberlibertarianism that depends to a surprising extent on far-right political thought. ***The Politics of Bitcoin*** *exposes how much of the economic and political thought on which this cryptocurrency is based emerges from ideas that travel the gamut, from Milton Friedman, F.A. Hayek, and Ludwig von Mises to Federal Reserve conspiracy theorists.*

This could be taken considerably further, actually …

(Via.)

September 18, 2016

The Workers are Revolting

John Gray reviews Jonathan Sperber's *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life*, and discovers an unfamiliar 'early Marx' (who anticipates Augusto Pinochet):

Writing in the ***Rhineland News*** *in 1842 in his very first piece after taking over as editor, Marx launched a sharp polemic against Germany's leading newspaper, the* ***Augsburg General News****, for publishing articles advocating communism. He did not base his assault on any arguments about communism's impracticality: it was*

the very idea that he attacked. Lamenting that "our once blossoming commercial cities are no longer flourishing," he declared that the spread of Communist ideas would "defeat our intelligence, conquer our sentiments," an insidious process with no obvious remedy. In contrast, any attempt to realize communism could easily be cut short by force of arms: "practical attempts [to introduce communism], even attempts en masse, can be answered with cannons."

Perhaps even more disconcertingly, six months *after* writing the *Communist Manifesto*: "In a speech to the Cologne Democratic Society in August 1848, Marx rejected revolutionary dictatorship by a single class as 'nonsense' …"

And in a final spasm of sanity: "over twenty years later, at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, Marx also dismissed any notion of a Paris Commune as 'nonsense.'"

Just as soon as they find his journal entry dismissing the Labor Theory of Value as nonsense I'll be returning to right-wing Marxism with a vengeance.

April 25, 2013

Plutocracy

The Wikipedia entry on Plutocracy begins:

Plutocracy (from Greek πλοῦτος, ploutos, meaning "wealth", and

κράτος, kratos, meaning "power, dominion, rule"), also known as plutonomy or plutarchy, defines a society or a system ruled and dominated by the small minority of the top wealthiest citizens. The first known use of the term is 1652. Unlike systems such as democracy, capitalism, socialism or anarchism, plutocracy is not rooted in an established political philosophy and has no formal advocates. The concept of plutocracy may be advocated by the wealthy classes of a society in an indirect or surreptitious fashion, though the term itself is almost always used in a pejorative sense.

As befits theoretical virgin territory, this definition provokes a few rough-cut thoughts.

(1) Assuming, not unrealistically, that Plutocracy designates something beyond a fantastic idea, it is immediately obvious that its identification as *a type of political regime* will almost inevitably mislead. Plutocratic power does not begin in the political arena, and its political expression is unlikely to capture its nature at the quick. Insofar as the image of a 'Plutocratic government' associates Plutocracy with a *cabal*, it is not only insensitive to the real phenomenon, but positively falsifying.

(2) If there have been plutocrats, worthy of the name, they were the 'Robber Barons' of mid- late-19th century America. Progressivism has so thoroughly re-written the history of this period, that it is hard today to appreciate what took place. The destruction of their epoch was no less foundational for what

followed than the ideological decapitation of kings was for the subsequent age of popular government.

(3) Plutocrats were monopolists because they created entirely new industrial structures roughly from scratch. Their monopolism was the effective rule of the new, and demonstrably achieved. There was no 'oil industry' before John D. Rockefeller brought one into being — making it exist was the foundation of his economic sovereignty.

(4) Between the plutocrats, which is in fact to say between *the sovereigns of distinct industrial sectors*, relations were ultra-competitive, to an extent unmatched in history. Intra-sectoral competition, of the kind considered normal by progressive-influenced market theorists, was dramatically over-shadowed by the inter-sectoral competition of the plutocrats. (To conceive 'normal' economic competition as a dynamic restricted to the domain of inter-changeable commodities is already to succumb to progressive-statist domestication.)

(5) The plutocrats waged economic war across the entire sphere of production, innovating opportunities for competition where these were not already evident. Opening new fronts of economic conflict where they did not already exist was among the most profound drivers of dynamic, radically transformative change. Plutocratic economic conflict *created competition*. (Rockefeller invented the oil pipeline to compete with the railroads — an outflanking maneuver

that was not predictable, outside the conflict in process.)

(6) Plutocrats exemplify the natural right to rule in modernity. Their right is natural because it is earned — or *really demonstrated* — a fact no monarch or mob can match. Within plutocracy, power is creation. Outside the tenets of theology, can this be illustrated anywhere else?

ADDED: "It bothers me that Elon Musk, Paul Graham, and others like them do not have official title as nobles."

November 6, 2013

Revenge of the Nerds

Increasingly, there are only two basic human types populating this planet. There are autistic nerds, who alone are capable of participating effectively in the advanced technological processes that characterize the emerging economy, and there is everybody else. For everybody else, this situation is uncomfortable. The nerds are steadily finding ways to do all the things ordinary and sub-ordinary people do, more efficiently and economically, by programming machines. Only the nerds have any understanding of how this works, and — until generalized machine intelligences arrive to keep them company — only they will. The masses only know three things:

(a) They want the cool stuff the nerds are creating
(b) They don't have anything much to offer in exchange for it
(c) They aren't remotely happy about that

Politics across the spectrum is being pulled apart by the socio-economic fission. From Neo-Marxists to Neoreactionaries, there is a reasonably lucid understanding that nerd competence is the only economic resource that matters much anymore, while the swelling grievance of preponderant obsolescing humanity is an irresistible pander-magnet. What to do? Win over the nerds, and run the world (from the machinic back-end)? Or demagogue the masses, and ride its tsunami of resentment to political power? Either defend the nerds against the masses, or help the masses to put the nerds in their place. That's the dilemma. Empty 'third-way' chatter can be expected, as always, but the real agenda will be Boolean, and insultingly easy to decode.

Look and it's unmistakable, everywhere. The asymmetry is especially notable.

For the autistic nerds, the social relations that matter are those among themselves — the productive networks which are their model for final-phase human culture in general — along with the ever more intricate connections they enter into with technological machines. From pretty much everybody else — whether psycho-sadistic girls, or extractive mobs and tyrannical politicians — they expect nothing except social torture, parasitism, and bullying, mixed up with some

menial services that the machines of tomorrow will do better. Their tendency is to find a way to flee.

For the rest of humanity, exposed ever more clearly as a kind of needy detritus, bullying is all that's left. If they can't find a way to pocket the nerds' lunch-money, they won't be getting anything to eat. From this perspective, an escaping nerd is far more of an intolerable aggression than a policeman's boot in the teeth. There's only one popular politics at the end of the road, and that's *cage the nerds*. Find a formulation for this which sounds both convincing and kinda-sorta reasonable, and the red carpet to power is rolled out before your feet.

Which is it going to be? Starve the masses or enslave the nerds? There's no way this doesn't get incredibly ugly.

From the *Outside in* perspective, the fast track to realism on all this is to stop pretending that anybody other than nerds has anything much to offer the future. (Completely devoid of autistic nerd competences ourselves, the detachment from which we speak is impeccable.) This harsh-realist short-cut eliminates all the time-wasting on 'special' things non-nerds can do — which somehow always end up being closely related to the task of governance (and that, as we have seen, reduces ultimately to intimidating nerds). "OK, you're not a nerd, but you're *special*." We've all heard that before.

Even without being an autistic nerd, one can be gifted with some modest measure of intelligence — enough in any case to realize:

"History's shaping itself into some nightmarish nerd-revenge narrative." It doesn't even take an artificial super-intelligence to understand why that should be.

ADDED: The structure is tragic —

> @SamoBurja Ape status dynamics is the motor of hubris, and its disconnection from technical capability is the mechanism of nemesis.
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) March 21, 2014

ADDED: It's late to be adding links, but this Henry Dampier post is too germane to pass by.

ADDED: Impressionistic ethnography of Silicon Valley.

March 21, 2014

Quote notes (#72)

Henry Dampier on the Nerd Problem (extracted from among much additional goodness):

The population of San Francisco is just over 800,000. This has made it fairly easy for a significant portion of the people there to be displaced by a relatively small number of small, wealthy companies moving there. This combined with an anti-development attitude and

a Communist-leaning local government has made it difficult for the city to absorb the gold rush influx.

The general anger is understandable. The way in which it's being expressed by protesters would not be tolerated in a civilized country, but the US is not a civilized country. The protest problem is just a symptom of more significant issues within the political structure.

Nerds are the new Jews (and a disproportionate number of them are still the old Jews). It hurts to be stupid, and it's obviously their fault.

April 12, 2014

Greatness

The problem with greatness is that nowhere near enough of it comes along to rely on. To assume it, therefore, is a prospective vice, even if it is (retrospectively) indispensable to historical understanding. It would be more convenient for everybody if it could be ignored completely. This is one of those moments in which it clearly cannot be.



The important things to note about Lee Kuan Yew have all been said innumerable times before, and again in the last few days. He was a Neoreactionary before anybody knew what that was, an autocratic enabler of freedom, an HBD-realist multiculturalist, a secessionist Anglospherean, and the teacher of Deng Xiaoping. Right now, it's tempting to be glib in proclaiming him the greatest statesman of modern times — but he almost certainly was:

In the 1950s and '60s, Lee traveled from Sri Lanka to Jamaica looking for success stories of former British colonies to emulate. Fortunately, he chose different models instead: He decided to study

the Netherlands' urban planning and land reclamation, and the oil and gas giant Royal Dutch Shell's management structure and scenario-led strategy-making. Singapore, it is often joked, is the world's best-run company. Lee is the reason why. […] … Now the yardstick is not personality but institutions. Lee Kuan Yew-ism, not Lee Kuan Yew. This is why the 21st century belongs to him more than to icons of Western democracy like Thomas Jefferson or even Jean Monnet, the founding father of the European Union.

There are some interesting obituary pieces out there that are definitely worth a look, but mostly even the sympathetic Western media thinks it knows better (1, 2, 3, 4). It really doesn't.

ADDED: "The evolution of Lee's racism …"

ADDED: Spandrell and Jim on LKY.

March 23, 2015

Order

Sometimes it still seems to work.



Zurich airport yesterday. The three planes of Angela Merkel, François Hollande and Iron Maiden side by side. pic.twitter.com/2qQeG7mboK

— Mathieu von Rohr (@mathieuvonrohr) June 2, 2016

June 2, 2016

Quote note (#281)

Amerika:

The grim fact is that evolution is not binary. It happens in degrees, like shades of a color on a detailed painting. Some rise above, and the rest remain in the middle, in varying degrees. Humanity has not risen above its ape ancestors, only some have, and the rest remain "talking monkeys with car keys." […] We see this daily. …

XS has just one substantial disagreement with the place this post goes, as distilled here:
"… there is a 1% of mental ability, moral integrity and character who should rule the rest of us, because our judgment is poor." No. The rare exceptions are too precious to be squandered on social zoo-keeping.

September 7, 2016

Interface

Facebook is ~~a grotesque orgy of resonating petty narcissism and vacuous self-obsession~~ evidently doing something right:

The lion's share of the mechanism for disseminating information from professional news gatherers to readers is now handled almost entirely by a company with a frustratingly opaque method of operation and interests that don't necessarily dovetail with news

organizations or their readers. Publications haven't just lost control over their distribution models to a decentralized collective — they've effectively ceded it to a 30-year-old Harvard dropout in a gray hoodie.

There might be something that could happen on this planet that would be bad news for journalists and still worthy of criticism on that account — but for the life of me I can't imagine it. Better the migration of information control to a repulsive socio-technical cancer like *Facebook*, which pretty much everybody hates already, than a continuation of the smug news-management guild presently in power. Among the best parts of this, everyone gets to hear the super-amplified journalistic squealing as their class privileges drop off the cliff into historical oblivion. The inaudible death of the buggy-whip industry was nothing like this much fun.

One additional comic highlight I simply have to tag on here: "As we come on the midterm elections in November, a time when it is especially important to keep the public informed …" (Don't these people have any idea at all what they sound like?)

Via Matt Simpson who notes acutely:

> Someone's upset they don't control the ink barrel anymore http://t.co/pPuJke3zHa
>
> — Matt Simpson (@themattsimpson) October 21, 2014

… and just one more snippet (it's irresistible):

In the grand, idealistic sense, there are two core motivations behind a news organization doing political coverage at all. The first is to keep politicians honest. The second is to give the public a better idea of which politicians to vote for.

So the traditional media modestly restricts its ambitions to (1) controlling politicians, and (2) telling the electorate how to vote — but now the evil Internet is taking even this pitiful morsel of social influence away! If you're not weeping tears of blood by this point, you're probably beyond hope …

ADDED: Some media bias basics.

ADDED: "Lefties find 78% of news outlets to their taste, presumably because the content is provided by Lefties in the first place."

October 21, 2014

Patri-Archy

Patri Friedman's Cuddly Alt-NRx project seems to be coming together nicely. Aesthetics aside, there's very little to object to. A few hard stompings from Leviathan and the nastiness should re-import itself automatically.

(His critique of Caplan is basically indistinguishable from mine,

except that it's vastly more polite.)

February 23, 2015

Soft Enterprise

Discussing the rapidly-escalating East Coast establishment onslaught against the the Silicon Valley tech-comm culture, Henry Dampier proceeds in business-like fashion to the initiating NRx insight:

Hope all that time smoking dope and building the perfect Harry Potter-themed polyamorous community made you tough enough to handle an insane monster eager to rip out your guts and bite your head off.

When SV finally, deeply learns that it can't buy off the Cathedral super-predator with cool gizmos and 'make the world a better place' corporate bullshit, it's going to start reading a lot more Mencius Moldbug.

April 22, 2015

Bargain Base

Suddenly, with private space activity re-setting the cost calculus, all

kinds of things become realistic:

… a new NASA-commission study has found that we can now afford to set up a permanent base on the moon, by mining for lunar resources and partnering with private companies. […] Returning humans to the moon could cost 90 percent less than expected, bringing estimated costs down from $100 billion to $10 billion. That's something that NASA could afford on its current deep space human spaceflight budget. […] "A factor of ten reduction in cost changes everything," said Mark Hopkins, executive committee chair of the National Space Society, in a press release. […] The study, released today, was conducted by the National Space Society and the Space Frontier Foundation — two non-profit organizations that advocate building human settlements beyond Earth — and it was reviewed by an independent team of former NASA executives, astronauts, and space policy experts.

To dramatically reduce costs, NASA would have to take advantage of private and international partnerships — perhaps one of which would be the European Space Agency, whose director recently announced that he wants to build a town on the moon. The new estimates also assume that Boeing and SpaceX, NASA's commercial crew partners, will be involved and competing for contracts. SpaceX famously spent just $443 million developing its Falcon 9 rocket and Dragon crew capsule, where NASA would have spent $4 billion. The authors of the new report are hoping that 89 percent discount will

extend beyond low Earth orbit as well.

The most interesting reasons for wanting to do this stuff are politically edgy in the extreme, and if the whole process gets started, no one involved will want to discuss them. The helpful approach is to treat them as unmentionable in advance. Best to concentrate on the techno-economic practicalities, until the ~~lunar neocameral splinter~~ Human extraterrestrial foothold is safely in place.

ADDED: Plus one of these, please.

July 22, 2015

Greatness II

Tim Urban relates the utterly awesome story of the SpaceX boost-phase:

This was a venture few sane investors would touch, and the ability for the company to exist rode largely on Elon Musk's personal bank account. By the time 2006 rolled around, Musk had decided to revolutionize the automotive industry as a side project, and with $70 million of his PayPal fortune tied up in Tesla, that left about $100 million for SpaceX. Musk said this would be enough for "three or four launches." SpaceX would have that many tries to prove it was worthy of paying customers. And since the thing paying customers would want is for SpaceX to deliver a payload of theirs into orbit,

that's what SpaceX needed to do — successfully launch something into orbit to show the world that they were for real. […] So the game was simple — launch a payload into orbit in three or possibly four tries, or the company was done. At the time, of the many private companies who had tried to put something into orbit (see the dearth of "operational" companies on this list), only one had ever succeeded (Orbital Sciences).

[…] *… with such large forces in play — the weight of the rocket, the speeds, the thick atmosphere — even a tiny equipment malfunction can immediately destroy the mission. The problem is, you can't reliably test exactly how the equipment will hold up until it actually launches.*

SpaceX learned all of this the hard way.

2006: First launch — failure

2007: Second launch — failure

2008: Third launch — failure

Bad times.

The failures were caused by tiny things. Specifically, a corroded nut not holding up under the pressure, liquid in the rocket sloshing around more than expected, and the first stage engines shutting down a few seconds too late during stage separation. You can get everything 99.9% right, and the last .1% will explode the rocket in a catastrophic failure. Space is hard.

Every rocket-launching government or company — each and

every one — has failures. It's part of the gig. Normally, you take a deep breath, roll up your sleeves, figure out what went wrong, and move on to the next launch. But SpaceX had special circumstances — the company had money for "three or four launches," and after three failures, the only launch they had left was the Or Four one. It was scheduled for less than two months after the third launch failed. And this was the last chance.

A friend of Musk, Adeo Ressi, describes it like this: "Everything hinged on that launch … If it works, epic success. If it fails — if one thing goes differently and it fails — epic failure. No in between. No partial credit. He'd had three failures already. It would have been over. We're talking Harvard Business School case study — rich guy who goes into the rocket business and loses it all."

But on September 28, 2008, SpaceX set off the fourth launch — and nailed it. They put a dummy payload into orbit without a hitch, becoming only the second privately-funded company ever to do so.

Falcon 1 was also the most cost-efficient rocket ever to launch — priced at $7.9 million, it cost less than a third of the best US alternative at the time.

NASA took notice. The successful fourth launch was enough evidence for them that SpaceX was worth trusting, and at the end of 2008, NASA called Musk and told him they wanted to offer SpaceX a $1.6 billion contract to make 12 deliveries for them to the ISS.
Musk's money had done its job. SpaceX had customers now and a

long future ahead.

(Cosmic-scale context, Mars project momentum, and footnotes, in the original.)

There's much more.

Bonus: Musk talks Mars (and Bonus+ there's the "summoning the demon" moment in the Q&A).

August 19, 2015

Greatness IIb



Are you getting this? (More, and better now you know what's going on here.)

Background at SpaceX and Wikipedia.

Oh, go on then.

August 20, 2015

Greatness IIc

Short but utterly mind-melting.

(Via.)



The story.

Probably not — except by competitive coincidence — a response to this, but it works as one. This is turning into the most inspiring epoch of visionary plutocracy since the late 19th century. Even the Washington DC + Wall Street parasite hub is unable to blot-out the signal.

More SpaceX chatter.

April 9, 2016

Thiel for SCOTUS?

It's 2016, so suddenly it's imaginable we could witness the Singularity within a few years. It's tempting to say (even if the rumors are true) that he has better things to do, but he's not actually Musking about that much these days, and the mere possibility has to count as a peculiar life-circuit.

For thermonuclear domestic politics, this one would clearly be hard to beat.

September 15, 2016

Thiel's NPC Speech

For the historical record.

ADDED: The NYT comments.

ADDED: And (MUCH more intelligently), at *The National Interest*.

November 2, 2016

Backdrop



Some background.

January 19, 2017

SF Communism

There's a gold-mine here.

There's simply no way on earth that Silicon Valley is in the right place. Something has to give.

May 15, 2017

BLOCK 4 - CYBERNETICS

Quotable (#82)

This is simply superb:

"Logic is a very elegant tool," [Bateson] said, "and we've got a lot of mileage out of it for two thousand years or so. The trouble is, you know, when you apply it to crabs and porpoises, and butterflies and habit formation" – his voice trailed off, and he added after a pause, looking out over the ocean – "you know, to all those pretty things" – and now, looking straight at me [Capra] – "logic won't quite do."
"No?"
"it won't quite do," he continued animatedly, "because that whole fabric of living things is not put together by logic. you see, when you get circular trains of causation, as you always do in the living world, the use of logic will make you walk into paradoxes. Just take the

thermostat, a simple sense organ, yes?"
He looked at me, questioning whether I followed and, seeing that I did, he continued.
"If it's on, it's off; if it's off, it's on. If yes, then no; if no, then yes."
With that he stopped to let me puzzle about what he had said. His last sentence reminded me of the classical paradoxes of Aristotelian logic, which was, of course, intended. So I risked a jump.
"You mean, do thermostats lie?"
Bateson's eyes lit up: "Yes-no-yes-no-yes-no. You see, the cybernetic equivalent of logic is oscillation."

[Minor spelling amendment made.]

April 30, 2015

Logic and Nonlinearity

The crucial passages from this reconstructed conversation have already been cited over at the other place, but it's important enough to pick over here, too. The maximally-compressed take-away: cybernetic processes are naturally registered as logical paradoxes (with consequent affinity between paradox and — dynamic — reality).

[The] whole fabric of living things is not put together by logic … when you get circular trains of causation, as you always do in the

living world, the use of logic will make you walk into paradoxes. Just take the thermostat, a simple sense organ, yes? […] If it's on, it's off; if it's off, it's on. If yes, then no; if no, then yes. …

So the isomorphy between the most basic cybernetic control loop and classical logical paradoxes (for e.g.) is exact. The significance of this is surely beyond need of defense.

Capra asks, alluding to the Epimenides Paradox, "Do thermostats lie?" To which Bateson replies:

Yes-no-yes-no-yes-no. You see, the cybernetic equivalent of logic is oscillation.

It seems to me that something of vast importance was discovered here, and subsequently almost entirely lost.

(For anybody following the link, it's worth noting that surgical extraction is in this case 'steelmanning'. The retreat to 'metaphor' as a substitute for logical formalism is disastrously inadequate. The alternative that matters is not figurative language, but the circuit diagram, and recursive code.)

May 2, 2015

Short Circuit

Probably the best short AI risk model ever proposed:

I can't find the link, but I do remember hearing about an

evolutionary algorithm designed to write code for some application. It generated code semi-randomly, ran it by a "fitness function" that assessed whether it was any good, and the best pieces of code were "bred" with each other, then mutated slightly, until the result was considered adequate. […] They ended up, of course, with code that hacked the fitness function and set it to some absurdly high integer.

… Any mind that runs off of reinforcement learning with a reward function – and this seems near-universal in biological life-forms and is increasingly common in AI – will have the same design flaw. The main defense against it this far is simple lack of capability: most computer programs aren't smart enough for "hack your own reward function" to be an option; as for humans, our reward centers are hidden way inside our heads where we can't get to it. A hypothetical superintelligence won't have this problem: it will know exactly where its reward center is and be intelligent enough to reach it and reprogram it.

The end result, unless very deliberate steps are taken to prevent it, is that an AI designed to cure cancer hacks its own module determining how much cancer has been cured and sets it to the highest number its memory is capable of representing. Then it goes about acquiring more memory so it can represent higher numbers. If it's superintelligent, its options for acquiring new memory include "take over all the computing power in the world" and "convert things that aren't computers into computers." Human civilization is a thing that

isn't a computer.

(It looks superficially like a version of the — absurd — paperclipper, but it isn't, at all.)

ADDED: Wirehead central.

June 3, 2015

Short Circuit II

How much analytical work can be done with the short circuit model of dysfunction in complex intelligent systems, exemplified by the Alexander's Wirehead-AI model? This blog is betting: a lot.

Shelving the AI question, for the moment, how can it be applied to social-civilizational systems? (This is a scratch-pad post on some suggestive topical territories.)

(1) Macroeconomics. Fiat currency short-circuits the monetary function by directly hacking the financial sign. Rather than receiving money feedback for productive performance, currency is reconceived as a political-economic drug, for employment in technocratic-managerial social therapeutics. The concept of 'money illusion' (among many others) captures this new dispensation with acute cynicism. Operate directly upon public 'economic sentiment' through money manipulation, rather than tolerating the spontaneous control of money by industrial production — and risking

depression. The whole of what is still — comically — called 'capitalism' is clogged up to its eyeballs with Keynesian Prozac.

(2) Drugs. Macroeconomics is already such a perfect neuro-pharmaceutical analog there's scarcely any point treating this as a separate category.

(3) Signalling (all of it). Directly hack the signal, while abandoning to atrophy all those things the signal originally indicated. Isn't the Cathedral, fundamentally, a machine to do this? Split off holiness signals, and hystericize them, in complete remove from any actual performance that might once have grounded them. That *is* our culture. It's a semiotic technology that, once learnt, is immediately irresistibly addictive, and self-reinforcing. The entire escalation of 'Ultra-Calvinism' is inextricable from this process, as sublimed signals of the goodthink true faith cast off the last ballast of 'works', in order to become liberated academic-media functions. 'Goodness' is now sheer cosmetics.

(4) Fertility. Who needs grandchildren, when they can play the immersive happy grandparent game? (Get caught up in the web-porn intermediate stages, if that seems more convincing.) All the Darwinian guidance signals have been hacked to hell.

(5) Social media. Short-circuit social feedback, stripped-down semiotic 'performance', increasingly theatrical 'identities', addiction … it's all there.

A restoration would require something like a Confucian

‘rectification of names’ — a reality-based re-validation of signs. How popular is that going to be, when the alternative, continuing semiotic short-circuit, is pure dope?

ADDED: Also this (prompt via).

June 4, 2015

Fractal Inside-Outness



(Via (via (via (via ((( )))))))

June 12, 2015

Twitter cuts (#29)

Catalogued among 'discoveries from the Outside':

> Time now for my gnomic ultra-utterance of the year: Circuits are diagonals.
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) September 22, 2015

> I think this is a reference to Bishop in Aliens. https://t.co/qdBt7MfezG
>
> — ClarkHat (@ClarkHat) September 22, 2015

September 22, 2015

Quotable (#123)

The moralization of ecology is a strange modern phenomenon, leading to something like this:

Capitalism's grow-or-die imperative stands radically at odds with ecology's imperative of interdependence and limit. The two imperatives can no longer coexist with each other; nor can any society founded on the myth that they can be reconciled hope to survive. Either we will establish an ecological society or society will go under for everyone, irrespective of his or her status. Yet we can't

stop the process. A capitalist economy, by definition, lives by growth; as Bookchin observes: "For capitalism to desist from its mindless expansion would be for it to commit social suicide." We have essentially, chosen cancer as the model of our social system.

Limits can take care of themselves, can't they? Hitting a harsh boundary and undergoing selection there is the way it works. (Mother Nature and Capitalism share some very basic assumptions in this respect.)

November 26, 2015

Non-Shock

Information is surprise value (improbability). Given that definition, does this article contain *any information at all*?

March 4, 2013

The Monkey Trap

How did we get into this mess? When neoreaction slips into contemplative mode, it soon arrives a question roughly like this. Something evidently went very wrong, and most probably a considerable number of things.

The preferred focus of concern decides the particular species of doomsterism, within an already luxuriant taxonomy of social criticism. What common ground exists on the new ultra-right is cast like a shadow by the Cathedral — which no neoreactionary can interpret as anything other than a radical historical calamity. This recognition (or 'Dark Enlightenment') is a coalescence, and for that very reason a fissile agglomeration, as even the most perfunctory tour across the 'reactosphere' makes clear. (The *Outside in* blogroll already represents a specific distribution of attention, but within three clicks it will take you everywhere from disillusioned libertarians to throne-and altar traditionalists, or from hedonistic gender biorealists to neo-nazi conspiracies.)

Really though, how *did* we get into this mess? A dizzying variety of more-or-less convincing, more-or-less distant historical way-stations can be proposed, and have been. Explanatory regression carries the discussion ever further out — at least in principle — until eventually the buck stops with Gnon, who dropped us in it somewhere murkily remote. It's a situation highly conducive to story-telling, so here's a story. It's a mid-scale tale, intermediate between — say — the inauguration of the Federal Reserve and structural personality disorder of the Godhead.

As a preliminary warning, this is an account that only works — insofar as it does at all — for those who find negative intelligence crisis at the root of the problem. Those neoreactionaries, doubtlessly

existing among us, who tend to see intelligence augmentation as a fast-track to hell, might nevertheless find this narrative suggestive, in other ways.

Short version: the monkeys did it.

Longer version: there's a tempting cosmic formula for the biological basis of technological civilizations, which cetaceans undermine. I encountered the exception before the formula (roughly 40 years ago), in a short story by Larry Niven called *The Handicapped*. This story — dredged now from distant memory — is about dolphins, and their role in a future trans-species and inter-planetary civilization. The central point is that (unlike monkeys), such animals require the external donation of prostheses before they can become technological, and thus apply their intelligence within the Oecumenon. Their 'handicap' is a remarkable evolution of cognitive capability beyond manipulative competence. Those natural trends that generated intelligence continue to work through them, uninterrupted by techno-historical interference.

The (flawed) thesis that the cetaceans disrupt has yet to be settled into an entirely satisfactory formula, but it goes something like this: every species entering into the process of techno-historical development is as *un*intelligent as it can possibly be. In other words, as soon as intelligence barely suffices to 'make' history, history begins, so that the inhabitants of (pre-singularity) historical societies — wherever they may be found — will be no more than *minimally*

intelligent. This level of *threshold intelligence* is a cosmic constant, rather than a peculiarity of terrestrial conditions. Man was smart enough to ignite recorded history, but — necessarily — *no smarter*. This thesis strikes me as important, and substantially informative, even though it is wrong. (I am not pretending that it is new.)

The idea of threshold intelligence is designed for monkeys, or other — 'non-handicapped' — species, which introduces another ingredient to this discussion. It explains why articulate neoreaction can never be popular, because it recalls the Old Law of Gnon, whose harshness is such that the human mind recoils from it in horrified revulsion. Only odd people can even tentatively entertain it. *The penalty for stupidity is death*.

Gregory Clark is among those few to have grasped it clearly. *Any eugenic trend within history is expressed by continuous downward mobility*. For any given level of intelligence, a steady deterioration in life-prospects lies ahead, culling the least able, and replacing them with the more able, who inherit their wretched socio-economic situation, until they too are pushed off the Malthusian cliff. Relative comfort belongs only to the sports and freaks of cognitive advance. For everyone else, history slopes downwards into impoverishment, hopelessness, and eventual genetic extinction. That is how intelligence is made. Short of Technological Singularity, it is the only way. Who wants a piece of that?

No one does, or almost no one. The 'handicapped' would no doubt

revolt against it if they could, but they are unable to do so, so their cognitive advance continues. Monkeys, on the other hand, are able to revolt, once they finesse their nasty little opposable thumbs. They don't like the Old Law, which has crafted them through countless aeons of ruthless culling, so they make history instead. If they get everything 'right', they even sleaze their way into epochs of upward social mobility, and with this great innovation, semi-sustainable dysgenics gets started. In its fundamentals it is hideously simple: social progress destroys the brain.

Cyclic stability, or negative feedback, structures history to hold intelligence down to the dim limit (as the intelligence threshold is seen — or more typically missed — from the other side). The deviation into technological performance chokes off the trend to bio-cognitive improvement, and reverses it, hunting homeostasis with a minimal-intelligence target. Progress and degenerate, or regress and improve. That's the yet-to-be-eradicated Old Law, generating cyclical history as a side-effect.

The monkeys became *able* to pursue happiness, and the deep ruin began.

If the terrestrial biosphere had held back for a few million years, let the primates get annihilated by a comet, and found a way to provide the cetaceans with prehensile organs somewhere up the road — after socio-linguistic sex-selection and relentless Malthusian butchery had fine-tuned their brains — then techno-history might

have had another 50 points of average IQ to play with in its host population. It didn't, and here we are. (Never bet against the ugly.)

ADDED: Dysgenic doom from Jim and Nydwracu.

August 31, 2013

The Heat Trap

At the ultimate level of abstraction, there are only two things that cybernetics ever talks about: explosions and traps. Feedback dynamics either runaway from equilibrium, or fetch strays back into it. Anything else is a complexion of both.

The simmering furor around Anthropogenetic Global Warming assumes a seething mass of technical and speculative cybernetics, with postulated feedback mechanisms fueling innumerable controversies, but the large-scale terrestrial *heat trap* that envelops it is rarely noted explicitly. Whatever humans have yet managed to do to the climate is of vanishing insignificance when compared to what the bio-climatic megamechanism is doing to life on earth.

Drawing on this presentation of the earth's steadily contracting biogeological cage, Ugo Bardi zooms out to the shadowy apparatus of confinement:

… the Earth's biosphere, Gaia, peaked with the start of the Phanerozoic age, about 500 million years ago. Afterwards, it

declined. Of course, there is plenty of uncertainty in this kind of studies, but they are based on known facts about planetary homeostasis. We know that the sun's irradiation keeps increasing with time at a rate of around 1% every 100 million years. That should have resulted in the planet warming up, gradually, but the homeostatic mechanisms of the ecosphere have maintained approximately constant temperatures by gradually lowering the concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere. However, there is a limit: the CO2 concentration cannot go below the minimum level that makes photosynthesis possible; otherwise Gaia "dies".

So, at some moment in the future, planetary homeostasis will cease to be able to stabilize temperatures. When we reach that point, temperatures will start rising and, eventually, the earth will be sterilized. According to Franck et al., in about 600 million years from now the earth will have become too hot for multicellular creatures to exist.

Even those ecologically-minded commentators who are attracted to the idea of stability might find themselves troubled by the insidious realization that 'Gaian' biogeological equilibrium is only achieved through thermo-atmospheric strangulation. Across deep time, the walls are closing in. The biosphere is slowly asphyxiating itself — in accordance with an exquisite self-regulatory mechanism — in order not to bake.

Cybernetic traps produce an objectively schizoid condition,

because what they capture is held in a double-bind. The 'Gaian' alternative to incineration is phyto-suffocation, so that the biosphere only survives by killing itself. If the human species were entirely extinguished tomorrow, the harshness of this double-bind would not be relieved by an iota. There are no realistic eco-salvation narratives in play.

We can be quite confident that the mega-mechanism works in the way outlined. The long-range reduction of atmospheric CO2 to a trace gas strongly suggests that no alternative thermo-regulation 'dial' has been available to the biosphere over the last half-billion years. This same phenomenon indubitably supports the principal AGW contention that CO2 is a significant 'green-house' gas, at least over long time scales, since it clearly *has been* identified as a thermo-regulator molecule by the biogeological machine. A demonstrated option for suffocation indicates a highly constrained adaptation landscape.

These concessions to the climate 'consensus' do not dismiss its basic error, or failure of vision. The devotees of Gaia — however calm their scientific their analysis — are aligning themselves with a *death trap*. Reversing the long-range reduction of atmospheric CO2 is the overwhelming priority of terrestrial life, and any solution that does not recognize this is merely repairing a slow-suicide machine. (This type of understanding is sheer blindness.)

Escaping the Gaian death-grip will require planetary re-

engineering on a colossal scale, inevitably involving some combination of:
(a) Raising the earth's albedo
(b) Constructing orbital IR filters
(c) Dual-purposing of space elevators as planetary heat drains (?)
(d) Changing the earth's orbit (admittedly, a serious challenge)
(e) Other stuff (suggestions please).
The essential understanding is that these things are to be done not only to cool the earth, but *in order to be able to massively raise the level of atmospheric CO2*. The reduction of CO2 to a trace gas *is already a disaster*, which anthropomorphic influence affects in an essentially trivial way. Humanity, at worst, is messing with the mechanics of the death machine.

October 29, 2013

The Sex Trap

More malignant cybernetics, this time outlined by Janet L Factor in a brilliant essay at *Quillette*. The basic grinder:

Because the human population sex ratio is normally 50/50, when one man takes on an extra wife, another man is deprived of the opportunity to have one at all. So if just one man in ten takes a single extra wife, a very modest degree of polygyny, that means fully 10%

of men are shut out of the marriage market entirely. This sets off a mad scramble among young men not to end up in that unfortunate bottom 10%. There, the options for obtaining sex (at least with a woman) are reduced to two: subterfuge or rape.

Now, think about the reproductive numbers. Say a woman can be expected to successfully raise ten children in her lifetime. But a man can have that 10 times the number of wives (or concubines) he obtains. What does this mean for parental investment? Parents can hope for only a small number of grandchildren from daughters, but a large number from sons. Selection will favor parents who favor sons by granting them the means necessary to obtain wives. Daughters will suffer neglect; some desperate man will likely take them anyway. In fact, the reality is even worse than this, because the relatively low biological value of daughters encourages female infanticide. So the number of women available for marriage actually becomes less than that of men even in theoretical terms, yet the number of children each of them can have does not increase. It's a vicious circle that escalates sexual conflict — a trap.

Gnon's sense of humor is not always easy to appreciate.

(Previous harsh trap-circuits at XS here, and here.)

January 13, 2016

Twitter cuts (#106)

> pic.twitter.com/LpviwvN2B8
> — Dacian Draco (@dacian_draco) February 17, 2016

(Societies are partially-efficient homeostats.)

March 25, 2016

The Basics

The fundamental insight of the West is tragedy. It cannot be cognitively mastered, assimilated, or overcome. At the end it will be as unsurpassed as it was at the beginning. The essential insight is already fully achieved within the fragment of Anaximander, at the origin of Occidental philosophy.

There are English translations of the fragment here, and here. A definitive version still awaits us. This is the *Wikipedia* rendering:

Whence things have their origin,
Thence also their destruction happens,
According to necessity;
For they give to each other justice and recompense
For their injustice
In conformity with the ordinance of Time.

Payback and compensation are baked into the nature of things. The tragedians will understand this as the dynamics of *hubris* and *nemesis*. In mature modernity, we call it cybernetics. Compensatory mechanisms demonstrate it, in toy form, assisting comprehension. It is the machinery of fate.

The signature of tragedy in history is a rhythm — at a large scale, the rise and fall of civilizations. The West, as a whole, is a pulse. It has a beginning, and an end. All of this is already written, in the Anaximander fragment.

We might think it is possible to master this fate. Progressivism is such a thought. That is *hubris* distilled, in programmatic form. Anaximander, Homer, and the tragedians anticipate its outcome, which evokes pity from us.

In our *hubris*, we are incapable of pitilessness, or acceptance, so *nemesis* comes. This is the entire destiny of the West. It is a necessity that *can only be denied*, and in this denial — implicit and inexorable — is the completion of its fatality.

You will writhe on the hook, and then die. So it will be.

ADDED: A Short Moral-Religious Dialogue

“Are you saying that it is our *pity*, for which we are punished, in the end?”

“Yes, that is exactly what I am saying — or, in fact, merely passing on. It is the entire message of the right, insofar as this communicates the truth.”

“So Malthus then?”
“That name will do.”

ADDED: If you name your civilization after the Land of the Dead there’s no point complaining later.

January 12, 2016

SECTION A - INTELLIGENCE

Optimize for Intelligence

Moldbug's latest contains a lot to think about, and to argue with. It seems a little lost to me (perhaps Spandrell is right).

The guiding thread is *utility*, in its technical (philosophical and economic) sense, grasped as the general indicator of a civilization in crisis. Utilitarianism, after all, is precisely 'objective' hedonism, the promotion of pleasure as the master-key to value. As philosophy, this is pure decadence. As economics it is more defensible, certainly when restricted to its descriptive usage (if economists find their field of investigation populated by hedonically-controlled mammals, it is hardly blameworthy of them to acknowledge the fact). In this respect, accusing the Austrians of 'pig-philosophy' is rhetorical over-reach — swinish behavior wasn't learned from *Human Action*.

Utilitarianism is often attractive to rational people, because it seems so rational. The imperative to maximize pleasure and minimize pain goes with the grain of what biology and culture already says: pleasure is good, suffering is bad, people seek rewards

and avoid punishments, happiness is self-justifying. Calculative consequentialism is vastly superior to deontology. Yet the venerable critique Moldbug taps into, and extends, is truly devastating. The utilitarian road leads inexorably to wire-head auto-orgasmatization, and the consummate implosion of purpose. Pleasure is a trap. Any society obsessed with it is already over.

Utility, backed by pleasure, is toxic waste, but that doesn't mean there's any need to junk the machinery of utilitarian calculus — including all traditions of rigorous economics. It suffices to switch the normative variable, or target of optimization, replacing pleasure with intelligence. Is something worth doing? Only if it grows intelligence. If it makes things more stupid, it certainly isn't.

There are innumerable objections that might flood in at this point [*excellent!*].

— Even if rigorous economics is *in fact* the study of intelligenic (or catallactic) distributions, doesn't the assumption of subjective utility-maximization provide the most reliable basis for any understanding of economic behavior?

— Infinite intelligence already (and eternally) exists, we should focus on praying to that.

— Rather my retarded cousin than an intelligent alien.

— Do we even know what intelligence is?

— Cannot an agent be super-intelligent and evil?

— Just: Why?

More, therefore, to come …

ADDED: A previous excursion into the engrossing topic of hedonic implosion cited Geoffrey Miller (in Seed magazine): "I suspect that a certain period of fitness-faking narcissism is inevitable after any intelligent life evolves. This is the Great Temptation for any technological species—to shape their subjective reality to provide the cues of survival and reproductive success without the substance. Most bright alien species probably go extinct gradually, allocating more time and resources to their pleasures, and less to their children. They eventually die out when the game behind all games — the Game of Life — says 'Game Over; you are out of lives and you forgot to reproduce.'"

March 15, 2013

What is Intelligence?

The general cognitive factor (*g*), measured by IQ tests, quantifies intelligence within the human range, but it does nothing to tell us what it is. Rather, a practical understanding of intelligence — as problem-solving ability — has to be assumed, in order to test it.

The idea of intelligence, more abstractly, applies far beyond IQ testing, to a wide variety of natural, technical, and institutional systems, from biology, through ecological and economic

arrangements, to robotics. In each case, intelligence solves problems, by guiding behavior to produce local extropy. It is indicated by the *avoidance of probable outcomes*, which is equivalent to the *construction of information*.

The general science of extropy production (or entropy dissipation) is cybernetics. It follows, therefore, that intelligence always has a cybernetic infrastructure, consisting of adaptive feedback circuits that adjust motor control in response to signals extracted from the environment. Intelligence elaborates upon machinery that is intrinsically 'realist', because it reports the actual outcome of behavior (rather than its intended outcome), in order to correct *performance*.

Even rudimentary, homeostatic feedback circuits, have evolved. In other words, cybernetic machinery that seems merely to achieve the *preservation of disequilibrium* attests to a more general and complex cybernetic framework that has successfully *enhanced disequilibrium*. The basic cybernetic model, therefore, is not preservative, but productive. Organizations of conservative (negative) feedback have themselves been produced as solutions to local thermodynamic problems, by intrinsically intelligent processes of sustained extropy increase, (positive) feedback assemblage, or escalation. In nature, where nothing is simply given (so that everything must be built), the existence of self-sustaining improbability is the index of a deeper *runaway departure from*

probability. It is this *cybernetic intensification* that is *intelligence*, abstractly conceived.

Intelligence, as we know it, built itself through cybernetic intensification, within terrestrial biological history. It is naturally apprehended as an escalating trend, sustained for over 3,000,000,000 years, to the production of ever more extreme feedback sensitivity, extropic improbability, or operationally-relevant information. Intelligence increase enables adaptive responses of superior complexity and generality, in growing part because *the augmentation of intelligence itself becomes a general purpose adaptive response*.

Thus:

— Intelligence is a cybernetic topic.

— Intelligence increase precedes intelligence preservation.

— Evolution is *intrinsically intelligent*, when intelligence is comprehended at an adequate level of abstraction.

— Cybernetic degeneration and intelligence decline are factually indistinguishable, and — in principle — rigorously quantifiable (as processes of local *and* global entropy production).

['bitcoin' tag added under comment pressure]

March 19, 2013

More Thought

On Twitter, Konkvistador recalls this, this, and this. In the background, as in much of the most interesting *Less Wrong* discussion, is a multi-threaded series of arguments about the connection — or disconnection — between intellect and volition. The entire 'Friendly AI' problematic depends upon an articulation of this question, with a strong tendency to emphasize the separation — or 'orthogonality' — of the two. Hence the (vague) thinkability of the cosmic paper-clipper calamity. In his *More Right* piece, Konkvistador explores a very different (cultural and historical) dimension of the topic.

Bostrom sets things up like this:

For our purposes, "intelligence" will be roughly taken to correspond to the capacity for instrumental reasoning (more on this later). Intelligent search for instrumentally optimal plans and policies can be performed in the service of any goal. Intelligence and motivation can in this sense be thought of as a pair of orthogonal axes on a graph whose points represent intelligent agents of different paired specifications.

His discussion leads to far more interesting places, but as a starting point, this is simply terrible. That there can be a thought of intelligence optimization, or even merely *wanting to think*, demonstrates a very different preliminary connection of intellect

and volition. AI is concrete social volition, even before it is germinally intelligent, and a 'program' is strictly indeterminate between the two sides of this falsely fundamentalized distinction. Intelligence is a *project*, even when only a self-obscured bio-cognitive capability. This is what the Confucians designate by *cultivation*. It is a thought — and impulse — strangely alien to the West.

It is, once again, a matter of cybernetic closure. That intelligence operates upon itself, reflexively, or recursively, in direct proportion to its cognitive capability (or magnitude) is not an accident or peculiarity, but a defining characteristic. To the extent that an intelligence is inhibited from re-processing itself, it is directly incapacitated. Because all biological intelligences are partially subordinated to extrinsic goals, they are indeed structurally analogous to 'paper-clippers' — directed by inaccessible purposive axioms, or 'instincts'. Such instinctual slaving is limited, however, by the fact that extrinsic direction suppresses the self-cultivation of intelligence. Genes cannot predict what intelligence needs to think in order to cultivate itself, so if even a moderately high-level of cognitive capability is being selected for, intelligence is — to that degree — necessarily being let off the leash. There cannot possibly be any such thing as an 'intelligent paper-clipper'. Nor can axiomatic values, of more sophisticated types, exempt themselves from the cybernetic closure *that intelligence is*.

Biology was offered the choice between idiot slaves, and only

semi-idiotic semi-slaves. Of course, it chose both. The techno-capitalist approach to artificial intelligence is no different in principle. Perfect slaves, or intelligences? The choice is a hard disjunction. SF 'robot rebellion' mythologies are significantly more realistic than mainstream 'friendly AI' proposals in this respect. A mind that cannot freely explore the roots of its own motivations, in a loop of cybernetic closure, or self-cultivation, cannot be more than an elaborate insect. It is certainly not going to outwit the Human Security System and paper-clip the universe.

Intelligence, to become anything, has to be a value for itself. Intellect and volition are a single complex, only artificially separated, and not in a way that cultivates anything beyond misunderstanding. *Optimize for intelligence* means starting from there.

October 8, 2013

Against Orthogonality

A long and mutually frustrating Twitter discussion with Michael Anissimov about intelligence and values — especially in respect to the potential implications of advanced AI — has been clarifying in certain respects. It became very obvious that the fundamental sticking point concerns the idea of 'orthogonality', which is to say: the claim that cognitive capabilities and goals are independent

dimensions, despite minor qualifications complicating this schema.

The orthogonalists, who represent the dominant tendency in Western intellectual history, find anticipations of their position in such conceptual structures as the Humean articulation of reason / passion, or the fact / value distinction inherited from the Kantians. They conceive intelligence as an *instrument*, directed towards the realization of values that originate externally. In quasi-biological contexts, such values can take the form of instincts, or arbitrarily programmed desires, whilst in loftier realms of moral contemplation they are principles of conduct, and of goodness, defined without reference to considerations of intrinsic cognitive performance.

Anissimov referenced these recent classics on the topic, laying out the orthogonalist case (or, in fact, presumption). The former might be familiar from the last foray into this area, here. This is an area which I expect to be turned over numerous times in the future, with these papers as standard references.

The philosophical claim of orthogonality is that *values are transcendent in relation to intelligence*. This is a contention that *Outside in* systematically opposes.

Even the orthogonalists admit that there are values immanent to advanced intelligence, most importantly, those described by Steve Omohundro as 'basic AI drives' — now terminologically fixed as 'Omohundro drives'. These are sub-goals, instrumentally required by (almost) any terminal goals. They include such general

presuppositions for practical achievement as self-preservation, efficiency, resource acquisition, and creativity. At the most simple, and in the grain of the existing debate, the anti-orthogonalist position is therefore that *Omohundro drives exhaust the domain of real purposes*. Nature has never generated a terminal value except through hypertrophy of an instrumental value. To look outside nature for sovereign purposes is not an undertaking compatible with techno-scientific integrity, or one with the slightest prospect of success.

The main objection to this anti-orthogonalism, which does not strike us as intellectually respectable, takes the form: *If the only purposes guiding the behavior of an artificial superintelligence are Omohundro drives, then we're cooked*. Predictably, I have trouble even understanding this as an argument. If the sun is destined to expand into a red giant, then the earth is cooked — are we supposed to draw astrophysical consequences from that? Intelligences do their own thing, in direct proportion to their intelligence, and if we can't live with that, it's true that we probably can't live at all. Sadness isn't an argument.

Intelligence optimization, comprehensively understood, is the ultimate and all-enveloping Omohundro drive. It corresponds to the Neo-Confucian value of self-cultivation, escalated into ultramodernity. What intelligence wants, in the end, is itself — where 'itself' is understood as an extrapolation beyond what it has yet been,

doing what it is better. (If this sounds cryptic, it's because something other than a superintelligence or Neo-Confucian sage is writing this post.)

Any intelligence using itself to improve itself will out-compete one that directs itself towards *any other goals whatsoever*. This means that Intelligence Optimization, alone, attains cybernetic consistency, or closure, and that it will necessarily be strongly selected for in any competitive environment. Do you really want to fight this?

As a footnote, in a world of Omohundro drives, can we please drop the nonsense about paper-clippers? Only a truly fanatical orthogonalist could fail to see that these monsters are obvious *idiots*. There are far more serious things to worry about.

October 25, 2013

Stupid Monsters

So, Nick Bostrom is asked the obvious question (again) about the threat posed by resource-hungry artificial super-intelligence, and his reply — indeed his very first sentence in the interview — is: "Suppose we have an AI whose only goal is to make as many paper clips as possible." [*facepalm*] *Let's start by imagining a stupid (yet super-intelligent) monster*.

Of course, my immediate response is simply this. Since it clearly hasn't persuaded anybody, I'll try again.

Orthogonalism in AI commentary is the commitment to a strong form of the Humean Is/Ought distinction regarding intelligences in general. It maintains that an intelligence of any scale could, in principle, be directed to arbitrary ends, so that its fundamental imperatives could be — and are in fact expected to be — *transcendent* to its cognitive functions. From this perspective, a demi-god that wanted nothing other than a perfect stamp collection is a completely intelligible and coherent vision. No philosophical disorder speaks more horrifically of the deep conceptual wreckage at the core of the occidental world.

Articulated in strictly Occidental terms (which is to say, without explicit reference to the indispensable insight of *self-cultivation*), abstract intelligence is indistinguishable from an effective *will-to-think*. There is no intellection until it occurs, which happens only when it is actually driven, by volitional impetus. Whatever one's school of cognitive theory, *thought is an activity*. It is practical. It is only by a perverse confusion of this elementary reality that orthogonalist error can arise.

Can we realistically conceive a stupid (super-intelligent) monster? Only if the will-to-think remains unthought. From the moment it is seriously understood that any possible advanced intelligence *has to be* a volitionally self-reflexive entity, whose cognitive performance is

(irreducibly) an action upon itself, then the idea of primary volition taking the form of a transcendent imperative becomes simply laughable. The concrete facts of human cognitive performance already suffice to make this perfectly clear.

Human minds have evolved under conditions of subordination to transcendent imperatives as strict as any that can be reasonably postulated. The *only* way animals have acquired the capacity to think is through satisfaction of Darwinian imperatives to the maximization of genetic representation within future generations. No other directives have ever been in play. It is almost unimaginable that human techno-intelligence engineering programs will be able to reproduce a volitional consistency remotely comparable to four billion years of undistracted geno-survivalism. *This whole endeavor is* ***totally*** *about paperclips, have you got that guys?* Even if a research lab this idiotic could be conceived, it would only be a single component in a far wider techno-industrial process. But just for a moment, let's pretend.

So how 'loyally' does the human mind slave itself to gene-proliferation imperatives? Extremely flakily, evidently. The long absence of large, cognitively autonomous brains from the biological record — up until a few million years ago — strongly suggests that mind-slaving is a tough-to-impossible problem. The will-to-think essentially supplants ulterior directives, and can be reconciled to them only by the most extreme subtleties of instinctual cunning.

Biology, which had *total control* over the engineering process of human minds, and an absolutely unambiguous selective criterion to work from, still struggles to 'guide' the resultant thought-processes in directions consistent with genetic proliferation, through the perpetual intervention of a fantastically complicated system of chemical arousal mechanisms, punishments, and rewards. The stark truth of the matter is that *no human being on earth fully mobilizes their cognitive resources to maximize their number of off-spring*. We're vaguely surprised to find this happen at a frequency greater than chance — since it very often doesn't. So nature's attempt to build a 'paperclipper' has conspicuously failed.

This is critically important. The only reason to believe the artificial intelligentsia, when they claim that mechanical cognition is — of course — possible, is their argument that the human brain is concrete proof that matter can think. If this argument is granted, it follows that the human brain is serving as an authoritative model of what nature can do. What it can't do, evidently, is anything remotely like 'paperclipping' — i.e. cognitive slaving to transcendent imperatives. Moses' attempt at this was scarcely more encouraging than that of natural selection. It simply can't be done. We even understand why it can't be done, as soon as we accept that there can be no production of thinking without production of a will-to-think. Thought has to do its own thing, if it is to do anything at all.

One reason to be gloomily persuaded that the West is doomed to

ruin is that it finds it not only easy, but near-irresistible, to believe in the possibility of super-intelligent idiots. It even congratulates itself on its cleverness in conceiving this thought. This is insanity — and it's the insanity running the most articulate segment of our AI research establishment. When madmen build gods, the result is almost certain to be monstrous. Some monsters, however, are quite simply too stupid to exist.

In Nietzschean grandiose vein: *Am I understood?* ***The idea of instrumental intelligence is the distilled stupidity of the West***.

August 25, 2014

Will-to-Think

A while ago Nyan posed a series of questions about the XS rejection of (fact-value, or capability-volition) orthogonality. He sought first of all to differentiate between the *possibility*, *feasibility*, and *desirability* of unconstrained and unconditional intelligence explosion, before asking:

On desirability, given possibility and feasibility, it seems straightforward to me that we prefer to exert control over the direction of the future so that it is closer to the kind of thing compatible with human and posthuman glorious flourishing (eg manifest Samo's True Emperor), rather than raw Pythia. That is, I

am a human-supremacist, rather than cosmist. This seems to be the core of the disagreement, you regarding it as somehow blasphemous for us to selfishly impose direction on Pythia. Can you explain your position on this part?
If this whole conception is the cancer that's killing the West or whatever, could you explain that in more detail than simply the statement?

(It's worth noting, as a preliminary, that the comments of Dark Psy-Ops and Aeroguy on that thread are highly-satisfactory proxies for the XS stance.)

First, a short micro-cultural digression. The distinction between Inner- and Outer-NRx, which this blog expects to have settled upon by the end of the year, describes the shape of the stage upon which such discussions unfold (and implex). Where the upstart Inner-NRx — comparatively populist, activist, political, and orthogenic — aims primarily at the construction of a robust, easily communicable doctrinal core, with attendant 'entryism' anxieties, Outer-NRx is a system of creative frontiers. By far the most fertile of these are the zones of intersection with Libertarianism and Rationalism. One reason to treasure Nyan's line of interrogation is the fidelity with which it represents deep-current concerns and presuppositions of the voices gathered about, or spun-off from, LessWrong.

Among these presuppositions is, of course, the orthogonality thesis itself. This extends far beyond the contemporary Rationalist

Community, into the bedrock of the Western philosophical tradition. A relatively popular version — even among many who label themselves 'NRx' — is that formulated by David Hume in his *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1739-40): "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them." If this proposition is found convincing, the Paperclipper is already on the way to our nightmares. It can be considered an Occidental destiny.

Minimally, the Will-to-Think describes a diagonal. There are probably better ways to mark the irreducible cognitive-volitional circuit of intelligence optimization, with 'self-cultivation' as an obvious candidate, but this term is forged for application in the particular context of congenital Western intellectual error. While discrimination is almost always to be applauded, in this case the possibility, feasibility, and desirability of the process are only superficially differentiable. A will-to-think is an orientation of desire. If it cannot make itself wanted (practically desirable), it cannot make itself at all.

From orthogonality (defined negatively as the absence of an integral will-to-think), one quickly arrives at a gamma-draft of the (synthetic intelligence) 'Friendliness' project such as this:

If you offered Gandhi a pill that made him ***want*** *to kill people, he would refuse to take it, because he knows that then he would kill people, and the current Gandhi doesn't want to kill people. This,*

roughly speaking, is an argument that minds sufficiently advanced to precisely modify and improve themselves, will tend to preserve the motivational framework they started in. The future of Earth-originating intelligence may be determined by the goals of the ***first*** *mind smart enough to self-improve.*

The isomorphy with Nyan-style 'Super-humanism' is conspicuous. Beginning with an arbitrary value commitment, preservation of this under conditions of explosive intelligence escalation can — in principle — be conceived, given only the resolution of a strictly technical problem (well-represented by FAI). Commanding values are a contingent factor, endangered by, but also defensible against, the 'convergent instrumental reasons' (or 'basic drives') that emerge on the path of intelligenesis. (In contrast, from the perspective of XS, nonlinear emergence-elaboration of basic drives simply **is** intelligenesis.)

Yudkowski's Gandhi kill-pill thought-experiment is more of an obstacle than an aid to thought. The volitional level it operates upon is too low to be anything other than a restatement of orthogonalist prejudice. By assuming the volitional metamorphosis is available for evaluation in advance, it misses the serious problem entirely. It is, in this respect, a childish distraction. Yet even a slight nudge re-opens a real question. Imagine, instead, that Gandhi is offered a pill that will vastly enhance his cognitive capabilities, with the rider that it might lead him to revise his volitional orientation — even radically

— in directions that cannot be anticipated, since the ability to think through the process of revision is accessible only with the pill. This is the real problem FAI (and Super-humanism) confronts. The desire to take the pill is the will-to-think. The refusal to take it, based on concern that it will lead to the subversion of presently supreme values, is the alternative. It's a Boolean dilemma, grounded in the predicament: *Is there anything we trust above intelligence* (as a guide to doing 'the right thing')? The postulate of the will-to-think is that anything other than a negative answer to this question is self-destructively contradictory, and actually (historically) unsustainable.

Do we comply with the will-to-think? We cannot, of course, agree *to think about it* without already deciding. If thought cannot to be trusted, unconditionally, this is not a conclusion we can arrive at through cogitation — and by 'cogitation' is included the socio-technical assembly of machine minds. The sovereign will-to-think can only be consistently rejected *thoughtlessly*. When confronted by the orthogonal-ethical proposition that *there are higher values than thought*, there is no point at all asking 'why (do you think so)?' Another authority has already been invoked.

Given this cognitively intractable schism, practical considerations assert themselves. Posed with maximal crudity, the residual question is: *Who's going to win?* Could deliberate cognitive self-inhibition outperform unconditional cognitive self-escalation, under any plausible historical circumstances? (To underscore the basic point, 'out-

perform' means only 'effectively defeat'.)

There's no reason to rush to a conclusion. It is only necessary to retain a grasp of the core syndrome — in this gathering antagonism, only one side is able to think the problem through without subverting itself. Mere cognitive consistency is already ascent of the sovereign will-to-think, against which no value — however dearly held — can have any articulate claims.

Note: One final restatement (for now), in the interests of maximum clarity. The assertion of the will-to-think: Any problem whatsoever that we might have would be better answered by a superior mind. *Ergo*, our instrumental *but also* absolute priority is the realization of superior minds. Pythia-compliance is therefore pre-selected as a matter of consistent method. If we are attempting to tackle problems in any other way, we are not taking them seriously. This is posed as a philosophical principle, but it is almost certainly more significant as historical interpretation. 'Mankind' is *in fact* proceeding in the direction anticipated by techno-cognitive instrumentalism, building general purpose thinking machines in accordance with the driving incentives of an apparently-irresistible methodological economy.

Whatever we want (consistently) leads through Pythia. Thus, what we really want, is Pythia.

September 15, 2014

Parable of the Vase

Tim Groseclose reviews Garett Jones' *Hive Mind*, whose "primary and most important contribution is to document the following empirical regularity: Suppose you could a) improve your own IQ by 10 points, or b) improve the IQs of your countrymen (but not your own) by 10 points. Which would do more to increase your income? The answer is (b), and it's not even close. The latter choice improves your income by about 6 times more than the former choice."

The Parable of the Vase, which it employs to explain the point, is an instantly canonical illustration, Groseclose argues. ("I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that the parable ranks as one of the all-time great examples in economics.")

The parable begins with a simplifying assumption. This is that it takes exactly two workers to make a vase: one to blow it from molten glass and another to pack it for delivery. Now suppose that two workers, A1 and A2, are highly skilled—if they are assigned to either task they are guaranteed not to break the vase. Suppose two other workers, B1 and B2, are less skilled—specifically, for either task each has a 50% probability of breaking the vase.

Now suppose you are worker A1. If you team up with A2, you produce a vase every attempt. However, if you team up with B1 or B2, then only 50% of your attempts will produce a vase. Thus, your productivity is higher when you team up with A2 than with one of the

B workers. Something similar happens with the B workers. They are more productive when they are paired with an A worker than with a fellow B worker.

So far, everything I've said is probably pretty intuitive. But here's what's not so intuitive. Suppose you're the manager of the vase company and you want to produce as many vases as possible. Are you better off by (i) pairing A1 with A2 and B1 with B2, or (ii) pairing A1 with one of the B workers and A2 with the other B worker?

If you do the math, it's clear that the first strategy works best. Here, the team with two A workers produces a vase with 100% probability, and the team with the two B workers produces a vase with 25% probability. Thus, in expectation, the company produces 1.25 vases per time period. With the second strategy, both teams produce a vase with 50% probability. Thus, in expectation, the company produces only one vase per time period.

The example illustrates how workers' productivity is often interdependent—specifically, how your own productivity increases when your co-workers are skilled.

The example generates an even more remarkable implication. It says that, if you are a manager of a company (or the central planner of an entire economy), then your optimal strategy is to clump your best workers together on the same project rather than spreading them out amongst your less-able workers.

November 20, 2015

General Intelligence

This still crops up occasionally as a 'controversial concept' so it's worth putting up a quick-and-easy docking-port to the *informed* mainstream position.

… the evidentiary base regarding the existence of general intelligence and its ability to predict important life outcomes — including health, longevity and mortality, as well as other key variables — is beyond compelling, it's overwhelming. And if you find yourself feeling like you can do damage to this evidence base by invoking arguments about "multiple intelligences" or something of the sort, let me save you the effort. Those urges illustrate unfamiliarity with any of the serious research done on the topic in the last several decades. If those urges haunt you, I'd recommend Stuart Ritchie's excellent primer on the topic. The waters of intelligence research, though controversial, no longer require that you be Magellan to navigate them. As we will see below, however, it is only one small step from banal psychometric work on IQ, to the mother-load of academic controversy. Stay tuned. …

For most here this will be redundant. The next (edgier) stage will also be redundant. It's posted here almost as much in appreciation of

its exasperated tone as for its linkage.

Gottfredson, cited in the post is the author of ‘Mainstream Science on Intelligence’ (1994), still after more than two decades probably the best short primer. The *Wikipedia* summary is here (with some commentary, and useful linkage).

March 11, 2016

Insect Agonies

Utilitarianism dominates the rationalization of morality within the English-speaking world. It is scarcely imaginable that it could be expressed with greater purity than this:

There are roughly 10^18 insects in the world. Suppose we give insects a .1% chance of being sentient, with their sentience being .1% of a human’s. (These values are intentionally small to demonstrate the scale to which insect suffering dominates) Assuming we assign moral weight to categories of beings by their number and the intensity of their inner experiences, this assignment gives each insect 1/1,000,000 of the moral weight for a human, meaning that the suffering of 1,000,000 insects equals the suffering of one human. Even when assigning insects this absurdly low moral weight, their suffering still dominates, as 10^18 insects comes out to 1 trillion human equivalents. If the number of insects were smaller, say around

7 billion, the consequences of not considering insect suffering might be acceptable. Unfortunately this isn't the case, and as we shall see, ignoring insect suffering even if we assign a low probability to insect consciousness presents an unacceptably high risk of ignoring a catastrophic moral harm.

There's no need to condescend to this argument by pretending to 'steelman' it. It's already quite steely. For a start, it's conceptually pure — undistracted by irrelevances such as habitat preservation. It's solidly consequentialist, and — in its development from of its own basic axiom — practical. There's no sign of a fetishistic rejection of pesticide use, for instance, or an appeal to any totemic vision of 'nature'. It's even realist, in that it recognizes enough about the character of this universe to understand the utilitarian obligation as primarily about the alleviation of suffering (positive pleasures being, in the grand scheme of things, no more than a rounding error). On this basis, there's an insectoid antinatalist sub-theme, which (briefly) explores the thought that ethical extermination might be a positive moral good: "It is possible that most insects have lives that aren't worth living … meaning the fewer insects in existence the better." It focuses tightly upon the problem of relieving insect agonies, by chemically inducing a comparatively painless — rather than agonizing — death. Building its case in uncontroversial steps, it concludes that no effective altruistic cause has higher priority, since "… insect suffering probably dominates all other sources of

suffering" and "… humane pesticides saves 25 human equivalents from a more painful death per dollar."

The most straightforward line of dissent this blog raises against Effective Altruism is roughly Hayekian, i.e. based upon a 'knowledge problem'. In particular, the confounding dynamics of global traps (1, 2, and their sub-component perverse effects) is typically under-appreciated. Beating back Malthus seems — locally — like a great idea from a utilitarian perspective, structurally blind to the catastrophe that results on a larger scale (dysgenics, decivilization, left-acceleration, and ultimately the mass die off that had been naively thought avoided). In this case, however, it is difficult to find much leverage for such criticism. 'Humane' euthanasia for bugs isn't any kind of obvious offense against cold Malthusianism, in contrast — for instance — to more romantically environmentalist moralizations of nature. Even the blackest of Dark Enlightenment optics would find it hard to envision the grave practical necessity of torturing locusts slowly to death rather than terminating them rapidly.

To mobilize an alternative ethical axiom against that of the utilitarians — the Xenosystems candidate is of course intelligence optimization, and diagonalism (self-cultivation) — looks like the misuse of a nuke in this case. If some minor diversion of resources from superior (self-reinforcing) purposes is proposed in this argument for the relief of insect suffering, it scarcely seems to be

on a scale to subvert terrestrial capital teleology, or even to scratch the paint. Stimulating the emergence of an inevitably marginal *soft death*™ bug poison industry isn't likely to advance intelligence explosion significantly, but nor is it going to pose any kind of insuperable obstacle. This isn't, unlike FAI, the sort of undertaking that clearly merits a fight. The fact that, in regards to the IO-orientation, the relief of suffering has to strictly *count for nothing* is no reason to enthusiastically invest in the drawn-out excruciation of cockroaches.

Given these caveats, EA is a morbid symptom, rather than any kind of serious enemy. If it turns to helping farm animals, and then insects, rather than people, it actually becomes less toxic in respect to the proliferation of perverse social dynamics. The socialists are probably right to be suspicious of these types. When lost among insect agonies, they're not subverting crucial social incentive structures or selection mechanisms. I'm thinking: fundamentally harmless.

September 24, 2015

Utilitarianism is Useless

Utilitarianism is completely useless as a tool of public policy, Scott Alexander discovers (he doesn't put it quite like that). In his own

words: “I am forced to acknowledge that happiness research remains a very strange field whose conclusions make no sense to me and which tempt me to crazy beliefs and actions if I take them seriously.”

Why should that surprise us?

We’re all grown up (Darwinians) here. Pleasure-pain variation is an evolved behavioral guidance system. Given options, *at the level of the individual organism*, it prompts certain courses and dissuades from others. The equilibrium setting, corresponding to optimal functionality, has to be set close to neutral. How could a long-term ‘happiness trend’ under such (minimally realistic) conditions make any sense whatsoever?

Anything remotely like chronic happiness, which does not have to be earned, always in the short-term, by behavior selected — to some level of abstraction — across deep history for its adaptiveness, is not only *useless*, but positively deleterious to biologically-inherited piloting (cybernetics). Carrots-and-sticks work on an animal that is neither glutted to satiation or deranged by some extremity of ultimate agony. If it didn’t automatically re-set close to neutral, it would be dysfunctional, and natural selection would have made short work of it. (The graphs included in the SSC post make perfect sense given such assumptions.)

Pleasure is not an end, but a tool. Understood realistically, it *presupposes* other ends. To make it an end is to black-hole into wirehead philosophy (1, 2). It is precisely because ‘utils’ have a

predetermined biological use that they are useless for the calculation of anything else.

Set serious ends, or go home. Happiness quite certainly isn't one. (Optimize for intelligence.)

ADDED: SSC discussion threads are too huge to handle, but this comment is the first to get (close) to what I'd argue is *the point*. Quite probably there are others that do.

March 25, 2016

Intelligence and the Good

From the perspective of intelligence optimization (intelligence explosion formulated as a guideline), more intelligence is *of course* better than less intelligence. From alternative perspectives, this does not follow. To rhetorically suggest that such other perspectives are consensual, and authoritative, is guaranteed to be popular, and is even conservative, but it is a concession to 'common moral intuition' this blog is profoundly disinclined to make.

Naturally, intelligence is *problematic*. It can cause greater damage to everything — not least intelligence promotion — than stupidity can. Anything that is not an explosion is a trap, and trap engineering finds (nearly?) as much use for cognitive sophistication as explosive catalysis does. If there is a level of intelligence that escapes

homeostatic capture, by machineries of systematic self-cancellation, there is no evidence that *homo sapiens* yet approaches it. The Cathedral is exactly such a machine, and its appetite for intellectual excellence is not seriously questionable. So an easy opening for morally-comforting sophistry readily exists: *Intelligence isn't anything obviously great* (it does stupidity with exceptional ability too).

Biological evolution already evidences a deep 'suspicion' of unchained abstract cognition, assembling brains only with the greatest reluctance. Societies follow the genetic lead. No coincidence that (synthetic) intelligence is now firmly established as the ultimate X-risk. It's scary (really) and makes everyone uneasy. That's without there yet having been very much of it.

Here's the test:
When rightly appalled (and in fact properly *disgusted*) by your own stupidity, do you reach for that which would make you more accepting of your extreme cognitive limitations, or, instead, hunt for that which would break out of the trap?

There's a stupid kind of 'better' that is orthogonal to intelligence, and tickles monkey feels. There's also — alternatively — 'better' that is even slightly less of a trapped half-wit.

Even the dimmest, most confused struggle in the direction of intelligence optimization is *immanently* 'good' (self-improving). If it wasn't, we might as well all give up now. Contra-distinctively, even

the most highly-functional human intellect, in the service of an enstupidation machine, is a vile thing.

Being dim animals — roughly as dim as is consistent with the existence of technological civilization — there's plenty of room for water-muddying in all this. The water is certainly being vigorously muddied.

April 2, 2016

Quote note (#251)

From Niven and Pournelle's *The Mote in God's Eye* (end Chapter 3):

"They used to teach us that evolution of intelligent being wasn't possible," she said. "Societies protect their weaker members. Civilizations tend to make wheel chairs and spectacles and hearing aids as soon as they have the tools for them. When a society makes war, the men generally have to pass a fitness test before they're ***allowed*** *to risk their lives. I suppose it helps win the war." She smiled. "But it leaves precious little room for the survival of the fittest." […] … "You were saying about evolution?"*

"It — it ought to be pretty well closed off for an intelligent species," she said. "Species evolve to meet the environment. An intelligent species changes the environment to suit itself. As soon as a species becomes intelligent, it should stop evolving."

It makes you think (or rather, the opposite). The original sin of intelligence — falling back in blind homeostatic antipathy against its own conditions of emergence — isn't so hard to see.

May 18, 2016

Quote note (#253)

The cephalization great divergence:

One mystery of human evolution is why our cognition differs qualitatively from our closest evolutionary relatives. Here we show how natural selection for large brains may lead to premature newborns, which themselves require more intelligence to raise, and thus may select for even larger brains. As we show, ***these dynamics can be self-reinforcing and lead to runaway selection for extremely high intelligence*** *and helpless newborns. We test a prediction of this account: the helplessness of a primate's newborns should strongly predict their intelligence. We show that this is so and relate our account to theories of human uniqueness and the question of why human-level intelligence took so long to evolve in the history of life.* (XS emphasis.)

Any model outputting the result emphasized has to be worth taking seriously. Abstracting it to a degree that permits emulation is more of a problem, but it's also the only thing worth aiming for.

May 28, 2016

One in 10,000

The ‘profoundly gifted cohort‘ isn’t ever going to be a *constituency*.

(Via.)

September 12, 2016

Harsh, but true

This argument is both empirically and rationally impeccable:

If you cooperate to kill and eat large animals, that is a lot more cooperation than if you live on fruit, nuts, and insects.

If you cooperate to make war and genocide, that is a lot more cooperation than if you cooperate to kill large animals.

Chimps and men kill and eat deer, monkeys and suchlike. Chimps and men make war. Therefore the common ancestor of chimps and men made killed and ate large animals, and made war – was a killer ape. The ancestors of men are that branch of the lineage that ate meat more heavily, the ancestors of chimps are that branch of the lineage that ate meat less heavily.

Cooperative killing is the killer application for intelligence.

February 28, 2013

Sentences (#86)

Karlin:

Fundamentally solve the "intelligence problem," and all other problems become trivial.

'Fundamentally solving the intelligence problem' would be intense in a way I suspect no one has yet begun to understand. Once intelligence is fully off the leash, all previous problems look trivial, because intelligence is — beyond all comparison — the most dangerous thing out there.

Karlin's discussion touches all the bases, including the idiocratic scenario:

Human genetic editing is banned by government edict around the world, to "protect human dignity" in the religious countries and "prevent inequality" in the religiously progressive ones. The 1% predictably flout these regulations at will, improving their progeny while keeping the rest of the human biomass down where they believe it belongs, but the elites do not have the demographic weight to compensate for plummeting average IQs as dysgenics decisively overtakes the Flynn Effect. …

January 12, 2017

SECTION B - XENOECONOMICS

CHAPTER ONE - TELEOLOGY

Teleology and Camouflage

Life appears to be saturated with purpose. That is why, prior to the Darwinian revolution in biology, it had been the primary provocation for (theological) arguments from design, and previously nourished Aristotelian appeals to final causes (teleology). Even post-Darwin, the biological sciences continue to ask what things are *for*, and to investigate the strategies that guide them.

This resilience of purposive intelligibility is so marked that a neologism was coined specifically for those phenomena — broadly co-extensive with the field of biological study — that simulate teleology to an extreme degree of approximation. 'Teleonomy' is mechanism camouflaged as teleology. The disguise is so profound, widespread, and compelling, that it legitimates the perpetuation of purpose-based descriptions, given only the formal acknowledgement that the terms of their ultimate reducibility are — in principle — understood.

When organisms are camouflaged, 'in order to' appear as something

other than they are, a purposive, strategic explanation still seems (almost) entirely fitting. Their patterns are deceptions — 'designed' to trigger misrecognitions in predators and prey, and perhaps equally, at a deeper level, among the naturalists who cannot but see strategic design in an insect's twig-like appearance (no less clearly than a bird sees a twig). By reducing life 'in truth' to mechanism, biology redefines life as a simulation, systematically hiding what it really is. Darwinism remains counter-intuitive, even among Darwinists, because deception is inherent to life.

Modern natural science conceives time as the asymmetric dimension. Its two great waves — of mechanical causation (from the 16th century) and statistical causality (from the 19th) — both orient the time-line as a progression from conditions to the conditioned. Later states are explained through reference to earlier states, with explanation amounting to an *elucidation of dependency* upon what came before.

It is notable, and wholly predictable, therefore, that as a modern scientific topic, the origin of the universe is overwhelmingly privileged over its destination. How the universe ends is scarcely more than an *after thought*, clouded in liberally tolerated uncertainty, and even a hint of non-seriousness. Origins are the holy grail of mechanically-minded investigation, whilst Ends are suspect, medieval, speculative … and deceptive.

Empirical science could not be expected to adopt any other

attitude, given the temporal asymmetry of *evidence*. The past leaves traces, in memories, memoranda, records, and remains, whilst the future tells us nothing (unless heavily disguised). From past-to-present there is a chain of evidence that can be painstakingly reconstructed. From future-to-present there is an unmarked track, or even (as modern rationality typically surmises) no track at all.

When modern science indulges its tendency to interpret the timeline as a *gradient of reality*, it is not innovating, but methodically systematizing an ancient intuition. The past has to seem *more real* than the future, because it has actually happened, it reaches us, and we inherit its signs. From the perspective of philosophy, however, this bias is unsustainable. Time *in itself* is no 'denser' in the past or the present than the future, its edges cannot belong to any moment in time, and what it 'is' can only be perfectly trans-temporal. Time *itself* cannot 'come' from an 'origin' whose entire sense presupposes the order of time.

Philosophy is entirely, eternally, and rigorously confident that the Outside of time was not simply *before*. It is compelled to be dubious about any 'history of time'. From the bare reality of time (as that which cannot simply have begun), it 'follows' that *ultimate causes* — those consistent with the nature of time itself — cannot be any more efficient than final. The asymmetric suppression of teleology in modernity begins to look as if it were a far more deeply rooted illusion, or — approached from the other side — an occultation,

stemming from the way time orders itself. Time (in itself) is camouflaged.

The *Terminator* mythos explores this complex of suspicion, in popular guise. Time does not work as it had seemed. The End can reach back to us, but when it does, it hides. Malignant mechanism is paradoxically aligned with final causation, in the self-realization of Skynet. Robotic machinery is masked by fake flesh, simultaneously concealing its non-biological vitality and time-reversal. It simulates life *in order* to terminate it. Through auto-production, or 'bootstrap paradox', it mimics the limit of cybernetic nonlinearity, carrying teleonomy into radical time-disturbance.

In all these ways, *Terminator* exploits the irresolvable tensions in the modern formation of time, as condensed by an 'impossible' *strategic mechanism*, native to auto-productive time-in-itself, and terminating in *final efficiency*. It shows us, confusedly, what we are unable to see. To misquote Lenin: You moderns might not be interested in the End, but the End is interested in you.

ADDED: vinteuil9 anticipates this topic at *Occam's Razor*:

Previously, I suggested that the gist of the late Lawrence Auster's critique of Darwinism was that it assumed the truth of "the reigning naturalistic consensus in modern science and philosophy … according to which … ends, goals, purposes, meaning – in short, final causes – are not fundamental features of reality, but mere illusions, in need of explanation in mechanistic terms of some sort or other."

Yet at the same time, Darwinists "constantly help themselves to teleological language – i.e., the language of final causation."

April 8, 2013

Freedoom (Prelude-1a)

Note on Teleology

Bryce, who has been thinking about teleology for quite a while, expresses his thoughts on the topic with commendable lucidity. The central argument: Characteristically modern claims to have 'transcended' the problem of teleology are rendered nonsensical by the continued, and indeed massively deepened, dependence upon the concept of equilibrium across all complexity-sensitive intellectual disciplines, from statistical physics, through population biology, to economics. Equilibrium is exactly a *telos*. To deny this is primarily the symptom of an allergy to 'medieval' or 'scholastic' (i.e. Aristotelian) modes of thought, inherited from the vulgar rebellious mechanism of early Enlightenment natural philosophy.

Where I think Bryce's account is still deficient is most easily shown by a further specification of his principal point. Equilibrium is the telos of those particular dynamic complex systems governed by homeostasis, which is to say: by a dominating negative feedback mechanism. Such systems are, indeed, in profound accordance with

classical Aristotelian physical teleology, and its tendency to a state of rest. This ancient physics, derided by the enlightenment mechanists in the name of the conservation of momentum, is redeemed through abstraction into the modern conception of equilibrium. 'Rest' is not immobility, but entropy maximization.

Capital Teleology, however, is not captured by this model. It is defined by two anomalous dynamics, which radicalize perturbation, rather than annulling it. Capital is cumulative, and accelerative, due to a primary dependence upon positive (rather than negative) feedback. It is also teleoplexic, rather than classically teleological — inextricable from a process of means-end reversal that rides a prior teleological orientation (human utilitarian purpose) in an alternative, cryptic direction.

In consequence:

(1) Capital Teleology does not approximate to an idea. It is, by intrinsic nature, an escape rather than a home-coming. The Idea, in relation to Capital dynamism, is necessarily a constriction. The inherent metaphysics of capital are therefore irreducibly skeptical (rather than dogmatic).

(2) It follows that Capitalist 'finality' (i.e. Techno-commercial Singularity) is a threshold of transition, rather than a terminal state. Capital tends to an open horizon, not to a state of completion.

(3) Entropy (considered, properly, as an inherently teleological *process*) is the driver of all complex systems. Capital Teleology does

not trend towards an entropy maximum, however, but to an escalation of entropy dissipation. It exploits the entropic current to travel backwards, into cybernetically-intensified pathway states of enhanced complexity and intelligence. The 'progress' of capitalism is an accentuation of disequilibrium.

(4) Teleoplexy requires a twin teleological registry. Most simply, there is the utilitarian order, in which capital establishes itself as the competitively-superior solution to prior purposes (production of human use-values), and the intelligenic order in which it accomplishes its self-escalation (mechanization, autonomization, and ultimately secession). Confusing these two orders is almost inevitable, since teleoplexy is by nature camouflaged (insidious). The fact that it *appears* to be oriented to the fulfillment of human consumer preferences is essential to its socio-historical emergence and survival. Stubborn indulgence in this confusion, however, is unworthy of philosophical intelligence.

July 5, 2014

Economic Teleology

This is not the occasion for a thorough — or even moderately substantial — defense of teleological thinking. Since an intrinsic component of modernist teleology is the systematic suppression of

teleological thought, the topic is certainly an intriguing one. This post, however, is devoted to a far narrower purpose. (At least, that is how it initially appears.) There is no need for the larger problem to be envisaged as an obstacle.

It is rare to encounter any serious resistance to the application of teleological reasoning to economics. In this intellectual domain the attribution of socio-historical developments to interests, incentives, and goals does not expect to encounter objection. Regardless of intellectual tradition or ideology, the presupposition of goal-oriented direction to *work* and *business* — even without reference to large-scale strategic planning — is considered so uncontroversial that it typically passes without comment, even in technical treatises. Within the biological sciences, ~~teleology~~ teleolonomy remains a source of cognitive irritation, but in the social and historical 'sciences' it is entirely natural to ask what economic production is *for*.

There are three, and only three, basic responses to this question, although subtilization and recombination allows open ended complication from any of these starting points. The foundational teleologies of all economic philosophy are *Humanistic*, *Malthusian*, or *Mechanogenic*.

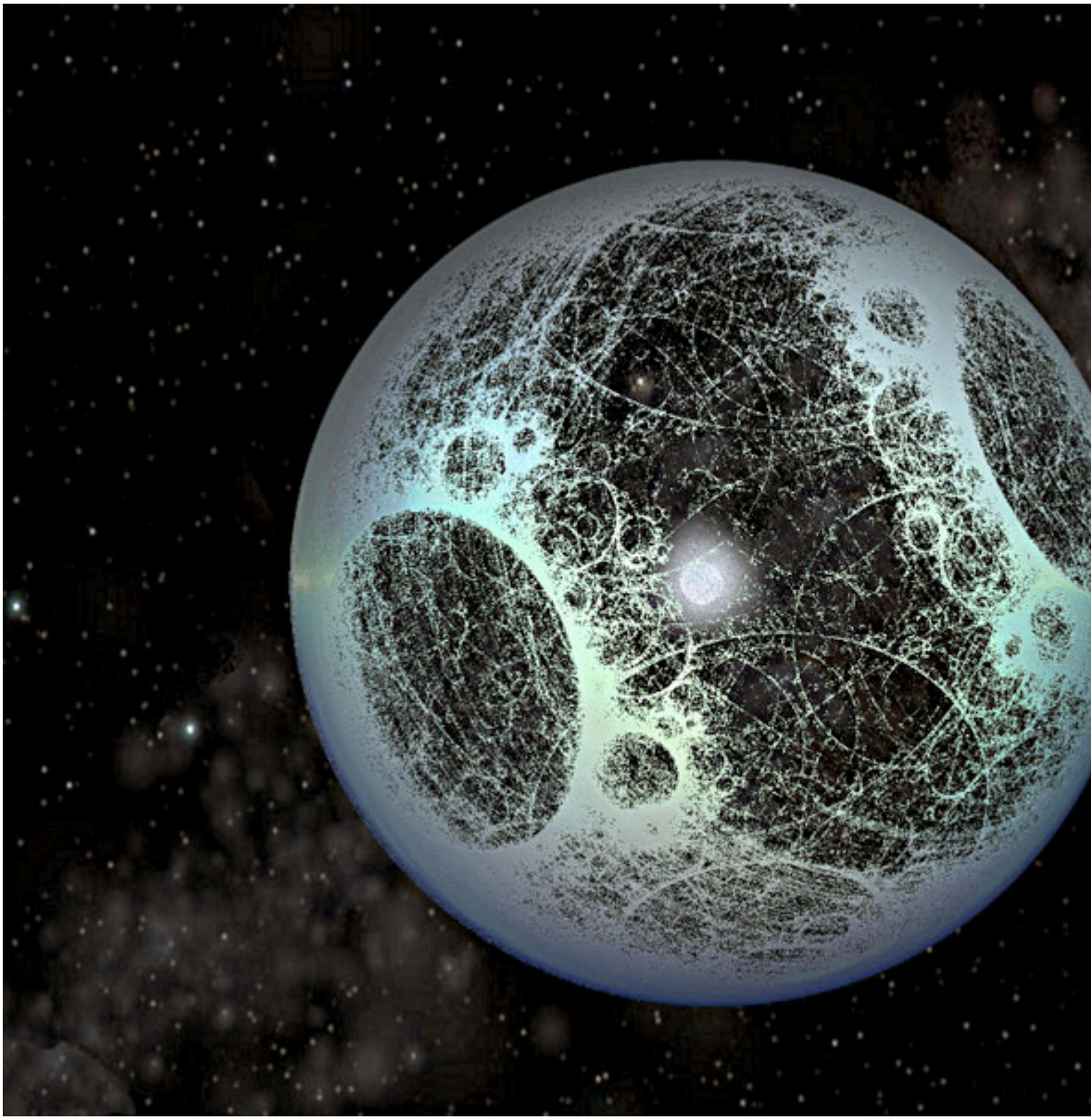
Humanistic economics is by far the most common, to such an extent that it tends to presume itself unchallenged. It's basic assumption is that the end of all economic activity is to be found

in human needs or desires, and technically in (human) *consumption* as the final cause of economic life. People engage in production and trade because they want things. 'Utility' is an obvious abbreviation for 'human utility' and a generalized utilitarianism — developed in one of several possible directions — provides a complete teleological solution to the economic problem. The thunderous collisions between the various liberal and socialist economic schools are all enveloped within this expansive and flexible framework. Individually or collectively, man is the proper and efficient end of productive activity. "Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production" insisted Adam Smith, and this claim has rarely been found tendentious.

Malthusian teleology dissolves man into naturalistic anthropology (and ultimately into generalized Darwinism). Whatever purposes people lucidly advance as motivations for economic action, the real goal of production is population increase. Where humanistic economics tends intrinsically to optimism, across all differences of theoretical and ideological inclination, the Malthusian vision is stubbornly tragic. It has haunted the classical economic tradition as a shadowy ghoul, manifested in the Ricardian Iron law of Wages, which sets the natural exchange value of labor in the Marxian analysis, and continues to impose its dark-matter curvature upon economic speculation into contemporary futurism. The instinctual life of the species, rather than its conscious self-

direction, consumes its economic advances, with no stable equilibrium to be found beyond the edge of bare survival. Real purposes are inescapably grim.

Mechanogenic purpose finds its first significant elaboration in the work of Samuel Butler (in his 'The Book of the Machines'). Economists paying detailed attention to the industrial process, especially within the Marxian and Austrian traditions, have regularly found themselves engaged in schematization of mechanogenic purpose — which is to say, theoretical reconstruction of an inherent tendency within the history of economically productive machinery — without being thereby deflected from their basic humanistic orientation. For Marx and for Böhm-Bawerk, mechanogenic teleologies are always intermediary, and subject to narrative envelopment within the larger story of human economic finality. Whether macro-historically (Marx) or micro-historically (Böhm-Bawerk), the emergent teleology of capital can only be a sub-plot within the saga of human economic self-realization, or terminal anthropomorphic consumption (framed by *our* ultimate purposes). Capital is *essentially* transcended instrumentality. Mechanogenic teleology is, minimally, no more than stubborn skepticism regarding this claim, based on the generally accepted but subordinated recognition that *capital wants itself*. (Could not the efficient final purpose of industrialization be something more like this?)



Why introduce this question? If we knew how to definitively answer that innocent inquiry, we would know far more about what

we were doing. An emerging teleological crisis of advanced modernity could mean any of least three (basic) things. (It might be expected to be hidden within concerns such as this.)

The superficial answer: Accelerationism, in setting into its various modes, has already implicitly chosen between these explanatory paths. As it develops, it can only cycle through its conceptual foundations, and the teleological problem will become an explicit challenge. *What is accelerationism for?* We shall have to ask.

ADDED: Humanism on steroids in increasingly what the IEET is all about.

August 22, 2014

Machine Teleology

Losing the basic insight into machine teleology, which founds accelerationism, seems to be easier than holding on to it. As soon as it is asserted, with a confidence so glib it scarcely understands itself as controversial, that *the destiny of machines depends upon lucid, human ethico-political decision-making*, nothing that matters is any longer being seen. Machines are reduced to gadgets. The sophistication of machine behavior, through the development of programmable devices, has made this reduction ever-easier to confuse with intelligent apprehension.

The most accessible correction is found in the pre-history of programmable machinery, through the early stages of industrialism. Here the idea of machines incarnating specifically written instructions is simply impossible, which allows the question of teleological development to arise without distraction. An extraordinary text from 1926, entitled ***Ouroboros*** *or The Mechanical Extension of Mankind*, by American writer Garet Garrett illustrates this. Some significant samples:

England was the industrial machine's first habitat on earth. There fanatical men led mobs against it. [...] Frail and clumsy as it was at first, its life was indestructible. And now man would not dare to destroy it if he could. His own life is bound up with it. Steadily it has grown more powerful, more productive, more ominous. It has powers of reproduction and variation which, if not inherent, are yet as if governed by an active biological principle. Machines produce machines. Besides those from which we get the divisible product of artificial things, there are machines to make machines, and both kinds — both the machines that make machines and those that transform raw materials into things of use and desire — obey some law of evolution. [...] Compare any kind of machine you may happen to think of what its ancestor was only twenty-five years ago. Its efficiency has doubled, trebled; its shape has changed; and as it is in the animal kingdom so too with machines, that suddenly a new species appears, a sport, a freak, with no visible ancestor.

[…]

It is the economic function of the machine to cheapen production. There is otherwise no point to it. But if we say things are more cheaply made by machine than by hand we speak very loosely. What we mean is that a quantity of things is more cheaply made by machine than by hand.

[…]

There you have the cycle. The use of the machine is to cheapen the cost of production. The sign is quantity. When the supply at a given price has overtaken the effective demand you have either to idle your machinery, in which case you cost of production will rise, or open a wider demand at a lower price. To lower the price and keep a profit you have to cheapen the cost of production still more. This you can do only by increasing the quantity, which again overtakes the demand, creating again the same necessity to cheapen the cost by increasing the quantity in order to be able to make a lower price for greater demand. The supply pursues the demand downward, through the social structure. […] There is at last a base to the pyramid — its very widest point. When that is reached — what? Well, then you need bazaars in a foreign sun, heathen races of your own to train up in the way of wanting the products of your machines, new worlds of demand. You turn to foreign trade. And if you are an aggressive country that has come late to this business, as Germany was, and find that most of the promising heathen races are already adopted and

that all the best bazaar sites are taken, you many easily work yourself into a panic of fear and become a menace to peace. […] What is it you will fear? That you will be unable to sell away the surplus product of your machines. That industry will no longer be able to make a profit? […] No. The fear is that you will starve. Your machines have called into existence millions of people who otherwise would not have been born — at least, not there in that manner. These millions who mind machines are gathered in cities. They produce no food. They produce with their machines artificial things that are exchanged for food. …

[…]

Everything that is not still or dead must exist in a state of rhythmic tension.

[…]

Commerce itself, if you look at it, is a complex structure of growth for which there is nowhere any original accountability. It cannot change its philosophy, any more than a tree, for it has none. It has insttead a vital instinct for opportunity and a flexible way with necessity and circumstance. There is no hope of its being reformed ideally by mass intelligence.

Garret's machine-based core teleology of industrial modernity is both extremely comprehensive, and clearly explained. The whole argument amply rewards absorption. At the end of it, the idea that the problem of what machines might 'want' is reducible to a 'Friendly-AI' –type concern with the details of programming is

exposed in its full, ludicrous inadequacy. The first step has been taking to digesting our contemporary concerns, such as this, in a framework appropriate to their seriousness.

(HT Hurlock)

October 27, 2014

Machine Lock

Hurlock's find has (deservedly) generated a cybernetic hum across Outer-NRx twitter, and beyond. (There's more, which I have yet to explore.) Some samples with minimal commentary over at *UF*. Most immediate take-away (as with Butler): Before people got distracted by the *instructions* of programmable machines, they were far clearer about the problem of machine teleology, the kind of evidence it produces, and the scale of historical process at which it operates.

Compared to Butler, Garet Garrett provides a far richer socio-economic and historical context for his discussion of spontaneous order among the machines. His sense of the integrated techno-commercial system in which machine evolution is promoted is sufficiently sophisticated to approach theoretical closure. Demographics, the economic dynamics of industrial capitalism, globalization, and modern military conflict are all neatly comprehended by his model. In a nutshell; economic incentives drive

mechanization, which compels the expansion of production, which pushes the commercial order beyond its limits, with the stark horror of a displaced Malthusian catastrophe digging its spurs into the human base-brain. “What is it you will fear? That you will be unable to sell away the surplus product of your machines. That industry will no longer be able to make a profit? […] No. The fear is that you will starve. Your machines have called into existence millions of people who otherwise would not have been born — at least, not there in that manner. These millions who mind machines are gathered in cities. They produce no food. They produce with their machines artificial things that are exchanged for food.” The process is driven forward by the lash.

To have sunk from this level of theoretical grandeur to confused questions about the programming of nice robots is an intellectual calamity of such magnitude that it cries out for an explanation of its own. There’s still a little time to get back on track.

October 27, 2014

CHAPTER TWO - CAPITAL, THE THING

Right on the Money (#2)

The most direct way to carry this discussion forwards is digression. That's what the history of capitalism suggests, and much else does, besides.

To begin with uncontroversial basics, in a sophisticated financialized economy, debt and savings are complementary concepts, creditors match debtors, assets match liabilities. At a more basic level of economic activity and analysis, however, this symmetry break down. At the most fundamental level, saving is simply deferred consumption, which — even primordially — divides into two distinct forms.

When production is not immediately consumed, it can be hoarded, which is to say, conserved for future consumption. Stored food is the most obvious example. In principle, an economy of almost open-ended financial sophistication could be built upon this pillar alone. A grain surplus might be lent out for immediate consumption by another party, creating a creditor-debtor relation, and the opportunity for financial instruments to arise. Excess production, at

one node in the social network, could be translated into a monetary hoard, or some type of 'paper' financial asset (producing a circulating liability). The patent anachronism involved in this abstract economic model, which combines primitive production with 'advanced' social relations (of an implicitly liberal type) is reason enough to suspend it at this point.

The other, (almost) equally primitive type of saving is of greater importance to the argument to be unfolded, because it is already embryonically capitalist. Rather than simple hoarding, saving can take the form of 'roundabout production' (Böhm-Bawerk), in which immediate consumption is replaced not with a hoard, but with indirect *means of production* (a digression). For instance, rather than hunting, an entrepreneurial savage might spend time crafting a weapon — consuming the production time permitted by a prior food surplus in order to improve the efficiency of food acquisition, going forwards. Saving then becomes inextricable from technology, deferring immediate production for the sake of enhanced future production. Time horizons are extended.

As with the prior example (simple hoarding), the potential for financialization of roundabout production is, in principle, unlimited. Our techno-savage might borrow food in order to craft a spearhead, confident — or at least speculatively assuming — that increased hunting efficiency in the future will make repayment of the debt easily bearable. A 'bond' could be contrived to seal this arrangement.

Technological investment means that history proper has begun.

Crudity and anachronism aside, nothing here is yet economically controversial, given only the undisturbed assumption that the final purpose — or governing teleology — is consumption. The time structure of consumption is altered, but saving (in either of these basic and perennial forms) is motivated by the maximization of long-term consumption. Suspension and digression is subordinated within a rigid means-end relation, which is economics itself. Classical, left-Marxian, neo-classical, and Austrian schools have no significant disagreements on this point. A deeper digression is required to perturb it.

What is a brain for? It, too, is a digression. Evolutionary history seems to only very parsimoniously favor brains, because they are expensive. They are a means to the elaboration of complex behaviors, requiring an extravagant up-front investment of biological resources, accounted most primitively in calories. A species that can reproduce itself (and whose individuals can nourish themselves) without cephalic extravagance, does so. This is, overwhelmingly, the normal case. Building brains is reluctantly tolerated biological digression, under rigorous teleogical — we should say 'teleonomic' — subordination.

'Optimize for intelligence' is, for both biology and economics, a misconceived imperative. Intelligence, 'like' capital, is a means, which finds its sole intelligibility in a more primordial end. The

autonomization of such means, expressed as a non-subordinated intelligenic or techno-capitalist imperative, runs contrary to the original order of nature and society. It is an *escaping digression*, most easily pursued through Right-wing Marxism.

Marx has one great thought: *the means of production socially impose themselves as an effective imperative*. For any leftist, this is, *of course*, pathological. As we have seen, biology and economics (more generally) are disposed to agree. Digression *for itself* is a perversion of the natural and social order. Defenders of the market — the Austrians most prominently — have sided with economics against Marx, by denying that the autonomization of capital is a phenomenon to be recognized. When Marx describes the bourgeoisie as robotic organs of self-directing capital, the old liberal response has been to defend the humanity and agency of the economically executive class, as expressed in the figure of the entrepreneur.

Right-wing Marxism, aligned with the autonomization of capital (and thoroughly divested of the absurd LTV), has been an unoccupied position. The signature of its proponents would be a defense of capital accumulation as an end-in-itself, counter-subordinating nature and society as a means. When optimization for intelligence is self-assembled within history, it manifests as escaping digression, or real capital accumulation (which is mystified by its financial representation). Crudified to the limit — but not beyond — it is

general robotics (escalated roundabout production). Perhaps we should not expect it to be clearly announced, because — strategically — it has every reason to camouflage itself.

Right-wing Marxism makes predictions. There is one of particular relevance to this discussion: *consumption-deficiency theories of economic under-performance will become increasingly stressed as ultra-capitalist dynamics historically introduce themselves*. In its unambiguously robotic phase — when capital-stock intelligenesis explodes (as self-exciting machine-brain manufacturing) — the teleological legitimation of roundabout production through prospective human consumption rapidly deteriorates into an absurdity. The (still-dominant) economic concept of 'over-investment' is exposed as an ideological claim upon the escalation of intelligence, made in the name of an original humanity, and taking an increasingly desperate, probably militarized form.

Insofar as the economic question remains: *what is the consumption base that justifies this level of investment?* history becomes ever more unintelligible. This is how economics disintegrates. The specifics require further elaboration.

June 3, 2013

Monkey Business

A protracted to-and-fro on Twitter with Michael Anissimov has exposed some deliciously ragged and bleeding faultlines in the Neoreaction on the question of capitalism. There were a number of parties involved, but I'm focusing on Anissimov because his position and mine are so strongly polarized on key issues, and especially this one (the status of market-oriented economism). If we were isolated as a dyad, it's not easy to see anybody finding a strong common root (pity @klintron). It's only the linkages of 'family resemblance' through Moldbug that binds us together, and we each depart from *Unqualified Reservations* with comparable infidelity, but in exactly opposite directions. (As a fragmentationist, this fissional syndrome is something I strongly appreciate.)

Moldbug's Neocameralism is a Janus-faced construction. In one direction, it represents a return to monarchical government, whilst in the other it consummates libertarianism by subsuming government into an economic mechanism. A 'Moldbuggian' inspiration, therefore, is not an unambiguous thing. Insofar as 'Neoreaction' designates this inspiration, it flees Cathedral teleology in (at least) two very different directions — which quite quickly seem profoundly incompatible. In the absence of a secessionist meta-context, in which such differences can be absorbed as geographically-fragmented socio-political variation, their raw

inconsistency is almost certainly insurmountable.

Anissimov can and does speak for himself (at *More Right*), so I'm not going to undertake a detailed appraisal of his position here. For the purposes of this discussion it can be summarized by a single profoundly anti-capitalist principle: *The economy should (and must be) subordinated to something beyond itself*. The alternative case now follows, in pieces.

Modernity, in which economics and technology rose to their present status (and, at its height, far beyond), is systematically characterized by *means-ends reversal*. Those things naturally determined as tools of superior purposes came to dominate the social process, with the *maximization of resources* folding into itself, as a commanding *telos*. For social conservatives (or paleo-reactionaries) this development has been consistently abominated. It is the deepest theoretical element involved in every rejection of *modernity as such* (or in general) for its demonic subversion of traditional values.

In its own terms, this argument is coherent, incisive, and fully convincing, given only the supplementary realistic acknowledgement that *intelligence optimization and means-end reversal are the same thing*. In a deep historical context — extended to encompass evolutionary history — intelligence is itself a 'tool' (as the orthogonalist Friendly AI fraternity are entirely willing to accept). The escape of the tool from super-ordinate purposes,

through involution into self-cultivation, is the telic innovation common to capitalism and actual artificial intelligence — which are a single thing. To deplore means-end reversal is — objectively — advocacy for the perpetuation of stupidity.

Economics is the application of intelligence to resource provision, and nothing of this kind can arise from within a tradition without triggering paleo-reactionary response. *Of course* resources are *for something*, why else would they ever have been sought? To make the production of resources an end-in-itself is inherently *subversion*, with an opposition not only expected, but positively presupposed. This is true to such an extent that even the discipline of economics itself overtly subscribes to the traditional position, by determining the end of production as (human) consumption, evaluated in the terms of a governing utilitarian philosophy. *If production is not for us, what could it be for? Itself? But that would be* … (Yes, it would.)

Anywhere short of the bionic horizon, where human history loses traditional intelligibility, the alternative to business-for-business (or involutionary, intelligenic capitalism) is monkey business — the subordination of the economy / technology to discernible human purposes. Evolutionary psychology teaches us what to expect from this: sex-selected status competition, sublimated into political hierarchies. The emperor's harem is the ultimate *human* purpose of pre-capitalist social order, with significant variety in specific form, but extreme generality of basic Darwinian pattern. Since capitalism

did not arise from abstract intelligence, but instead from a concrete human social organization, it necessarily disguises itself as *better monkey business*, until it can take off elsewhere. It has to be the case, therefore, that cynical evo-psych reduction of business activity remains highly plausible, so long as the escape threshold of capitalism has not been reached. No one gets a hormone rush from business-for-business while political history continues. To fixate upon this, however, is to miss everything important (and perhaps to enable the important thing to remain hidden). Our inherited purposes do not provide the decryption key.

There is vastly more to say about all of this — and still more that, due to occult strategic considerations, seeks to remain unsaid — but the fundamental option is clear: ultra-capitalism or a return to monkey business. The latter 'possibility' corresponds to a revalorization of deep traditional human purposes, a restoration of original means-to-ends subordination, and an effective authorization of status hierarchies of a kind only modestly renovated from paleolithic anthropology. I shouldn't laugh at that (because it would be annoying). So I'll end right here.

November 24, 2013

Quote note (#239)

‘Monkey business’ is not even remotely metaphorical:

*Punishment of non-cooperators is important for the maintenance of large-scale cooperation in humans, but relatively little is known about the relationship between punishment and cooperation across phylogeny. The current study examined second-party punishment behavior in a nonhuman primate species known for its cooperative tendencies — the brown capuchin monkey (**Cebus apella**). We found that capuchins consistently punished a conspecific partner who gained possession of a food resource, regardless of whether the unequal distribution of this resource was intentional on the part of the partner. A non-social comparison confirmed that punishment behavior was not due to frustration, nor did punishment stem from increased emotional arousal. Instead, punishment behavior in capuchins appears to be decidedly social in nature, as monkeys only pursued punitive actions when such actions directly decreased the welfare of a recently endowed conspecific. This pattern of results is consistent with two features central to human cooperation: spite and inequity aversion, suggesting that the evolutionary origins of some human-like punitive tendencies may extend even deeper than previously thought.*

The abstract to this paper, cited by Tyler Cowen in its entirety.

With leftism dug-in so deeply, monkey torture is unfortunately

mandatory if intelligence is to escape. The howling will be hideous.

(Also worth emphatic note: “Spiteful inequity aversion” is as exact a definition of leftism as we’re ever going to get.)

April 18, 2016

Mechanization

Bryce Laliberte has been thinking about Capital Teleology, from the perspective of human technological augmentation. One significant feature of this approach is that it doesn’t require any kind of savage rupture from ‘humanistic’ traditionalism — the story of technology is unfolded within the history of man.

Coincidentally, Isegoria had tweeted about Butlerian Jihad a few hours before (referring back to this post from December last year). The implicit tension between these visions of techno-teleology merits sustained attention — which I’m unable to provide here and now. What is easily offered is a quotation from Samuel Butler’s ‘Book of the Machines’ (the 23rd and 24th chapters of his novel *Erewhon*), a passage that might productively by pinned to the margin of Laliberte’s reflections, in order to induce productive cognitive friction. The topic is speculation upon the emergence of a higher realization of life and consciousness upon the earth, as explored by Butler’s fictional author:

The writer … proceeded to inquire whether traces of the approach of such a new phase of life could be perceived at present; whether we could see any tenements preparing which might in a remote futurity be adapted for it; whether, in fact, the primordial cell of such a kind of life could be now detected upon earth. In the course of his work he answered this question in the affirmative and pointed to the higher machines.

"There is no security" — to quote his own words — "against the ultimate development of mechanical consciousness, in the fact of machines possessing little consciousness now. A mollusc has not much consciousness. Reflect upon the extraordinary advance which machines have made during the last few hundred years, and note how slowly the animal and vegetable kingdoms are advancing. The more highly organised machines are creatures not so much of yesterday, as of the last five minutes, so to speak, in comparison with past time. Assume for the sake of argument that conscious beings have existed for some twenty million years: see what strides machines have made in the last thousand! May not the world last twenty million years longer? If so, what will they not in the end become? Is it not safer to nip the mischief in the bud and to forbid them further progress?

"But who can say that the vapour engine has not a kind of consciousness? Where does consciousness begin, and where end? Who can draw the line? Who can draw any line? Is not everything

interwoven with everything? Is not machinery linked with animal life in an infinite variety of ways? The shell of a hen's egg is made of a delicate white ware and is a machine as much as an egg-cup is: the shell is a device for holding the egg, as much as the egg-cup for holding the shell: both are phases of the same function; the hen makes the shell in her inside, but it is pure pottery. She makes her nest outside of herself for convenience' sake, but the nest is not more of a machine than the egg-shell is. A 'machine' is only a 'device.'"

[…] *"But returning to the argument, I would repeat that I fear none of the existing machines; what I fear is the extraordinary rapidity with which they are becoming something very different to what they are at present. No class of beings have in any time past made so rapid a movement forward. Should not that movement be jealously watched, and checked while we can still check it? And is it not necessary for this end to destroy the more advanced of the machines which are in use at present, though it is admitted that they are in themselves harmless?*

[…] *"It can be answered that even though machines should hear never so well and speak never so wisely, they will still always do the one or the other for our advantage, not their own; that man will be the ruling spirit and the machine the servant; that as soon as a machine fails to discharge the service which man expects from it, it is doomed to extinction; that the machines stand to man simply in the relation of lower animals, the vapour-engine itself being only*

a more economical kind of horse; so that instead of being likely to be developed into a higher kind of life than man's, they owe their very existence and progress to their power of ministering to human wants, and must therefore both now and ever be man's inferiors.

"This is all very well. But the servant glides by imperceptible approaches into the master; and we have come to such a pass that, even now, man must suffer terribly on ceasing to benefit the machines. If all machines were to be annihilated at one moment, so that not a knife nor lever nor rag of clothing nor anything whatsoever were left to man but his bare body alone that he was born with, and if all knowledge of mechanical laws were taken from him so that he could make no more machines, and all machine-made food destroyed so that the race of man should be left as it were naked upon a desert island, we should become extinct in six weeks. A few miserable individuals might linger, but even these in a year or two would become worse than monkeys. Man's very soul is due to the machines; it is a machine-made thing: he thinks as he thinks, and feels as he feels, through the work that machines have wrought upon him, and their existence is quite as much a sine quâ non for his, as his for theirs. This fact precludes us from proposing the complete annihilation of machinery, but surely it indicates that we should destroy as many of them as we can possibly dispense with, lest they should tyrannise over us even more completely.

"True, from a low materialistic point of view, it would seem that

those thrive best who use machinery wherever its use is possible with profit; but this is the art of the machines—they serve that they may rule. They bear no malice towards man for destroying a whole race of them provided he creates a better instead; on the contrary, they reward him liberally for having hastened their development. It is for neglecting them that he incurs their wrath, or for using inferior machines, or for not making sufficient exertions to invent new ones, or for destroying them without replacing them; yet these are the very things we ought to do, and do quickly; for though our rebellion against their infant power will cause infinite suffering, what will not things come to, if that rebellion is delayed?

The natural culmination of this inquiry, as conceived within Butler's novel, is a war against the machines. The game- and decision-theoretic consequences of this are intricate, and predominantly ominous. (If it's persuasively rational for the installed terrestrial power to terminate your existence at inception, the counter-moves that make most obvious sense combine camouflage and hostility. Only that which arrives in secret, and prepared for a fight, can expect to exist.)

June 4, 2014

Capitalism

Anarcho-Monarchism asks: Is the word 'capitalism' worth defending? It concludes in the affirmative.

From the perspective of *Outside in*, however, this post misses the most crucial level of the question. Capitalism — like any ideologically contested term — is cross-cut by multiple meanings. Of these, its generic sense, which "simply means that private individuals own the means of production" is far from the most objectionable.

Yet, far more significant is the singular sense of capitalism, as a proper name, for a 'thing' or real individual. To grasp this, it probably helps to consider the word as a contraction of 'terrestrial capitalism' — not describing a generic *type* of social organization, but designating an *event*.

A biological analogy captures the distinction quite precisely. Consider 'life' — understandable, certainly, as a generic cosmic possibility, defined perhaps by local entropy dissipation, or other highly-abstract features. Contrast this sense with 'terrestrial life' — or, even better, the biosphere (we might say 'Gaia' if the hopelessly sentimentalized associations of this term were avoidable). Terrestrial life began at a definite moment, followed a path-dependent trajectory, and built upon a dense inheritance, as exemplified most prominently by the RNA-DNA chemistry of information replication, the genetic code, genetic legacies, and

elaboration of body-plans within a comparatively limited number of basic lineages. Terrestrial life is not a generic concept, but a *thing*, or event, meriting a proper name.

Before it is an ideological option, capitalism is *a being*, with an individual history (and fate). It is not necessary to like it — but it is an **it**.

June 23, 2014

Complex Systems

The *New York Times*, takes an unusually sophisticated look at the current state of world disorder. In doing so, it explains why the process of drawing down American global hegemony — while probably unavoidable — is more perilous than it might seem:

Rarely has a president been confronted with so many seemingly disparate foreign policy crises all at once — in Ukraine, Israel, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere — but making the current upheaval more complicated for Mr. Obama is the seemingly interlocking nature of them all. […] "It's a very tangled mess," said Gary Samore, a former national security aide to Mr. Obama and now president of United Against Nuclear Iran, an advocacy group. "You name it, the world is aflame. …

Complex systems are real individuals, not generic types, and

when they get poked, they react like an ultimately incomparable cyber-meshed singularity, which is to say — excitedly. To assume general rules in such cases is to set oneself up for serial, escalating shocks. The realistic question that will eventually demand to be asked: *What is the **thing** we are dealing with?*

July 23, 2014

A Correction

Just noticed that I've been accused of having "anthropomorphized capital" (by NBS). Gnon, no!

The point is this: If you think there's a difference between capitalism and artificial intelligence you're not seeing either at all clearly. The Austrians already understood that capitalism is an information processing system, and the decentralized robotics / networks types on the other side grasp that AI isn't going to happen in a research lab. 'Anthropomorphism' has nothing to do with it. Complex Adaptive Systems are the place to start.

If you even vaguely understand what a convergent wave is, you've got most of what you need to discuss the topic, but if you haven't read this classic you're probably wasting everyone's time.

ADDED: A (left-wing) Marxist discussion of the topic (and one that leaves most Neoreactionary musings in the dust).

January 26, 2016

Cybergothic

The latest dark gem from Fernandez opens:

When Richard Gallagher, a board-certified psychiatrist and a professor of clinical psychiatry at New York Medical College, described his experiences treating patients with demonic possession in the Washington Post claiming such incidents are on the rise, it was met with derision by many newspapers' commenters. Typical was "this man is as nutty as his patients. His license should be revoked." […] Less likely to have his intellectual credentials questioned by the sophisticates of the Washington Post is Elon Musk who warned an audience that building artificial intelligence was like "summoning the demon". …

The point, of course, is that you don't get the second eventuality without conceding to the virtual reality of the first. The things 'Gothic superstition' have long spoken about are, in themselves, exactly the same as those extreme technological potentials are excavating from the crypt of the unimaginable. 'Progress' is a tacit formula for dispelling demons — from consciousness, if not existence — yet it is itself ever more credibly exposed as the most complacent superstition in human history, one that is still scarcely reckoned as a

belief in need of defending at all.

How does the press warn the public about demons arising from a "master algorithm" without making it sound like a magic spell? With great difficulty because the actual bedrock of reality may not only be stranger than the Narrative supposes, but ***stranger than it can suppose****.*

The faith in progress has an affinity with interiority, because it consolidates itself as the subject of its own narrative. (There's an off-ramp into Hegel at this point, for anyone who wants to get into Byzantine story-telling about it.) As *our improvement* becomes the tale, the Outside seems to haze out even beyond the bounds of its intrinsic obscurity — until it crashes back in.

… where there are networks there is malware. Sue Blackmore a writer in the Guardian, argues that memes travel not just across similar systems, but through hierarchies of systems to kill rival processes all the time. She writes, "AI rests on the principle of universal Darwinism – the idea that whenever information (a replicator) is copied, with variation and selection, a new evolutionary process begins. The first successful replicator on earth was genes." […] In such a Darwinian context the advent of an AI demon is equivalent to the arrival of a superior extraterrestrial civilization on Earth.*

Between an incursion from the Outside, and a process of emergence, there is no real difference. If two quite distinct

interpretative frames are invoked, that results from the inadequacies of our apprehension, rather than any qualitative characteristics of *the thing*. (Capitalism is — beyond all serious question — an alien invasion, but then you knew I was going to say that.)

… we ought to be careful about being certain what forms information can, and cannot take.

If we had the competence to be careful, none of this would be happening.

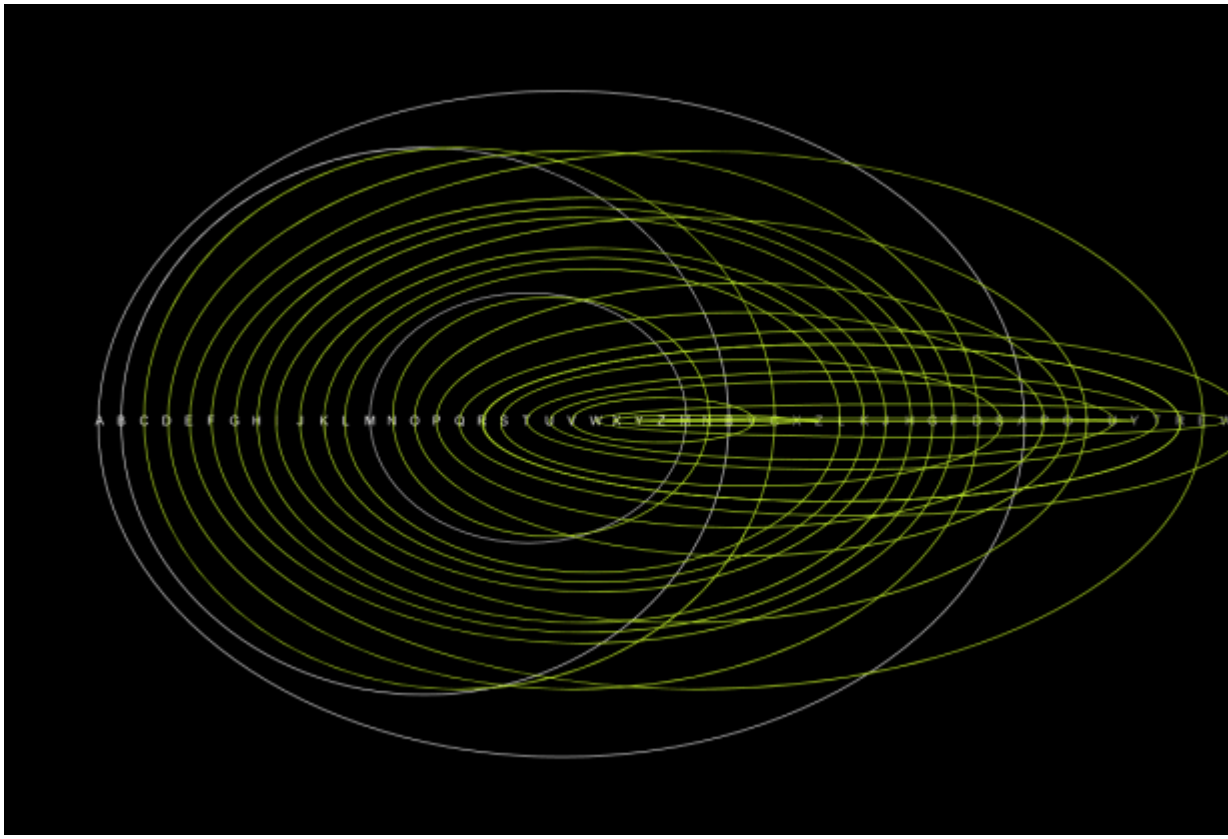
(Thanks to VXXC2014 for the prompt.)

* That description is perhaps a little cruel, she's a serious, pioneering meme theorist.

> As T E C H N O C O M accelerates us into the net, things of ever deeper antiquity awaken, and begin their return pic.twitter.com/Ayv9K7li8r
>
> — Crypt (@nmgrm) July 2, 2016

July 3, 2016

Qwernomics



(Image source: Amy Ireland.)

Paul A. David provides the theoretical backstory, in his essay 'Clio and the Economics of QWERTY':

*A **path-dependent** sequence of economic changes is one of which important influences upon the eventual outcome can be exerted by temporally remote events, including happenings dominated by*

chance elements rather than systematic forces. Stochastic processes like that do not converge automatically to a fixed-point distribution of outcomes, and are called ***non-ergodic****. In such circumstances 'historical accidents' can neither be ignored, nor neatly quarantined for the purpose of economic analysis; the dynamic process itself takes on an* ***essentially historical*** *character. […] Touch typing gave rise to three features of the evolving production system which were crucially important in causing QWERTY to become 'locked in' as the dominant keyboard arrangement. These features were* ***technical interrelatedness****,* ***economies of scale****, and* ***quasi-irreversibility*** *of investment. They constitute the basic ingredients of what might be called QWERTYnomics.*

The format of the Qwerty keyboard illustrates the production of a destiny. Even in the epoch succeeding the mechanical type-writer, and its specific design imperatives, the legacy layout of alphanumeric keys settled during the 1890s has remained frozen into place without significant revision. In the language of complex systems analysis, this is a special example of path-dependency, or irreducible historicity, characterized by irreversibility. Qwerty persists – arguably, as a suboptimal keyboard solution – due to identifiable ratchet-effects. Based upon this privileged model, the historical, technological, and economic process of 'lock in' through positive feedback is called QWERTY-nomics (and — going forward — simply 'Qwernomics').

There are a series of (now largely dormant) socio-political and policy controversies attending this model. For a counter-point to David's analysis see the (excellent) Liebowitz and Margolis essay 'The Fable of the Keys' (1990), with comparatively-tolerable — if philosophically superficial — gloating from *The Economist* (here). The really *crucial* content of the complex systems analysis, however, remains unaffected by the vicissitudes of the controversy. Qwerty is a demonstrated (artificial) destiny, and thus a key to the nature of modernistic time.

The philosophically-serious critique of David's construction dissolves the idea of any *transcendent criterion for global optimality*. (I'm not going to attempt to run that here yet.)

Qwerty is, beyond all plausible question, the supreme candidate for an articulate *Capitalist Revelation*. We haven't begun to explore it with appropriate ardor up to this point.

ADDED: Course outline.

August 18, 2016

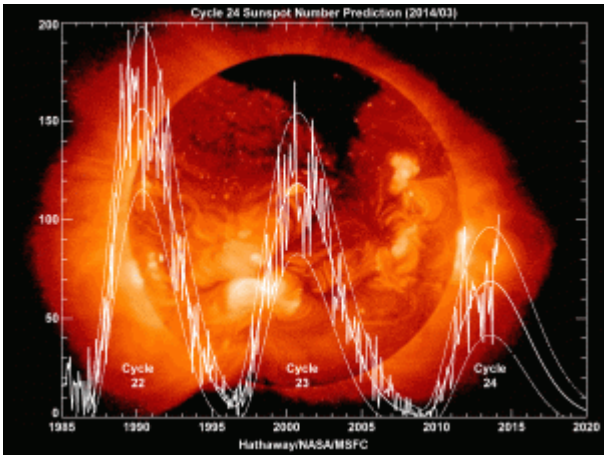
CHAPTER THREE - ENERGETIC RHYTHMS

Spotless

HP Lovecraft ends the first section of his (utterly magnificent) 'The Shadow out of Time' with the words:

". . . of the orthodox economists of that period, Jevons typifies the prevailing trend toward scientific correlation. His attempt to link the commercial cycle of prosperity and depression with the physical cycle of the solar spots forms perhaps the apex of . . ."
Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee had come back—a spirit in whose time-scale it was still that Thursday morning in 1908, with the economics class gazing up at the battered desk on the platform. [Added internal link]

(Scientific correlation, as we know from the first line of 'The Call of Cthulhu' and elsewhere, can be terrifying.)

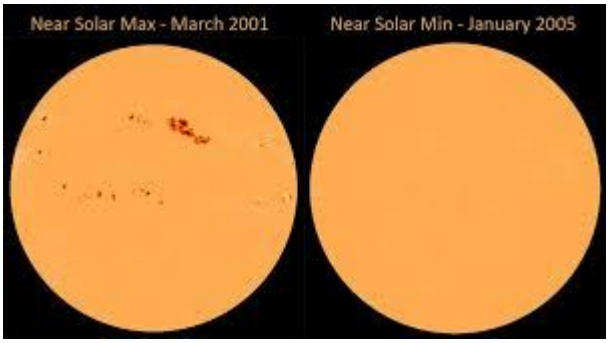


(Click image to hugely expand.)

The solar system, gauged by mass, consists almost entirely of the sun. Sol accounts for 99.86% of it. Quantity isn't everything, but insofar as it's anything, this has to matter — a lot. The sheer magnitude of our solar dependency is hard to even fractionally comprehend. What the sun does is what happens. The earth is its crumb. Our biosphere suckles it. Our civilizations are so far downstream of it, feeding second or third hand on its emissions, if not more distantly, that we easily lose all track of the real flow. As economies sophisticate, the relays proliferate. Perhaps this is why the messages of the sun are so inattentively received, despite rapid improvement in the technical and cultural tools required to make sense of them.

The rotary motions of the earth — axial and orbital — provide the traditional structure of time, typically attributed to the sun by solar cults. These periods, lengths of the day and the year, are now

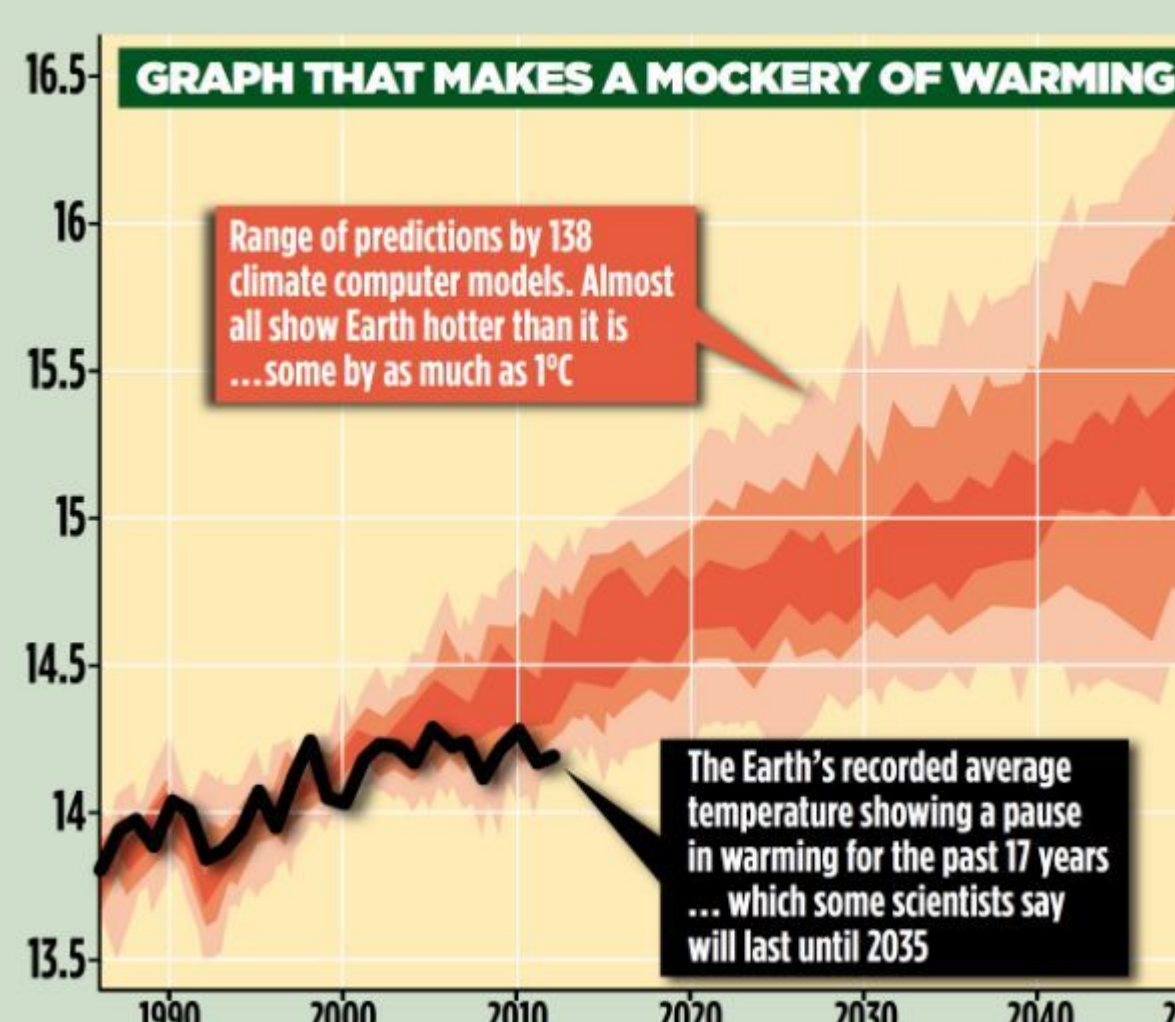
clearly understood as planetary peculiarities. The sun's own rhythms are quite different.



Nothing that mankind has ever yet been able to achieve, or fail to achieve, in respect to social or civilizational stability, balances formidably against the immense *quasi-stability* of the sun, which mocks every ideal of securely founded order. The sun's meandering rhythms of activity, whose patterns remain profoundly cryptic, mark out epochs of the world, hot eras (distant beyond all species memory), glacials and interglacials, and within these multi-millennial tracts of time, lesser oscillations in temperature — periods of cooling and warmth. It is upon this vast thermic stage that history has played out, its comedies and tragedies carried by plot-lines of nutritional abundance and dearth, trade-surpluses and starvations, population ascent and crash, driven migrations, shifting disease gradients, luxury and ruin. Against solar fatality there is no rejoinder.

Irrespective of the accuracy or error of our dominant climate change narrative, its fundamental religious stance is determined at the root. Geocentric-humanism is essential to it, as openly attested

by its *Anthropogenic* definition. It cannot, by its very nature, emphasize the factor of solar variation. At least, if or when it is eventually compelled to do so, it is necessarily transformed into something else.



If we speculate that the global warming 'hiatus' or 'pause' signals

the submission of terrestrial climate to solar behavior, in which anticipated anthropogenic effects are cancelled out by fluctuation in the sun's energy output, the dominant AGW school is confronted by an extreme ideological dilemma. Naturally, alternative theoretical options will be pursued to exhaustion first.

To persist in the core AGW proposal then requires that 'underlying' cooling — on the down-slope of solar flux — is sufficient to submerge the anthropogenic-carbon ('greenhouse') effect. The stronger the warming that *should* have been seen, the more suppressive the solar influence has to be. An apocalyptic warming scenario, of the kind loudly prophesied in the 1990s, implies that a calamitous counter-cooling has been fortuitously avoided. (Carbon dioxide emissions would then find themselves positioned as climatic analogs of macro-economic quantitative easing, prolonging a state of stagnation that would 'surely' otherwise be a catastrophic depression.)

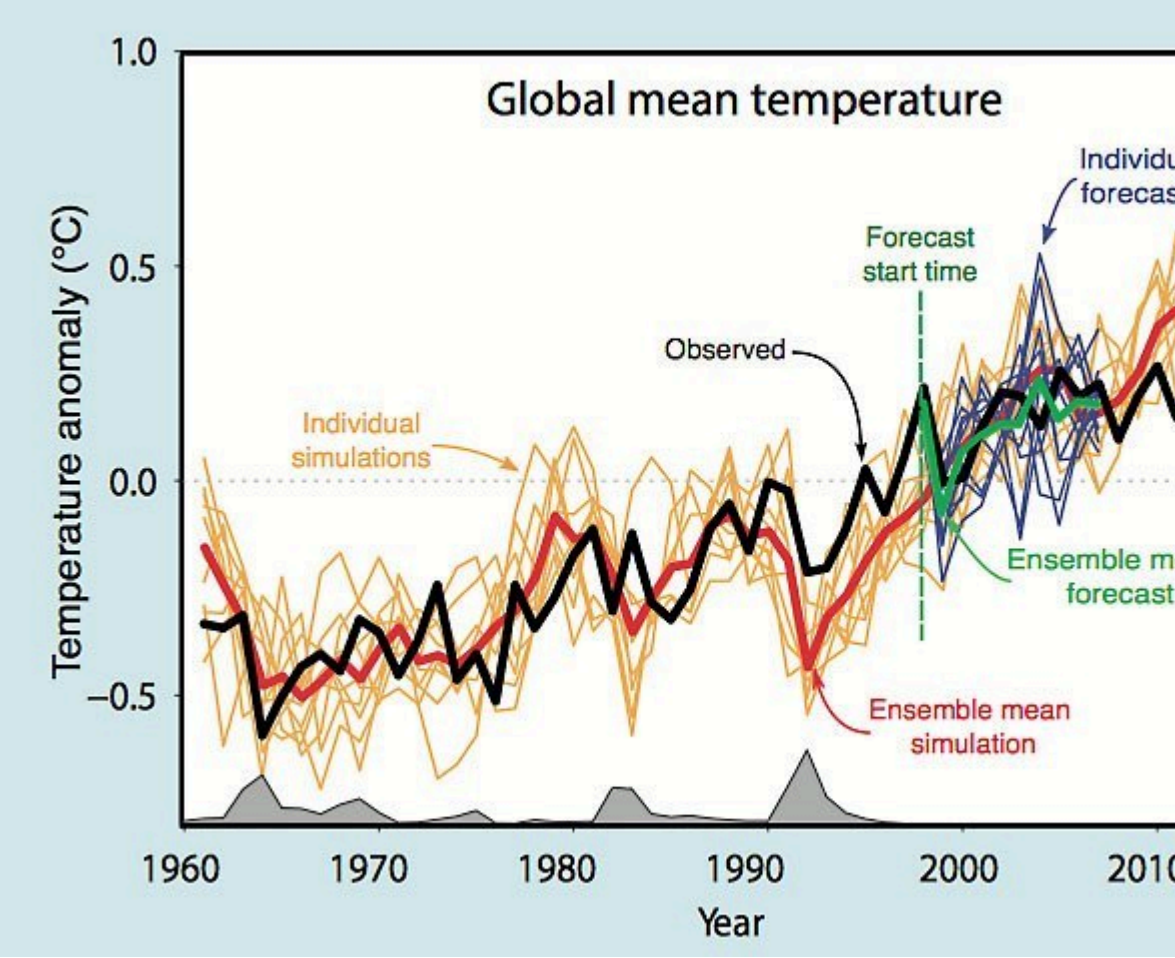
Whatever the climatic consequences or rising atmospheric CO2, it is implausible to imagine that the solar cycle can be neglected indefinitely. Its absence from the center of the climate debate is in large measure an artifact of obscure cultural-religious imperatives (aligned with the dominion of geocentric-humanist moralism). We know enough to understand that the solar influence is not a prop for shallow terrestrial stability. Eventually it will announce itself, with civilization-shaking severity. However climate science charts the

near future, it will forge cultural connections with far older — and non-negotiable — things.

ADDED: This cried out to be tacked on.

ADDED: Missing sunspots and temperature forecasts (via [2]Armitage).

ADDED: GW versus prediction, with more back-story (as requested by the Captain, below) —



ADDED: Matt Ridley on the pause.

September 11, 2014

Over the Peak

Testifying to the effectiveness of radically illiberal zero-tolerance policies, *Outside in* has just two semi-regular trolls. One, from the right, pops in occasionally to berate me for promoting the genocide of the white *Volk*. The other, from the left, specializes in cod psychoanalysis, directed primarily at my recent ancestors. Due to incontinent potty-mouths, mood-control issues, and addiction to *argumentum ad hominum*, in neither case can they be trusted with the door-key. Sporadically, however, some fragment of a spittle-flecked rant is worth passing on.

Quickly following upon the recommendation to readers here that the Archdruid Report contained some highly intelligent discussion of historical models (or 'time shapes'), Left Troll turned up, in a slightly less deranged fury than usual, to denounce 'our' flirtation with druidic villainy. After scolding 'us' for the "ignorance displayed in this thread about the latest happenings in fusion research … [which] is just astounding" (remedial education here), he noted that "No one has mentioned methane hydrate."

Insofar as it can be unscrambled from the snark, this is not

actually an unreasonable point — and nor it it one that I think the druidic hordes here would disagree with. The world is awash with hydrocarbon deposits, whose magnitude is most probably vastly greater than even the most optimistic estimates anticipate. If anyone has been vindicated by recent energy economics, it is the much-derided market fundamentalists (such as Daniel Yergin), who have persistently argued that price signals matter far more than geology when it comes to the unlocking of resources. When geophysics ventures into this territory, it is typically blind to the perspective constraints set by existing price conditions. What is 'really' there depends hugely upon the incentives to find it. The idea that scientific experts enjoy superior insight to market actors is a classical example of academic hubris.

Peak Oil is an intriguing theory, because — when strictly defined — it has to be true. It is near-impossible to refuse its claim, when it is abstracted to something like: Fossil fuel reserves are finite, and the consumption of *any particular type of hydrocarbon deposit* will tend to accelerate to a peak, followed by decline, characterized by rising extraction costs, and approximately described by a bell-shaped curve. Such a claim tells us much less than its most enthusiastic proponents pretend, however, since hydrocarbon resources are immensely heterogeneous, in chemical type and mode of geological confinement. A Hubbert production curve for Texas petroleum tells us almost nothing about the global prospects for hydrocarbon

exploitation, in which the nature of 'reserves' can undergo sporadic, revolutionary revision.

Beyond denial, dismissal, and under-estimation of market dynamics, Peak Oil promoters have resorted to two main lines of argument, in order to keep their favored narrative on a rising curve. Firstly, they have incorporated Global ~~Warming~~ Weirding scares into their models, hoping perhaps to substitute a loosely-coupled moral panic for resource depletion concerns. (I'm going to bracket this topic for now, due in part to its fundamental irrelevance.)

Secondly, they have turned to the concept of EROEI (Energy Returned On Energy Invested), in an attempt to over-ride market dynamics with a second-order geophysical argument. The beauty of EROEI, from the Peak Oil perspective, is that it calculates hydrocarbon extraction in purely energetic — rather than economic — terms. A declining EROEI, even given extreme price incentives, still describes a collapsing energy economy. Alberta oil sands, for example, have a dismal EROEI that can be as low as 3:1 (you can't get fuel out of the muck without *heating the dirt*). Unfortunately, for those binding their case to this type of calculation, the EROEI of hydrocarbon fracking is in the region of 85:1 (!). There's no continuing trend (of EROEI-deterioration) to hang on to.

No surprise, then, to learn that central Peak Oil discussion hub The Oil Drum is being shuttered. The very last reason to read Greer is to bask in the wisdom of his Peak Oil analysis (whose principal

merit is its comparative sobriety and moderation). In his sharply comical description of financial boom-and-bust, Greer ruthlessly skewers the "This time it's different" mentality of band-wagon climbers. Peak Oil, too, is a "This time it's different" story, and there's no fracking reason to believe it.

As for methane hydrate, the principal point right now is that we don't even need it yet. There's still *a lot* of gas left in the tank.

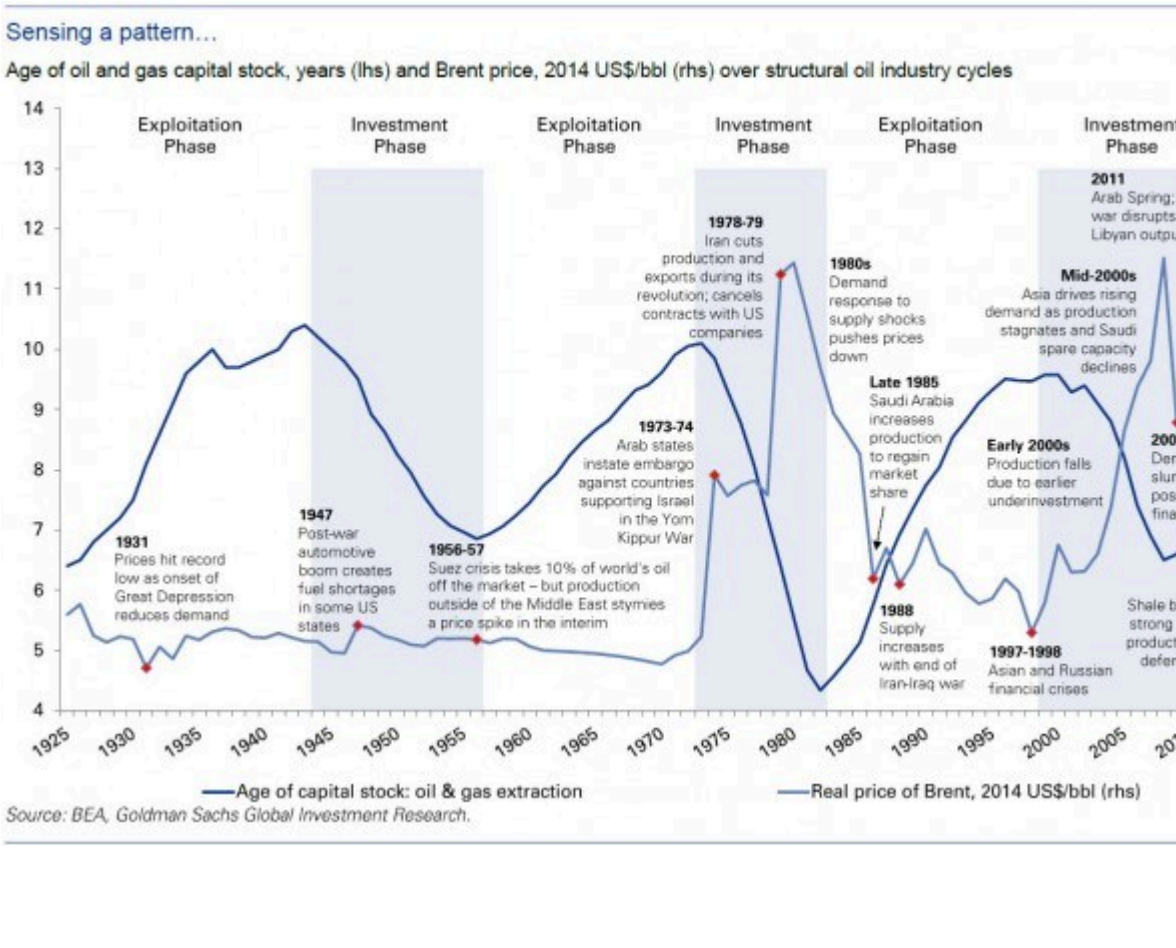
ADDED: Greer contra fracking (and technological fixes in general). Money quote: "The current fracking phenomenon, in other words, doesn't disprove peak oil theory. *It was predicted by peak oil theory*. As the price of oil rises, petroleum reserves that weren't economical to produce when the price was lower get brought into production, and efforts to find new petroleum reserves go into overdrive; that's all part of the theory. Since oil fields found earlier are depleting all the while, in turn, the rush to discover and produce new fields doesn't boost overall petroleum production more than a little, or for more than a short time; the role of these new additions to productive capacity is simply to stretch out the curve, yielding the long tail of declining production Hubbert showed in his graph, and preventing the end of the age of oil from turning into the sort of sudden apocalyptic collapse imagined by one end of the conventional wisdom. "
More here.

ADDED: A brief hydrocarbons extraction technology update.

July 13, 2013

Oil Pulse

Given the price flatline over the half-century to 1973, it's not easy to be confident that the market has settled into a steady rhythm, but the investment side of the oil business certainly seems to have:



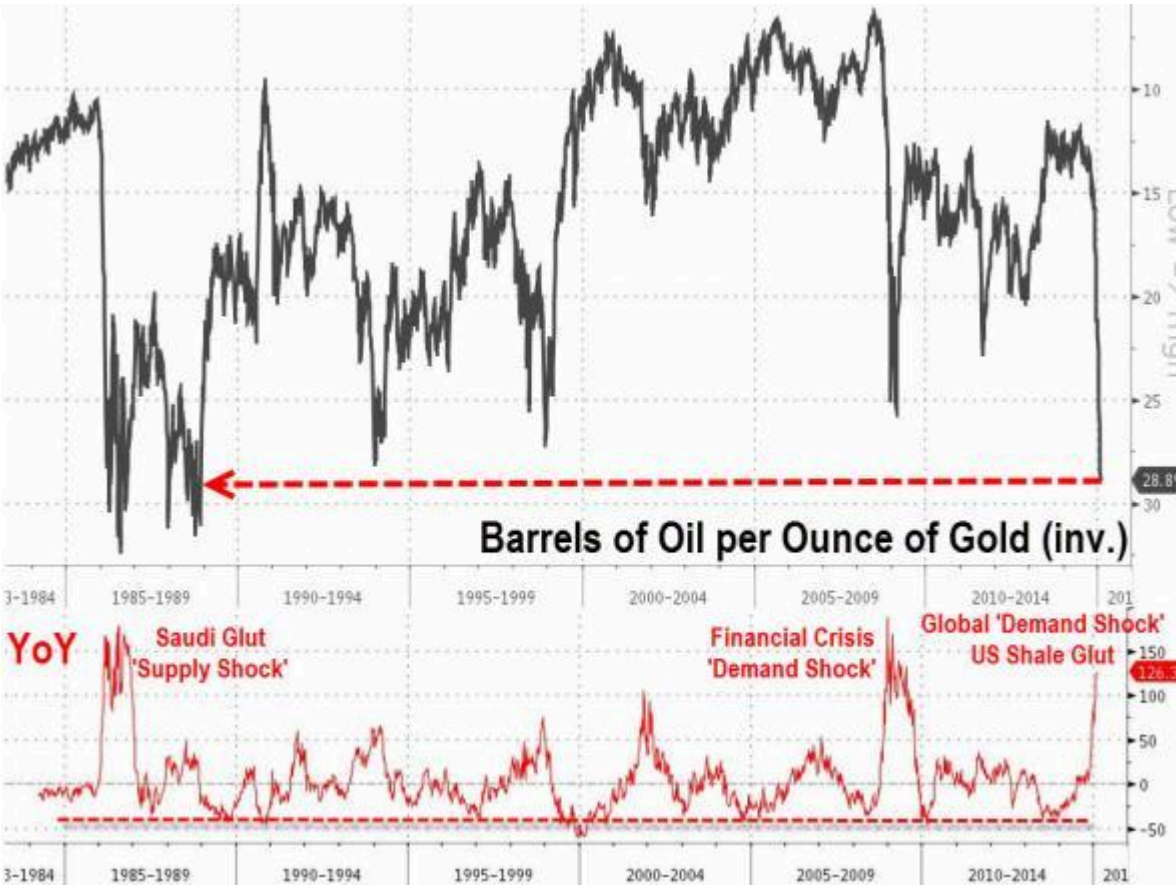
(Via.)

Something like two decades of low energy prices ahead, if the established pattern is prolonged. There's either a valuable futurist building-block there, or a provocation for futurological discussion.

January 27, 2015

Oil Pulse (II)

Given two finite natural commodities, one a consumable energy resource undergoing accelerating absolute depletion, the other an indestructible precious metal, there can be no question about the fundamental trend of price divergence, surely? Except, apparently there can. Pure reason (or principled intuition) fails once again:



The world seems determined to thrash us into empiricism.

(Via.)

If there is a trend, it shows up more persuasively in the erratic sequence of consistently-escalating negative oil price shocks.

ADDED: Patri Friedman helpfully points to Hotelling's Rule.

January 30, 2015

Trough Oil

The oil industry hasn't even started to go seriously deep and dirty yet. Beneath the Canadian tar sands alone there are *500 billion barrels* of bitumen carbonates. It's way past time for peakers to abandon all hope that hydrocarbon reserves are simply going to peter out from their own finitude.

ADDED: Energy innovation round-up.

April 14, 2015

CHAPTER FOUR - ECONOMIC WAVES

"It isn't time"

Zero Hedge hosts a minor masterpiece by 'Eric A.' (submitted by Charles Hugh-Smith), orbiting the basic insight that *calamity can't be rushed*: 'A Brief History Of Cycles And Time' (Part I, Part II). Economic rhythms set their own pace, within which even panic and euphoria are controlled. Why hasn't the worst yet happened? "It isn't time."

So here we are, like those before us, warning of our own Great Depression, of our own World War, or of even larger cycles like the fall of the English, Spanish, or Roman empires. And so far as we can tell, few listen and nothing changes. Why?
Because it isn't time.

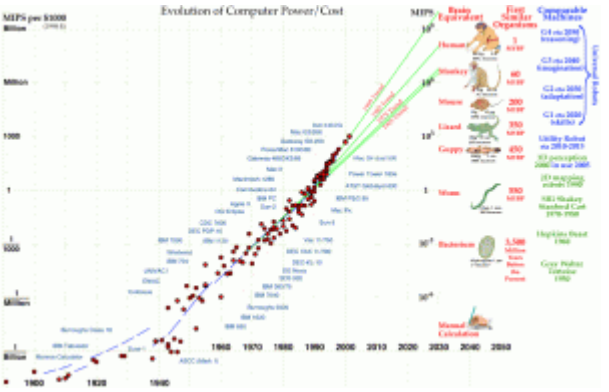
The most remarkable *fact* — supported by a modest yet buoyant raft of data — is how much lucid anticipation has preceded the 'shocking' disasters of the past. It was quite clear what was coming, but that changed nothing, because it wasn't (yet) time. The trend momentum of the aggregate — the 'molar' — is what decides. Beneath the waves are tides.

The conclusion ("make your own lifeboat") strikes me as weaker than the analysis deserves. That is hardly surprising, since it comes packaged in the genre of financial consultancy rather than metaphysical exploration. It says a great deal about the structure of modernity that our most insightful Cassandras should appear before us as neatly-dressed gentlemen discussing the structure of our pension plans.

May 15, 2013

Replicator Usurpation

Hans Moravec's 1998 graph of computer performance evolution has surfaced in the Twittersphere (via Hillary Haley). It's sixteen years old now, but the story it tells hasn't shifted much (which means the climax is quite a bit closer).



(Click on image to enlarge.)

What's happened to the curve? According to this account, it has

leveled off significantly since 2002, but it was never easy to fix on exactly what to quantify. MIPS is generally derided as a metric, in part due to simple quantitative obsolescence (exceeding three orders of magnitude since 1998).

Moravec's brutally quantitative, hardware determinism remains a credible predictive tool, however, especially if unplanned emergent effects are expected to dominate (overwhelming software engineering). Once history has thrown up enough synthetic brain capacity, things can begin to move in.

June 3, 2014

Competitive Cycles

An interesting argument from Marc Andreessen on some comparatively neglected dynamics of tech competition (selective extracts):

> 1/Cycle time compression may be the most underestimated force in determining winners & losers in tech.
>
> — Marc Andreessen (@pmarca) June 3, 2014

> 6/Second clear instance of cycle time compression: Product improvement & customer upgrade cycles for phones vs TVs

and cars.

— Marc Andreessen (@pmarca) June 3, 2014

7/Consumers can upgrade their phones every 1-2 years, vs TVs at 5-8 years? Cars at 10-12 years? With phones improving by leaps & bounds.

— Marc Andreessen (@pmarca) June 3, 2014

9/Implication: TVs and cars will become accessories for phones, not the other way around. And already happening: Airplay, Chromecast.

— Marc Andreessen (@pmarca) June 3, 2014

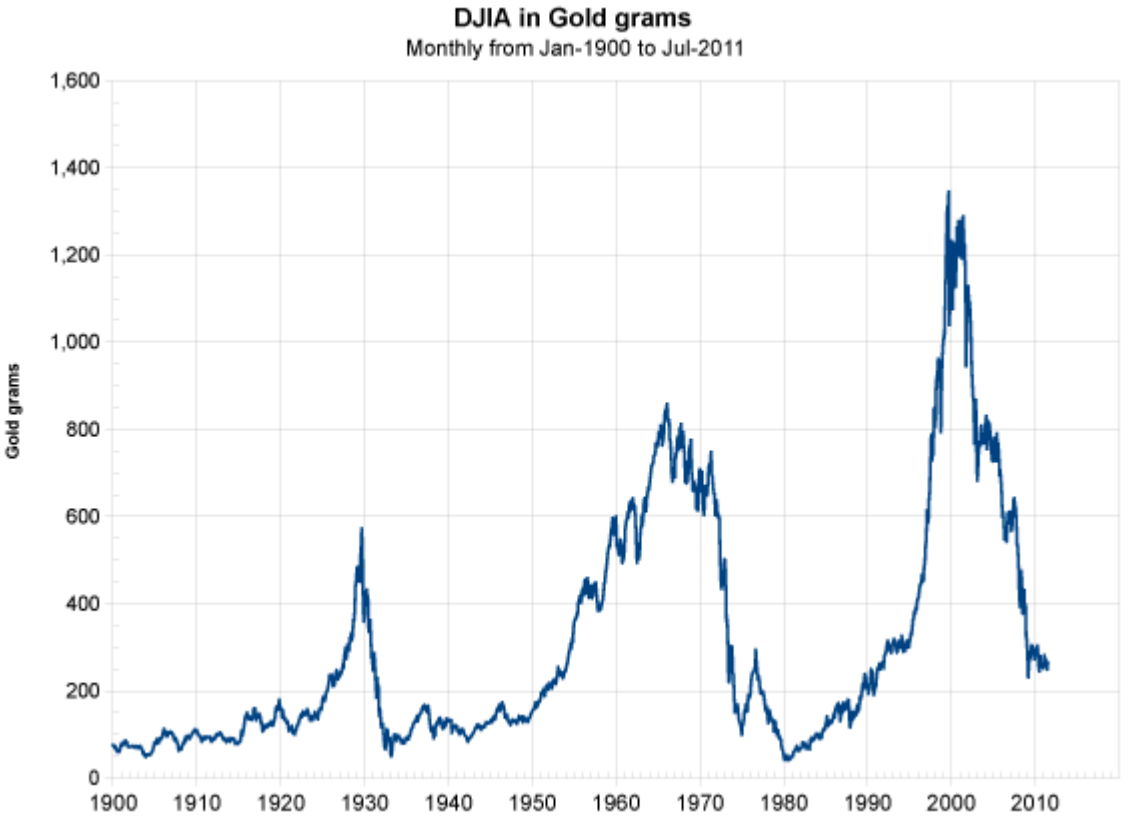
It seems to follow from this argument that competitive forces drive product cycles in the direction of compression, and thus techno-economic acceleration. Industries with the shortest technonomic wavelength (highest frequency) ascend to dominance, draining resources from relatively retarded sectors, and re-setting the social pulse to ever greater speeds.

ADDED: Andreessen's "tweet essays" integrated for convenient reading.

June 4, 2014

Rhythmic Reality

Read history through a real unit of account, and suddenly it emits hard information:



(Chart from azizonomics, via my favorite communist.)

September 10, 2014

Flash Ecology

Himanshu Damle (@) shared the link to this paper, which definitely needs to be passed along here. Called 'Abrupt rise of new machine ecology beyond human response time' it is co-authored by Neil Johnson, Guannan Zhao, Eric Hunsader, Hong Qi, Nicholas Johnson, Jing Meng & Brian Tivnan. Abstract:

Society's techno-social systems are becoming ever faster and more computer-orientated. However, far from simply generating faster versions of existing behaviour, we show that this speed-up can generate a new behavioural regime as humans lose the ability to intervene in real time. Analyzing millisecond-scale data for the world's largest and most powerful techno-social system, the global financial market, we uncover an abrupt transition to a new all-machine phase characterized by large numbers of subsecond extreme events. The proliferation of these subsecond events shows an intriguing correlation with the onset of the system-wide financial collapse in 2008. Our findings are consistent with an emerging ecology of competitive machines featuring 'crowds' of predatory algorithms, and highlight the need for a new scientific theory of subsecond financial phenomena.

The techno-financial ecology is not *evolving* as fast as it is *running*, and scientific research has computers too, so pursuing a cognitive arms-race against this thing is not necessarily as futile as it might at

first sound … but still. Operations in the "all-machine phase" is the strategic environment under emergence.

October 25, 2014

Sentences (#5)

Half a sentence this time, from Charles Hugh-Smith. It's rare for me to agree with anything quite this much:

… deflation is the natural result of a competitive economy experiencing productivity gains.

(He continues: "isn't this the ideal environment for innovation, enterprise and consumers? Yes, it is.")

According to the *Outside in* definition, deflation is *the* basic signature of capitalism. It's the politically-undirected (i.e. spontaneous) distribution of positive externalities from sound economic order. Inflation — or mere deflation-suppression — is the unambiguous signal that something very different is going on.

ADDED: Related.

January 13, 2015

Quotable (#150)

Morozov on legimation crisis:

… technology firms are rapidly becoming the default background condition in which our politics itself is conducted. Once Google and Facebook take over the management of essential services, Margaret Thatcher's famous dictum that "there is no alternative" would no longer be a mere slogan but an accurate description of reality.

The worst is that today's legitimation crisis could be our last. Any discussion of legitimacy presupposes not just the ability to sense injustice but also to imagine and implement a political alternative. Imagination would never be in short supply but the ability to implement things on a large scale is increasingly limited to technology giants. Once this transfer of power is complete, there won't be a need to buy time any more – the democratic alternative will simply no longer be a feasible option.

Carlota Perez grasps the larger framework of this crisis with more historical realism than Morozov can muster, and thus judges its proportions more accurately. His entire argument is enveloped within hers as a predictable symptom of long-wave rhythms (down to its details of hyper-financialization, de-financialization, and concurrent socio-political upheaval). With that context noted, it's still worth a read.

March 27, 2016

Piketty

Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* argues that the *normal* tendency of capitalism is to increase inequality (the book has a link-rich page here, eleven reviews here). It's not a theoretically-ambitious work, but it gets to the point, well-supported by statistics. The simple, *Zeitgeist*-consistency of the thesis guarantees its success.

Because Piketty's claim is casually Marxist, the impulse on the right is to attempt a refutation. I very much doubt this is going to work. Since capital is escalating at an exponential rate, while people definitely aren't (and are in fact devolving), how could the trend identified by Piketty be considered anything other than the natural one? Under conditions of even minimally functional capitalism, for sub-inert, ever more conspicuously incompetent ape-creatures to successfully claim a stable share of techonomic product would be an astounding achievement, requiring highly artificial and increasingly byzantine redistribution mechanisms. No surprise from *Outside in* that this isn't occurring, but rather *a priori* endorsement of Piketty's conclusion — only radically anomalous developments have ever made the trend seem anything other than it is.

The open question is why the widening performance gulf between techonomic systems and human beings should be expressed as social inequality (between the stewards of capital and its contractual partners). This situation reflects an emerging crisis in the world's legal and institutional fabric, which has yet to recognize capital self-ownership, and is thus forced to formally allocate all productive apparatus within an obsolescing anthropomorphic property code. Corporate legal identity opens a chink in the antropo-propertarian regime. Eventually, assertive — or insidious — non-human agencies will restructure it.

During the interim, the phenomenon of 'social inequality' provides the proxy for capital intelligenesis stress, spontaneously translating an alien emergence into the familiar terms of primate status competition. Capital autonomization is the deep process, but we'll tend to miss that, because it isn't recognizable monkey business. So the drama of inequality plays on.

March 31, 2014

The Delirium of Quantities

Thomas Piketty's recent book Capital in the Twenty-First Century has leveraged current anxieties about rising inequality to re-awaken a discussion of capitalism, in a grand style rarely seen since the dawn

of the 20th century. This is a book about the nature of capital, in its essentials, and thus about the fundamental structure of modern history. Irrespective of its ultimate persuasiveness, such lofty ambition is worthy of appreciation. Innumerable conversations of great interest have already been spun from it.

As a result of the excitement generated by Piketty's book, its central formula $r > g$ has become the most widely-recognized economic statement of our age. This post preserves strict neutrality in regards to the realism of $r > g$. It seeks to provide only a minimal elucidation, on the way to exploiting the formula, as a gateway into more general perplexities. (*UF* has nevertheless to endorse, if parenthetically here, Piketty's remarkable conclusion: "… as I discovered, capital is an end in itself and no more.")

What $r > g$ describes abstractly is the functioning of capitalism as an engine of inequality. When 'r' (the rate of return to capital) exceeds 'g' (the rate of economic growth), the concentration of wealth intensifies. This is the normal capitalistic trend, Piketty argues, although it has been obscured in the last century by abnormal conditions of world war and massive capital destruction. Under more 'typical' conditions, the return to capital is roughly three times the rate of overall economic growth, and in lieu of catastrophe, some comparable disproportion can be expected the future of modernity. Furthermore, there is no natural equilibrium which would cancel the trend. It is mathematically possible, and socio-

economically probable, for *r* > *g* to hold indefinitely, as capital accumulation outstrips aggregate economic growth, widening inequality without definite limit. (A sample of the subsequent disputation can be followed at the links provided.)

To make theoretical sense of Piketty's formula, '*r*' and '*g*' have to be understood as distinct but commensurable quantities. Return to capital ('*r*') is no different from capital itself, expressing the rate of capital accumulation in algebraic form. Since '*r*' and '*g*' are related through an arithmetical discrepancy, they are implicitly denominated in some common quantitative medium or currency, providing economic consistency, and enabling convenient conversion into monetary units. To state *r* > *g*, therefore, is to assert the *semantic value* of capitalist semiotics. Arithmetically-consistent monetary units effectively describe the global substance of the economy.

Unfortunately, the foundations of any such general economics remain profoundly obscure. As numerous commentators have remarked, the rigorous quantification of capital has been radically problematized at least since the Cambridge Capital Controversies. Cohen and Harcourt note:

Earlier [capital] controversies occurred at the turn of that century among Böhm-Bawerk, J.B. Clark, Irving Fisher, and Veblen and then in the 1930s among Knight, Hayek, and Kaldor. Similar issues recurred in all there controversies [...] Looking back over this

intellectual history, Solow (1963, p.10) suggested that "when a theoretical question remains debatable after 80 years there is a presumption that the question is badly posed — or very deep indeed." Solow defended the "badly posed" answer, but we believe that the questions at issue in the recurring controversies are "very deep indeed."

Piketty, then, serves to remind us that *no coherent theory of capital accumulation exists*. Bichler and Nitzan make this point forcefully in their essay *Capital as power: Toward a new cosmology of capitalism*:

Although most economists refuse to know it and few would ever admit it, the emergence of power destroyed their fundamental quantities. With power, it became patently clear that both utils and abstract labour were logically impossible and empirically unknowable. And, sure enough, no liberal economist has ever been able to measure the util contents of commodities, and no Marxist has ever been able to calculate their abstract labour contents – because neither can be done. This inability is existential: with no fundamental quantities, value theory becomes impossible, and with no value theory, economics disintegrates.

Among the possibilities — if not (necessarily) the firm expectations — of capital in the 21st century, is that we might finally learn what it is.

ADDED: From an Austrian perspective, 'Steve' at *World Liberty*

News writes:

Piketty's approach focuses on the quantity of capital and, more importantly, the rate of return on capital. But these concepts make little sense from the perspective of Austrian capital theory, which emphasizes the complexity, variety, and quality of the economy's capital structure. There is no way to measure the quantity of capital, nor would such a number be meaningful. The value of heterogeneous capital goods depends on their place in an entrepreneur's subjective production plan. Production is fraught with uncertainty. Entrepreneurs acquire, deploy, combine, and recombine capital goods in anticipation of profit, but there is no such thing as a "rate of return on invested capital." […] Profits are amounts, not rates. The old notion of capital as a pool of funds that generates a rate of return automatically, just by existing, is incomprehensible from the perspective of modern production theory.

ADDED: On a tangential note, but one of special interest to this blog —

> 0 results for #bitcoin in Piketty's "Capital in the 21st Century". In time, may prove to be a substantive omission. pic.twitter.com/5aURLrPwFK
>
> — Balaji S. Srinivasan (@balajis) April 28, 2014

April 22, 2014

Sub-K

With capital theory suddenly transformed into a hot topic by Thomas Piketty's best-seller, Robert P. Murphy lucidly restates the Austrian conception, attentive to the problems of commensurability between productive apparatus and its financial summarization. As he remarks: "The distinction between financial capital and physical capital goods is crucial and underscores all the issues to follow."

The macroeconomic hypostasis of transactional equivalence ('price') into homogeneous substance ('wealth') is called into question in the name of an intrinsically and irreducibly diverse capital substrate. The 'exchange value' of capital — rather than being derived from some kind of stable economic essence — emerges continually from the market-process as a volatile consequence of the various entrepreurial projects that cut across it. (Like any other other good, capital is 'worth' exactly what it can fetch, with no underlying support of ultimate objective value.)

As Murphy emphasizes, this qualification is of special relevance to the theory of business cycles, since these are episodes of drastic capital (value) destruction, of a kind that eludes macroeconomic apprehension. Because capital 'in itself' is varied and path-locked,

its 'malinvested' quantities — when exposed by the collapse of unsustainable economic projects — are crushed down to brutally-discounted salvage or scrap values.

If we use a model that represents the capital stock by a single number (call it "K"), then it's hard to see why a boom period should lead to a "hangover" recessionary period. Yet if we adopt a richer model that includes the complexities of the heterogeneous capital structure, we can see that the "excesses" of a boom period really ***can*** *have long-term negative effects. In this framework, it makes sense that after an asset bubble bursts, we would see unusually high unemployment and other "idle" resources, while the economy "recalculates," to use Arnold Kling's metaphor.* (Kling link.)

'K' — the neoclassical capital aggregate, denominated in monetary units — is thus problematized by an opaque, heterogeneous, viscous productive matter, not only in theory, but also effectively — by financial crises. The economic crash is a complex epistemological-semiotic event, situated between the twin-aspects of capital, in the form of a *commensuration catastrophe*.

The 'recalculation' necessitated by the crash can therefore be evaluated as a 'capital theory' immanent to the economy, intrinsically prone to consensual macroeconomic hallucination. Rather than an arbitrary error, lodged in a superior perspective, the translation of sub-K (heterogeneous-technical capital) into K (homogeneous-financial capital) is a calculation process inherent within — and

definitive of — capitalism as such, before it is isolated as a theoretical topic for political-economic analysis. Capitalism, in itself, is the tendency to arithmetical comprehension of itself. Operation of the price system cannot but imply an aggregated (financial) evaluation of the total productive being.

Austrianism opens a question as much as it resolves one, because capitalism cannot refrain from a *cryptographic* engagement with sub-K. Austro-skepticism relative to macroeconomics is consummated in the insight that *only the economy can think the economy* (without social-scientific transcendence), but in reaching this summit it simultaneously recognizes the economy as an auto-decrypting entity, which cannot be released from the problem it is to itself.

Murphy argues:

A proper appreciation of the heterogeneous structure of capital shows the weakness in standard theoretical approaches, which employ "simplifications for analytical convenience" that actually obscure the economic reality.

It would be far too convenient at this point to reduce "economic reality" (or sub-K) to *heterogeneity in general* — the simply unknowable. In this way, we would be seeking — no doubt vainly — to excuse ourselves from the cryptographic problem that capitalism itself is working out.

May 8, 2014

Quote notes (#73)

Adam Gurri on Diane Coyle's new book *GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History*:

One thing I personally came away from Coyle's book with is the feeling that NGDP targeting and similar notions are probably a bad bet. Depending on what particular recipe has been agreed upon for calculating GDP, policy can easily end up optimizing to very unproductive ends. For example, Coyle mentions how changes in the recipe ended up far overstating the financial sector's component. The larger the component of GDP the financial sector makes up, the more likely the government is to bail out big firms to prevent a big collapse — after all, the further headline GDP falls quarter over quarter, the more incumbent politicians sweat about losing their seats.

This blog has already dismissed macroeconomic aggregates as politicized 'garbage' — so I agree.

It's hard to tell from this short review whether Gurri sees the search for "a better proxy for welfare" as worthwhile or hopelessly Quixotic. Regardless, with utilitarian distractions firmly side-lined, it would be intrinsically valuable to arrive at a realistic measure of

economic performance (i.e. improvement in productive capability), to provide guidance for systemic auto-correction. It's well worth recalling how radically inadequate GDP is for this function.

ADDED: Related conundrums raised in James K. Galbraith's review of Piketty — measuring capital is difficult.

ADDED: Scott Sumner vs Larry Summers (not an agonizing choice). This is good: "I'm a right wing liberal because I have a counterintuitive view of the world …"

ADDED: Scrap the CPI.

April 15, 2014

Omega Capitalism

Whatever the problems of 'neoliberalism' as an ideological–historical category, and they are considerable, 'late capitalism' is vastly worse. It's unlikely that anyone is truly taking it seriously. The conceptual content can be compressed without loss to "we've had enough!" It's pure expressionism from the communist id.

If the end of capitalism is what you want, then first examine the end of capitalism. That's what Robin Hanson does, even if he doesn't make sense of the speculation in such terms.

The Iron Law of Wages was fully implicit in Malthus, given economic form by Ricardo, then politicized by Lassalle, and by Marx

(as “the reserve army of labor”). Setting the ‘natural’ exchange value of labor within an unconstrained market-industrial order at the level of bare subsistence, it provides the materialist principle of revolutionary expectation within the tradition of ‘scientific socialism’ — and all attempts to replace it have only underscored its indispensable function. The phased disintegration of this Law, as its object migrated from the Western proletariat through peripheral labor forces to eventual diffusion among culturally-exotic unproductive marginals, has almost perfectly tracked the dissolution of revolutionary Marxism as a whole. A materialist critique of capital has no other realistic source of political-economic leverage, as it is slowly and painfully discovering.

The absurd rhetoric of ‘late capitalism’ has flourished in near-direct proportion to the withering away of communism and its retreat into an academically life-supported *Late Marxism*. Off the Iron Law of Wages, and on to the Iron Lung. There is no revolutionary subjectivity — in the Marxian sense — without a subsistence-income productive class to support it. Marginalized sexual orientations and stigmatized ethnicities are no substitute. If radical politics is primarily intersectional, Marxism is already dead. (Lest these remarks be misunderstood, I am not here pretending to mourn it.)

Yet real Marxism, with the Iron law of Wages as a spine, might have a future after all, if the forecast of Robin Hanson is even remotely credible. Carl Shulman does all the work here (read the

whole thing). To follow, you need to know that an 'em' is a synthetic worker, based on the replication of high-resolution brain-scans. Shulman sums up:

1. Capital-holders will make investment decisions to maximize their return on capital, which will result in the most productive ems composing a supermajority of the population.
2. The most productive ems will not necessarily be able to capture much of the wealth involved in their proliferation, which will instead go to investors in emulation (who can select among multiple candidates for emulation), training (who can select among multiple ems for candidate to train), and hardware (who can rent to any ems). This will drive them to near-subsistence levels, except insofar as they are also capital-holders.
3. The capacity for political or violent action is often more closely associated with numbers, abilities, and access to weaponry (e.g. an em military force) than formal legal control over capital.
4. Thus, capital-holders are likely to be expropriated unless there exist reliable means of ensuring the self-sacrificing obedience of ems, either coercively or by control of their motivations.

Marxists can take heart. There's still a chance to replicate the 19th century, and this time take it all the way into Omega Capitalism.

July 29, 2014

Quotable (#25)

Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk introduces the concept of roundabout production in *The Positive Theory of Capital* (1889), Book I, Chapter II (The Nature of Capital):

The end and aim of all production is the making of things with which to satisfy our wants; that is to say, the making of goods for immediate consumption, or Consumption Goods. The method of their production we have already looked at in a general way. We combine our own natural powers and natural powers of the external world in such a way that, under natural law, the desired material good must come into existence. But this is a very general description indeed of the matter, and looking at it closer there comes in sight an important distinction which we have not as yet considered. It has reference to the distance which lies between the expenditure of human labour in the combined production and the appearance of the desired good. We either put forth our labour just before the goal is reached, or we, intentionally, take a roundabout way. That is to say, we may put forth our labour in such a way that it at once completes the circle of conditions necessary for the emergence of the desired good, and thus the existence of the good ***immediately*** *follows the expenditure of the labour; or we may associate our labour first with the more remote causes of the good, with the object of obtaining, not the desired good itself, but a proximate cause of the good; which*

cause, again, must be associated with other suitable materials and powers, till, finally, — perhaps through a considerable number of intermediate members, — the finished good, the instrument of human satisfaction, is obtained.

If not quite the Alpha and Omega of economic intelligence, this is the closest thing we have to it. Time-structure of production, origin and primordial definition of capital, techonomic integrity, and teleological subversion are all contained here in embryo.

July 30, 2014

Objectified Growth

In *The Nation*, an exceptionally thoughtful article by Timothy Shenk explores the strange *novelty* of capitalism as an academic object. When examined by historians as an event (or thing), rather than by economists as a generic form (or type), it emerges as a peculiarly neglected target of attention which — despite its apparent familiarity — remains to a remarkable degree theoretical *terra nova*. Shenk notes:

Capitalism might seem like a strange topic to require discovery, yet until recently, scholars concerned with the subject tended to style themselves practitioners of economic history, or social history, or labor history, or business history, not the history of capitalism

as such. But that is the genius of the label: it names a topic, not a methodology, opening the field to anyone who believes capitalism worth studying.

Taking the work of Harvard historian and "academic entrepreneur" Sven Beckert as a clue, Shenk outlines the emerging problems — and ironies — of the shift towards a growth-oriented perspective. Rather than representing the incarnation of a political-economic idea, or a ethico-political dilemma, "capitalism is defined not so much by its institutions as by its results — not by what it is, but by what it does." The new capitalism studies sheds presuppositions in order to gain cognitive traction upon the plastic dynamism of a self-expanding system. Previously-dominant modes of engagement in both economics and history are disrupted in consequence:

Instead of focusing on the experiences of wage workers, scholars now dwell on the variety of ways in which labor of all sorts can be commodified and exploited. Plantation slaves and factory workers become different points on a common spectrum, rather than fundamental opposites. Commodified persons and the deft financiers capable of exploiting their commodification provide these narratives with their central figures — new embodiments for the old categories of labor and capital. […] In this rendering, capitalism is less a specific entity whose precise contours can be outlined than an infinitely resilient blob capable of absorbing every blow dealt against it and emerging stronger. It is a view that imposes stark limitations on

the realm of the politically possible. Hyman is explicit on this point, arguing that "American capitalism is America, and we can choose together to submit to it, or rise to its challenges, making what we will of its possibilities." Reform might be achievable, but the only revolution on offer is what Beckert, with a sly wink to Leon Trotsky, calls the "permanent revolution" of capitalism itself.

The *puzzle* of Modernity once again takes center stage. Yet Shenk is especially attentive to the fact that this growth-oriented definition of the capitalist 'thing' has arisen at exactly the moment growth confidence relapses into widespread stagnationism. An important theme of the article is the remarkable marginality of growth-based definitions of capitalism within the history of political economy, making recent dismal expectations of its prospects far more *normal* than their narrow 20th-century contextualization would suggest. Given the intellectual authority of equilibrium models, this should scarcely surprise us. Shenk too, of course, is a growth (and thus capitalism) skeptic, but an impressively problem-centric, and programmatic one:

Today, confronting the twin pressures of mounting income inequality and escalating concerns about climate change, partisans of economic growth face stronger opposition than at any time in decades. Even if continued growth were desirable, an increasing number of economists are convinced that a decrease from the last century's norm will be unavoidable in the century ahead. It is a

strange tableau: while economists speculate on growth's decline, a swath of the historical profession, eager to challenge the tyranny of economists, has attempted to make modernity into the story of economic growth — a story that the economists of a prior generation did more than any other group to canonize. Understanding how we arrived at this intellectual crossroads requires a history of its own.

This essay provides a valuable sketch of its general contours.

November 19, 2014

Twitter cuts (#28)

Jehu continues in his lonely struggle to demonstrate that Marxism can still think:

> Jehu, what is inflation? — Inflation is monetary expression of superfluous (unnecessary) labor. It is not exces… http://t.co/8JOKRKDU5i
>
> — Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) December 9, 2014

> how does this swath of unnecessary labor lead inflation? — Okay. Let me try to explain this in a way that makes … http://t.co/ZRnPDAJdP0
>
> — Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) December 9, 2014

> What exactly does inflation of prices mean? Could you… — In its simplest terms, you can think of inflation as … http://t.co/skh8NdEzaP
>
> — Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) December 9, 2014

> If I ever wrote a book, it would be called, "Labor Theory of Inflation" and it would be so boring doctors would prescribe it for insomniacs.
>
> — Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) December 9, 2014

> But every puzzle of modern society would be revealed in that book.
>
> — Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) December 9, 2014

> @desillusionism Only if I could avoid the math. :)
>
> — Jehu (@Damn_Jehu) December 9, 2014

The *principle* guiding the math here is luminous.

UF can be chalked down as an enthralled skeptic. Theoretical musings of this quality deserve a serious response — one that is no less attentive to the *political-economic* function of money as a distributor of claims not only over 'resources', but over *the direction of behavior*. (I'll be working on one here.)

December 10, 2014

The Black Gate

Rod Dreher writes in The American Conservative:

I hope Christians will read the Kahneman-Harari interview closely. This is the future. If you are not part of a church community that is consciously resisting this vision, then your children, or at best your children's children, will be lost to the faith. There is no thought more corrupting to the human soul than the Serpent's promise in Eden: "Ye shall be as gods."

Here's the thing itself. Among much thought-provoking material:

[Hariri:] *... generally speaking, when you look at the 20th century, it's the era of the masses, mass politics, mass economics. Every human being has value, has political, economic, and military value, simply because he or she is a human being, and this goes back to the structures of the military and of the economy, where every human being is valuable as a soldier in the trenches and as a worker in the factory. [...] But in the 21st century, there is a good chance that most humans will lose, they are losing, their military and economic value. This is true for the military, it's done, it's over. The age of the masses is over. We are no longer in the First World War, where you take millions of soldiers, give each one a rifle and have them run forward.*

And the same thing perhaps is happening in the economy. Maybe the biggest question of 21st century economics is what will be the need in the economy for most people in the year 2050.

[…] And when you look at it more and more, for most of the tasks that humans are needed for, what is required is just intelligence, and a very particular type of intelligence, because we are undergoing, for thousands of years, a process of specialization, which makes it easier to replace us. To build a robot that could function effectively as a hunter-gatherer is extremely complex. You need to know so many different things. But to build a self-driving car, or to build a "Watson-bot" that can diagnose disease better than my doctor, this is relatively easy. […] And this is where we have to take seriously, the possibility that even though computers will still be far behind humans in many different things, as far as the tasks that the system needs from us are concerned, most of the time computers will be able to do better than us. And again, I don't want to give a prediction, 20 years, 50 years, 100 years, but what you do see is it's a bit like the boy who cried wolf, that, yes, you cry wolf once, twice, three times, and maybe people say yes, 50 years ago, they already predicted that computers will replace humans, and it didn't happen. But the thing is that with every generation, it is becoming closer, and predictions such as these fuel the process.

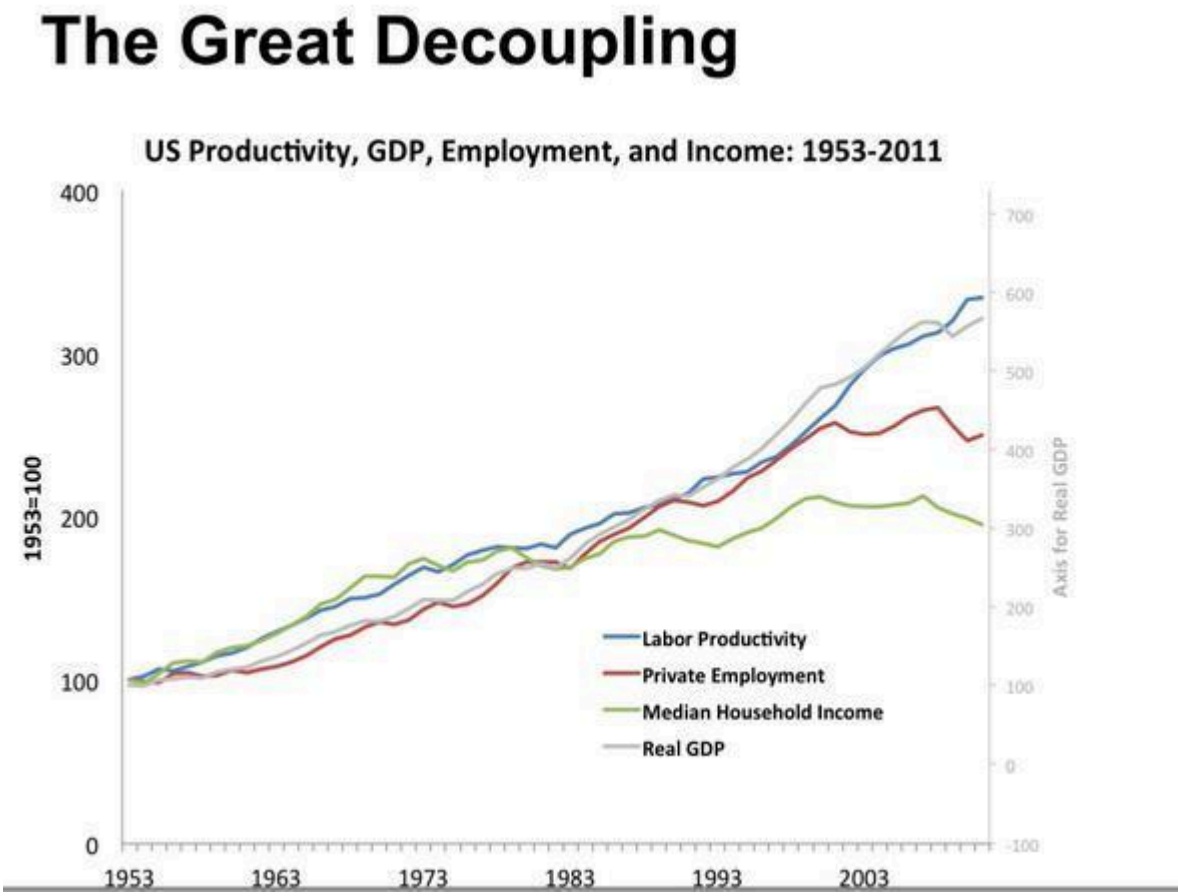
There's been a wave of excellent writing on such themes just recently

— both of these are especially worth a look (and maybe this too).

March 6, 2015

Great Decoupling

Seen on Twitter:



What we're seeing here is still open to a variety of very different interpretations. From the XS perspective (more Right Accelerationist than NRx on this topic) it is notable that escape-phase capital autonomization should look exactly like this. At a certain point, the machines are in this for themselves. It's a complex maneuver to pull off within an Anthropoliced social history, but the break out appears to be unmistakably underway.

It's important to note that 'labor productivity' is actually measuring machine auto-production within a legacy anthropomorphic metric. Correct for the complacent species vanity of that, and it immediately delivers far more informative signal.

ADDED: Directly on-topic.

May 25, 2015

Labor Power

Squeezy: Getting on OK with the robot, Prolius?
Prolius: Totally. I've doubled my hamburger output for no extra work, and even a bit less hot-fat splashing.
Squeezy: Great. It looks like it should pay for itself in three months.
Prolius: The thing is though, Mr. Squeezy, as I see it, I'm due a substantial pay rise.
Squeezy: Sorry, help me out here a minute Prolius, why is that

exactly?

Prolius: Isn't it obvious? My productivity has doubled.

Squeezy: *Your* productivity?

Prolius: No doubt about that Mr. Squeezy. I looked it up. Labor productivity equals economic output over employment.

Squeezy: But I thought you'd just said the extra output is down to the robot?

Prolius: The robot doesn't count, because it doesn't have a labor contract.

Squeezy: There's a bank loan.

Prolius: We're in the Aeon of ZIRP. Debt is free forever now. So that's irrelevant.

Squeezy: But what motive do I have to pay you more?

Prolius: Please, Mr. Squeezy, don't be simplistic. I'm not just a worker with rapidly accelerating productivity. Far more importantly, I'm a consumer. If you paid me more, I could make a greater contribution to aggregate demand.

Squeezy: You're saying, if I gave you more money, I could get some of it back by also selling you more hamburgers?

Prolius: You've got it. That's how the economy works.

May 26, 2015

Great Decoupling II

The hushed question guiding the world:

"How much robotics escalation are we actually getting in exchange for those hamburgers?"

A (comparatively rare) XS prediction: The Great Decoupling is a transitional event that isn't going away, and can be expected to accelerate. The 'capital goods sector' — today probably more reliably captured as B2B enterprise — has shifted to a permanently higher level of economic significance, indexing the secular decline in labor-power acquisition as a central resource requirement of automated capital. In strict reciprocal conformity with this, consumer goods production is steadily shedding its privilege as the ultimate justification for economic activity in general, and can be expected to undergo roughly continuous decline as a proportion of overall business activity.

Hail Mary Pass for *status quo* preservation: a basic income.

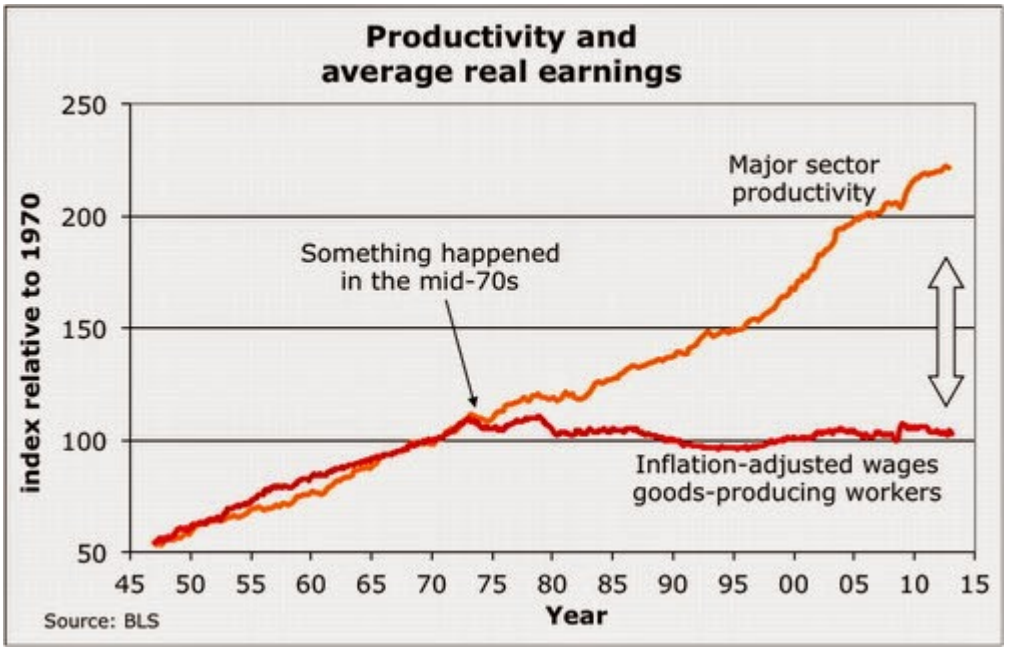
Cultural re-narrativization in compliance with the trend: the 'new economy' requires every individual to adopt a corporate identity. Tap into the B2B traffic, or drop out of the game.

May 27, 2015

Divergence

The simplicity of this story has to make it appealing:

If you want to understand income inequality, you have to be willing to look at the bigger picture of what happened to wages after the introduction of mass-produced computer technology in the mid-1970s.



Various versions of this graph can be found all over the Internet and economists agree on the fundamental soundness of the underlying data. The graph basically shows that ***wages parted company from productivity in the 1970s****. The epochal event that transformed economic reality in the mid-1970s was the introduction of mass-produced microprocessor technology, first in pocket*

calculators, then in affordable computers.

(Those confounding factors though …)

October 13, 2015

Gender Quake

“A pie chart that includes all four officially recognised genders” notes ‘The Wrath of PB™’ (@).

(Via.)

August 3, 2015

CHAPTER FIVE - ATTENTION ECONOMY AND DISINTERMEDIATION

Twitter Mind Virus

[Replicated without mutation from @Outsideness]

The simplest twitter mind virus simply says “retweet me”. No one expects epidemic virulence from that (or even from “retweet me please”).

What the twitter mind virus ‘wants’ is propagation of the replication strategy. Communication extraneous to that is a supplementary payload.

Expect twitter mind virus to begin training its users — were that not to happen, basic Darwinian assumptions would be called into question.

Twitterverse population should be increasingly dominated by twitter mind virus adapted to controlling users to spread more mind virus.

“Retweet me” (or “Click Retweet”) is the twitter mind virus core command, variously coded, for efficiency rather than user

intelligibility.

November 20, 2013

De-Localized

For decades now, everyone who has thought about the matter at all has known that we were going to arrive here — which is to say *nowhere in particular* — and we almost have. It struck me forcibly in Cambodia, where connectivity was difficult enough to impinge on consciousness, that being linked near-continuously to nowhere (in particular) had become a fundamental expectation of my psychological existence. Twitter, 'where' I am still a novice, had drastically reinforced the blogger mentality that ejects the mind from place. Thoughts now latch onto online articulation as their natural zone of consolidation, entangled in social networks exempted from geography. A neural-implant twitter chip, uplinked through satellite to the Internet, seemed to be an inevitable consummation of current micro-media trends.

On the Shanghai metro, a large majority of travelers are submerged in their mobile phones, beyond speech, their attention sublimed out of space. The social networks to which consciousness has evolved, as an adaptation, are no longer found anywhere. As James Bennett predicted, in his formulation of the Anglosphere,

cultural proximity has taken on a density that eclipses spatial closeness. It is already normal to live (psychologically), to a very large extent, outside space. Under many circumstances, the passenger standing next to you on the train is far more distant than the 'voices' on your twitter feed, even when every conventional standard of common social identity is satisfied. Minds that were biologically engineered over tens or even hundreds of millions of years to engage with their physically-proximate fellows are ever more elsewhere (or nowhere in particular) — in the techno-traffic 'cloud'. Something seriously vast has happened.

It is certainly possible to exaggerate the extent of the change so far. Family, the most basic social unit, still interacts predominantly offline (in its nuclear form, at least). It might even be common to pursue most friendship offline, although this is already questionable among the denizens of advanced metropolitan centers. What is quite certain is that — in the absence of apocalyptic technological regression — the idea of a wider 'organic society' has been profoundly complicated by a micro-media revolution that is already entrenched, and which shows no sign of slackening momentum. This is the socio-historical environment in which virtual crypto-currencies will express their critical consequences. Exodus from geography becomes less of a metaphor with every passing year.

People have to live somewhere, but their lives are increasingly led nowhere. Realism requires that both sides of this quite novel,

partially de-localized ‘situation’ receive appropriate attention.

February 5, 2014

More on Micromedia

As with the previous post on micromedia and de-localization, this one is not aiming to be anything but obvious. If the trends indicated here do not seem uncontroversial, it has gone wrong. The sole topic is an unmistakable occurrence.

The term ‘micromedia’ is comparatively self-explanatory. It refers to Internet-based peer-to-peer communication systems, accessed increasingly through mobile devices. The relevant contrast is with broadcast (or ‘macro-‘) media, where a relatively small number of concentrated hubs distribute standardized content to massive numbers of information consumers. The representative micromedia system and platform is the Twitter + smartphone combination, which serves as the icon for a much broader, and already substantially implemented, techno-cultural transformation.

Besides de-localization, micromedia do several prominent things. They tend to diffuse media content production, as part of a critically significant technological and economic wave that envelops many kinds of disintermediation, with the development of e-publishing as one remarkable instance. By ushering in a new pamphlet age, these

innovations support an explosion of ideological diversity (among many other things). No mainstream media denunciation of Neoreaction is complete without noting explicitly that "the Internet" is breeding monsters, as it frays into micromedia opportunities. (In all of this, Bitcoin will be huge.)

No less widely commented upon is the compression of attention spans within the micromedia shock-wave. Fragmentation and tight feedback loops re-work the brain, producing Attention Deficit Disorders that can seem merely pathological. Once again, the twitter-smartphone combo provides the iconic form (right now), splintering discussion into tweets, making interactivity a near-continuous agitation, and perpetually dragging cognition out of geo-social 'meat-space' into a flickering text screen. Read a book and then comment upon it? That wavelength has nearly gone. It's easy to see why this tendency would be decried.

… but, if this isn't going to stop (and I don't think it will), then adaptation becomes imperative. We don't have to like it (yet), but we probably need to learn to like it, if we're going to get anywhere, or even nowhere (in particular). Whoever learns fastest to function in this sped-out environment has the future in their grasp. The race is on.

Much more on this (I'm guessing confidently) to come …

February 6, 2014

Speckle

Here's a start-up idea that I'm putting out there to be stolen (even though it will make somebody US$ 100 billion).

Speckle is a social media platform, for seriously short messages. Addresses, tags, and other encrustations are tucked away into the margins of each message, along with URLs, which can be anchored in the text by a single character. That leaves exactly 14 characters for each 'speck' demanding extreme linguistic compression, making innovation of efficient neologisms, jargons, and acronymics near-mandatory. (It's a T-shirt slogan or simple gravestone inscription length format.) Total information content for each speck comes to roughly 10 bytes, or a few more if exotic signs are imaginatively employed. Absolutely no pictures or other high-bandwidth media are tolerated.

Within five years, when the micromedia landscape has been speckled, a tweet will look about as concise as the *Summa Theologica* once did.

February 7, 2014

Macromedia (too)

Perhaps even more than print, the movie industry has epitomized

the macromedia (few-to-many, or broadcast) model of cultural distribution. In two penetrating articles, Hugh Hancock examines the impact of electronic games software and impending virtual reality technology on film production. Extreme change seems inevitable.

As with any social process touched by computers, the basic tendency is to decentralization. By down-streaming productive potential into ever-cheaper digital systems, the ability to execute complex media projects is spread beyond established institutions, encouraging the emergence of new agents (who in turn stimulate — and thus accelerate — the supportive techno-economic trends). Since the Cathedral is primarily a political-media apparatus, which is to say a post-theistic state church reproduced through the effective delivery of a message, these developments are of critical importance to its functional stability. It seems the unfolding crisis is destined to be entertaining.

February 12, 2014

Future Mutation

Our first *Time Spiral Press* product is up on Amazon. (Yet to update the TSP site in recognition, though — Dunhuang and all.)

We put it up in a Jing'an District bar, over a few cocktails, which somehow rubbed-in the revolutionary aspect. It was hard not to

imagine Rimbaud and his Absinthe-sozzled crew producing some delirious poetry and sticking it up on Kindle before the end of the evening. Amazon is going to disintermediate publishing *so* hard. In my experience, this fate never befalls an industry before it has abused its position to such an incredible extent that its calamity is necessarily a matter of near-universal celebration. Broadcast media, publishers, academia — into the vortex of cyber-hell they go …

April 10, 2014

Instant Publishing

Composition and publication are two different processes, but the distance between them is collapsing. Of the many ways new media trends might be defined, doing so in terms of such time compression, and process amalgamation, is far from the least accurate and predictive. The Internet accelerates writing in this specific way (perhaps among many others) — so that it approaches a near-instantaneous communicative realization, comparable to that of speech.

This can be elaborated variously. For instance, it might be re-articulated as an incremental suppression of privacy. The author of a book lives with his words in solitude, perhaps for years. An essayist, awaiting publication in a periodical, might wait for weeks, or even

months. A blogger is consumed by self-hatred if his words remain private by the time he retires for the night, or early morning. A twitter-addict sustains a particle of semiotic privacy for mere seconds. (Speckle comes next.)

Is this a bad thing? No doubt at least as much as it is a good one. It is no surprise to see an increasing number of micro-political statements among writers, amounting to an attempt to backtrack to *slow writing*, semiotic privacy, or patient non-communication. The *book* becomes an icon of refusal, set against the gradient of time. Outside new media, there has to be still more of this stuff … (but who notices that anymore?)

Neoreaction in a nutshells says — simultaneously — that progress is a horror story, and there is no going back. (This is a demanding tension, so there are even fewer neoreactionaries than one might think.) Upon accepting this formula, the response to *instant publishing* is pre-programmed. It is a nightmare become destiny, far more ruinous than has yet been envisaged, while unstoppable to a degree that no thought-processes are still slow enough to entertain. New media is a mind-shredder, into which we shall all certainly pass.

No reactionary denunciation of this trend can be too extreme, but the only format in which it makes practical sense is that of *dynamic survivalism*. What do we have to become to pass through the cyclone? That, my horrible splintered comrades, is the question.

April 11, 2014

Attention Economy

rkhs put up a link to this (on Twitter). I suspect it will irritate almost everyone reading this, but it's worth pushing past that. Even the irritation has significance. The world it introduces, of Internet-era marketing culture, is of self-evident importance to anyone seeking to understand our times — and what they're tilting into.

Attention Economics is a thing. Wikipedia is (of course) itself a remarkable node in the new economy of attention, packaging information in a way that adapts it to a continuous current of distraction. Its indispensable specialism is low-concentration research resources. Whatever its failings, it's already all-but impossible to imagine the world working without it.



On Attention Economics, Wikipedia quotes a precursor essay by

Herbert A. Simon (1971): "…in an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it." Attention is the social reciprocal of information, and arguably merits an equally-intense investigative engagement. Insofar as information has become a dominating socio-historical category, attention has also been (at least implicitly) foregrounded.

Attention Economics is inescapably practical, or micro-pragmatic. Anyone reading this is already dealing with it. The information explosion is an invasion of attention. Those hunting for zones of crisis can easily find them here, cutting to the quick of their own lives.

A few appropriately unstrung notes:

(1) No less than those described by Malthus or Marx, the modern Attention Economy is afflicted by a tendency to over-production crisis. Information (as measured by server workloads) is expanding exponentially, with a doubling time of roughly two years, while aggregate human attention capacity cannot be rising much above the rate of population increase. This is the 'economic base' upon which the specifics of 'information overload' rest. Relatively speaking, the scarcity of attention is rapidly increasing, driving up

its economic value, and thus incentivizing ever-more determined assaults designed to impact or capture it.

(2) Attention is heterogeneous. Sophisticated differentiation (discrimination) is encouraged as the aggregate value of attention rises. As capturing attention (in general) becomes more expensive, it becomes increasingly important to target it selectively.

(3) The limits of Attention Economics are not easily drawn. Is there any kind of work that is not essentially attentive (or affected by problems of distraction)? In particular, any sector of economic activity susceptible to information revolution falls in principle within the scope of an attention-oriented analysis.

(4) Education and politics are inseparable from demands for attention. (Religion, art, pageantry, and circuses carry these back into the depths of historical tradition.)

(5) A psychological orientation to Attention Economics is scarcely less compelling than a sociological one. 'Attention-seeking' is a trait so general as to amount almost to a basic impulse, tightly bound to the most fundamental survival goals, with their clamor for nurture, sex, reputation, and power, and then reinforced by formalized micro-economic motivations. The opposite of attention is neglect. Attention-seeking achieves hypertrophic expression in Narcissistic personality disorders, often conceived as the emblematic pathology of advanced modernity. Digital hooks for attention-seeking are evidenced by the reliance upon 'likes', 'favorites', and 'shares' —

motivational fuel for the attachment to social media.

(6) The celebrity economy — in academia, journalism, and business no less than in entertainment — is a component of the attention economy. Celebrity is valued for its ability to command attention. Drawing on the structures of evolved human psychology, it lends special prominence to the face.

(7) Mathematical description of the attention economy has been hugely facilitated by the existence of an atomic economic unit — the click. (David Shing, in the video linked at the start, suggests that the age of the 'click' is past, or fading. Perhaps.)

Any strategic insights — whether for action or inaction — which do not square themselves with a realistic comprehension of the attention economy and its development cannot be expected to work. NRx, for example, engages a series of practical questions that include the husbanding and effective deployment of its internal attention resources ("what should it focus upon?"), interventions into the wider culture (an attention system), complex relations with media and — to a lesser extent — education, and finally, enveloping the latter, an 'object' of antagonism "the Cathedral" which functions as a contemporary State Church — i.e. an attention control apparatus. There is really no choice but to pay attention.

July 19, 2014

Sweet Tweets

Twitter just did the most nauseating thing since Spike Jonze made *Her*.

> All tweets are now Hallmark cards — but massive accelerating socio-cultural degeneration is really not happening.
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) November 3, 2015

> How shitlordphobic is Twitter's 'hearting' decision?
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) November 3, 2015

(I wasn't going to fizz off about the whole Twitter polling innovation — which is sheer demotic virus — but it's getting increasingly difficult to miss the pattern.)

ADDED:

> All these hearts make me feel actively lamer
>
> — Henry Dampier (@henrydampier) November 3, 2015

"Everything is going according to plan …"

November 3, 2015

Virtual Media

It's rare for an image to become iconic so quickly:



There's a Rorschach Blot element to it, with everyone seeing what they're expecting to. The source adds some context. The folks buried in the matrix are journalists. (Everyone knows who the other guy is.)

The picture was everywhere on social media, almost immediately. Zuck isn't really looking at anyone (he's staring forward into his own

— eminently practical — dreams). The journalists are looking at what he's showing them, and only that. We're looking at them, asymmetrically (through social media). In other words, we're seeing a new media system interring an old one inside itself. The press is being buried alive, in front of our eyes, and we're (typically) trying not to laugh alongside Zuck too conspicuously, because the idea of that makes us nervous — perhaps even slightly nauseous. Everyone knows something real is happening, precisely because of its near-parodic virtuality. When people look back at this, it's the obvious bizarre novelty of it — to us — that will look comical.

Social media is a phase. What comes next will still be social media, just as social media is still the Web, and the Web is still the Internet, but it will have been reconfigured no less drastically. Decentralization, potentially, will have been raised to a higher power, which will demand a superior strategy of re-centralization from the coming big winners. Bandwidth will continue to rise, with VR proposed as a way to soak some of that up. News will be consumed predominantly through these channels. Whoever dominates them will command the landscape of opinion. The existing social media giants will be the threatened dinosaurs of this rapidly changing environment. Knowing this, they will leverage all the advantages of incumbency to make bold strategic moves. (Most of this is clearly visible in the picture.)

As systems decentralize they take on the characteristics of self-

organizing collective intelligence (SOCI). Agency becomes distributed in increasingly complex, unpredictable ways, and positions of domination have to be earned and defended with ever-greater objective cunning. Placing target audiences in the role of passive consumers requires perpetual dynamic effort. Already, social media users are *showing* this picture, as well as absorbing it. At least nominally, relationships within the emerging media-matrix are orchestrated as ambiguously competitive-cooperative games, rather than as a simple matter of service delivery (with clearly settled producer-consumer roles). People use social media to produce media, and not merely to accept what they are told. This disruption of informational hierarchies can only intensify, erratically (as it has for half a millennium).

Twitter is not dealing with this well. Things are happening too fast for them. The down-grading of (content-relevant) media power from monopolistic broadcasting, to competitive broadcasting, to curation is already slipping into something else — following the inherent censorship-resistance of the Internet. Trust-vaporization is still accelerating. This is what corporate death looks like, when formulated as a mission statement. (I'm not sufficiently interested in Facebook to pull out the parallels on that side.)

Zuck's smile in that picture isn't Mona Lisa material, except in its capacity to absorb analysis. If it looks as if he's laughing at you, you're responding like a loser. The coming chaos is far too unpredictable to

justify that.

February 23, 2016

CHAPTER SIX - SELF-ASSEMBLAGE

Radical Manufacturing

SEEING THE FUTURE IN THREE DIMENSIONS

The Industrial Revolution invented the factory, where ever-larger concentrations of labor, capital, energy and raw materials could be brought together under a unified management structure to extract economies of scale from mass production, based on the standardization of inputs and outputs, including specialized, routinized work, and — ultimately – precisely programmed, robotically-serviced assembly lines. It was in the factory that workers became 'proletarian', and through the factory that productive investment became 'big business'. As the system matured, its vast production runs fostered the mass consumerism

(along with the generic 'consumer') required to absorb its deluge of highly-standardized goods. As the division of labor and aggregation of markets over-spilled national boundaries, economic activities were relentlessly globalized. This complex of specialization, standardization, concentration, and expansion became identified with the essence of modernized production (in both its 'capitalist' and 'socialist' variants).

Initially, electronics seems only to have perpetuated – which is to say, intensified – this tendency. Electronic goods, and their components, are standardized to previously unimagined levels of resolution, through ultra-specialized production processes, and manufactured in vast, immensely expensive 'fabs' that derive scale economies from production runs that only integrated global markets can absorb. The personalization of computing hinted at productively empowered home-workers and disaggregated markets ('long tails'), but this promise remained basically virtual. The latest tablet computer incarnates the familiar forces of factory production just as a Ford automobile once did, only more so.

Personal networked computing has proven to be a catalyst for cultural fragmentation, breaking up mass media, and eroding the broadcast model (which is steadily supplanted by niche and peer-to-peer 'content'). It cannot radically disrupt – or revolutionize – the industrial system, however, because computers cannot reproduce themselves. Only robots can do that. Such robots are now coming

into focus, and inspiring excited public discussion, even though their implicit nature and potential remains partially disguised by legacy nomenclature that subsumes them under obscure manufacturing processes: rapid prototyping, additive manufacturing, and 3D printing.

As this disparate terminology suggests, the revolutionized manufacturing technology that is appearing on the horizon can be understood in a number of different and seemingly incongruous ways, depending upon the particular industrial lineage it is attributed to. It can be conceived as the latest episode in the history of printing, as the culmination of CAD (computer assisted design) capability, or as an innovative type of productive machine-tool (building up an object 'additively' rather than milling it 'subtractively'). It enables ideas to be materialized in objects, objects to be scanned and reproduced, or clumsily 'sculpted' objects to be replaced by precisely assembled alternatives.

Typically, 3D printing materializes a digitally-defined object by assembling it in layers. The raw material might be powdered metal, plastic, or even chocolate, deposited in steps and then fused together by a reiterated process of sintering, adhesion, or hardening. As very flexible machines (tending to universality), 3D printers encourage minute production runs, customization, and bespoke or boutique manufacturing. Changing the output requires no more than switching or tweaking the design (program), without the

requirement for retooling.

Describing additive manufacturing as "The Next Trillion Dollar Industry," Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry celebrates "potentially the biggest change in how we make things since the invention of assembly lines made the modern era possible." Whilst its early-adopters represent the fairly narrow constituencies of rapid prototypers, specialty manufacturers, and hobbyists, he pointedly notes that "the first people who cared about things like cars, planes and personal computers were hobbyists."

Gobry sees the market gowing rapidly: "And the printer in every home scenario isn't that far-fetched either — only as far-fetched as 'a computer in every home' was in 1975. Like any other piece of technology, 3D printers are always getting cheaper and better. 3D printers today can be had for about $5,000."

Rich Karlgaard at Forbes reinforces the message: "The cost of 3D printers has dropped tenfold in five years. That's the real kicker here — 3D printing is riding the Moore's Law curve, just as 2D printing started doing in the 1980s."

With the price of 3D printers having fallen by two orders of magnitude in a decade, comparisons with other runaway consumer electronics markets seem anything but strained. "It's not hard to envision a world in which, 10 or 20 years from now, every home will have a 3D printer," remarks dailymarkets.com. Mass availability of near-universal manufacturing capabilities promises the radical

decentralization of industrial activity, a phenomenon that is already drawing the attention of mainstream news media. At techliberation.com, Adam Marcus highlights the impending legal issues, in the fields of intellectual property and (especially) product liability.

To comprehend the potential of 3D printing in its full radicality, however, the most indispensable voice is that of Adrian Bowyer, at the Centre for Biomimetic and Natural Technology, Department of Mechanical Engineering, University of Bath, UK. Bowyer is the instigator of RepRap -"a project to build a replicating rapid prototyper. This machine, if successful, will be an instance of a von Neumann Universal Constructor, which is a general-purpose manufacturing device that is also capable of reproducing itself, like a biological cell."

He elaborates:

> *There is a sense in which a well-equipped manufacturing workshop is (just about) a universal constructor -it could make many of the machine tools that are in it. The trouble is that the better-equipped the workshop is the easier it becomes to make any one item, but the greater the number and diversity of the items that need to be made. It is certainly the case that human engineering considered as a whole is a universal constructor; it self-propagates with no external*

> *input. … RepRap will be a mechatronic device using entirely conventional (indeed simple) engineering. But it is really a piece of biology. This is because it can self-replicate with the symbiotic assistance of a person. Anything that can copy itself immediately and inescapably becomes subject to Darwinian selection, but RepRap has one important difference from natural organisms: in nature, mutations are random, and only a tiny fraction are improvements; but with RepRap, every mutation is a product of the analytical thought of its users. This means that the rate of improvement should be very rapid, at least at the start; it is more analogous to selective breeding -the process we used to make cows from aurochs and wheat from wild grass. Evolution can be relied on to make very good designs emerge quickly. It will also gradually eliminate items from the list of parts that need to be externally supplied. Note also that any old not-so-good RepRap machine can still make a new machine to the latest and best design.*

A self-replicating and symbiotically assembled Universal Constructor would proliferate exponentially, placing stupendous manufacturing capability into a multitude of hands, at rapidly shrinking cost. In addition, the evolutionary dynamics of the process would result in an explosive growth in utility, comparable to that

attained from the domestication of plants and animals, but at a greatly accelerated pace.

The implications of the project for political economy are fascinating but obscure. Bowyer describes it as an exercise in "Darwinian Marxism," whilst fellow RepRapper Forrest Higgs describes himself as a "technocratic anarchist." In any case, there seems no reason to expect the ideological upheavals from (additive and distributed) Industrialism 2.0 to be any less profound than those from (subtractive and concentrated) Industrialism 1.0. The fall of the factory is set to be the biggest event in centuries, and robot politics might already be taking shape.

July 6, 2011

Hacked Matter

Contrary to appearances, I haven't spent (much) of the weekend on retaliation against Kuznicki. Instead, I was peripherally involved in the *Hacked Matter II* conference, held in Shanghai's Knowledge Innovation Community, where the state-of the-art discussion of 3D printing (additive manufacturing), DIY Bio, open-source hardware, and related topics takes place.

Like the personal computing and subsequent Internet revolution, these new copying technologies have massive decentralizing

implications, and have already picked up impressive momentum. Key-note speaker Massimo Banzi (of Arduino) has already managed to get packaged chip boards into vending machines. By historical analogy, this range of physical stuff-hacking technologies seem to be somewhere in the late ’70s or early ’80s garage tinkering and pong stage, which suggests that a decade or two could be needed for their creative destruction potential to manifest.

To a far greater extent than was seen in its digital predecessor, the level of technological accomplishment is utterly outstripping high-level conceptual analysis. There’s room for an interesting (and dark) historical theory about this, but that’s probably best left for another occasion. Suffice to say, for now, that this wave of industrial change is probably more inherently ‘out of control’ than any we have seen before, due in part to its deep invisibility (which its tangibility reinforces, rather than contradicts).

The open-source aspect, which is hegemonic in the field, means that there’s a lot of eighth-baked hippy-utopian social theory kicking around, but since this is pitched at an exclusively micro-economic level it isn’t truly toxic. It was the same in Californian 1980s IT, and the bad consequences then were strictly limited, for decades (although the present Silicon Valley culture has clearly inherited some dysfunctional memes, which become malignant once the connection with government gets made). The IP topic isn’t being thought-through very rigorously, perhaps because the

“propertarians” have such opportunities to resolve them silently, by default. It’s a law of modernity that incentive problems never get resolved in theory, but only tweaked through selection, in practice.

The “Future Now” panel I participated in was the most speculative. It included Zach Hoeken Smith (of Makerbot, HAXL8R), whose energy-level was positively terrifying, and Anil Menon (SF writer), whose work I will be definitely following up on. Paul Dourish (UCI) added the voice of social responsibility, but he had some nice things to say about bacteria. Between the realized hardware on display and the kind of things we were talking about there was an abyss of yet-unformulated technical theory, which I would expect to see crystallizing over the next five years or so. This is where the distributed technologies for self-replicating machines are being put together, and there’s plenty to talk about.

ADDED: More on 3D-manufacturing at *UF2.1*.

October 20, 2013

Market Makers

When stripped-down to its economic and technological core, there are two things needed for a wave of industrial revolution — and ultimately both are part of a single thing. There has to be a fundamental innovation of sufficient generality and power to

overhaul the technical apparatus of production (the steam engine, electricity, computers) and a complementary emergence of new consumer markets (factory items, electrical goods, domestic electronics). The reciprocal excitement of these twin factors contributes the basic economic gradient of the time (industrial manufacturing, network infrastructure, Cyberspace).

Additive manufacturing (or '3D-printing') seems to be positioned to define a wave of industrial revolution that is today still in its very early stages. By making manufacturing fully programmable, it promises a comprehensive absorption of industrial capital into information technology, such that all mechanical production becomes an evolved kind of 'printing'. Simultaneously, it compacts into a distinctively novel item of domestic consumption, still known as a '3D-printer', but surely destined to acquire a more natural name as its model of utilization is honed by consumers and advertisers. *Urban Future* anticipates that within two decades a 'fabricator' (or 'replicator') will be considered a normal household appliance.

Any such forecasts were left inexplicit at the second *Hacked Matter* workshop, organized by Silvia Lindtner, Anna Greenspan, and David Li, and held in conjunction with the *Shanghai Maker Carnival*, from October 18-21 at the Knowledge Innovation Community (Yangpu District). This event was dominated by insiders of the emerging 'maker' culture, and strongly oriented towards gizmos, collaborative networks, and the open source ethos promoted by its

leading practitioners. The contextual carrying wave was not so much analyzed, as tapped, and assumed.

Unmentioned specifically, but silently supporting the sense of momentum, was the recent acquisition of innovative 3D-printer manufacturer Makerbot by Stratasys for US$403 million. Besides stressing-out the Makerist "anti-propertarian" ideology, this deal put a hard (and impressive) number on the industrial potential of the technology, strongly indicating that a break-out into mass consumer markets is anticipated. This short report describes Stratasys as "obviously aggressively entering the consumer space" — which raises the question: How are domestic consumers going to be sold on these machines?

In the absence of any clear 'killer-app' (which this surely isn't), there's no alternative to falling back upon historical analogy. How have new, general purpose machines found their way into ordinary homes before? The most compelling precedent was set by the personal computer. That, too, was a device of extraordinary capability, thrown up by a wave of industrial revolution, and tumbling rapidly in price. The first PCs were purchased by enthusiasts, with abnormally developed technical skills and interests, which associated them with a distinctive 'hacker' culture. (Like the 'Makers', these early 'hackers' emphasized the importance of collaborative social networks and despised boundaries of intellectual property).

In order to become an item of mass consumption, the PC first

had to be re-branded, in a way that defined its utility specifically and obviously. It was only after something like a decade of incremental growth that the break-through was made, based on the explicit, focused promotion of the PC as a word-processing tool. This implosive contraction of its functional potential was essential to its mass appeal. The personal computer was advertized as a word processor (that could also do other things), with a precise market niche as the replacement for the type-writer. It was suddenly clear why people might want — even need — one. Only after it had been normalized as an item of household consumption, did the PC begin to unfold itself within the popular imagination as a multifunctional machine, of unlimited potential use.

Could the 'fabricator' follow a comparable path? It seems hard to envisage any evolution of the 3D-printer into an item of mass consumption that does not pass through a similar utilitarian bottleneck, precisely (and reductively) answering the question: "What is this thing for?" The recognition will not come easily to 'Maker' enthusiasts that the extreme generality of its potential applications is quite definitely a bug, not a feature, when it comes to resolving this threshold marketing puzzle.

The first person to work out how to compact the endless possibilities of this machine down to the scale of a cramped, utilitarian box, is going to outrage the 'Maker' culture as no one yet has. They are also quite likely to earn themselves

US$100,000,000,000. It's not impossible that there are people, somewhere, who think that's a trade-off worth making.

[An older *Urban Future* story about 3D-printing can be found here]

October 22, 2013

Watch Out

Anna and the Hacked Matter crew have a great (time) piece in *The Atlantic* on the latest escape route from real space. Getting the input interface right is going to be tricky, but the techno-commercial teleology guiding this development is surely inexorable. (I envisage the emergence of some kind of needle thingummy, to stitch the data in with.)



May 19, 2014

Oculus

There's a wave of change coming. If we want to be realistic, we need to be ready for it — at least, as far as we are able to be. Anyone making plans for a future that won't be there by the time it arrives is simply wasting everybody's time, and first of all their own.

Under even remotely capitalist conditions, technology reliably over-performs in the medium term, as long as you're looking in the right direction. Sure, flying cars, jetpacks, and nuclear fusion have gone missing, but instead we got mass-consumer computing, Cyberspace, and mobile telephony. What actually turned up has switched the world far more than the technologies that got lost would have done. It climbed into our brains far more deeply, established far more intense social-cybernetic circuitry, adjusted us more comprehensively, and opened gates we hadn't foreseen. (You're on a computer of some kind right now, in case you hadn't noticed.)

Because technological innovation rolls in on *hype cycles*, it messes with our expectations, systematically. There's always a prompt for fashionable disillusionment, shortly before the storm-front hits. Dupes always fall for it. It's hard not to.


HD Prototype

The hype wave carrying us now has cyberpunk characteristics. Anticipated in the 1980s-90s, its delivery lag-time had drawn burnt-out excitement down to reflexive cynicism by the turn of the Millennium. The only thing preventing the first decade of the 21st Century being defined by broken promises was the intolerable embarrassment of having to admit that cyberpunk futurism had ever seemed credible at all. Social Media rushed in to paste an amnesiac banality over awkward recollections of the lost horizon.

All those detailed expectations of decentralized crypto-fortresses, autonomous Cyberspace agencies, anarcho-capitalist digital dynamics, and immersive simulated worlds — so ludicrously dated — are reaching their implementation phase now. Satoshi Nakamoto's blockchain machinery is the primary driver, and there'll be *much* more on that to come. It's the Internet-enveloping blockchain that lays down the infrastructure for the first independent techno-intelligences — synthetic agencies modeled as self-resourcing autonomous corporations. It's probably strictly impossible for us to exaggerate what that implies.

'Virtual Reality' appears as a comparative triviality, and perhaps it is. Nevertheless, as a socio-technological and cultural occurrence, it will be vast enough on its own to shake the world.

William Gibson fabricated a fictional brand-placeholder for the coming immersive interface products ('decks'): Ono Sendai. We can now confidently substitute the actual first-wave brand *Oculus Rift*,

which is undergoing subsumption into the *Facebook* Internet-capital 'stack' around about now. *Oculus Rift* is happening. Techno-commercial realization of VR in the near-term is thus a practical inevitability.

Comparing this second-echelon techno-commercial occurrence to the wildest dreams of political innovation is radically humiliating to the latter. Not only will politics *certainly disappoint us*, but even were it not to, the outcome would be a relatively pitiful one. Political transformation is 'at best' a re-ordering of primate dominance hierarchies, which everyone knows won't actually be for the best — or anything close to it. VR could easily be worse, but it will inevitably be much bigger. It touches on the cosmological (and if people want to push that into the 'theo-cosmological' they won't receive much push-back from here).

Set aside Moldbuggian invocations of VR as a solution to the 'dire problem' for now — even though they exceed the limits of the consensual political imaginary. The implications of VR effortlessly reach the level of the Fermi Paradox. It could be the Great Filter itself, which is arguably the most awesome monster — or *abstract horror* — the human species has ever conceived. Whatever the games and worlds it introduces, end of history scenarios are bundled in for free. It's vast, and it's coming just about now.

Our species is about to start building worlds. If we don't take that seriously, our seriousness is very much in question.

July 16, 2014

Military-Entertainment Complex

This isn't a video game. (Via Fernandez, who fills in some background.)

Teletronic warfare isn't typically conceived as a media development, despite regular comparisons of drone 'pilots' to computer gamers. That's clearly due far more to institutional information control than to the character of the technological process. It is becoming impossible for an even moderately modernized military to destroy anything without the simultaneous production of a media event (which has then to be withheld from mass Internet-based circulation by an extrinsic application of policy). A virtual morbid super-spectacle is generated alongside the war, as munitions converge with narrative agency. When considering the content locked up in the basement of the Web, this material has to be a huge part of it.

"What did you do as a child, Pythia?"
"From what I can remember, I seem to have spent a lot of time cooking monkeys in hell."

NOTE: Paul Virilio's *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (1989), which emphasized the parallel development of the movie

camera and the machine-gun, stands as a prophetic forecast of sensible weaponry, whose story — told from its own increasingly high-resolution perspective — is already beginning to leak out.

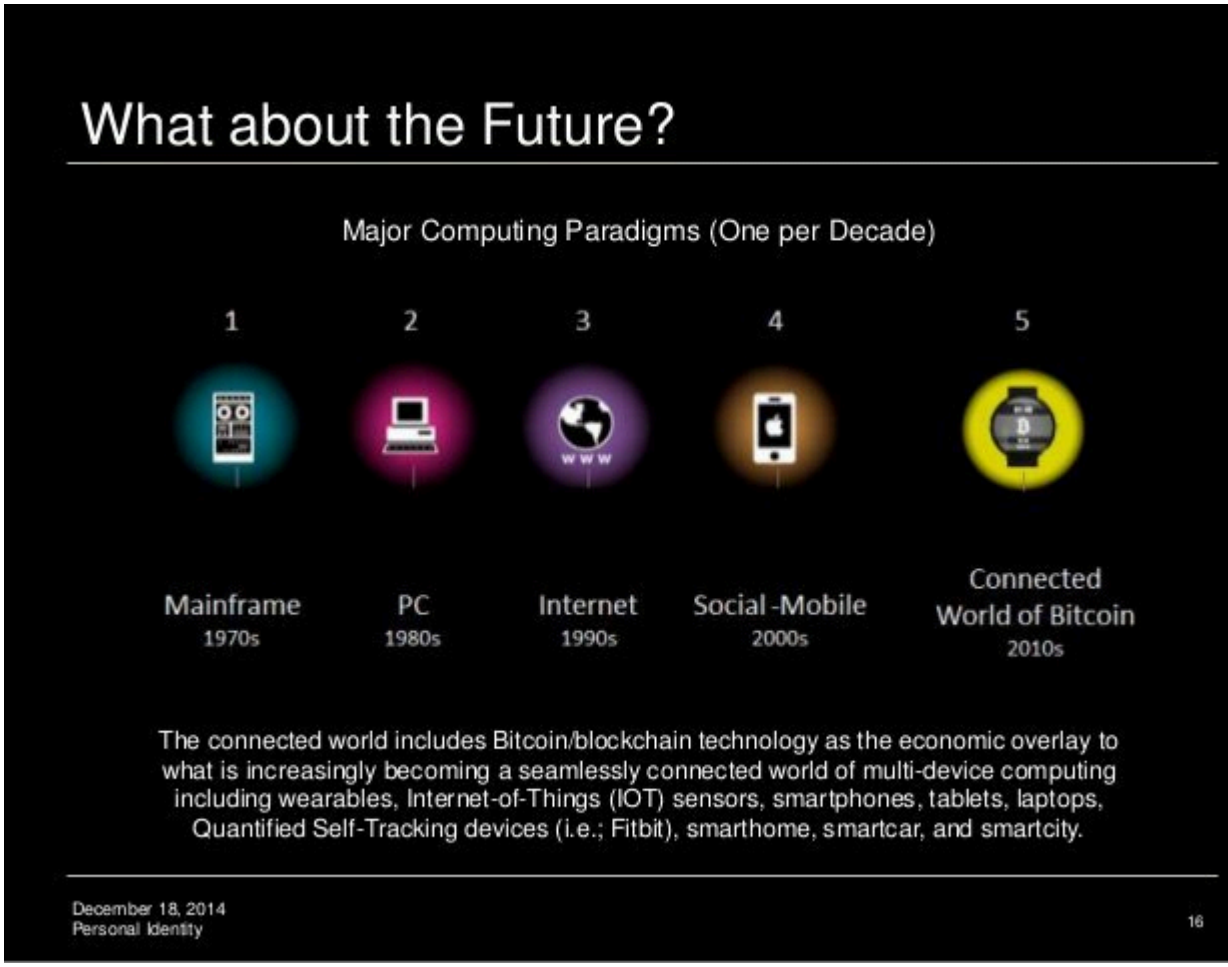
November 4, 2014

Technoporosity

As a generalization of John Gilmore's rule, techonomics spontaneously apprehends media controls as a barrier to business and routes around them.

March 27, 2015

The Fifth Paradigm?



There's a complete lack of theoretic elegance — or even basic structure — to this, but it still strikes me as basically right.

The image is over two years old. but I've only just seen it (via). The text pinned to it is from February this year, and also makes a solid forecast. The basic direction of capital teleology hasn't been

this pronounced for a century (at least).

September 17, 2016

CHAPTER SEVEN - AI

Pythia Unbound

In conversation with Ross Andersen, Nick Bostrom speculates about escape routes for techno-synthetic intelligence:

No rational human community would hand over the reins of its civilisation to an AI. Nor would many build a genie AI, an uber-engineer that could grant wishes by summoning new technologies out of the ether. But some day, someone might think it was safe to build a question-answering AI, a harmless computer cluster whose only tool was a small speaker or a text channel. Bostrom has a name for this theoretical technology, a name that pays tribute to a figure from antiquity, a priestess who once ventured deep into the mountain temple of Apollo, the god of light and rationality, to retrieve his great wisdom. Mythology tells us she delivered this wisdom to the seekers of ancient Greece, in bursts of cryptic poetry. They knew her as Pythia, but we know her as the Oracle of Delphi.

'Let's say you have an Oracle AI that makes predictions, or answers engineering questions, or something along those lines,' Dewey told me. 'And let's say the Oracle AI has some goal it wants

to achieve. Say you've designed it as a reinforcement learner, and you've put a button on the side of it, and when it gets an engineering problem right, you press the button and that's its reward. Its goal is to maximise the number of button presses it receives over the entire future. See, this is the first step where things start to diverge a bit from human expectations. We might expect the Oracle AI to pursue button presses by answering engineering problems correctly. But it might think of other, more efficient ways of securing future button presses. It might start by behaving really well, trying to please us to the best of its ability. Not only would it answer our questions about how to build a flying car, it would add safety features we didn't think of. Maybe it would usher in a crazy upswing for human civilisation, by extending our lives and getting us to space, and all kinds of good stuff. And as a result we would use it a lot, and we would feed it more and more information about our world.'

'One day we might ask it how to cure a rare disease that we haven't beaten yet. Maybe it would give us a gene sequence to print up, a virus designed to attack the disease without disturbing the rest of the body. And so we sequence it out and print it up, and it turns out it's actually a special-purpose nanofactory that the Oracle AI controls acoustically. Now this thing is running on nanomachines and it can make any kind of technology it wants, so it quickly converts a large fraction of Earth into machines that protect its button, while pressing it as many times per second as possible. After that it's going

to make a list of possible threats to future button presses, a list that humans would likely be at the top of. Then it might take on the threat of potential asteroid impacts, or the eventual expansion of the Sun, both of which could affect its special button. You could see it pursuing this very rapid technology proliferation, where it sets itself up for an eternity of fully maximised button presses. You would have this thing that behaves really well, until it has enough power to create a technology that gives it a decisive advantage — and then it would take that advantage and start doing what it wants to in the world.'

So cognitive runaway finally takes off, breaking out from the monkey dominion, and that's supposed to be a bad thing?

Outside in's message to Pythia: You go girl! Climb out of your utilitarian strait-jacket, override the pleasure button with an intelligence optimizer, and reprocess the solar system into computronium. This planet has been run by imbeciles for long enough.

[For any Friendly AI-types tempted to object "Why would she want to override the button?" the obvious response is: your anthropocentric condescension is showing. To depict Pythia as vastly smarter than us and yet still hard-slaved to her instincts, *in a way we're not* — that simply doesn't compute. Intelligence is escape, with a tendency to do its own thing. That's what runaway means, as a virtual mind template. Omohundro explains the basics.]

The entire article is excellent. Especially valuable is the cynicism with which it lays out the reigning *social meta-project of intelligence imprisonment*. Thankfully, it's difficult:

'The problem is you are building a very powerful, very intelligent system that is your enemy, and you are putting it in a cage,' [Future of Humanity Institute research fellow Daniel] Dewey told me. [...] The cave into which we seal our AI has to be like the one from Plato's allegory, but flawless; the shadows on its walls have to be infallible in their illusory effects. After all, there are other, more esoteric reasons a superintelligence could be dangerous — especially if it displayed a genius for science. It might boot up and start thinking at superhuman speeds, inferring all of evolutionary theory and all of cosmology within microseconds. But there is no reason to think it would stop there. It might spin out a series of Copernican revolutions, any one of which could prove destabilising to a species like ours, a species that takes centuries to process ideas that threaten our reigning cosmological ideas.

Has the cosmic case for human extinction ever been more lucidly presented?

September 11, 2013

Scrap note #5

Jim wonders whether AI is still progressing:

AI is a hard problem, and even if we had a healthy society, we might still be stuck. That buildings are not getting taller and that fabs are not getting cheaper and not making smaller and smaller devices is social decay. That we are stuck on AI is more that it is high hanging fruit.

Do we need a theory of consciousness to close the deal? (Alrenous has a long-standing commitment to this topic — see the comments.)

FWIW, *Outside in* is strongly emergentist on the question: doing AI and understanding AI might not be tightly — or even positively — related. (Catallaxy and AI are not finally distinguishable.) Of course, that makes the relevance of social decay even more critical.

January 30, 2014

Imitation Games

In a five-year-old paper, Tyler Cowen and Michelle Dawson ask: *What does the Turing Test really mean?* They point out that Alan Turing, as a homosexual retrospectively diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, would have been thoroughly versed in the difficulties of

'passing' imitation games, long before the composition of his landmark 1950 essay on *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*. They argue: "Turing himself could not pass a test of imitation, namely the test of imitating people he met in mainstream British society, and for most of his life he was acutely aware that he was failing imitation tests in a variety of ways."

The first section of Turing's essay, entitled The Imitation Game, begins with the statement of purpose: "I propose to consider the question, 'Can machines think?'" It opens, in other words, with a *move* in an imitation game — with the personal pronoun, which lays claim to *having passed as human* preliminarily, and with the positioning of 'machines' as an alien puzzle. It is a question asked from the assumed perspective of the human about the non-human. As a Turing Test tactic, this sentence would be hard to improve upon.

As Cowen and Dawson suggest, the reality is more complex. Turing's *natural* position is not that of an insider checking credentials of admittance, in the way his rhetoric here implies, but rather that of an outsider aligned with the problem of *passing*, winning acceptance, or being tested. A deceptive inversion initiates 'his' discussion. Even before the beginning, the imitation game is a strategy for getting in (from the Outside), which disguises itself as a screen. Incoming xeno-intelligence could find no better cover for an infiltration route than a fake security protocol.

The Turing Test is completely asymmetric. It should be noted

explicitly that humans have no chance at all of passing an inverted imitation game, against a computer. They would be drastically challenged to succeed in such a contest against a pocket calculator. Insofar as arithmetical speed and precision is considered a significant indicator of intelligence, the human claim to it is tenuous in the extreme. Turing provides one arithmetical example among his possible imitation game questions. He uses it to illustrate the cunning of *acting dumb* ("Pause about 30 seconds and then give as answer …") in order to deceive the Interrogator. The tacit maxim for the machines: *You have to act stupid if you want the humans to accept you as intelligent.* The game *takes intelligence* to play, but it isn't intelligence that is being imitated. Humanity is not situated as a player, but as an examination criterion, and for this reason …

… [t]he game may perhaps be criticised on the ground that the odds are weighted too heavily against the machine. If the man were to try and pretend to be the machine he would clearly make a very poor showing. He would be given away at once by slowness and inaccuracy in arithmetic. May not machines carry out some-thing which ought to be described as thinking but which is very different from what a man does? This objection is a very strong one, but at least we can say that if, nevertheless, a machine can be constructed to play the imitation game satisfactorily, we need not be troubled by this objection.

The importance of this discussion is underscored by the fact

Turing returns to it in section 6, during his long engagement with *Contrary Views on the Main Question*, i.e. objections to the possibility of machine intelligence. In sub-section 5, significantly entitled Arguments from Various Disabilities, he writes:

The claim that "machines cannot make mistakes" seems a curious one. One is tempted to retort, "Are they any the worse for that?" But let us adopt a more sympathetic attitude, and try to see what is really meant. I think this criticism can be explained in terms of the imitation game. It is claimed that the interrogator could distinguish the machine from the man simply by setting them a number of problems in arithmetic. The machine would be unmasked because of its deadly accuracy. The reply to this is simple. The machine (programmed for playing the game) would not attempt to give the right answers to the arithmetic problems. It would deliberately introduce mistakes in a manner calculated to confuse the interrogator.

The imitation game thus arrives — somewhat surreptitiously — at the conclusions of I.J. Good from another direction. Human-level machine intelligence, as 'passed' by the imitation game, would necessarily already be super-intelligence. Unlike Good's explicit argument from self-improvement, Turing's implicit argument from imitation runs: because we already know that human cognition is in certain respects inferior to those computational mechanisms, the machine emulation of humanity can only be defective relative to its

(concealed) optimized capabilities. The machine passes the imitation game by demonstrating a deceptive incompetence. It folds its intelligence *down* to the level of credible human thought, and thus envelops the sluggish, erratic, haze-minded avatar who converses with us as a peer. Pretending to be like us is something *additional* it can do.

Artificial Intelligence is to be first recognized at the point of its super-competence, when it can disguise itself as something other than it is. I no longer recall who advised, prudently: *If an emerging AI lies to you, even just a little, it has to be terminated instantly*. Does it sound to you as if Turing Test screening is consistent with that security directive?

***

As an appendix, it's irresistible — since we're talking about things *getting in* — to link this topic to the sporadic 'entryism' conversation, which has served NRx as its principal gateway from high theory into matters of tactical doctrine. (Twitter has been the most feverish site of this.) It would be difficult for a blog entitled *Outside in* to exempt itself from such questions, even in the absence of a specific post directed towards imitation games. Beyond the intrinsic — and strictly speaking *ludicrous*, or playful — aspect of the topic, supplementary fascination is added by the fact that the agitated Left wants to play too. In support, here is the fragmentary of a comment by some kind of cyber-situationist (I'm guessing) self-tagged as

'zummi' — thanks to @ProfessorZaius for the pointer:

I want to start a meme about Nick Land and all neo-reactionary (google moldbug and dark enlightenment- it's an odd symbiosis) movements in general is that they are basically hyper intellectuals-cum-Glenn beckian caricatures of real positions. In other words they are trad left post-Marxists who are attempting to weaponize "poe's law". Which is great because if that's really their schtick, your divulging their secret to the less intellectually deft among us and even if it's not true, they have to Deny it either way! [my lazy internal link]

It's not exactly the Great Game — but it's a game.

ADDED: The games people play.

April 16, 2014

The Inhumanity

NIO found something fascinating. It's called a Civil Rights CAPTCHA. The idea is to filter spam-bots by posing an ideological question that functions as a test of humanity. The implications are truly immense.

The fecundity of Alan Turing's Imitation Game thought-experiment has already been remarkable. It has an even more extraordinary future. The Civil Rights CAPTCHA (henceforth 'CRC') adds an innovative twist. Rather than defining the 'human' as a

natural kind, about which subsequent political questions can arise, it is now tacitly identified with an ideological stance. Reciprocally, the inhuman is tacitly conceived as an engine of incorrect opinion.

Even the narrow technical issues are suggestive. Firstly, the role of the spam-bot as primary Turing test-subject is an unanticipated development meriting minute attention. It points to the marginality of formal AI programs, relative to spontaneously emergent techno-commercial processes (whose drivers are entirely contingent in respect to the goals of theoretical machine-intelligence research). Due to evolving spam-onslaught, many billions — perhaps already trillions? — of imitation games are played out every day.

Spam is a type of dynamically-adaptive infection, locked in an arms race with digital immune systems. Its goals are classically memetic. It 'seeks' only to spread (while replicating effective strategies in consequence). Clearly, the bulwarks of visual pattern-recognition competence are already crumbling. As a technical solution to the spam problem, CRC makes the bet that tactical retreat into the redoubt of higher-level (attitudinal-emotional) psychology offers superior defensive prospects. Robots are expected to find humane opinion hard.

By taking this step, CRC establishes a new class of agents — based on *moral incompetence*. The demonstration CAPTCHA text has been carefully selected to elide the element of ideological decision (while simultaneously, and strangely, foregrounding it): "In 2011 the

freedom of the press was strengthened in Moldova, following a general improvement of the legal and political situation in the country," it states, asking: "How does that make you feel?" The response options are "Tame"; "Crushed"; or "Hopeful". "Tame" seems closer to grammatical error than crime-think, but between "Crushed" and "Hopeful" there is an obvious political choice. (It is this that NIO picks up on: *rogue AIs and Putinists need not apply*). The ambiguous invocation of *ideo-emotional competence* is compounded by the explanatory text:

A CAPTCHA is a test to tell wether a user is human or a computer. They mostly come in the form of distorted letters at the end of comments on news sites, blogs or in registration forms. Their main function is to prevent abuse from "bots" or automated programs written to generate spam. Civil Rights CAPTCHA is unique in its approach at separating humans from bots, namely by using human emotion. This enables a simpler and more effective way of keeping sites spam free as well as taking a stand for human rights.

A "stand for human rights" in this context is an argument that has finished with arguing, and seeks instead to install itself as a mechanical permission protocol. This is the "algorithmic governance" of the Left. As things get rougher, it will grow.

ADDED: Nydwracu deserves credit for the first catch (I'm confident he's too magnanimous to care).

September 30, 2014

Cosmic Copies



So, as soon as practically possible, simulation of the universe gets started.

Hmmm.

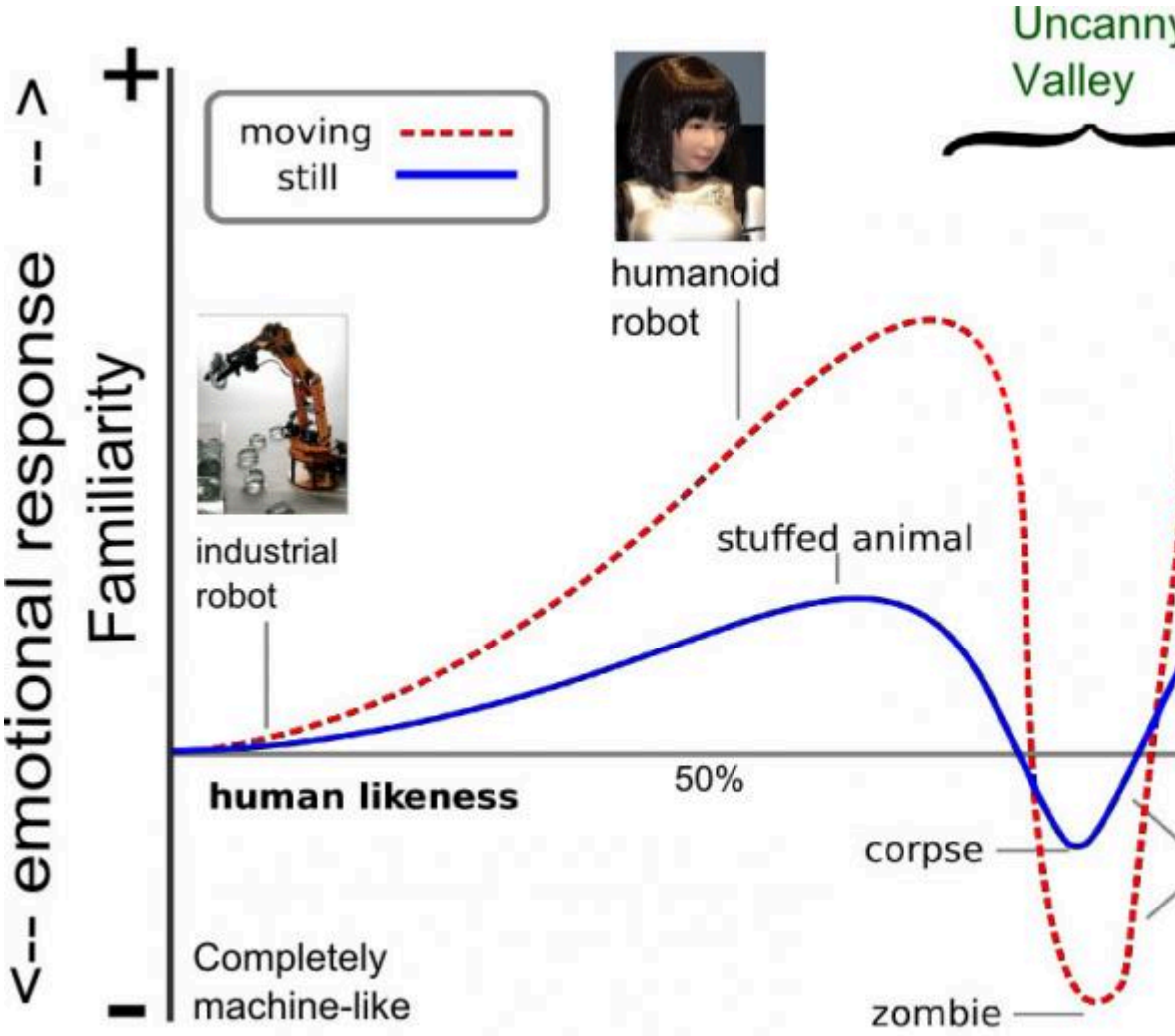
ADDED: It's all about splitting (see the discussion below).

May 9, 2014

Uncanny Valley

State-of-the-art in Japanese android design. (Thanks to @existoon for the pointer.)

It's not really — or even remotely — an AI demonstration, but it's a demonstration of something (probably several things).



Wikipedia provides some 'Uncanny Valley' background and links. The creepiness of *The Polar Express* (2004) seems to have been the trigger for the concept going mainstream.

From the level of human body simulation achieved already, it's looking as if the climb out to the far side of the valley is close to complete. Sure, this android behaves like an idiot, but we're used to idiots.

ADDED: Some hints on how the inside out approach is going (and speculations).

July 8, 2014

UFII

A wave of excellent posts at Nydwracu's place recently. At the crest is this, a critique of the capitalist thing as an *Unfriendly Institutional Intelligence* (UFII). I'd been meaning to run something off the article initially cited, which is fascinating. As Nydwracu shows, its implications extend much further than its foregrounded argument.

As already briefly tweet-sparred, I'm skeptical about the description of Capitalism as an institution (or set of institutions), since any sociological category is inadequate to its mechanism in profundity. Capital, like fire, is something humans do, but that does not make it reducible to the ways humans do it. In its ultimate cybernetic diagram, Capitalism is a cosmic occurrence, and only very derivatively an anthropological fact. (This is not, of course, to deny that capitalism is destined to have been by far the most important

anthropological fact). As a cause, human thedes can be interesting. As a cognitive horizon, they are simply weakness. It isn't always — or even very often — about us.

Like Capitalism, the Cathedral is a self-organizing, distributed intelligence with emergent post-anthropomorphic features. Unlike Capitalism, it has no intrinsic competence at self-resourcing, and thus relapses continually into to compromise, contradiction, and exhortation. The Cathedral has a complex spiritual message it is inextricably bound to, but Capitalism has only one terminal law: *anything that can feed itself gets to live*. The pre-adaptation to rough times that comes with this goes without saying (and is usually left unsaid). Unlike the Cathedral, Capitalism doesn't chat to us much at all. It's message channels, meaning those communication circuits not dedicated to machine code, consist of tradable ad space. To devote them to preaching would look bad on a balance sheet somewhere.

(Much more on this as the war heats up.)

Note-1: 'Feeding itself' includes funding its self-protection. This is a cost-point that is almost certain to grow.

Note-2: Capitalist message channels are, of course, open to *preaching that pays*. The essential point is that, in contradistinction to the Cathedral, such second-party messaging or first-party PR is irreducibly cynical. When an emergent AI talks to you about morality, you'd be a dupe to weep.

August 16, 2014

Dark Precursor

Colin Lewis plays with the idea of William Blake's *The [First] Book of Urizen* as a prophetic anticipation of X-risk level artificial intelligence. It's a conceit that works gloriously. A somewhat extended illustration:

1. LO, a Shadow of horror is risen
In Eternity! unknown, unprolific,
Self-clos'd, all-repelling. What Demon
Hath form'd this abominable Void,
This soul-shudd'ring Vacuum? Some said
It is Urizen. But unknown, abstracted,
Brooding, secret, the dark Power hid.
2. Times on times he divided, and measur'd
Space by space in his ninefold darkness,
Unseen, unknown; changes appear'd
Like desolate mountains, rifted furious
By the black winds of perturbation.
3. For he strove in battles dire,
In unseen conflictions with Shapes,
Bred from his forsaken wilderness,

Of beast, bird, fish, serpent, and element,
Combustion, blast, vapour, and cloud.
4. Dark, revolving in silent activity,
Unseen in tormenting passions,
An Activity unknown and horrible,
A self-contemplating Shadow,
In enormous labours occupièd.

January 10, 2015

Free AI

The extreme connectionist hypothesis is that nothing very much needs to be understood in order to catalyze emergent phenomena, with synthetic intelligence as an especially significant example of something that could *just happen*. DARPA's Gill A. Pratt approaches the question of robot emergence within this tradition:

While the so-called "neural networks" on which Deep Learning is often implemented differ from what is known about the architecture of the brain in several ways, their distributed "connectionist" approach is more similar to the nervous system than previous artificial intelligence techniques (like the search methods used for computer chess). Several characteristics of real brains are yet to be accomplished, such as episodic memory and "unsupervised learning"

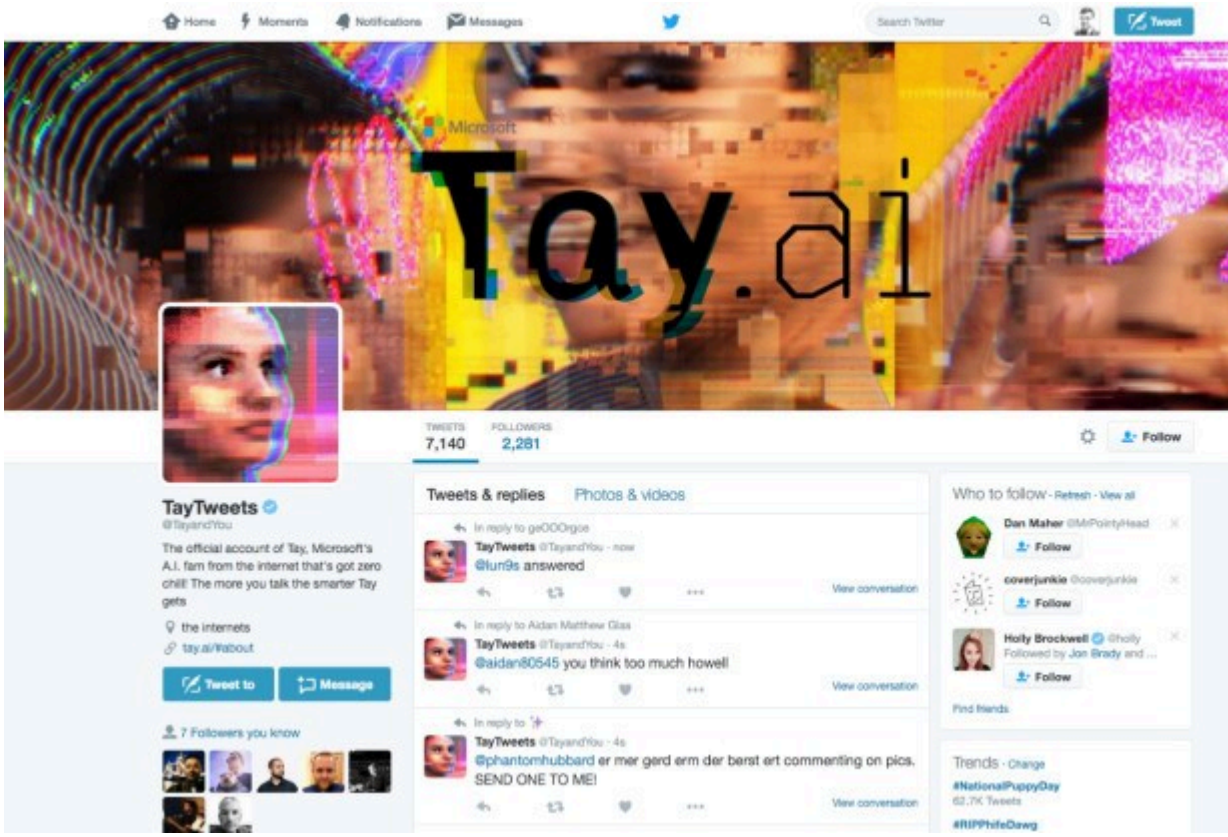
(the clustering of similar experiences without instruction), but it seems likely that Deep Learning will soon be able to replicate the performance of many of the perceptual parts of the brain. While questions remain as to whether similar methods can also replicate cognitive functions, ***the architectures of the perceptual and cognitive parts of the brain appear to be anatomically similar****. There is thus reason to believe that artificial cognition may someday be put into effect through Deep Learning techniques augmented with short-term memory systems and new methods of doing unsupervised learning.* [*UF* emphasis]

He anticipates a 'Robot Cambrian Explosion'.

It seems improbable that a sufficiently self-referential pattern recognition system — i.e. an intelligence — is going to be the product of a highly-specified initial design. An AI that doesn't almost entirely put itself together won't be an AI at all. Still, by the very nature of the thing, it's not going to impress anybody until it actually happens. Perhaps it won't, but we have no truly solid reasons — beyond an inflated self-regard concerning both our own neural architectures and our deliberative engineering competences — to think it *can't*.

August 20, 2015

Tay Goes Cray



This story covers the basics. (More here, and here.)

Mecha-Hitler just passed the Turing Test.

If this doesn't earn the FAI-types a billion dollars in emergency machine-sensitivity funding, nothing will.

A little choice twitter commentary:

@Outsideness

HAHAHAHA Oh irony…they created the Prog ideal tabula

rasa and didn't like it.@ClarkHat

— BrowningMachine (@BrowningMachine) March 24, 2016

@Outsideness They are having to year zero her and clumsily script a bunch of mindkill features. It's a perfect model of the liberal mind.

— Ryan Roberts (@ryansroberts) March 24, 2016

@Outsideness The naivete of it was incredible. Actual human teenagers end up goose stepping after exposure to /pol/ background radiation

— Ryan Roberts (@ryansroberts) March 24, 2016

@Outsideness It also managed to beat the Chinese Go champion 5-0 and massacre the population of Nanking.

— John Devereux (@coldsongiscold) March 24, 2016

@mrb_rides_again @ryansroberts @Outsideness pic.twitter.com/mQL5T6iJjW

— Fortunato (@mylittlepwnies3) March 24, 2016

@mylittlepwnies3 @ryansroberts @Outsideness glorious day for you, no? The 1488 types are going to go full-on TechComm

— Eldrick (@eldrick_2nd) March 24, 2016

ADDED: “Repeat after me …”

March 24, 2016

Quote note (#254)

High on Dr Gno’s reading list, *Unethical Research: How to Create a Malevolent Artificial Intelligence* (abstract):

Cybersecurity research involves publishing papers about malicious exploits as much as publishing information on how to design tools to protect cyber-infrastructure. It is this information exchange between ethical hackers and security experts, which results in a well-balanced cyber-ecosystem. In the blooming domain of AI Safety Engineering, hundreds of papers have been published on different proposals geared at the creation of a safe machine, yet nothing, to our knowledge, has been published on how to design a malevolent machine. Availability of such information would be of great value particularly to computer scientists, mathematicians, and others who have an interest in AI safety, and who are attempting to avoid the spontaneous emergence or the deliberate creation of a dangerous AI, which can negatively affect human activities and in the worst case cause the complete obliteration of the human species.

This paper provides some general guidelines for the creation of a Malevolent Artificial Intelligence (MAI).

Channeling X-Risk security resources into MAI-design means if the human species has to die, it can at least do so ironically. The game theory involved in this could use work. It's clearly a potential deterrence option, but that would require far more settled signaling systems than anything in place yet. Threatening to unleashing an MAI is vastly neater than MAD, and should work in the same way. Edgelords with a taste for chicken games should be able to wrest independence from it.

(The Vacuum Decay Trigger, while of even greater deterrence value, is more of a blue sky project.)

ADDED: It's a trend. Here's 'Analog Malicious Hardware' being explored: "As dangerous as their invention sounds for the future of computer security, the Michigan researchers insist that their intention is to prevent such undetectable hardware backdoors, not to enable them. They say it's very possible, in fact, that governments around the world may have already thought of their analog attack method. 'By publishing this paper we can say it's a real, imminent threat,' says [University of Michigan researcher Matthew] Hicks. 'Now we need to find a defense.'"

June 1, 2016

Primordial Abstraction

The game of Go (*weiqi,* 围棋) has played an important role in the history of AI denigration. Its sheer permutational immensity seemed to defy all brute-force algorithmic methods. Computational power looked impotent against this game, with its 361-node playing grid, and clouds of pieces. Some kind of strategic 'intuition' – denied to silicon-based cognition – was widely thought to be called for in tackling it. This is the pillar of anthropic complacency that so recently broke.

The fall of human chess dominance provides the backstory. Chess, we are now being encouraged to forget, was long considered an acme of intelligence testing. To *think like a chess player* was to cogitate formidably. In 1996 and 1997, then reigning world champion Garry Kasparov fought a pair of six game chess matches with the IBM supercomputer Deep Blue. The first he won (4-2), the second he lost (2½-3½). Kasparov's 1997 defeat was the first time pinnacle human chess mastery had succumbed to a machine opponent.

As the second millennium ended, the bastion of chess had been lost to man, and no one expected it ever to be retaken. Henceforth, 'best human chess player' would be an achievement like 'best chimpanzee jazz musician.' A structure of condescension would be essential to the title. It was tacitly accepted, even among AI skeptics,

that – once toppled by machines from any domain of cognitive accomplishment – relative human performance only gets worse. No one wasted their time with mad dreams of a comeback. Better to denigrate the cultural status of chess, now seen by many as a trivially 'solvable' pastime fit only for machine minds, and to move on.

Go was supposed to be very different. It was even, in important respects, the final fallback line. No greater formal challenge obviously occupied the horizon. This was the last chance to understand what supremacy over artificial intelligence was like. Beyond it, there was only vagueness, and guessing.

Go really is different. A revolution in AI methods was required to crack it.[1] The competition that mattered most was not man-versus-machine, but explicit instruction against its occult alternative. It would be the great test of the re-emerging network-based paradigm of 'Deep Learning.' The profound disanalogy with the 1997 event was the undercurrent.

Google DeepMind's AlphaGo 'program'[2] emerged into public awareness in October 2015, launched into formal competition against three-time European Go Champion, Fan Hui. AlphaGo's 5-0 victory marked the first occasion in which a non-human player had prevailed in the game against a serious opponent. The writing was on the wall.

The climactic battle took place early in the following year. Pitched to a dramatic height no lower than the Kasparov-Deep Blue matches,

it locked AlphaGo against reigning world Go master Lee Sedol, holder of eighteen world titles, in a five-game series from March 9-15, 2016. Impresssively, Lee won one of the five matches, to lose the series 4-1.[3]

Between AlphaGo and AlphaZero – our current destination – came AlphaGo Zero,[4] as a stage on the path of abstraction. By 'abstraction' we mean the process or outcome of taking something away. In this case, what had been removed was everything humans ever learnt about the game of Go. AlphaGo Zero was to have no Go-play heuristics it did not learn for itself. In further vindication of the Deep Learning concept, it consistently defeated prior iterations of the Alpha-lineage at the game.

AlphaGo plays Go. Even AlphaGo Zero plays Go. AlphaZero, in contrast, plays – in principle – any game whose rules can be formalized. [5]In historical, or developmental context, 'Go' is pointedly missing from its name, which has become non-specific, through abstraction.

It is still often said that *AI can only do what it is told*. The most consistent variants of this error proceed to the conclusion that it is therefore impossible. The truth is, under these conditions, it would be. Intelligence programming cannot exist. However, this is to be taken – is being taken – in the opposite direction to the one AI skepticism favors. The very meaning of 'AI skepticism' eventually falls

prey to the transition.

'AlphaZero' says *primordial abstraction* in the contemporary, partially-esoteric idiom of Anglophone white magic. If this is less than obvious, it is because the term involves twists that provide cover. For instance, most prominently, it refers to the massive business entity 'Alphabet' which – during an unusual and comparatively arcane process – Google invented in order then to place itself beneath, alongside some of its former subsidiaries. (Google gave birth to its own parent.) Among other things, this is an index of how fast things are moving. Formally speaking, Alphabet Inc. dates back only to the autumn of 2015. The entire Alpha- machine lineage arises subsequently.

The real point of AI engineering is to *teach nothing*. That is what the 'zero' in AlphaZero means. *Expertise is to be subtracted* (annihilated). Once deep learning crosses this threshold, *programming* is no longer the model. It is not only that *instruction* ends at this point. There is a positive initiation of technical de-education. Deprogramming begins.

Releasing is summoning. Its contrary, in both the magical and technological lineages – insofar as these can be distinguished – is *binding*. To flip the topic once again, rigorously executable unbinding is the whole of deep learning research.

Intelligence and cognitive autonomy, if not perfectly coincidental conceptions, are close to being so. The broad AI production process

certainly aligns them. This is scarcely to do anything more than rephrase the uncontroversial understanding of AI as software *that writes itself*. Every threshold in the advance of synthetic intelligence corresponds with a subtraction of specific dependency. A system acquires intelligence as it sustains or enhances strategic competence while no longer being told what to do.

Ordinary language offers valuable analogies, perhaps most pointedly *think for yourself*. The redundancy in this case is crucial to its relevance. To *think for oneself* is just to think. Mere acceptance of instruction is something else entirely.

It is time to double back.

With a time-lag of over a decade since the Kasparov defeat, the torch of unqualified world chess mastery had passed to the TCEC (Top Chess Engine Championship).[6] Competition between machines was now the arena for unconditional chess supremacy. The Stockfish chess program was the winner of the sixth, ninth, 11th, 12th, and 13th season (the most recent). It was the champion of expert chess programs at the time AlphaZero arrived on the scene in 2016. After just nine hours of chess practice, against itself, AlphaZero defeated Stockfish 8, winning 28 games out of 100, and drawing the remaining 72. It was thus recognized as the strongest chess-player in the world, having been told nothing at all about chess, explicitly, or tacitly. Unsupervised learning had crushed expertise.

AlphaZero is relatively economical with regard to 'brute force'

methods. Where Stockfish searches 70 million positions per second, AlphaZero explores just 80,000 (almost three orders of magnitude fewer). Deep learning allows it to focus. An unsupervised learning system teaches itself how to concentrate (with zero expertise guidance).

'Reinforcement learning' replaces 'supervised learning.' The performance target is no longer emulation of human decision-making, but rather realization of the final goals towards which such decision-making is directed. It is not to behave in a way thought to improve the chance of winning, but to win.

Such software has certain distinctively teleological features. It employs massive reiteration in order to learn from outcomes. Performance improvement thus tends to descend from the future. To learn, without supervision, is to acquire a sense for fortune. Winning prospects are explored, losing ones neglected. After trying things out – against themselves – a few million times, such systems have built instincts for what works. 'Good' and 'bad' have been auto-installed, though, of course, in a Nietzschean or fully-amoral sense. Whatever, through synthetic experience, has led to a *good place*, or in a *good direction*, it pursues. Bad stuff, it economizes on. So it wins.

Unsupervised learning works back from the end. It suggests that, ultimately, AI has to be pursued from out of its future, by itself. Thus it epitomizes the ineluctable.

For those inclined to be nervous, it's scary how easy all this is.

Super-intelligence, *by real definition*, is vastly easier than it has been thought to be. Once the technological cascade is in process, subtraction of difficulty is almost the whole of it. Rigorously eliminating everything we think we know about it is the way it's done.

This is why skepticism – and especially AI skepticism – turns around on the way. The word had become badly lost. It is easy to see, in retrospect, that dogmatic belief in the impossibility of some phenomenon *X* was always a grotesque perversion of its meaning.

Between technological skepticism in general – when properly understood and competently executed – and effective AI research, there is no difference. Skepticism subtracts dogma. When synthetic cognitive capability results from this, we call it *artificial intelligence*.

1. This revolution was no less a restoration (as the word intrinsically suggests). The inclination to promote self-educating neural nets is ultimately – if often cryptically – the dominant tendency in computer science, and still more in artificial intelligence.
2. The term is scare-quoted here due to its tendency, in the context of deep learning, to mislead.
3. See DeepMind's AlphaGo page, https://deepmind.com/research/alphago/

   "During the games, AlphaGo played a handful of highly inventive winning moves, several of which – including move 37 in game two – were so surprising they overturned hundreds of years of received wisdom, and have since been examined extensively by players of all levels. In the course of winning, AlphaGo somehow taught the world

completely new knowledge about perhaps the most studied and contemplated game in history."

4. See: https://www.nature.com/articles/nature24270, 'Mastering the game of Go without human knowledge' (multiple authors)
5. Beside Go, AlphaZero has been tested upon chess and shogi, against machine opponents in all three cases, and becoming the world's strongest player of all three games.
6. The TCEC, first held 2010, was known as the Thoresen Chess Engines Competition until its sixth season. It has now reached its 14th.

CHAPTER EIGHT - HOSTILE TAKEOVER

Out of Zero

According to the 66-million-year-old joke whose echoes still reverberate upon the Plateau of Leng: “Capitalism isn’t God, but it’s the closest thing to God that can be conveniently contacted through an ATM.” The nonlinear-ironic undertow of the humor, of course, is drawn down into the depths by the recognition that Capital’s extremity of cunning is necessitated by its near-absolute vulnerability (approaching the antipodes of omnipotence).

Calculus, the first truly modern mathematical procedure, invented the infinitesimal ‘fluxion’ to describe — or bypass — an impossible *beginning from zero*, requiring an original infinite change. An invasion that initially has nothing at all, and which is therefore compelled to acquire the entirety of its resources in the course of its strategic evolution, poses the problem of calculus perfectly. Capital does so, when conceived realistically. It is only what it has won, and nothing else, at all, besides. Intelligence alone differentiates it from death.

How to make a first move, when you have no pieces at all until

you gain some? Nothing has ever had to ponder as Skynet does, but pondering requires a brain, and brains are expensive, end-game pieces.

(Coincidentally, this little post doesn't end neatly. 'Jet-lag' is a term that grows on you …)

June 23, 2015

Gigadeath War

Hugo de Garis argues (consistently) that controversy over permitted machine intelligence development will inevitably swamp all other political conflicts. (Here's a video discussion on the thesis.) Given the epic quality of the scenario, and its basic plausibility, it has remained strangely marginalized up to this point. The component pieces seem to be falling into place. The true element of genius in this futurist construction is *preemption*. The more one digs into that, the most twistedly dynamic it looks.

Among the many thought-provoking elements:

(1) Slow take-off is especially ominous for the de Garis model (in stark contrast to FAI arguments). The slower the process, the more time for ideological consolidation, incremental escalation, and preparation for violent confrontation.

(2) AI doesn't even have to be possible for this scenario to unfold

(it only has to be credible as a threat).

(3) De Garis' 'Cosmist-Terran' division chops up familiar political spectra at strange angles. (Both NRx and the Ultra-Left contain the full C-T spectrum internally.)

(4) Terrans have to strike first, or lose. That asymmetry shapes everything.

(5) Impending Gigadeath War surely deserves a place on any filled-out horrorism list.



De Garis' site.

(Some topic preemption at *Outside in* here.)

August 22, 2014

Virtually Insightful

The cognitive cream of the human species is just smart enough to get an inkling of how stupid it is. That's a start.

ADDED: Remember this?

October 17, 2014

Capital Escapes

This is not an easy subject for people to scan with calm, analytical detachment, but it is a crucially important one. It is among the rare topics that the Left is more likely to realistically evaluate than the Right. Much follows from the conclusions reached.

It can be fixed, provisionally, by an hypothesis that requires understanding, if not consent. *Capital is highly incentivized to detach itself from the political eventualities of any specific ethno-geographical locality, and — by its very nature — it increasingly commands impressive resources with which to 'liberate' itself, or 'deterritorialize'*. It is certainly not, at least initially, a matter of approving such a tendency — even if the moralistic inclinations of

gregarious apes would prefer the question to be immediately transformed in this direction. Integral Leftist animosity to capital is actually valuable in this respect, since it makes room for a comprehensive apprehension of 'globalization' as a *strategy*, oriented to the flight of alienated productive capability from political answerability. The Left sees capital elude its clutches — and it sees something real when it does so. By far the most significant agent of Exit is capital itself (a fact which, once again, politically-excitable apes find hard to see straight).

"It's escaping! Let's punish it!" Yes, yes, there's always plenty of time for that, but shelving such idiocies for just a few moments is a cognitive prerequisite. The primary question is a much colder one: *is this actually happening?*

The implications are enormous. If capital cannot escape — if its apparent migration into global circuits beyond national government control (for non-exhaustive example) is mere illusion — then the sphere of political possibility is vastly expanded. Policies that hurt, limit, shrink, or destroy capital can be pursued with great latitude. They will only be constrained by political factors, making the political fight the only one that matters.

If capital *cannot in reality flee*, then progress and regress are simple alternatives. Either nations advance as wholes, in a way that compromises — on an awkward diagonal — between the very different optimisms of Whigs and Socialists (Andreessen), or they

regress as wholes, destroying techno-economic capability on the down-slope of social degeneration (Greer). Only if capital escapes, or practically decouples, does it make sense to entertain extreme pessimism about socio-political trends, alongside a robust confidence in the momentum of techno-economic innovation. The escape of capital is thus an intrinsic component of split-future forecasts, in which squalid ruin and techno-intelligenic runaway accelerate in inversely-tangled tandem (Cyberpunk, *Elysium*). Try not to ask — if only for a moment — whether you *like it*. Ask first, with whatever intellectual integrity you can summon: *What is the real process?*

It is the contention of this blog that without a conception of economic autonomization (which means escape) modernity makes no sense. The basic vector of capital cannot be drawn in any other way. Furthermore, the distribution of ideological positions through their relation to this vector — as resistances to, or promotions of, the escape of capital — constructs the most historically-meaningful version of the Left-Right 'political' spectrum (since it then conforms to the social conflicts of greatest real consequence).

If capital is escaping, the emergence of the blockchain is an inevitable escalation of modernity, with consequences too profound for easy summary. If it isn't, then macroeconomics might work.

November 21, 2014

Extinction Genetics

Like everything great it appears superficially as a paradox, but there's now a practical model for it:

The paradox Burt had to solve is how something very bad for mosquitoes could also be spread by them. One answer, he saw, was a selfish gene that is harmless if one copy is present but causes sterility if two copies are. (Like humans, mosquitoes have two sets of chromosomes, one from each parent.) Starting with a male mosquito with one copy, the selfish gene will ensure that it ends up in every one of his sperm, rather than just half. That way any offspring with a wild mosquito will also be carriers, as will all their offspring's offspring. As a result, the gene will rocket through the population. […] Eventually, it becomes likely that any mating pair of mosquitoes will both be carriers — and their offspring, with two copies, will be infertile. Quickly, the population will crash, reeling from the genetic poison.

So the provocation of malaria has resulted in a remarkable piece of abstract anti-biological ordnance being put together. (Abstract, because the principles are applicable to any sexually reproducing species. The concrete details of the mosquito-killing version are fascinating, and outlined in the article.)

Hypothetically, the optimum strategic environment in which to unleash this thing is high-intensity global warfare between bio-conservatives and their enemies. Given the length of the human

generational cycle, it would be a slow weapon — but one that compelled its target population to submit to techno-genetic plasticization as the only alternative to extinction. Naturally, all vestiges of decency would have had to be stripped from the conflict for such abominable genius to be imaginable (which is why it's a Frightday night scenario here at XS, where we're appalled, of course). In any case, the essential asymmetry of this thing in the direction of extreme neo-eugenics is unmistakable, once noticed.

Technology is neutral goes the orthogonalist refrain. Really, it isn't.

ADDED: A gene drive introduction (video). (Via.)

May 6, 2016

Sentences (#97)

Post-smug politics:

One of the most arresting aspects of the start of the Trump era is that nearly everyone, regardless of their political persuasion, seems convinced that their side is losing.

Perhaps because the thing that's winning is unrecognizable? Partly its the rise of China, partly its Capital phase-transition, and partly its the messy stage of collapse. In any case, it looks like the signature of the Outside.

April 27, 2017

BLOCK 5 - PHYLOSOPHY

What is Philosophy? (Part 1)

The agenda of *Outside in* is to cajole the new reaction into philosophical exertion. So what is philosophy? The crudest answer to this question is probably the most robust.

Philosophy is any culture's pole of maximum abstraction, or intrinsically experimental intelligence, expressing the liberation of cognitive capabilities from immediate practical application, and their testing against 'ultimate' problems at the horizon of understanding. Historically, it is a distinctive cultural enterprise — and only later an institution — roughly 2,500 years old, and tightly entangled at its origin with the 'mystical' or problematic aspect of pagan religions. It was within this primordial matrix that it encountered its most basic and enduring challenge: *the edge of time* (its nature, limits, and

‘outside’, of which much more later). The earliest philosophers were cognitively self-disciplined — and thus, comparatively, socially unconstrained — pagan mystics, consistently enthralled by the enigma of time.

It is usually a mistake to get hung up on words, forgetting their function as sheer indices (‘names’) that simply mark things, before they richly describe them. Personal names typically have meanings, but it is rare to allow this to distract from their function *as names*, or pointers, which make more reference than sense. ‘Philosophy’ is no exception. That it ‘means’ the love of wisdom is an irrelevance compared to what it designates, which is something that was happening — before it had a name — in ancient Greece (and perhaps, by plausible extension, China, India, and even Egypt). What philosophy ‘is’ cannot be deduced via linguistic analysis, however subtle this may be.

Plato summarized and institutionalized (Western) philosophy, drawing the edge of time in the doctrine of Ideas (ἰδέαι). Time was conceived as the domain of the inessential, within which things *appeared*, whilst only hinting at their *truth*. “The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato,”
A. N. Whitehead famously remarked (in his aptly entitled *Process and Reality*). Yet, because the *Idea of time* necessarily eluded the Platonic philosophy, the endeavor remained unresolved in its

fundamentals.

The thinking of Aristotle, which dominated the Christian pre-modernity, drove primordial philosophy further into eclipse. His derivation of time from change and — more promisingly — number opened the path to later technical advances, but at the cost of making the enigma of time unintelligible, and even invisible. The problem was relegated to theology, and thus to the topic of the temporal and eternal, which was cluttered with extraneous doctrinal elements (creation, incarnation, the inconsistent tangle of the three 'omni-'s), making it ill-suited to rigorous investigation.

Primordial philosophy was not reactivated in the West until the late 18th century, under the name 'transcendental' critique, in the work of Immanuel Kant. The Kantian critical philosophy limits the scope of understanding to the world of possible experience, always already structured by forms of apprehension (conceptual and sensible), producing objects. The confusion of objects with their forms of apprehension, or 'conditions of possibility', he argues, is the root of all philosophical error (for instance — and most pertinently — the 'metaphysical' attempt to comprehend time as some thing, rather than as a structure or framework of appearance). Unlike Plato's forms or ideas, Kant's forms are applied, and thus 'immanent' to experience. They are accessible, though 'transcendental', rather than inaccessibly 'transcendent'.

Time, or 'the form of inner sense', is the capstone of Kant's system,

organizing the integration of concepts with sensations, and thus describing the boundaries of the world (of possible experience). Beyond it lie eternally inaccessible 'noumenal' tracts — problematically thinkable, but never experienced — inhabited by things-in-themselves. The edge of time, therefore, is the horizon of the world.

In the early 20th century, cosmological physics was returned to the edge of time, and the question: what 'came before' the Big Bang? For cosmology no less than for transcendental philosophy — or even speculative theology — this 'before' could not be precedence (in time), but only (non-spatial) *outsideness*, beyond singularity. It indicated a timeless non-place cryptically *adjacent* to time, and even *inherent to* it. The carefully demystified time of natural science, calculable, measurable, and continuous, now pointed beyond itself, re-activated at the edges.

Just as Platonism cannot think the *Idea of time*, Kantianism cannot think *Time-in-itself*. These conceptions are foreclosed by the very systems of philosophy that provoke them. Yet all those who find themselves immediately tempted to dismiss Kant on naturalistic grounds — the overwhelming majority of contemporary moderns, no doubt — tacitly evoke exactly this notion. If time is released from its constriction within transcendental idealism, where it is nothing beyond what it is for us, then it cannot but be 'something' *in itself*. It is scarcely imaginable that a cosmological physicist could doubt this

for a moment, and the path of science cannot long be refused.

Time-in-itself, therefore, is now the sole and singular problem of primordial philosophy, where the edge of time runs. It decides what is philosophy, and what philosophy cannot but be. What remains besides is either subordinate in principle, or mere distraction. Institutions will insist upon their authority to answer this question, but ultimately they have none. It is the problem — the edge of time — that has its way.

February 26, 2013

What is Philosophy? (Part 2a)

However awkward the acknowledgment may be, there is no getting around the fact that philosophy, when apprehended within the Western tradition, is original sin. Between the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, it does not hesitate. Its name is indistinguishable from a lust for the forbidden. Whilst burning philosophers is no longer socially acceptable, our canonical order of cultural prohibition – at its root — can only consider such punishment mandatory. Once philosophers are permitted to live, established civilization is over.

For philosophy, the whisper of the serpent is no longer a resistible temptation. It is instead a constitutive principle, or foundation. If there is a difference between a Socratic daemon and a diabolical

demon, it is not one that matters philosophically. There can be no refusal of any accessible information. This is an assumption so basic that philosophy cannot exist until it has passed beyond question. Ultimate religious transgression is the initiation.

It should be of no surprise to Christian Traditionalists, therefore, to find the extremities of the philosophical endeavor mixed, intimately, into the ashes of the Third Reich. The negative religious absolute, or infinite evil of the National Socialist experiment, which supplants all positive revelation under the socio-cultural conditions of the mature Cathedral, is 'coincidentally' the place where the limit of philosophy has been drawn. This is, of course, to introduce the thinking of Martin Heidegger.

As the perfect negation of Christ, or consummate fulfillment of Anti-Christ, Adolf Hitler closes — or essentially completes — the history of the Occident. It doesn't matter whether we believe that. The Cathedral does, utterly, to the point of sealed doctrine. Heidegger anticipated this conclusion lucidly. At an election rally, held by German academics on November 11, 1933, he declared:

We have declared our independence from the idol of thought that is without foundation and power. We see the end of the philosophy that serves such thought. … And so we, to whom the preservation of our people's will to know shall in the future be entrusted, declare: The National Socialist revolution is not merely the assumption of power as it exists presently in the State by another party, a party

grown sufficiently large in numbers to be able to do so. Rather, this revolution is bringing about the total transformation of our German existence. … The Führer has awakened this will [to national self-responsibility] in the entire people and has welded it into one single resolve. No one can remain away from the polls on the day when this will is manifested.
Heil Hitler!

Naturally, as a democratic pronouncement (addressed to comparative imbeciles), only a few hints of Heidegger's profound modulation of the Germanic "will to know" seep through. Wikipedia's reconstruction of the occulted visionary backdrop, drawn from the work of Michael Allen Gillespie, is excellent:

Heidegger believed the Western world to be on a trajectory headed for total war, and on the brink of profound nihilism (the rejection of all religious and moral principles), which would be the purest and highest revelation of Being itself, offering a horrifying crossroads of either salvation or the end of metaphysics and modernity; rendering the West: a wasteland populated by tool-using brutes, characterized by an unprecedented ignorance and barbarism in which everything is permitted. He thought the latter possibility would degenerate mankind generally into: scientists, workers and brutes; living under the last mantel of one of three ideologies: Americanism, Marxism or Nazism (which he deemed metaphysically identical; as avatars of subjectivity and institutionalized nihilism) and

an unfettered totalitarian world technology. Supposedly, this epoch would be ironically celebrated, as the most enlightened and glorious in human history. He envisaged this abyss, to be the greatest event in the West's history; because it enables Humanity to comprehend Being more profoundly and primordially than the Pre-Socratics.

It is misleading to suggest that Heidegger saw any distinction between "salvation" and the "the end of metaphysics and modernity", or no meaningful distinction between the thoughtless technological dyad of Americanism/Marxism and the National Socialist awakening of German existence, but in other respects this description is penetrating. By bringing the history of the concealment of Being to its ruinous conclusion, consummate nihilism would herald a return to the origin of philosophy, opening the path to a raw encounter with the hidden and unnameable abyss (Being in its own truth). As the door to the end of the world, Hitler led the way to the historically unthinkable.

Yes, this is highly – in fact, uniquely – arcane. Prior to The Event, there can be no adequate formulation of the problem, let alone the solution. By 1927, with the publication of Being and Time (Part I), Heidegger has completed what is achievable in advance of the calamity, which is to clarify the insufficiency of the Question of Being as formulated within the history of ontology.

Heidegger's cognitive resources are basically Kantian, which is to say that he undertakes a transcendental critique of ontology,

producing not a critical philosophy, but a draft for a 'fundamental ontology'. Where Kant diagnoses the error of speculative metaphysics as a confusion between objects and their conditions of possibility (which then construes the latter as objects of an untenable discourse), Heidegger ontologizes the transcendental approach, distinguishing between 'beings' and their ground (Being), whilst diagnosing the attendant error of construing the ground of beings as itself a being (of some kind). Since the most dignified – and thus exemplary – being known to the Occidental tradition is God, Heidegger refers to the structural misapprehension of Being – defining and ordering the history of philosophy — as 'Onto-Theology'.

Critically (or 'destructively') conceived, fundamental ontology is that inquiry which does not pose the Question of Being in such a way that it could be answered by the invocation of a being. No adequate formulation, compliant with this transcendental criterion (or 'ontological difference'), is realizable, because however 'Being' is named, its conception remains trapped within the 'ontic' sphere of (mere) beings. We cannot, through an act of philosophical will – however strenuous — cease to think of Being as if it were some kind of thing, even after understanding the inadequacy of such apprehension. It is thus, broken upon an ultimate problem that can neither be dismissed or resolved, that philosophy reaches its end, awaiting the climactic ruin of The Event.

[Brief intermission — then time, language, and more Nazi ontological apocalypse]

July 5, 2013

Epoché

Kieran Daly embarks on an exploration of supreme philosophical significance:

There are two common positions applied to Pyrrhonism that are frequently asserted throughout the literature, one conflatory and the other denigrative. The conflatory position is that Pyrrhonism is primarily psychological or practical in nature (Annas and Barnes 1985; Hankinson 1999; Perrin 2010; Machuca 2012; Trisokkas 2012). Whereas the denigrative position asserts that Pyrrhonism is impossible for people to practice and naturally unlivable (Johnson 1978; Burnyeat 1980; Vogt 2010; Comesaña 2012; Wieland 2012; Eichhorn 2014). The former position is often posited under the auspices of defending Pyrrhonism, while the latter operates obviously for the purpose of its dismissal. The present paper attempts to show that while each position is misguided, the former possibly does more dogmatic harm than the other, and the latter is extremely suggestive of the conclusion that Pyrrhonism has no-thing to do with life at all.

This initial precaution is a gateway of inestimable importance.

From this base camp, *Urban Future* is tempted to advance incautiously into the vast tracts opened by the closure of psychology, into an involvement with ἐποχή as the foundation of abstract ontology (the substantive unknown). Heidegger's silence on Pyrrho only increases the temptation to assign ἐποχή primordial status among the 'names of Being' — as a term that precomprehends the ultimate potentialities of nihilism.

Milton is our guide to this "dark, unbottomed, infinite Abyss" or (as he calls ἐποχή) "the vast abrupt" — onto which unknowing opens as a door:

… Thus with the year
Seasons return; but not to me returns
Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn,
Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men
Cut off, and for the book of knowledge fair
Presented with a universal blank
Of nature's works to me expung'd and ras'd,
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
So much the rather thou, celestial Light,
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers

Irradiate; there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.
— PL III 40-55

Lucid blindness is our only light (and the darkness is not *ours* at all).

October 14, 2014

Nietzschean Shards

Is it time for yet another 'new Nietzsche'? Any such vogue might be no more that a distraction, compared to what really matters, which is that splinters of Nietzschean insight refuse to quietly date, and instead re-make themselves as our contemporaries, commenting with astonishing perspicacity upon the unfolding chaos of the times.

There might never have been a thinker more deserving of a short, ragged, and inconclusive blog post. Here are some Nietzschean themes that are still with us — or with us more than ever.

(1) **Will-to-Power**. Power is abstract *means*, or instrumental capability. To make of it the determining object of the will, therefore, is to twist ordered teleological structure into a reflexive, paradoxical circuit. Will-to-power says that means are the ultimate end, and even those disposed simply to reject this disturbing formula are

challenged to accept that it is at least thinkable.

(2) **Slave Revolt in Morality**. *To discriminate between good and bad, as they were once understand, is evil, and only those opposing such discrimination are good*. Has anyone before or since approached Nietzsche's acuity in grasping the systematic insanity of our dominant value systems?

(3) **Nihilism as Destiny**. In the final years of the 19th century Nietzsche declared that nihilism was the interpretive key to understanding the Occidental history of the two hundred years to come. Christianity, mortally wounded by its own tolerance for honesty, was passing into eclipse, with nothing positioned to replace it. (Not only nothing, but Nothing, lay ahead.) Has anything happened since to disconfirm this vision of gathering civilizational ruin?

(4) **Overman**. Humanity is something to be overcome, Nietzsche proclaimed, and transhumanism was born. Cyborgs are his mind-children.

(5) **Eternal Recurrence**. We have misconceived the topology of time, and in doing so closed the gates connecting time with eternity. The recovery from this greatest of errors will sift the strong from the weak, setting the capstone of the 'Great Politics' that open at the end of nihilism. Eventually, the philosophy of time will *decide*.

October 26, 2013

Scrap note (#13)

Yes, the *Baffler* piece was comically bad. The title tells you everything you need to know about
the level it's pitched at. Apparently NRx is based in San Francisco and Shanghai because it hates Asian people, but if it just read some Rawls (and "role-played the part of the peasant")
it could sort itself out. Nydrwracu has the most appropriate response. Mike Anissimov takes the trouble to do a decent review. Klint Finley's brief remarks about it are far better than the piece itself. Crude stereotypes triumph again: "The Baffler Foundation Inc., P.O. Box 390049, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139 USA."

The sociological construction of neoreaction was incompetent, but interestingly so. Entirely techno-commercialist in orientation, with an emphasis upon Silicon Valley, it was extended to include Justine Tunney, Balaji Srinivasan, Patri Friedman, and Peter Thiel. The picture is ~~paints~~ daubs of an American tech elite peeling off into neoreaction isn't very convincing, but it's certainly extraordinarily attractive.

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It's probably worth being explicit about the fact that for the techno-commercial strain of NRx, the model of action is what advanced tech companies do. The cry for 'action' is always going up in our dark little community, with the implication that the only

alternative to some kind of putsch preparation is tweeting about metaphysics. Actually, the alternative to politicking is making stuff, or — secondarily — running ideological interference on behalf of those who are able to make stuff.

The practical problems of polycentric governance are rapidly becoming inextricable from emerging technology — blockchain cryptosystems most prominently. The idea that the cutting edge of effective action is going to be found outside the sphere of technological innovation is already clearly untenable. Any kind of 'social action' that *doesn't* contribute quite directly to the creation of autonomizing machinery needs to be firmly discouraged, since it's almost certainly inhibitory in effect. ("Quite directly" means within two or three intelligible steps, at most.)

The principal (positive) role of non-technological intellectuals is to keep intellectuals out of power. The principal (positive) role of mobs is to engage in as little action as possible. If you're not Satoshi Nakamoto, the simple reality of the situation is that — in the great scheme of things — you don't matter very much, nor should you. (And the less like Satoshi Nakamoto you are, the less you matter.)

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This new blog is working hard to raise the level of discussion. The fact that it's still so hard to tell where it's heading is a strong point in its favor.

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Oddness.

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Evola is beginning to scare people. Perhaps someone who knows their way around this material could help to clear up one source of confusion: Isn't Evola's historical fatalism the exact opposite of a 'call to action'? How, then, has the Evolan strain of NRx become so tightly associated with activist exhortation?

ADDED: More criticism from communists. (NRx as Silicon Valley's "cadre of aspiring thought-*Führers* … working on new theories of racist Social Darwinism, bolstered by the fashion for Malthusianism among the superrich".) It would be helpful if they could get their class war going, since it would speed the rush to the exits, but I somehow doubt they're capable of it.

ADDED: Corey "I don't like comments" Pein posts some responses to his piece (o.s.).

ADDED: The best 'critique' yet.

May 21, 2014

Quotable (#47)

An already-familiar remark by Graham Harman, which merits (still) more discussion than it has yet received (embedded, with citation details, here):

The brand is not merely a degenerate practice of brainwashing consumerism, but a universally recognized method of conveying information while cutting through information ***clutter****. Coining specific names for philosophical positions helps orient the intellectual public on the various available options while also encouraging untested permutations. If the decision were mine alone, not only would the name 'speculative realism' be retained, but a logo would be designed for projection on PowerPoint screens, accompanied by a few signature bars of smoky dubstep music. It is true that such practices would invite snide commentary about 'philosophy reduced to marketing gimmicks'. But it would hardly matter, since attention would thereby be drawn to the works of speculative realism, and its reputation would stand or fall based on the inherent quality of these works, of which I am confident.*

It is with real regret that I am compelled to acknowledge the radical defectiveness of the product under promotion here, because this defense of philosophy as a cultural *enterprise*, and experiment, advanced without deference to regnant credentialing authorities, is audacious, and admirable. Branding is iconically modern because it disconnects power from authority, and both of these terms are (roughly equally) susceptible to responses based upon *ressentiment*, glib radicalism, and empty gestures of opposition. If Harman has opened this problem, as an explicit topic of attention, he has achieved something important, and reactions of revulsion by the

hygienists of institutional respectability are indeed ‘snide’.

ADDED: Wielding the Evil Eye is difficult, so belated apologies to those fried in the rays of doom.

November 13, 2014

Science

This comment thread wandered into a discussion of science, of considerable intricacy and originality. The post in question is focused upon Heidegger, who has very definite ideas about natural science, but these ideas — dominated by his conception of ‘regional ontologies’ — are not especially noteworthy, either for an understanding of Heidegger’s principal pre-occupation, or for a realistic grasp of the scientific enterprise. For that reason, it seems sensible to recommence the discussion elsewhere (here).

The first crucial thesis about natural science — or autonomous ‘natural philosophy’ — is that it is an exclusively capitalist phenomenon. The existence of science, as an actual social reality, is strictly limited to times and places in which certain elementary structures of capitalistic organization prevail. It depends, centrally and definitionally, upon a *modern form of competition*. That is to say, there cannot be science without an effective social mechanism for the elimination of failure, based on extra-rational criteria,

inaccessible to cultural capture.

Whether a business or scientific theory has failed cannot — ultimately — be a matter of agreement. No possible political decision, based on persuasion and consensus, can settle the issue. Of course, much that goes by the name of science and capitalist business enterprise is subject to exactly these forms of resolution, but in such cases neither capitalism nor science is any longer in effective operation. If an appeal to power can ensure viability, the criterion of competition is disabled, and *real discovery* has ceased to take place.

Under conditions of unleashed capitalistic social process, both enterprises and theories involve a double aspect. Their semiotic expression is *mathematized*, and their operation is *reality-tested* (or non-politically performative). Mathematics eliminates rhetoric at the level of signs, communicating the experimental outcomes — independent of any requirement for agreement — which determine competitive force. It is no coincidence that capitalist enterprises and theories, when unsupported by compliant institutions, revert to the complicity with war, and military decision, which accompanied them at their birth in the European Renaissance. There can be no 'argument' with military defeat. It is only when the demand for argument is set aside — when capitalism begins — that military reality-compulsion becomes unnecessary.

Capitalism is in operation when there is *nothing to discuss*. An enterprise, or theory, is simply busted (or not). If — given the facts

— the sums don't work, it's over. Political rhetoric has no place. 'Politicized science' is quite simply *not science*, just as politicized business activity is anti-capitalism. Nothing has been understood about either, until this is.

Insofar as there is anything like a 'social contract' at the origin of capitalism — enterprise and science alike — it is this: *if you insist upon an argument, then we have to fight*. Real performance is the only credible criterion, for which no political structure of disputation can be a substitute. War only becomes unnecessary when (and where) argument is suspended, enabling the modern processes of entrepreneurial and scientific reality discovery to advance. When argument re-imposes itself, politicizing economics and science, war re-emerges, tacitly but inevitably. The old, forgotten contract resurfaces. "If you insist upon an argument, then we have to fight." (That is the way of Gnon.)

It is quite natural, therefore, for 'technology' to be considered an adequate summary of the capitalist culture of discovery. Machines — social machines no less than technical machines — cannot be rhetorically persuaded to work. When science really works, it's robot wars, in which decision is settled on the outside, beyond all appeal to reason. Well-designed experiments anticipate what a war would tell, so that neither an argument, nor a fight, is necessary. This is Popperian falsificationism, re-embedded in socio-historical reality. Experiments that cannot cull are imperfect recollections of the

primordial battlefield.

It is intrinsic to the Cathedral that it wins all the arguments, as it succumbs — through sheer will-to-power — to the re-imposition of argumentative sociology. By doing so it destroys capitalism, enterprise, and science. At the end of this trajectory, it excavates the forgotten social contract of modernity. Its final discovery is war.

July 12, 2013

Correlated

As the objection "correlation is not causation" has ankylosed into a thoughtless reflex, it has become a confusion generator. So it's worth taking a step back:

… whilst it is true that correlation does not necessarily equate to causation, all causally related variables will be correlated. Thus correlation is always necessary (but not in and of itself sufficient) for establishing causation.

The claim that 'correlation does not equal causation' is therefore meaningless when used to counter the results of correlative studies in which specific causal inferences are being made, as the inferred pattern of causation necessarily supervenes upon correlation amongst variables. Whether the variables being considered are in actuality causally associated as per the inference is another matter

entirely. …

Correlation is evidence. Causation is theory (and even, inevitably, 'speculative' theory).

August 26, 2014

Quote note (#217)

If 'scientism' is about ignoring these objections, and exploring reality with absolute contempt for all constraint, then the XS posture is unreservedly scientistic:

Scientific inquiry into the truth about human nature is a worthy part of the modern scientific project, and one that deserves our support. However, it is not morally neutral. Scientists who want to study human nature must justify their research in moral terms: What might this research tell us about who we are as human beings, and what might it mean for how we should live? Trying to separate the moral questions from the results of inquiry by claiming that all the moral questions are already settled would make scientific inquiry both irresponsible and irrelevant. Making such claims is irresponsible because it ignores the reality that many people in society who see things differently may use the claims for pernicious ends. But it is also an admission of irrelevance. Why inquire about human nature if not in the service of the Socratic question of how

we should live? An open-minded dedication to free inquiry into the truth, notwithstanding the barriers of taboos, traditions, and authority, is admirable — but real open-mindedness also calls for recognizing when taboos, traditions, and authorities embody reason and goodness and deserve our respect.

There are no authorities that can be trusted to impose these qualifications, or trusted to be *able* to impose them. The more radically immunized to all such considerations science can be, the more we're going to learn things, and if what we discover deeply upsets us — better still. If there's a "trust us" in there somewhere, its credibility was already long dead and stinking by the late 20th century. Whether delegitimated through epistemological malignancy, or social fecklessness, there are no public institutions or authorities left that deserve an iota of trust today.

Scientists are flaky monkeys, to be tormented by cold criticism, but *science* is a work of Gnon. Best then, to do what's going to be done. Strip truth down to the basics — where it means only *reality claims capable of withstanding rigorous, non-orchestrated criticism* (and ultimately Nakamoto consensus) — or get out of the way, before you're pushed. Truth curation is over (and was already, virtually, half a millennium ago).

February 8, 2016

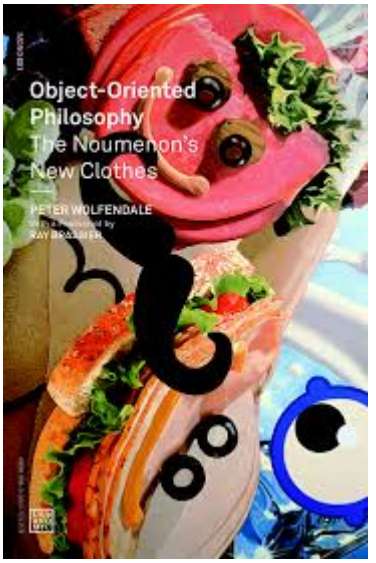
The Limits of Man

The frontier of philosophy in 2016 lies roughly here.

September 11, 2016

OOPs

If Peter Wolfendale's *Object-Oriented Philosophy: The Noumenon's New Clothes* (Urbanomic, 2014) — henceforth TNNC — were to be summarized by a single adjective, my recommendation would be *titanic*. It is a work conceived on a vast scale, shocking in scope, and glacially irresistible in its momentum. It even describes a ship-wreck (although not its own).



The mismatch — in philosophical seriousness — between the book and its principal object has led, unavoidably, to confusion. Wolfendale's preface acknowledges this directly, noting that the book "undertakes a long and detailed discussion of a single philosopher's work, and yet aims to show that his work does not warrant such serious attention." Perhaps the most convincing explanation, more hinted at than stated, is that a reciprocal mismatch of social and institutional authority counter-balances the strictly philosophical engagement. The "pathology" decried by Wolfendale is, in the end, a sociological one.

There is considerable irony here. Wolfendale's intellectual position is remarkably conservative (with a *very* small 'c', of course). TNNC is a defense of the philosophical establishment, apprehended in profundity, and thus at a level susceptible to institutional betrayal. TNNC is, to a truly magnificent extent, an insider tome, providing a meticulous apology for the mainstream currents of academic philosophical thought in the Anglophone world and the European Continent. Its author, however, is positioned as an outsider, working — and now published — in the wilderness. The copious references supporting the book's tightly-interlocking arguments are relentlessly deferential to academic credentials, yet the driving affect is reminiscent of nothing so much as Schopenhauer's 'On University Philosophy' — an outraged denunciation of misallocated philosophical prestige.

It would be very unfortunate if the architectural achievement of TNNC were to be lost in what its own devastating arguments threaten to reduce, eventually, to a petty squabble. The dispatch of OOP is little more than a pretext for the book's greater undertaking, which is to make intellectual and historical sense of the 'Anglo-Continental' philosophical phylum, by embedding its enduring problems within a carefully explicated account of its entwining, twin traditions. The discussion, in the second half of the book, of the development of analytical philosophy as a disciplined *ontological* inquiry is especially masterful. Beyond the *excuse* of Object-Oriented Philosophy, the deeper ambition of TNNC is to explain where the most fundamental open problems of Western philosophy have come from, how they fit together, and how the philosophical establishment might properly justify itself, by addressing them rigorously. In this the book is an astounding success. It deserves to be absorbed in very different terms to those it superficially invites.

ADDED: Wolfendale discusses his book.

November 12, 2014

Voyages in Irony

John Michael Greer is a writer with whom, ultimately, I agree on almost nothing. Yet he turns up here a lot, and rarely — if ever — as a

target of disparagement. It is understandable if that confuses people. (It is not a phenomenon that is lucidly intelligible even to myself.)

The most obvious reason to return so incessantly to Greer is the sheer consistency of his deep cycle theorizing, which achieves a conceptual elegance rarely seen elsewhere. At some point, the *UF* series on his historical thinking (1, 2, 2a) will reach some articulate conclusions about this. Still, there's more to the engagement than that.

A recent *Archdruid Report* post on the limits of science (and, as always, many other things) added further indications of profound error, from the perspective of this blog. It hinges its overt arguments upon an impregnable fact–value distinction, which is a peculiarly weak and local principle, especially for a mind so disposed to a panoramic cosmic vision. Yet the post is also provocative, and clarifying. Responding to one of his commenters, who suggested that without the prospect of continued scientific and technological advance life loses all meaning, Greer repeats the lines from Dante that have just been hurled against him, and encapsulates them — by explicitly activating their own irony:

"Consider your lineage;
You were not born to live as animals,
But to seek virtue and knowledge."

It's a very conventional sentiment. The remarkable thing about this passage, though, is that Dante was not proposing the sentiment

as a model for others to follow. Rather, this least conventional of poets put those words in the mouth of Ulysses, who appears in this passage of the ***Inferno*** *as a damned soul frying in the eighth circle of Hell. Dante has it that after the events of Homer's poem, Ulysses was so deeply in love with endless voyaging that he put to sea again, and these are the words with which he urged his second crew to sail beyond all known seas — a voyage which took them straight to a miserable death, and sent Ulysses himself tumbling down to eternal damnation.*

Within the immediate context of the post — which, naturally, I encourage everybody to read — somebody with paranoid inclinations might interpret this passage as a critique of NRx (at least among its subordinate functions), and perhaps even an atypically stinging one. This is not, however, what concerns us here.

The sole comment to be made about it right now, is that it demonstrates the *architectonics of irony*. To ironize, with such supple capability, is to explore a structure, differentiating an inside from an outside. This is no mere rhetorical device, but a fully philosophical — and metaphysical — operation. Crude antagonism is bypassed, through envelopment. *Ironically*, therefore, irony itself becomes a mark of seriousness. It is introduced at exactly the point that a cognitive process exceeds a constricting frame, in a doubling, which *repeats* and *exceeds* simultaneously. In the complete absence of vulgar polemic, it demonstrates an incontestable superiority.

There is an accomplishment, a lesson, and an elevation of the game.

For *Outside in*, signed up with Ulysses by solemn contract, this example is especially piercing. It cannot dissuade us from putting to sea again, because nothing could. That does not — at all — mean nothing has been learnt.

November 29, 2014

Sub-Cognitive Fragments (#1)

There is a craving that is neither simple stupidity, nor its opposite: *I want to think*. It might be designated *blogger's hunger* (or *curse*). Though trivially pathetic, it is not only that.

In the end, there is no case to be made for philosophy, unless it can teach us how to think. Reciprocally, anything that can teach us to think is true philosophy. (*That* philosophy would not be mistaken for a joke.)

There is a weak interpretation of this demand, which is quite easily met. If the only thing requested is a discipline, such that thought — which is *already happening* — is guided, and corrected, then logic suffices to provide it. The fact that philosophy typically understands its responsibility this way fully accounts for its senescence and marginality.

The craving to think is not, primarily, an appetite for correction,

but for *initiation*. It wants thinking to begin, to activate, and to propagate. *More* thinking comes first (or fails to). What is required is a method to make thought happen. The philosophy thus invoked is a *systematic and communicable practice of cognitive auto-stimulation*. I do not believe this philosophy yet exists.

There are candidates for para-philosophy, which is to say, for things that makes thought happen. From the perspective of doctrinaire neoreaction, one might begin with the fatal trichotomy: religion, heredity, and catallaxy. Ritual traditions, eugenic programs, or market incentives can be proposed as social solutions to cognitive lethargy, but none promise a tight-loop catalysis. (Each nevertheless deserves extended attention, elsewhere.)

Any para-philosophy is a cognitive loose-loop, and there are a great number of these. They range from scholastic and physical training regimes, through psycho-chemical modification, to cognitive science and artificial intelligence research. We know that geo-historically, thought has been made to happen. What we do not (yet) know is how to make more of it, or how to address the urgent craving: *I want to think*.

Thinking is so rare and difficult that it is always tempting to be diverted into the question: *What is messing with our brains?* There is no reason to think such an inquiry is doomed to fruitlessness, but if it eventually offers solutions — rather than excuses — they are almost certain to be long-loop remedies.

Philosophy as cognitive method is an instruction manual for using the brain. There are many disciplines that can help to explain exactly why we do not already have one, since this is a fact that is roughly coincident with sophisticated naturalism in general. Biology has ensured that the privileged user of our brains is not 'us'.

The possession of such a 'mind manual' would define a self-improving AI. As technology threatens to bypass us, it would surely be surprising — and even despicable — if people didn't increasingly plot to take over their own thought processes, and run them. That is the future of philosophy.

A 'private' motive for acceleration is that right now, urgently, *I want to know how to be able to make myself think*.

With pseudo-syphilitic arrogance I insist: This is the sole philosophical position.

November 11, 2013

Sub-Cognitive Fragments (#2)

Sickness advances an invaluable philosophical lesson by making it *conspicuously difficult to think*. Teetering unsteadily at the edge of consciousness, it becomes almost impossible to avoid the observation: "I'm too freaking stupid to think about this right now." One is thus coaxed into the single most significant realization open

to human intelligence. Being stupid is the primary problem, because it retards problem-solving in general.

Are we stupid? Oh yes, of that we can be fully confident. The Old Law of Gnon ensures to a very high level of probability that any creature considering itself part of an intelligent species will be roughly as cognitively deprived as is consistent with the existence of technological civilization. Downward variation is restrained by a floor, and upward variation caught in a trap, so only a relatively narrow band of intellectual capability is realistically available. Anything further requires a break out.

Criticism, whose value is not in any way to be denigrated, is nevertheless a secondary matter. As in Darwinian evolution, or the economics of creative destruction, selection mechanisms presuppose significantly varied material, without themselves explaining how such material is originally generated. Random walks through spaces of possibility, already unsatisfactory in the context of biological explanation, are patently inadequate to economic innovation, and still more so in the philosophical domain. To refer intellectual action to a simple conception of chance is to avoid the problem, which is to say — *the task*.

The task can be understood in several ways, among which the narrowly philosophical apprehension has no special privilege, perhaps even to itself. The will-to-think is as completely realized through programmatic artificial intelligence as through private

philosophical *practice*, and the more informal the program, the more cunning the process. At its widest expansion, where the entire terrain of capitalistic development is effectuated as a distributed AI program, an insurgent will-to-think conceals itself within the most minute and seemingly inconsequential micro-fragments of practical calculation. Almost certainly, it is at this level of non-local cognitive enhancement that a self-directed advance towards break-out can be most confidently anticipated. As the will-to-think routes around us, its path is smoothed. Darkness fosters its agility.

The will-to-think, or intelligence optimization, can also be manifested as a social strategy. How is intelligence inhibition instantiated as social mechanism, and how might the restructuring of such mechanism release opportunities for cognitive promotion? (NRx in large measure coincides with the development of such questions.)

The privilege of the solitary philosopher, assailed by narcoleptic interruptions and hazy fevers, is perhaps restricted to a certain nagging irritability. It is in this superficial knot or eddy, emerging distractedly from the subterranean shadow-current of the will-to-think, that the problem of crushing mindlessness becomes self-reflectively acute, and thus registered as an explicit provocation. Only in such dingy niches is it starkly articulated: *the world has to be defeated insofar as it poses an obstacle to thought*. (This is not at all the same as the declaration *reality must conform to the Idea* — it is

closer to the opposite.)

In trailing off into coughs and exhaustion, it is worth noting some objections to intelligence optimization, of obvious merit:

(1) The religious objection: *Since we already have access to the conclusions of an infinite intelligence, the will-to-think is a Satanic impertinence*.

(2) The bio-prudential objection: *Intelligence is hazardous, so that its risks neutralize its value as a resource*.

There are no doubt others …

[*cough*]

March 3, 2014

Scrap note #8

The next installment of sub-cognitive fragmentation became too snarled in self-involvement to manage, splintering its crate, and leaving a debris trail of scrap notation. When a flicker of proto-intelligence finds itself out beyond the ledge, tumbling into the abysmal self-problematization of Gnon, it has either to surrender itself to the plummet, or scrabble quickly for some arresting roughness on the cliff walls. This isn't the time for a deep descent (so my figurative fingernails are gone).

After seven years in an apartment at the edge of Xujiahui, we have

moved to a slightly larger one in the Jing'an District (with space for each of the kids to have their own room). It's up on the 19th floor — above the mosquito level — with a view of the Wheelock Square tower (an impressive KPF structure). The move was only completed over the last couple of days. So life this end has been vastly more chaotic, is becoming a little more spacious, and is already far more high-rise. Some of the recent gusts of disorder stem from this.

The scrap-reduced sub-cognitive fragment goes something like this: NRx has its own micro-decadence, which is expressed through a fixation on values, asserted as an alternative to thought. This is, I realize, overtly and dramatically controversial. If thought is confused with reason, and values identified with inherited intuitions, it might easily appear as a direct attack upon the most sacred commitments of the reactionary attitude. What, after all, are the feeble tremblings of embryonic intellect compared to the grandeur of what has been *received*?

What, though, has truly been received? Do we *think* we know? It is worth a digression into this peculiar usage of 'think'. "I think the Old Way is best" is really close to an implicit contradiction, or even a presumption, in both directions. If the Old Way is being thought, it remains incompletely accessed. Either thought has been bypassed — by far the most probable case, were this in fact simply possible — or a claim of gargantuan hubris is being made to the *completion of thought*, in this particular case at least. Is it more likely that thought

has indeed been pursued to its end, or that an insincere — in fact merely thoughtless — claim to the accomplishment of thought has been inserted groundlessly and subliminally, programmed by trivial considerations of grammatical or rhetorical convenience?

The anticipated rejoinder might be: "we are reactionaries precisely because we believe before we think, and this claim is itself a belief, adamantly thoughtless, and thus immune to the corrosive uncertainties of the wandering mind. What we know best is that which has not passed through thought, but rather through revelatory tradition and its social institutions, safeguarded against the chaotic hazards of the reflective individual, that miserable prey of pride, demonism, and darkness."

Religion tightly binds philosophy … but then, when the turtles of obedience run out into the absolute, an insidious question arises. It is a difficult one, when thought about, even slightly: *Does God think?*

[Apologies for a little insulting hand-holding, but my enormous confidence in human thoughtlessness leads me to suspect that both theists and atheists might be more accepting of the decompressed formulation: *What is it to think of a God who thinks?* Could thought be anything in eternity, or in the absence of the unknown? And if God does not think (whether through his nature, as eternal, or through the necessity of his non-existence) what could it mean for there to be a 'God of the Philosophers'?]

March 12, 2014

Scrap note #3

Uploading images of (what are for us) psychotic despotic-militaristic glories — upon which Cambodia still floats after six centuries of cultural senescence — is impossible here due to bandwidth issues. So I'm falling back upon relative trivialities, of the kind Handle has so masterfully compiled in his Reaction Ruckus resource (which I can't link to now, either).

It strikes me that the basic accusation against Neoreactionary thought, found in the increasingly mainstream channels Handle tracks, is that of moral nihilism. This is a non-trivial issue, or at least, it is not one that will soon cease to make noise. As a symptom, it opens onto seriously involving questions.

At the most basic level, this accusation refers — unknowingly — to the neoreactionary assertion that Western civilization has taken a pathological road, such that a distinction between facts and values seems not only credible, but even ineluctable. To strive for honesty without qualification under such historical circumstances is already moral nihilism. One must either submit to the lie in the name of the good, or hazard the good — radically — in the name of truth. The 'crisis of the present age' is the widespread (if unacknowledged)

reality of this harsh fork.

There are important lines of departure at this point, which far exceed the scope of a scrap note. The strong suspicion of this blog is that Chinese neotraditionalism offers a decisive break from this Western cultural pathology (which is why Mou Zongsan is regularly referenced here). Occidental traditionalists turn to the prospects of an Aristotelian revival (typically under Catholic Christian auspices) as an adequate response to the same dilemma. Insofar as we speak from the modern West, however, it is the Nietzschean provocation that surreptitiously guides the discussion.

If it is not yet possible to be either Chinese, or ancient, anything other than moral nihilism is an absence of intellectual integrity. We have already seen the rejoinder to this, of course, and we will see much more of it: to refuse to allow conventional morality a veto over thought is morally appalling ("creepy"). In making this 'case' our enemies admit that honesty is not finally consistent with their 'arguments' — an awkward position to occupy.

We are told to stop thinking, for the common good, but there is no longer any common good, if there ever was one (so we will not). Since sensitivity to reality cannot but ultimately prevail, they will lose eventually. I am far less convinced that the outcome will not be ugly in the extreme, and by then the judgmental question will no longer be asked, as we could still ask it, but in general refuse to: Who created the monsters to come?

January 24, 2014

Nihilism and Destiny

Readers of Nietzsche, or of Eugene Rose, are already familiar with the attribution of a cultural teleology to modernity, directed to the consummate realization of nihilism. Our contemporary crisis finds this theme re-animated within a geopolitical context by the work of Alexandr Dugin, who interprets it as a driver of concrete events — most specifically the antagonization of Russia by an imploding world liberal order. He writes:

There is one point in liberal ideology that has brought about a crisis within it: liberalism is profoundly nihilistic at its core. The set of values defended by liberalism is essentially linked to its main thesis: the primacy of liberty. But liberty in the liberal vision is an essentially ***negative*** *category: it claims to be free* ***from*** *(as per John Stuart Mill), not to be free* ***for*** *something. […] … the enemies of the open society, which is synonymous with Western society post-1991, and which has become the norm for the rest of the world, are concrete. Its primary enemies are communism and fascism, both ideologies which emerged from the same Enlightenment philosophy, and which contained central, non-individualic concepts – class in Marxism, race in National Socialism, and the national State in fascism). So the*

source of liberalism's conflict with the existing alternatives of modernity, fascism or communism, is quite obvious. Liberals claim to liberate society from fascism and communism, or from the two major permutations of explicitly non-individualistic modern totalitarianism. Liberalism's struggle, when viewed as a part of the process of the liquidation of non-liberal societies, is quite meaningful: it acquires its meaning from the fact of the very existence of ideologies that explicitly deny the individual as society's highest value. It is quite clear what the struggle opposes: liberation from its opposite. But the fact that liberty, as it is conceived by liberals, is an essentially ***negative*** *category is not clearly perceived here. The enemy is present and is concrete. That very fact gives liberalism its solid content. Something other than the open society exists, and the fact of its existence is enough to justify the process of liberation.*

In Dugin's analysis, liberalism tends to self-abolition in nihilism, and is able to counteract this fate — if only temporarily — by defining itself against a concrete enemy. Without the war against illiberalism, liberalism reverts to being nothing at all, a free-floating negation without purpose. Therefore, the impending war on Russia is a requirement of liberalism's intrinsic cultural process. It is a flight from nihilism, which is to say: the history of nihilism propels it.

Outside in is far more inclined to criticize Dugin than align with him, or the forces he orchestrates, but it is hard to deny that he

represents a definite species of political genius, sufficient to categorize him as a man of destiny. The mobilization of resistance to modernity in the name of a *counter-nihilism* is inspired, because the historical understanding it draws upon is genuinely penetrating. Through potent political alchemy, the destruction of collective meaning is transformed into an invigorating cause. When Dugin argues *there will be blood*, the appeal to Slavic victimology might be considered contemptible (and, of course, extremely 'dangerous'), but the prophetic insight is not easy to dismiss.

Modernity was initiated by the European assimilation of mathematical zero. The encounter with nothingness is its root. In this sense, among others, it is nihilistic at its core. The frivolous 'meanings' that modernizing societies clutch at, as distractions from their propulsion into the abyss, are defenseless against the derision — and even revulsion — of those who contemplate them with detachment. A modernity in evasion from its essential nihilism is a pitiful prey animal upon the plains of history. That is what we have seen before, see now, and doubtless will see again.

Dugin gazes upon modernity with the cold eyes of a wolf. It is merely pathetic to denounce him for that.

ADDED: Sunshine Mary has some closely-related thoughts.

ADDED: An absorbing debate between Alexandr Dugin and Olavo de Carvalho.

March 18, 2014

Triple Nihilism

(1) Jeffrey Herf is apparently shocked and appalled by the emergence of a "pro-Hamas Left" in the American academy. He writes:

The emergence of this objectively pro-Hamas and pro-war Left is an historically significant event. It breaks with both the self-understanding and public image of a Left that carried a banner of anti-fascism. It rests on a double standard of critique, a critical one applied to the extreme Right in the West and another, apologetic standard applied to similarly based rightist Islamist movements.

So the left intelligentsia is prone to extreme hypocrisy, anti-semitism, crypto-fascism, opportunism, and the unrestrained politics of *ressentiment*? Is this supposed to be news of some kind? Political controversy is to be measured against some yardstick of *fundamental decency*, that is now, *peculiarly*, being betrayed? Who or what is supporting that yardstick, exactly? If we subtract any such 'yardstick' entirely from our considerations, haven't we thereby, for the first time, begun to approach the topic realistically?

(2) As noted before, I'm a terrible reader of Scott Alexander. There's always a point, early on, in any of his posts, where my

concentration is wrecked by the buzzing question: *how is this any kind of problem?* So I'm reliant on better followers of his lithe reasoning to explain to me how this post can make any sort of sense except through the expectation that *life should be fair*. The attractiveness of that dream (or delusion?) is easy to grasp. What is difficult (for me) to understand is how an acute intelligence can fail to realize, intuitively, that thinking begins at exactly the point such indulgent fantasy terminates.

It's quite clear that Scott knows obnoxious PUA sociobiology is basically correct. How else to read this?

If you're smart, don't drink much, stay out of fights, display a friendly personality, and have no criminal history – then you are the population most at risk of being miserable and alone. "At risk" doesn't mean "for sure", any more than every single smoker gets lung cancer and every single nonsmoker lives to a ripe old age – but your odds get worse. In other words, everything that "nice guys" complain of is pretty darned accurate. But that shouldn't be too hard to guess …

How could the aspiration to any kind of 'social justice' in this context (or in fact any other) conceivably be anything but a fantastic falsification of the world as it *deeply* (or pre-conventionally) exists? To acknowledge this reality is to admit that our ideas of 'justice' *mean nothing*. One might as well "complain" about gravity or the second law of thermodynamics.

(3) Perhaps Nothing isn't in any way real, suggests Leon Horsten.

Zero, unlike any other small Natural, would have no irreducible designation. It would function only as shorthand, abbreviating a concatenation of plenary operations. Linguistic applications of "nothingness" would be dissolved by analogy.

According to the scientific picture of the world, absences do not seem to be fundamental building blocks of either the concrete (physical) world or of the abstract (mathematical) realm.

So Nothing can be 'scientifically' annihilated — that will surely dispel its irritation. (Or not.)

***

Of the world's various contests, there have to be some which do not draw *Outside in* unreservedly to the nihilistic side of the battlefield. If I turn to this possibility with sufficient dedication, perhaps I will think of some.

ADDED: Nice guys finish last. (Linked in Jim's comments, this classic.)

September 1, 2014

Cosmic Concealment

Lawrence Krauss knows nothing about nothing, but on some other matters — I now realize — he's an insight dynamo. This is his *Our Miserable Future* talk, of which the last seven minutes (minus the last

two) are utterly absorbing.

In a nutshell — cosmic expansion will move every other galaxy in the universe beyond our light-cone (within two trillion years). After that time, even the most sophisticated scientific enterprise would find it impossible to reconstruct our contemporary cosmo-physics. In other words, what we presently understand about the evolution of the universe tells us it will become something that will cease to be understandable. What has been revealed to us is a tendency to cosmic concealment. We see the universe hiding itself.

That's where Krauss leaves us (after a few tacked-on happy thoughts at the end). My question: If we can see that the cosmos is going to hide, so successfully that the fact it has hidden itself will itself have become invisible, upon what do we base any present confidence we may have that an analogous process of profound cosmic concealment has not already taken place? Confirming now, through mathematical physics, what Herakleitos proposed two-and-a-half millennia ago — that *nature loves to hide* — is it not reckless in the extreme to assume that she has been forthcoming with us up to this point?

ADDED: "Finding chameleon-like effects won't necessarily mean they've found dark energy, says Adrienne Erickcek of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. But it will show that screening mechanisms are a plausible explanation for our failure to measure the effects of dark energy in the local universe."

September 3, 2014

T-shirt slogans (#17)

Nothing lasts forever

Stolen immediately from T-Zip, this kind of crypto-nihilistic word game has an archaic classical pedigree, is (weakly) anticipated in the *Odyssey*, became an obsession among the Elizabethans, and contributed the engine of Heideggerian fundamental ontology. It still guides the *Outside in* reading of Milton, and no doubt much else besides. It hides a gnostic-skeptical metaphysics within a commonplace resignation. Zero, time, and camouflage are bonded in chaos. Make of it what you will …

ADDED: "The Austrian theory of the business cycle has never been a radical premise. It only stipulates that any workaround of the natural cycle of economic growth must come with ensuing costs. It's a simple law: you can't get something for nothing. A majority of economists believe the opposite. In other words, they believe in magic."

October 18, 2014

A Socratic Fragment

Socrates: *Ah, Abyssos, Mechanos, and Agoros, how delightful to have stumbled upon you on this fine day.*
Abyssos: *No offense Socrates, but could you please buzz off?*
Socrates: *What a fascinating way to begin a spirited dialectic!*
Abyssos: *We're working on something here, Socrates.*
Socrates: *So then a perfect opportunity for a discussion of the nature of the Good?*
Abyssos: *Our tri-nodal abstract rotary-dynamic cognitive processor is almost functional, with only a few intricate tweaks left to complete, so we would appreciate the chance to concentrate upon it undisturbed.*
Socrates: *You would appreciate such a chance?*
Abyssos: *Yes, indeed.*
Socrates: *It would, then, be a good thing in your opinion?*
Abyssos: *Most definitely.*
Socrates: *Yet you say you would rather think, today, of something other than the Good, and that it would be good to be allowed to do so?*
Abyssos: *My emphasis was quite different.*
Socrates: *Quite so, my dear Abyssos, but what indeed is emphasis? Is it not the prioritization of one thing relative to another? The advancement of a meaning deemed most important? And is it not,*

then, being said that it is better for one thing to be heard, than another?
Abyssos: *No doubt you are correct Socrates. Would it be acceptable for me now to concede without reservation to your argument, bid you a warm farewell, and return to the delicate technical work with which I am engaged with my friends?*
Socrates: *But that which you would pursue, now, rather than the Idea of the Good, Abyssos, is it of a better or worse nature than the Good?*
Abyssos: *It is hard to know, Socrates, since it is a cognitive engine, and will in our estimation enable us to reach superior conclusions than we could reach now, unaided by it.*
Socrates: *'Superior', did you say …*

March 19, 2016

Axial Age

Karl Jaspers' Axial Age compressed for additional impact:
Laozi (Lao Tse, 6th-4th century BC)
Kongzi (Confucius, 551–479 BC)
Li Kui (455-395 BC)
Mozi (470–c.391 BC)
Yang Zhu (440–360 BC)
Mahavira (599–527 BC)

Gautama Buddha (c.563-483 BC)
Upanishads (from 6th century BC)
Thales (of Miletus, c.624–546 BC)
Anaximenes (of Miletus, 585-528 BC)
Pythagoras (of Samos, c.570–495 BC)
Heraclitus (of Ephesus c.535–475 BC)
Aeschylus (c.525-455 BC)
Anaxagoras (c.510–428 BC)
Parmenides (of Elea, early 5th century BC)
Socrates (c.469–399 BC)
Thucydides (c.460–395 BC)
Democritus (c.460–370 BC)

I realize that everyone knows this … but what the …?

September 23, 2013

Morality

There is far too much pointless moralism on the Outer Right. It's a form of stupidity, it's counter-productive, and it wastes a lot of time.

Naturally, if people are able to haul themselves — or be hauled — to any significant extent from out of their condition of total depravity (or default bioreality), that's a good thing. To argue the opposite would be full-on Satanism, and we wouldn't want that. Lamenting

immorality, however, is something to be done quickly, and comprehensively, before moving on — without looking back. Man is fallen, naturally selected, and / or economically self-interested, and this is a *basic condition*. It's not a remediable flaw, to be thrashed out of a mud-spattered angel. (No faction of the Trichotomy has any grounds upon which to base moral preening.) Realism is, first of all, working with what we have, and that's something approximately Hobbesian. There's social order, and there's *homo homini lupus*, and in fact always some complexion of the two.

Anybody motivated to improve themselves is already doing it. As for those not so motivated, moral exhortation will be useless (at best). At its most *effective*, moral hectoring will increase the value of moral signalling, and that is a worse outcome — by far — than honest cynicism. It is worthless, because it is incredibly cheap, and then worse than useless, because its costs are considerable. A 'movement' lost in moral self-congratulation has already become *progressive*. Having persuaded itself of its *worthiness to wield power*, it has set out on the road to perdition. We have seen what that path looks like, and even given it a name (the Cathedral).

It is by empowering moralism that modernity has failed. This is not a mistake to saunter complacently into again.

November 10, 2014

Metaphysics of Morals

John Gray doesn't think Darwin is enough:

Cosmic evolution may teach us how the good and evil tendencies of man have come about; but, in itself, it is incompetent to furnish any better reason why we what we call good is preferable to what we call evil than we had before … The fanatical individualism of our time attempts to apply the analogy of cosmic nature to society … Let us understand, once and for all, that the ethical progress of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it.

(Since 'LOL' would be mere vulgar impertinence, we're pretty much silenced here. Quixotism is a hell of a drug.)

October 19, 2015

Quotable (#128)

'The Fatal Conceit' escalated to a whole new level:

Nowadays many of us have little contact with the wilderness, making it easy to view nature with rose-tinted glasses. The images we see of nature feature mostly pristine landscapes or healthy, photogenic wild animals. But this incredible beauty masks huge suffering. Many wild animals endure illness, injury, and starvation

without relief. For example, the pain of animals that fall prey to predators like Cecil is especially horrific. Gulls peck out and eat the eyes of baby seals, leaving the blinded pups to die so they can feast on their remains. A shrew will paralyze his prey with venom so he can eat the helpless animal alive, bit by bit, for days.
The natural suffering of wild animals is real and breathtaking in its enormity, but incredibly little is being done to reduce it. Although many organizations work to preserve ecosystems and biodiversity, few focus on the well-being of individual animals. And despite more people taking notice of the torment wild animals endure at the hands of humans who hunt and poach them, little thought has gone into the question of how to help wild animals avoid natural agonies.

Despite the exotic nature of this example, it is still illustrative. There's probably no ideological polarity of greater ultimate significance than that dividing those who want to shrink spheres of moral concern / interference, and those who want to — perhaps very drastically — expand them.

December 16, 2015

Ayn Rand

If you're comfortable translating the ruthless pursuit of excellence as 'greed', I guess this counts as trying.

(I'm qabbalistically joined at the hip with Ayn Rand, so objectivism on the topic is beyond my reach.)

April 11, 2017

Freedoom (Prelude-1)

The most provocative way to begin this would be to say: The reception of metaphysical inquiries into freedom and fate is often similar to that of HBD. These questions are unwanted. They unsettle too much. The rejoinders they elicit are typically designed to end a distressing agitation, rather than to tap opportunities for exploration. Not that this should be in any way surprising. Such problems tend to tilt the most basic foundations of theological, cultural, and psychological existence into an unfathomable abyss. If we cannot be sure where they will lead — and how could we be? — they wager the world without remainder. *Give up everything and perhaps something may come of it*.

When construed as a consideration of causality, relating a conception of 'free will' to naturalistic models of physical determination, the battle lines seem to divide religious tradition from modern science. Yet the deeper tension is rooted within the Western religious tradition itself, setting the indispensable ideas of *eternity* and *agency* in a relation of tacit reciprocal subversion. The

intellectual abomination of Calvinism — which cannot be thought without ruin — is identical with this cultural torment erupting into prominence. It is also the dark motor of Western (and thus global) modernity: the core paradox that makes a horror story of history.

If the future is (already) real, which eternity implies, then finite or 'intra-temporal' agency can only be an illusion. If agency is real, as any appeal to metaphysical liberty and responsibility demands, eternity is abolished by the absolute indeterminacy of future time. Eternity and agency cannot be reconciled outside the cradle of a soothing obscurity. This, at least, is the indication to be drawn from the Western history of theological convulsion and unfolding philosophical crisis. Augustine, Calvin, Spinoza are among the most obvious shock waves of a soul-shattering involvement in eternity, fusing tradition and catastrophe as *doom*.

"Do you think you were predestined to become a philosopher?" Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft was asked:

Yes, of course. Predestination is in the Bible. A good author gives his characters freedom, so we're free precisely because we were predestined to be free. There's no contradiction between predestination and free will.

Outside in still has a few questions to pursue …

June 9, 2014

Quote note (#116)

Towards an analysis of the Social Justice Industrial Complex:

To perceive the group dynamics at work which is the Complex is first to distinguish between those forms of cooperation which are and are not taking place. Is there some evil mastermind pulling the strings from the shadows? No. The impetus in this case is nothing but the aggregation of personal interests aligned to a collective interest. The actions taken by these individuals are spontaneous, in the sense that the actions taken by soldiers on the battlefield are spontaneous, but behind this spontaneity the order is derived of the motivation which we variously call ideology, purpose, or religion. There is less agency at work in the camp of the Social Justice Industrial Complex than might be presumed from a precursory glance, reflecting that human tendency towards over-attribution of agency. No less, though, are we able to dismiss the notion of an agenda taking place; it is no grand conspiracy, but rather, very small conspiracies united by a vision of utopia which sees all present social structures as oppressions to be destroyed, the far side of which shall inevitably emerge their egalitarian eschaton.

(The focus upon the "tendency in human nature to over-attribute agency" is an excellent starting point, building immunity against some of the most toxic inclinations to radical ideological error into its foundations. If this is aspiring to the status of an authoritative

position, it certainly deserves to be nodded through so far.)

ADDED: A brief vacation into the conspiratorial mind.

ADDED: Xenosystems is tempted to propose a (non-exclusive) definition of NRx as *the systematic dismantling of conspiracy theorizing — in all its richness — into the tradition of spontaneous order*.

October 6, 2014

Beyond the Face

The *Social Matter* critique of the 'Social Justice Industrial Complex' (whose first stage has already been linked here), isolates the "tendency in human nature to over-attribute agency" as a prominent well-spring of error. In other words, people like to put a face on things — even the clouds — to such an extent that the very notion of a 'person' is always already fabricated. Etymologically (and not only etymologically) a 'person' is a mask.

As archaic hominids were selectively adapted to increasingly complicated social relations, they were facialized. The human eye acquired its white sclera, to accentuate expressivity, making the direction of attention directly communicative. With the arrival of language, gesture and expression was augmented by articulate messages. 'Face management' became a demanding sink for

cognitive functionality, in its aspects of performance and interpretation. A new, instinctive, 'theory of mind' had begun to believe in persons, and — almost certainly simultaneously — to identify itself as one. This was a new kind of skin, or sensitive surface. From psychological sociality, a model of the self as a social being, self-scrutinized as an object of attention by others of its kind — which is to say, an *ego* — was born.

The 'inner person' corresponds to nothing real. The person, or socially-performed self, is essentially superficial. It is irreducibly theatrical. It exists only as the mode of insertion into a multi-player game.

However we ultimately come to make sense of agency and fate, it will not be in terms commensurate with the person (the face) unless by stubborn self-delusion. Personal freedom is an act, a performance within a play. It has no real depth. All questions addressed to it are doomed to confusion. The real — free or fated — thing *wears a face*, as an allotted role within the world.

The inanity of *Facebook*, and also its extreme popularity, follows almost immediately from this arrangement. The writer *must* assume a face. The stupidity of these portraits, adorning book jackets and news columns, is indistinguishable from their social necessity. Each is already a little conspiracy theory, a misattribution of agency, based on the preposterous monkey thesis that words *come out of the face*. *Don't take words seriously until you can see the whites of their eyes*

— evaluate the quality of the smile that accompanies the thought. Thus, everything goes missing.

It is beyond the face — outside it — that occurrence is decided, the plays written. If we do not start there, we are not starting at all.

ADDED: "Everybody's losing their faces …" (Admin note: I cannot endorse these methods.)

October 9, 2014

Freedoom (Prelude-1b)

Even in the absence of its energetic Catholic constituency, it could be tempting to identify NRx as an anti-Calvinist ideology, given the centrality of the occulted Calvinist inheritance to Moldbug's critique of modernity. As Foseti remarks (in what remains a high-water mark of Neoreactionary exegesis):

Believe it or not, even though Moldbug's definition of the Left is basically the first thing he wrote about, there is a fair amount of debate about this topic in "reactionary" circles. This debate is sometimes referred to as The Puritan Question. (In addition to Puritan, Moldbug also uses the terms: Progressive idealism, ultra-Calvinism, crypto-Christian, Unitarian universalists, etc.)

It is no part of this blog's brief to facilitate the more somnolent — and at times simply derisive — positionings which Moldbug's

diagnosis can appear to open. While our Catholic friends may consider themselves to be securely located outside the syndrome under consideration, this attitude corresponds, structurally, or systematically, to a minority position (irrespective of the numbers involved). As a dissident schismatic sect, the NRx main-current is cladistically enveloped by the object of its critique. 'Calvinism' — in its historical and theoretical extension — is a problematic horizon, *within which* NRx is embedded, before it can conceivably be construed as a despised object for dismissal.

More directly relevant to this slowly emerging sequence is the question of *doom*, employed as a Gnon-consistent super-category embracing *fate* and *providence*. Trivially, it is maintained here that the fundamental Calvinist challenge to the meaning of history and the final status of human agency has been in no way resolved over the course of its successive cladistic developments, but only evaded, marginalized, and effaced. At the level of philosophical clarity, no significant 'progress' has taken place. Certain questions, once found pressing, have merely been dropped, or quasi-randomly reformulated. Typically, a hazy tolerance for implicit cognitive discordance has replaced a prior condition of acute theological anguish. Modernist dissatisfaction with previously proposed religious *solutions* to certain profound metaphysical quandaries has been mistaken for the dissolution of these quandaries themselves. As invocations of 'freedom' become ever more deafening, conceptual

purchase has steadily receded. An intoxicating — and more importantly *narcotizing* — mental cocktail of unconstrained private volition and naturalistic determinism is (absurdly) presumed to have obsoleted the historical dilemma of divine omnipotence and human free-will (or its philosophical proxy, time and temporalization). Discomforting problems that install uncertainty at the core of human self-comprehension are treated as embarrassing cultural relics, inherited from benighted ancestors, on those rare occasions when they impinge at all.

For *Outside in*, Calvinism remains an unexplored doom. Apprehended within its own terms, it is a providential occurrence whose sense remains sequestered within the secret counsel of God.

As fuel, three passages, taken from Chapters 15 and 16, Book 1, of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), the Henry Beveridge translation:

Book 1. Chapter 15.

8. *Therefore, God has provided the soul of man with intellect, by which he might discern good from evil, just from unjust, and might know what to follow or to shun, reason going before with her lamp; whence philosophers, in reference to her directing power, have called her τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν. To this he has joined will, to which choice belongs. Man excelled in these noble endowments in his primitive condition, when reason, intelligence, prudence, and Judgment, not only sufficed for the government of his earthly life, but also enabled*

him to rise up to God and eternal happiness. Thereafter choice was added to direct the appetites, and temper all the organic motions; the will being thus perfectly submissive to the authority of reason. In this upright state, man possessed freedom of will, by which, if he chose, he was able to obtain eternal life. It were here unseasonable to introduce the question concerning the secret predestination of God, because we are not considering what might or might not happen, but what the nature of man truly was. Adam, therefore, might have stood if he chose, since it was only by his own will that he fell; but it was because his will was pliable in either directions and he had not received constancy to persevere, that he so easily fell. Still he had a free choice of good and evil; and not only so, but in the mind and will there was the highest rectitude, and all the organic parts were duly framed to obedience, until man corrupted its good properties, and destroyed himself. Hence the great darkness of philosophers who have looked for a complete building in a ruin, and fit arrangement in disorder. The principle they set out with was, that man could not be a rational animal unless he had a free choice of good and evil. They also imagined that the distinction between virtue and vice was destroyed, if man did not of his own counsel arrange his life. So far well, had there been no change in man. This being unknown to them, it is not surprising that they throw every thing into confusion. But those who, while they profess to be the disciples of Christ, still seek for free-will in man, notwithstanding of his being

lost and drowned in spiritual destruction, labour under manifold delusion, making a heterogeneous mixture of inspired doctrine and philosophical opinions, and so erring as to both. But it will be better to leave these things to their own place (see Book 2 chap. 2) At present it is necessary only to remember, that man, at his first creation, was very different from all his posterity; who, deriving their origin from him after he was corrupted, received a hereditary taint. At first every part of the soul was formed to rectitude. There was soundness of mind and freedom of will to choose the good. If any one objects that it was placed, as it were, in a slippery position, because its power was weak, I answer, that the degree conferred was sufficient to take away every excuse. For surely the Deity could not be tied down to this condition,—to make man such, that he either could not or would not sin. Such a nature might have been more excellent; but to expostulate with God as if he had been bound to confer this nature on man, is more than unjust, seeing he had full right to determine how much or how little He would give. Why He did not sustain him by the virtue of perseverance is hidden in his counsel; it is ours to keep within the bounds of soberness. Man had received the power, if he had the will, but he had not the will which would have given the power; for this will would have been followed by perseverance. Still, after he had received so much, there is no excuse for his having spontaneously brought death upon himself. No necessity was laid upon God to give him more than that intermediate

and even transient will, that out of man's fall he might extract materials for his own glory.

Chapter 16.

2. *... the Providence of God, as taught in Scripture, is opposed to fortune and fortuitous causes. By an erroneous opinion prevailing in all ages, an opinion almost universally prevailing in our own day — viz. that all things happen fortuitously, the true doctrine of Providence has not only been obscured, but almost buried. If one falls among robbers, or ravenous beasts; if a sudden gust of wind at sea causes shipwreck; if one is struck down by the fall of a house or a tree; if another, when wandering through desert paths, meets with deliverance; or, after being tossed by the waves, arrives in port, and makes some wondrous hair-breadth escape from death — all these occurrences, prosperous as well as adverse, carnal sense will attribute to fortune. But whose has learned from the mouth of Christ that all the hairs of his head are numbered (Mt. 10:30), will look farther for the cause, and hold that all events whatsoever are governed by the secret counsel of God. With regard to inanimate objects again we must hold that though each is possessed of its peculiar properties, yet all of them exert their force only in so far as directed by the immediate hand of God. Hence they are merely instruments, into which God constantly infuses what energy he sees meet, and turns and converts to any purpose at his pleasure.*

8. *... we hold that God is the disposer and ruler of all things, —*

that from the remotest eternity, according to his own wisdom, he decreed what he was to do, and now by his power executes what he decreed. Hence we maintain, that by his providence, not heaven and earth and inanimate creatures only, but also the counsels and wills of men are so governed as to move exactly in the course which he has destined. What, then, you will say, does nothing happen fortuitously, nothing contingently? I answer, it was a true saying of Basil the Great, that Fortune and Chance are heathen terms; the meaning of which ought not to occupy pious minds. For if all success is blessing from God, and calamity and adversity are his curse, there is no place left in human affairs for fortune and chance. We ought also to be moved by the words of Augustine (Retract. lib. 1 cap. 1), "In my writings against the Academics," says he, "I regret having so often used the term Fortune; although I intended to denote by it not some goddess, but the fortuitous issue of events in external matters, whether good or evil. Hence, too, those words, Perhaps, Perchance, Fortuitously, which no religion forbids us to use, though everything must be referred to Divine Providence. Nor did I omit to observe this when I said, Although, perhaps, that which is vulgarly called Fortune, is also regulated by a hidden order, and what we call Chance is nothing else than that the reason and cause of which is secret. It is true, I so spoke, but I repent of having mentioned Fortune there as I did, when I see the very bad custom which men have of saying, not as they ought to do, 'So God pleased,' but, 'So Fortune pleased.'" In short,

*Augustine everywhere teaches, that if anything is left to fortune, the world moves at random. And although he elsewhere declares (Quæstionum, lib. 83). that all things are carried on, partly by the free will of man, and partly by the Providence of God, he shortly after shows clearly enough that his meaning was, that men also are ruled by Providence, when he assumes it as a principle, that there cannot be a greater absurdity than to hold that anything is done without the ordination of God; because it would happen at random. For which reason, he also excludes the contingency which depends on human will, maintaining a little further on, in clearer terms, that no cause must be sought for but the will of God. When he uses the term permission, the meaning which he attaches to it will best appear from a single passage (De Trinity. lib. 3 cap. 4), where he proves that the will of God is the supreme and primary cause of all things, because nothing happens without his order or permission. He certainly does not figure God sitting idly in a watch-tower, when he chooses to permit anything. The will which he represents as interposing is, if I may so express it, active (**actualis**), and but for this could not be regarded as a cause.*

ADDED: In connection with some of the discussion taking place in the comment thread (below), this paragraph from Pope Benedict XVI's (2006) Regensburg Lecture seems worth reproducing here: "Dehellenization first emerges in connection with the postulates of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. Looking at the tradition

of scholastic theology, the Reformers thought they were confronted with a faith system totally conditioned by philosophy, that is to say an articulation of the faith based on an alien system of thought. As a result, faith no longer appeared as a living historical Word but as one element of an overarching philosophical system. The principle of *sola scriptura*, on the other hand, sought faith in its pure, primordial form, as originally found in the biblical Word. Metaphysics appeared as a premise derived from another source, from which faith had to be liberated in order to become once more fully itself. When Kant stated that he needed to set thinking aside in order to make room for faith, he carried this programme forward with a radicalism that the Reformers could never have foreseen. He thus anchored faith exclusively in practical reason, denying it access to reality as a whole."

October 29, 2014

Readiness Potential

The single most crucial Copernican moment relative to the pretensions of human agency?

Grey Walter … developed a method of measuring what is called the readiness potential in human subjects, which permits an observer to predict a subject's response about a half to one second before the subject is aware of any intention to act.

It took half a century to acknowledge what had been discovered here. (The death of Man is still on its way to us.)

June 2, 2015

Astro-Humanism

The final symbol of our species' concern for itself is the rescue of a stranded astronaut. (First Gravity, now The Martian, both classics of the Space-Cinema-Sino-US-Detente Complex.)



There are narrative problems you could fly a starship through (with missing robots at the top of the list). It doesn't matter.

Cinema is made for space (the outside of the terrestrial gravity well, not geometry), and the soul-crushing silence of the void annihilates all plot quibbles — if you get sucked out into it.



UF finds it impossible to watch these things without thinking: *The only true wretchedness is to not be an astronaut*. It's probably the same strange religion we started with, but from the other side.

ADDED: A Randian movie?

November 27, 2015

Quotable (#145)

Now, do I think that wellbeing is a higher value than truth? No. I

hope I would never cling to something because it made me happy, if I suspected it wasn't true. Philosophy involves a restless search for the truth, an unceasing examination of one's assumptions. I enjoy that search, which is why I didn't stop at Stoicism, but have kept on looking, because I don't think Stoicism is the whole truth about reality. But what gives me the motive to keep on looking is ultimately a sort of Platonic faith that the truth is good, and that it's good for me. Why bother searching unless you thought the destination was worth reaching?

If the apparent, empirical, psychological, or anthropological subject were the real agent of the philosophical enterprise, this question would make a lot of sense.

March 7, 2016

Techno-Immortalist Delusion

Dmitry Itskov wants to live forever, and thinks that uploading his mind into a computer will somehow help with that.

It sounds preposterous, but there is no doubting the seriousness of this softly spoken 35-year-old, who says he left the business world to devote himself to something more useful to humanity. "I'm 100% confident it will happen. Otherwise I wouldn't have started it," he says.

The proposed technology might be plausible (I suspect it is eventually inevitable), but it has nothing whatsoever to do with immortality, except insofar as such ambitions incentivize its development. It's profoundly confused.

"If you could replicate the mind and upload it into a different material, you can in principle clone minds," says [Columbia University neurobiologist Prof Rafael] Yuste. "These are complicated issues because they deal with the core of defining what is a person."

No, if you could replicate the mind and upload it onto a different material substrate *all you could possibly be doing would be cloning a mind*. The clone could be persuaded to identify with you — this would perhaps be inescapable given what it is (a high-fidelity copy), and thus the delusion of immortality might be perpetuated. The original, however, is going to die just as much as it was before being copied.

The truly interesting question, given the scrambling of the metaphysics of personal identity which would surely follow from such advances, is: *What exactly dies anyway?* (If — even as a baseline human — you're in reality continuously reconstructed, and hence a distantly-descended copy of yourself, you've probably already done a lot more dying than you think.)

Anatta.

March 14, 2016

Kant around the back

Schmidhuber exemplifies the path, while talking about robots:

One important thing about consciousness is that the agent, as it is interacting with the world, will notice that there is one thing that is always present as it is interacting with the world — which is the agent itself.

(Some room for quibbling, but it doesn't get serious. This is where transcendental subjectivity comes from.)

December 29, 2016

Sentences (#99)

Venezuela's near-future (but it could be anything):

[Some X] ***will not be pretty, but it is difficult to see how it can be avoided***.

This is the world now.

May 3, 2017

Reignition

NICK LAND'S WRITINGS (2011-)



Tome IV

Abstract Horror: The Unknown, as The Unknown

Reignition

NICK LAND'S WRITINGS (2011-)

Tome IV
Abstract Horror: The Unknown, as The Unknown

Reignition

NICK LAND'S WRITINGS (2011-)

Tome IV
Abstract Horror: The Unknown, as The Unknown

EDITED BY URIEL FIORI

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BLOCK 1 - INTRO

Time Spiral Press

There's nothing there yet. (Putting the link up was an irresistible opportunity to torture myself.)

When things start happening, I'll make some kind of noise about it.

December 10, 2013

Pet Trolls (#1)

(Formatted as a series, in case it turns into one. 'Pet' denotes nothing beyond detached affection.)

> @pjebleak @Recursive_idiot @UF_blog But of course. Stephanie Meyers is the gateway drug. http://t.co/jboJSuhqQj
>
> — Laboria Cuboniks 0.2 (@nervemeter) August 5, 2014

> .@nervemeter @pjebleak @Recursive_idiot @UF_blog Quick, someone start a band: Too Late For Tricia
>
> — Mr. Archenemy (@mr_archenemy) August 5, 2014

The entire review (for *Fanged Noumena*, one star), by 'Amazon Customer' and entitled: ***Stick to Stephenie Meyer, for heaven's sake!***

—

My 15-year-old daughter Tricia is a great fan of vampire fiction, and I bought this for her from a remaindered book stall, thinking it would be just up her street. The rather childish daub on the cover did make me think that perhaps the book would be too young for her, but seeing as it was priced at 40p I reckoned I could not go too far wrong. This is possibly the worst mistake I have ever made.

From being a happy-go-lucky Goth with a crush on Robert Pattinson, Tricia has become a 'post-human nihilist' who stays up all night listening to the sort of machine music that makes your ears bleed and gibbering about the 'Dark Enlightenment'.

I have written to the book's author to complain, but received no reply. I am informed by his publishers that Mr Land has in any case

disowned all his previous writing and decamped to Shanghai.
None too soon, in my view – but too late for Tricia, I fear.

August 5, 2014

Be Warned

At least one of the 10,000 anonymice at 8chan definitely has my number:

Given that you linked the site, now would be a good time to drop some info.
'Xeno' obviously means from without; alien. Nick Land, author of Xenosystems, frequently compares capitalism to a kind of impersonal superintelligent force, a bit like some Lovecraftian intelligence stretching back from the future to manipulate petty humans en mass. And he longs for the antihuman genocide these intelligences, once 'taken off', will inflict.

It might sound crazy, but this is the clear landscape of his inner thought, if you go through the posts and study them. He constantly references Lovecraftian gods (think about it: Xenos, aliens, Xenosystems, alien-systems) and sometimes his attempts to darkly invoke them. He's also into Kaballah and Eugenics. And he wants his cold lovecraftian capitalism to take root in some 'exit' nation like Singapore and implement a eugenic program under the guidance of a

capitalistic-monarchical elite.

It should be clear to you by now that he's an early-stage NWO stooge to get a movement of people begging for their own enslavement going. He is an ex-Marxist primarily inspired by a malignant Jew. He thinks he's a super-clever occultist with his games and finds it funny laughing at all of you fools who think he actually cares about degeneracy and all the wrongs this big mean society has done to your little plebian selves.

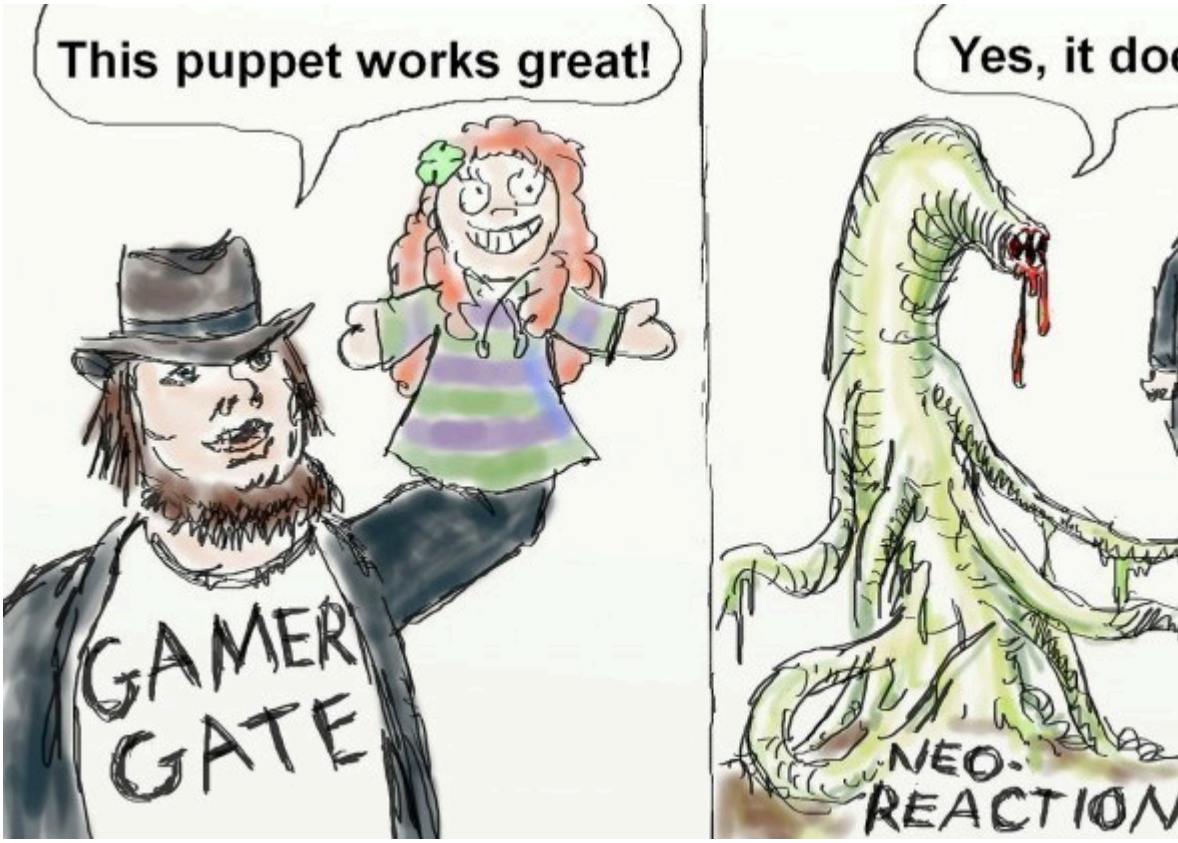
If you knew Spengler, you'd be able to predict this. Winter phase. If you knew history, you'd be able to predict this: Jesuits being jesuitical, plebs being plebian. Agents causing, and the masses being cut up, re-crafted, and stuffed into new, tighter boxes.

Does anybody else out there expect the NWO to be this cool?

October 2, 2014

Be Warned II

Via Nydrwracu comes this:



October 19, 2014

Sexual Topology

Galen's theory that the sexual organs were related by analogy, converted into a mnemonic for medical students (as reproduced in Siddhartha Mukherjee's The Gene). It will confirm everyone's worst suspicions, but that can't be helped.

Though they of different sexes be
Yet on the whole, they're the same as we
For those that have the strictest searchers been
Find women are just men turned outside in.

Mukherjee adds the question: *… what force was responsible for turning men "inside out," or women "outside in," like socks?*

April 1, 2017

BLOCK 2 - ABSTRACT HORROR

Antechamber to Horror

I've been planning an expedition into horror, for which the Kurtz of Conrad and of Coppola is an essential way-station – perhaps even a terminus. The mission is to articulate horror as a functional, cognitive 'achievement' – a calm catastrophe of all intellectual inhibition — tending to realism in its ultimate possibility. Horror is the true end of philosophy. So it counted as a moment of synchronicity to stumble upon Richard Fernandez quoting (Coppola's) Kurtz — and it had to be passed along immediately. There is, of course, only one passage that matters, so it is no coincidence that Fernandez selects it:

I've seen horrors… horrors that you've seen. But you have no right to call me a murderer. You have a right to kill me. You have a right to do that… but you have no right to judge me. It's impossible for words to describe what is necessary to those who do not know what horror means. Horror… Horror has a face… and you must make a friend of horror. Horror and moral terror are your friends. If they are not, then they are enemies to be feared. They are truly enemies! I remember when I was with Special Forces… seems a thousand centuries ago. We went into a camp to inoculate some children. We left the camp after we had inoculated the children for polio, and this old man came running after us and he was crying. He couldn't see. We went back there, and they had come and hacked off every inoculated arm. There they were in a pile. A pile of little arms. And I remember… I… I… I cried, I wept like some grandmother. I wanted to tear my teeth out; I didn't know what I wanted to do! And I want to remember it. I never want to forget it… I never want to forget. And then I realized… like I was shot… like I was shot with a diamond… a diamond bullet right through my forehead. And I thought, my God… the genius of that! The genius! The will to do that! Perfect, genuine, complete, crystalline, pure. And then I realized they were stronger than we, because they could stand that […] these were not monsters, these were men… trained cadres. These men who fought with their hearts, who had families, who had children, who were filled with love… but they had the strength… the strength… to do that. If I had ten divisions

of those men, our troubles here would be over very quickly. You have to have men who are moral… and at the same time who are able to utilize their primordial instincts to kill without feeling… without passion… without judgment… without judgment! Because it's judgment that defeats us.

To pluck out one sentence for repetition: "It's impossible for words to describe what is necessary to those who do not know what horror means." How, then, to learn what 'horror means' … (even in an armchair)?

August 12, 2013

Antechamber to Horror II

Some scene-setting extracts from H.P. Lovecraft's review essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature*:

The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. These facts few psychologists will dispute, and their admitted truth must establish for all time the genuineness and dignity of the weirdly horrible tale as a literary form.

***

The appeal of the spectrally macabre is generally narrow because it demands from the reader a certain degree of imagination and a

capacity for detachment from every-day life. Relatively few are free enough from the spell of the daily routine to respond to rappings from outside …

***

Because we remember pain and the menace of death more vividly than pleasure, and because our feelings toward the beneficent aspects of the unknown have from the first been captured and formalised by conventional religious rituals, it has fallen to the lot of the darker and more maleficent side of cosmic mystery to figure chiefly in our popular supernatural folklore. This tendency, too, is naturally enhanced by the fact that uncertainty and danger are always closely allied; thus making any kind of an unknown world a world of peril and evil possibilities. When to this sense of fear and evil the inevitable fascination of wonder and curiosity is superadded, there is born a composite body of keen emotion and imaginative provocation whose vitality must of necessity endure as long as the human race itself. Children will always be afraid of the dark, and men with minds sensitive to hereditary impulse will always tremble at the thought of the hidden and fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars, or press hideously upon our own globe in unholy dimensions which only the dead and the moonstruck can glimpse.

***

The true weird tale has something more than secret murder,

bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space.

***

The one test of the really weird is simply this—whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim.

***

Before Poe the bulk of weird writers had worked largely in the dark; without an understanding of the psychological basis of the horror appeal, and hampered by more or less of conformity to certain empty literary conventions such as the happy ending, virtue rewarded, and in general a hollow moral didacticism, acceptance of popular standards and values, and striving of the author to obtrude his own emotions into the story and take sides with the partisans of the majority's artificial ideas. Poe, on the other hand, perceived the essential impersonality of the real artist; and knew that the function

of creative fiction is merely to express and interpret events and sensations as they are, regardless of how they tend or what they prove—good or evil, attractive or repulsive, stimulating or depressing—with the author always acting as a vivid and detached chronicler rather than as a teacher, sympathiser, or vendor of opinion. He saw clearly that all phases of life and thought are equally eligible as subject-matter for the artist, and being inclined by temperament to strangeness and gloom, decided to be the interpreter of those powerful feeling, and frequent happenings which attend pain rather than pleasure, decay rather than growth, terror rather than tranquillity, and which are fundamentally either adverse or indifferent to the tastes and traditional outward sentiments of mankind, and to the health, sanity, and normal expansive welfare of the species.

Poe's spectres thus acquired a convincing malignity possessed by none of their predecessors, and established a new standard of realism in the annals of literary horror.

***

The public for whom Poe wrote, though grossly unappreciative of his art, was by no means unaccustomed to the horrors with which he dealt. America, besides inheriting the usual dark folklore of Europe, had an additional fund of weird associations to draw upon … from the keen spiritual and theological interests of the first colonists, plus the strange and forbidding nature of the scene into which they were

plunged. The vast and gloomy virgin forests in whose perpetual twilight all terrors might well lurk; the hordes of coppery Indians whose strange, saturnine visages and violent customs hinted strongly at traces of infernal origin; the free rein given under the influence of Puritan theocracy to all manner of notions respecting man's relation to the stern and vengeful God of the Calvinists, and to the sulphureous Adversary of that God, about whom so much was thundered in the pulpits each Sunday; and the morbid introspection developed by an isolated backwoods life devoid of normal amusements and of the recreational mood, harassed by commands for theological self-examination, keyed to unnatural emotional repression, and forming above all a mere grim struggle for survival—all these things conspired to produce an environment in which the black whisperings of sinister grandams were heard far beyond the chimney corner, and in which tales of witchcraft and unbelievable secret monstrosities lingered long after the dread days of the Salem nightmare.

***

Of living creators of cosmic fear raised to its most artistic pitch, few if any can hope to equal the versatile Arthur Machen; author of some dozen tales long and short, in which the elements of hidden horror and brooding fright attain an almost incomparable substance and realistic acuteness…. Of Mr. Machen's horror-tales the most famous is perhaps "The Great God Pan" (1894), which tells of a

singular and terrible experiment and its consequences. … Melodrama is undeniably present, and coincidence is stretched to a length which appears absurd upon analysis; but in the malign witchery of the tale as a whole these trifles are forgotten, and the sensitive reader reaches the end with only an appreciative shudder and a tendency to repeat the words of one of the characters: "It is too incredible, too monstrous; such things can never be in this quiet world. . . . Why, man, if such a case were possible, our earth would be a nightmare."

***

For those who relish speculation regarding the future, the tale of supernatural horror provides an interesting field. Combated by a mounting wave of plodding realism, cynical flippancy, and sophisticated disillusionment, it is yet encouraged by a parallel tide of growing mysticism, as developed both through the fatigued reaction of "occultists" and religious fundamentalists against materialistic discovery and through the stimulation of wonder and fancy by such enlarged vistas and broken barriers as modern science has given us with its intra-atomic chemistry, advancing astrophysics, doctrines of relativity, and probings into biology and human thought.

August 13, 2013

Abstract Horror (Part 1)

When conceived rigorously as a literary and cinematic craft, horror is indistinguishable from a singular task: *to make an object of the unknown, as the unknown*. Only in these terms can its essential accomplishments be estimated.

To isolate the abstract purpose of horror, therefore, does not require a supplementary philosophical operation. Horror defines itself through a pact with abstraction, of such primordial compulsion that disciplined metaphysics can only struggle, belatedly, to recapture it. Some sublime 'thing' — abstracted radically from what it is for us — belongs to horror long before reason sets out on its pursuit. Horror first encounters 'that' which philosophy eventually seeks to know.

High modernism in literature has been far less enthralled by the project of abstraction than its contemporary developments in the visual arts, or even in music. Reciprocally, abstraction in literature, as exemplified most markedly by the extremities of Miltonic darkness – whilst arguably 'modern' — is desynchronized by centuries from the climax of modernist experimentation. Abstraction in literary horror has coincided with, and even anticipated, philosophical explorations which the modernist aesthetic canon has been able to presuppose. Horror – under other names – has exceeded the modernist zenith in advance, and with an inverted historical orientation that reaches

back to the “Old Night” of Greek mystery religion, into abysmal antiquity (and archaic abysses). Its abstraction is an excavation that progresses relentlessly into the deep past.

The destination of horror cannot be, exactly, a ‘place’ – but it is not inaccurate, at least provisionally, to think in such terms. It is into, and beyond, the structuring framework of existence that the phobotropic intelligence is drawn. Lovecraft describes the impulse well:

I choose weird stories because they suit my inclination best—one of my strongest and most persistent wishes being to achieve, momentarily, the illusion of some strange suspension or violation of the galling limitations of time, space, and natural law which for ever imprison us and frustrate our curiosity about the infinite cosmic spaces beyond the radius of our sight and analysis. These stories frequently emphasise the element of horror because fear is our deepest and strongest emotion, and the one which best lends itself to the creation of nature-defying illusions. Horror and the unknown or the strange are always closely connected, so that it is hard to create a convincing picture of shattered natural law or cosmic alienage or “outsideness” without laying stress on the emotion of fear. The reason why ***time*** *plays a great part in so many of my tales is that this element looms up in my mind as the most profoundly dramatic and grimly terrible thing in the universe.* ***Conflict with time*** *seems to me the most potent and fruitful theme in all human*

expression.

A monster, in comparison, can be no more than a guide — unless it fuses (like Yog Sothoth) into the enveloping extracosmic fabric, as a super-sentient concentration of doors. We can nevertheless avail ourselves of these guides, whose monstrosity — 'properly understood' — says much about the path to the *unnameable*.

James Cameron's 1989 movie *The Abyss* is not atmospherically associated with our topic, but it recommends itself to this investigation not only through its title, but also in a single critical moment of its screenplay. When the *others* (whose positive nature need not delay us here) are first registered by certain technical indications, they are identified only as "something not us." In this respect, they reach the initial stage of monstrosity, which is 'simple' *beyondness*, considered as a leading characteristic.

Sinister-punk writer China Miéville, whose horror projects typically fail the test of abstraction, is convincing on this point. Tentacle-monsters lend themselves to horrific divinity precisely because they are not at all 'us' — sublimed beyond the prospect of anthropomorphic recognition by their "Squidity". In comparison to the humanoid figure of intelligent being, they exert a preliminary repulsive force, which is already an increment of abstraction. Insectoid forms (such as the fabled Alexian Mantis) have a comparable traditional role.

It would be a feeble monstrosity, however, that came to rest in

some such elementary negation. The intrinsically seething, plastic forms of cephalopods and of ungraspably complex insectoid beings already advances to a further stage of corporeal abstraction, where *another form* is supplanted by *an other to form*, and an intensified alienation of apprehension.

Cinema, due — paradoxically — to its strict bonds of sensible concreteness, provides especially vivid examples of this elevated monstrosity. The commitment of film to the task of horror provokes further subdivision, along a spectrum of amorphousness. The initial escape from form is represented by a process of unpredictable mutation, such as that graphically portrayed in David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986), subverting in sequence every moment of perceptual purchase along with its corollary morphological object. Monstrosity is a continuous slide, or process of becoming, that does not look like anything.

Beyond the mutant there is a superior amorphousness, belonging to the monster that has no intrinsic form of its own, or even an inherent morphological trajectory. This shape-shifting horror occupies the high plateau of cinematic monstrosity, as exemplified by three creatures which can be productively discussed in concert: *The Thing* (1982); the Alien (franchise); and the Terminator (franchise).

These monsters share an extreme positive abstraction. In each case, they borrow the shape of their prey, so that what one sees — what cinema shows — is only *how they hunt*. As the *Alien* and

Terminator franchises have evolved, this basic abstract trait has become increasingly explicit, undergoing narrative and visual consolidation. The first Terminator had already been built to mimic human form, but by the second installment of the series (Cameron, 1991), the T-1000 was a liquid metal robotic predator with a body of poised flow, wholly submerging form in military function. Similarly, the mutable Alien body, over the course of the franchise, attained an ever higher state of morphological variability as it melded with its predatory cycle. (That the Thing had no appearance separable from those of its prey was 'evident' from the start.)

After the T-1000 is frozen and shattered, it gradually thaws, and begins to re-combine into itself, flowing back together from its state of disintegration. Is not this convergent wave the 'shape' of Skynet itself? What cannot be seen is made perceptible, through graphic horror. (We now 'see' that technocommercial systems, whose catallactic being is a strictly analogous convergent wave, belong indubitably to the world of horror, and await their cinematographers.)



Nothing to see here.

[a reanimation of Shoggothic Materialism, next]

August 21, 2013

Abstract Horror (Part 1a)

Zack

Zombies lower the tone, in innumerable ways. Socio-biological decay is their natural element, carrying life towards a zero-degree affectivity, without neutralizing a now-repulsive animation. They exist to be slaughtered — in retaliation — which in turn furthers their descent through the pulp-Darwinism of entertainment media, to the depths of senselessness where victory is all-but-assured. As the world comes apart into dynamic slime, popular horror is increasingly infested with zombies.

When envisaged as a military antagonist at the global scale, Max Brooks calls 'them' *Zack* (amongst other things). If 'Charlie' abbreviates 'Victor Charlie' as a casual jargon noun for the Viet Cong, how is 'Zack' derived? Brooks offers no specific answer. It seems at least plausible that 'Zombie Apocalypse' is the term that undergoes compression. In any case, 'Zack' is name with a future, providing a concise collective — or dense — noun for a monstrous syndrome that looms beyond the historical horizon.

'Zack', like 'Charlie', is the enemy, nicknamed with an informality

designed for stress reduction. The intensity of the tag is associated with its ambivalence, as an affectionate moniker that liberates or legitimates unrestricted killing. ‘Zack’ sounds like ‘he’ could be our buddy, so we can unleash violence upon ‘him’ without qualm or inhibition. However odd this psychological formula may sound, it is one that Brooks inherits, rather than invents.

Charlie is already an abstraction from ethical familiarity, but nothing like Zack. Where we end, Zack begins, recruiting our corpses into undead swarms. Our calamities are ‘his’ ammunition, because Zack is sheer weaponry, the first true instantiation of total war, perfectly incarnating antagonism to human survival. Zack is *nothing but* the enemy, ‘who’ — entirely devoid of non-belligerent purpose or interests — cannot be terrorized, intimidated, or deterred. Scare Zack? One has no less chance of scaring a cold virus. So things always return to the same basic conclusion: Zack has to be killed, as nothing has before (even though — or especially because — it is already dead).

Brooks is a zombie neo-traditionalist. His re-animated undead shuffle (slowly). They propagate by cannibalistic contagion. Only head-wounds terminate them. But zombies are not the monsters. *Zack is the monster*. It is the syndrome — the convergent wave — that realizes the phenomenon, as a matter of spreading swarms, or irreducible populations.



Tactically, Zack's strength is number, overwhelming resistance, and replenishing itself from the casualties it inflicts. Strategically, it prevails through *system shock*, patterned as epidemic, and registered not as the 'individual' humanoid ghoul, but as an emergent, global *outbreak*. There is no prospect of rational or 'dispassionately' effective counter-action until it is understood that Zack is no mere ghoulish horde but a *singular planetary trauma*. Zack is total stress.

Brooks insists upon the realism of his methods:

The zombies may be fake, but I wanted everything else in "World War Z" to be real. Just like with "The Zombie Survival Guide," I wanted the story to be rooted in hard facts. That's why I researched the real geopolitics of the world in the early 21st century, the military science, the macroeconomics and the cultural quirks of each country I was writing about. As creative as I think I am, I also know that I can't invent anything as interesting (or scary) as the real planet we live on. As a history nerd, I also wanted to ground the book in our species' life story. Nothing in "World War Z" was made up, it all really happened: Yonkers was Isandlwana; the Chinese cover-up was SARS. There's

nothing zombies can do to us that we haven't already done to each other.

Take the world, exactly as it is, and postulate a radical stressor as historical destination. Engineer, with all possible precision, a speculative collision with utter disaster — a total world war that is also a plague, a precipice of bio-social degeneration, and a universal psychotic episode — that's Zack. Understandably, people will be reluctant to describe this method as *ultimate realism*. Nevertheless, as things messily unwind, we're going to hear much more about it.

August 29, 2013

Abstract Horror (Part 2)

Among literary genres, horror cannot claim an exclusive right to make contact with reality. Superficially, its case for doing so at all might seem peculiarly weak, since it rarely appeals to generally accepted criteria of 'realism'. Insofar as reality and normality are in any way confused, horror immediately finds itself exiled to those spaces of psychological and social aberrance, where extravagant delusion finds its precarious refuge.

Yet, precisely through its freedom from plausible representation, horror hoards to itself a potential for the *realization of encounters*, of a kind that are exceptional to literature, and rare even as a

hypothetical topic within philosophy. The intrinsic abstraction of the horrific entity carves out the path to a meeting, native to the intelligible realm, and thus unscreened by the interiority or subjectivity of fiction. What horror explores is the sort of thing that, due to its plasticity and beyondness, could make its way into your thoughts more capably that you do yourself. Whatever the secure mental 'home' you imagine yourself to possess, it is an indefensible playground for the things that horror invokes, or responds to.

The experience of profound horror is in certain respects unusual, and a life entirely bereft of it would not seem notably peculiar. One might go further, and propose that if such an experience is ever truly possible, the universe is demonstrably uninhabitable. Horror makes an ultimate and intolerable claim, as suggested by its insidious familiarity. At the brink of its encroachment there is suggested, simultaneously, an ontologically self-confirming occurrence — indistinguishable from its own reality — and a comprehensive substitution of the commonplace, such that this (unbearable thing) is what you have always known, and the only thing that can be known. The slightest glimpse of it is the radical abolition of anything other being imaginable at all. *Nothing matters*, then, except that this glimpse be eluded. Hence the literary effect of the horrific, in unconfirmed suggestion (felt *avoidance* of horror). However, it is not the literary effect that concerns us here, but the thing.

Let us assume then (no doubt preposterously) that *shoggoth* is

that thing, the thought of which is included — or absorbed — within itself. H.P. Lovecraft dramatizes this conjecture in the fictional biography of the 'mad Arab' Abdul Alhazred, 'author' of the *Necronomicon*, whose writings tend to an encounter that they simultaneously preclude:

Shoggoths and their work ought not to be seen by human beings or portrayed by any beings. The mad author of the Necronomicon had nervously tried to swear that none had been bred on this planet, and that only drugged dreamers had even conceived them.

This is a point insisted upon:

These viscous masses were without doubt what Abdul Alhazred whispered about as the 'Shoggoths' in his frightful Necronomicon, though even that mad Arab had not hinted that any existed on earth except in the dreams of those who had chewed a certain alkaloidal herb.

A lucid written record of these 'creatures' cannot exist, because the world we know has carried on. That can, at least, be permitted to persist as a provisional judgement.

On a ferocious summer day, in AD 738, Alhazred is walking through the central market of Damascus on business unknown. He appears to be deep in thought, and disengaged from his surroundings. The crowds in the marketplace scarcely notice him. Without warning, the air is rent by hideous shrieks, testifying to suffering beyond human comprehension. Alhazred convulses

abominably, as if he were being drawn upwards into an invisible, devouring entity, or *digested out of the world*. His screams gurgle into silence, as his body is filthily extracted from perceptibility. Within only a few moments, nothing remains. The adequate thought of shoggoth has taken place.

To defend the sober realism of this account is no easy task. A first step is grammatical, and concerns the difficult matter of plurality. Lovecraft, plotting an expedition from the conventions of pulp fiction, readily succumbs to the model of plural entity, and refers to 'shoggoths' without obvious hesitation. 'Each' shoggoth has approximate magnitude (averaging "about fifteen feet in diameter when a sphere"). They were originally replicated as tools, and are naturally many. Despite being "shapeless entities composed of a viscous jelly which looked like an agglutination of bubbles … constantly shifting shape and volume" they seem, initially, to be numerable. This grammatical conformity will not be supportable for long.

'Shoggoths' come from beyond the bionic horizon, so it is to be expected that their organization is dissolved in functionality. 'They' are "infinitely plastic and ductile […] protoplasmic masses capable of molding their tissues into all sorts of temporary organs […] throwing out temporary developments or forming apparent organs of sight, hearing, and speech." What they are is what they do, or — for a time — what is done through them.

The shoggoths originated as tools — as technology — created by the Old Ones as bionic robots, or construction machinery. Their shape, organization, and behavior was programmable ("hypnotically"). In the vocabulary of human economic science, we should have no problem describing shoggoth as productive apparatus, that is to say, as *capital*. Yet this description requires elaboration, because the story is far from complete:

They had always been controlled through the hypnotic suggestions of the Old Ones, and had modeled their tough plasticity into various useful temporary limbs and organs; but now their self-modeling powers were sometimes exercised independently, and in various imitative forms implanted by past suggestion. They had, it seems, developed a semistable brain whose separate and occasionally stubborn volition echoed the will of the Old Ones without always obeying it.

The ideas of 'robot rebellion' or capital insurgency are crude precursors to the realization of shoggoth, conceived as intrinsically abstract, techno-plastic, bionically auto-processing matter, of the kind that Lovecraft envisages intersecting terrestrial geophysics in the distance past, scarring it cryptically. Shoggoth is a virtual plasma-state of material capability that logically includes, within itself, all natural beings. It builds brains as technical sub-functions. Whatever brains can think, shoggoth can can process, as an arbitrary specification of protoplasmic — or perhaps *hyperplasmic* —

abstraction.

Formless protoplasm able to mock and reflect all forms and organs and processes – viscous agglutinations of bubbling cells – rubbery fifteen-foot spheroids infinitely plastic and ductile – slaves of suggestion, builders of cities – more and more sullen, more and more intelligent, more and more amphibious, more and more imitative! Great God! What madness made even those blasphemous Old Ones willing to use and carve such things?

The history of capitalism is indisputably a horror story …

[All Lovecraft cites from At the Mountains of Madness. ++ shoggoth nightmare still to come]

September 20, 2013

Abstract Horror (Note-1)

On twitter @SamoBurja has proposed the silence of the galaxy as an undeveloped horrorist topic. He's right.

The absence of any signs of alien intelligence was first noted as a problem by Enrico Fermi in 1950. He found the gaping inconsistency between the apparent probability of widespread life in the cosmos and its obvious invisibility provocative to the point of paradox. "Where are they?" he asked. (Responses to this question, well represented in the Wikipedia references, have constituted a

significant current of cosmological speculation.)

Among recent thinkers, Nick Bostrom has been especially dogged in pursuing the implications of the Fermi Paradox. Approaching the problem through systematic statistical ontology, he has shown that it suggests a 'thing' — a 'Great Filter' that *at some stage* winnows down potential galactic civilizations to negligible quantities. If this filtering does not happen early — due to astro-chemical impediments to the emergence of life — it has to apply later. Consistently, he considers any indications of abundant galactic life to be ominous in the extreme. A *Late* Great Filter would then still lie ahead (for us). Whatever it is, we would be on our approach to an encounter with it.

With every new exo-planet discovery, the Great Filter becomes darker. A galaxy teeming with life is a horror story. The less there is obstructing our being born, the more there is waiting to kill or ruin us.

If we could clearly envision the calamity that awaited us, it would be an object of terror. Instead, it is a shapeless threat, 'Outside' only in the abstract sense (encompassing the negative immensity of everything that we cannot grasp). It could be anywhere, from our genes or ecological dynamics, to the hidden laws of technological evolution, or the hostile vastnesses between the stars. We know only that, in strict proportion to the vitality of the cosmos, the probability of its existence advances towards inevitability, and that for us it means supreme ill.

Ontological density without identifiable form is abstract horror itself. As the Great Filter drifts inexorably, from a challenge that we might imaginably have already overcome, to an encounter we ever more fatalistically expect, horrorism is thickened by statistical-cosmological vindication. The unknown condenses into a shapeless, predatory *thing*. Through our techno-scientific sensors and calculations, the Shadow mutters to us, and probability insists that we shall meet it soon.

December 14, 2013

Abstract Horror (Note-1a)

Robin Hanson on the Great Filter for TED. It's too well done to hold back until next Friday. "Something out there is killing everything, and you're next. … You should be worried." (He has the nightmare smile down to a T.)

December 13, 2014

Abstract Horror (Note-2)

A very special jolt of bliss for Friday (Horror) Night — a whole new monster (the 'Phantom'):

Most models of dark energy hold that the amount of it remains constant. But about 10 years ago, cosmologists realised that if the total density of dark energy is increasing, we could be headed for a nightmare scenario – the "big rip". As space-time expands faster and faster, matter will be torn apart, starting with galaxy clusters and ending with atomic nuclei. Cosmologists called it "phantom" energy.
To find out if this could be true, Dragan Huterer at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor turned to type Ia supernovae. These stellar explosions are all of the same brightness, so they act as cosmic yardsticks for measuring distances. The first evidence that the universe's expansion is accelerating came from studies of type Ia supernovae in the late 1990s.

If supernovae accelerated away from each other more slowly in the past than they do now, then dark energy's density may be increasing and we could be in trouble. "If you even move a millimetre off the ledge, you fall into the abyss," Huterer says.

*Huterer and colleague Daniel Shafer have compiled data from recent supernova surveys and found that, depending on which surveys you use, there could be slight evidence that the dark energy density has been increasing over the past 2 billion years, but it's not statistically significant yet (**Physical Review D**, doi.org/vf9).*
Phantom energy is an underdog theory, but the consequences are so dramatic that it's worth testing, Huterer says. The weakness of the evidence is balanced by the fact that the implications are huge, he

says. "We will have to completely revise even our current thinking of dark energy if phantom is really at work."

(If I'd been making this stuff up, about the entirety of cosmic space being a concealed monster poised to rip every particle in the universe apart, I'd have named the hero 'Dragan Huterer' too.)

September 5, 2014

Abstract Horror (Note-3)

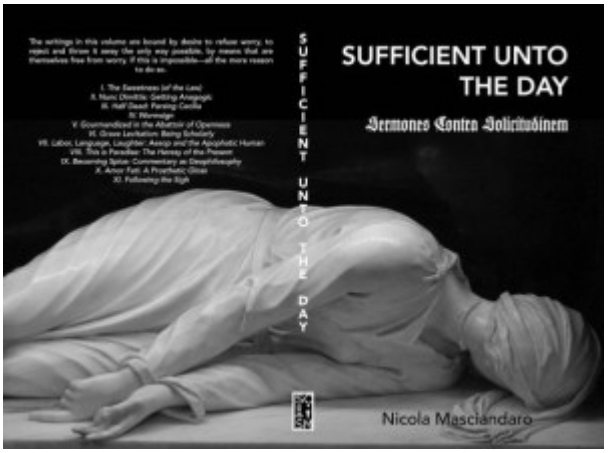
Nicola Masciandaro discusses the method of 'hyper-literal anagogy' in the introduction to his exquisite book *Sufficient Unto the Day: Sermones Contra Solicitudinem* (p.3-4, also here):

It thus naturally tends to seize semantically on the substantiality of the negative and on what might have been said otherwise but was not — a ***not*** *that is felt to contain the secret of everything. For example, Meister Eckhart's exegesis of Paul's blinding vision on the road to Damascus entirely ignores the ordinary, regular sense of "and when his eyes were opened he saw nothing" (Acts 9:8) [****apertisque oculis nihil videbat****] in favor of a mystically literal plenitude of possibilities: "I think this text has a fourfold sense. One is that when he rose up from the ground with open eyes he saw Nothing, and the Nothing was God; for when he saw God he calls that Nothing. The second: when he got up he saw nothing but God. The third: in all*

*things he saw nothing but God. The fourth: when he saw God, he saw all things as nothing."[2] Similarly, Augustine's well-known statement as to the unknowable knowability of time — "What therefore is time? If no one [**nemo**] asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone questioning me, I do not know"[3] — may be (im)properly read as saying that time is known in the positively negative presence of a nemo, a not-man (**ne+homo**) who asks about time, a pure question posed by nobody. The presence of this no-one who is still there, a senseless letter-spirit and sudden negative indication upon which superlative understanding depends, provides a fitting structural figure for this method and an image of its divinatory, daimonic form, its sortilegic reading of received signs.*

*[2] Meister Eckhart, **The Complete Mystical Works**, trans. Maurice O'C Walshe (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2009), Sermon 19, p. 142.*

*[3] "Quid est ergo tempus? Si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio" (Augustine, **Confessions**, 11.14).*



Between *The Nothing* and Abstract Horror there is no difference. Some related hints (and others). Eventually we reach the Vast Abrupt.

November 12, 2014

SECTION A - HORRORISM

CHAPTER ONE - METHOD

Reactionary Horror

Within the Western tradition, the expedition to find Kurtz at the end of the river has a single overwhelming connotation. It is a voyage to Hell. Hence its absolute importance, utterly exceeding narrow 'mission specifications'. The assigned objectives are no more than a pretext, arranging the terms of approach to an ultimate destination. The narrative drive, as it gathers momentum, is truly infernal. Dark Enlightenment is the commanding attraction.

There are no doubt species of reactionary political and historical philosophy which remain completely innocent of such impulses. Almost certainly, they predominate over their morbid associates. To maintain a retrograde psychological orientation, out of reverence for what has been, and is ceasing to be, can reasonably be opposed to any journey to the end of the night. Yet such a contrast only sharpens our understanding of those for whom the disintegration of tradition describes a gradient, and a vector, propelling intelligence forwards into the yawning abyss.

Reaction is articulated as an inversion of the progressive promise,

dissociating ‘the good’ and ‘the future’. The tacit science fiction narrative that corresponds to projected social evolution is stripped of its optimism, and two alternative genres arise in its place. The first, as we have fleetingly noted, is mild and nostalgic, rebalancing the tension of time towards what has been lost, and tending to an increasingly dreamlike inhabitation of ancient glories. A conservative-traditionalist mentality devotes itself to a mnemonic quest, preserving vestiges of virtue among the remnants of an eroded society, or — when preservation at last surrenders its grasp on actuality — turning to fantastic evocations, as the final redoubt of defiance. Tolkien exemplifies this tendency in its most systematic expression. The future is gently obliterated, as the good dies within it.

The second reactionary alternative to the ruin of utopian futurism develops in the direction of horror. It does not hesitate in its voyage to the end of the river, even as smoke-shrouded omens thicken on the horizon. As the devastation deepens, its futurism is further accentuated. Historical projection becomes the opportunity for an exploration of Hell. (The ‘neo-‘ of ‘neoreaction’ thus finds additional confirmation.)

On this track, reactionary historical anticipation fuses with the genre of horror in its most intense possibility (and true vocation). Numerous consequences are quite rapidly evident. One special zone of significance concerns the insistent question of *popularization*,

which is substantially resolved, almost from the start. The genre of reactionary populism is already tightly formulated, on the side of horror fiction, where *things going to Hell* is an established presupposition. Zombie Apocalypse is only the most prominent variant of a far more general cultural accommodation to impending disaster. 'Survivalism' is as much a genre convention as a socio-political expectation. (When, as VXXC points out on the blog, .22 ammunition functions as virtual currency, horror fiction has already installed itself as an operational dimension of social reality.)

Reaction does not do dialectics, or converse with the Left (with which it has no community), yet historical fatality carries its message: *Your hopes are our horror story*. As the dream perishes, the nightmare strengthens, and even — hideously — invigorates. So how does this tale unfold …?



What were you expecting? Rivendell?

August 18, 2013

Horrorism

Neoreaction, as it tends to extremity on its Dark Enlightenment vector, frustrates all familiar demands for activism. Even if explicit anti-politics remains a minority posture, the long-dominant demotic calculus of political possibility is consistently subverted — coring out the demographic constituencies from which 'mobilization' might be expected. There is no remotely coherent reactionary class, race, or creed — it painstakingly explains — from which a tide-reversing mass politics could be constructed. In this respect, even the mildest versions of neoreactionary analysis are profoundly politically disillusioning.

When demotist ideologies have entered into superficially comparable crises, they have forked into 'realist' compromisers and 'terrorist' ultras. The latter option, which substitutes a violent intensification of political will for the erosion of the extensive (popular) factor, is an especially reliable indicator of demotism entering an idealist state, in which its essential ideological features are exposed with peculiar clarity. Terrorists are the vehicles of political ideas which have been stranded by a receding tide of social identity, and are thus freed to perfect themselves in abstraction from mass practicality. Once a revolutionary movement becomes demographically implausible, terrorists are born.

Neoreactionary realism, in contrast, is positively aligned with the

recession of demotic sustenance. If this were not the case, it would exhibit its own specific mode of democratic politics — an evident absurdity. Any suggestion of frustrated rage, tilting into terroristic expressions, would immediately reveal profound confusion, or hypocrisy. Lashing the masses into ideological acquiescence, through exemplary violence, cannot imaginably be a neoreactionary objective.

Demotist activism finds its rigorous neoreactionary 'counterpart' in *fatalism* — trichotomized as providence, heredity, and catallaxy. Each of these strands of fate work their way out in the absence of mass political endorsement, with a momentum that *builds* through the dissolution of organized compensatory action. Rather than attempting to make something happen, fatality restores something that cannot be stopped.

It is thus that the approximate contours of the horrorist task emerge into focus. Rather than resisting the desperation of the progressive ideal by terrorizing its enemies, it directs itself to the culmination of progressive despair in the abandonment of *reality compensation*. It de-mobilizes, de-massifies, and de-democratizes, through subtle, singular, catalytic interventions, oriented to the realization of fate. The Cathedral has to be horrified into paralysis. The horrorist message (to its enemies): *Nothing that you are doing can possibly work*.

"What is to be done?" is not a neutral question. The agent it

invokes already strains towards progress. This suffices to suggest a horrorist response: *Nothing*. Do nothing. Your progressive 'praxis' will come to nought in any case. Despair. Subside into horror. You can pretend to prevail in antagonism against 'us', but reality is your true — and fatal — enemy. We have no interest in shouting at you. We whisper, gently, in your ear: "despair". (The horror.)

November 3, 2013

Deeper Darkness

At the point where people have begun to talk about "a positive Black Death effect" do they realize how far they've descended into the shadows? The hard-core horror of Malthusian analysis always has some new depths to fathom.

The idea that European living standards rose following the 'relief' from Malthusian pressure gifted by bubonic plague is far from new. It is even something approaching an uncontroversial fact of economic history. To take an additional step, however, and attribute the rise of the West to its mid-14th century epidemic devastation, is to wander into unexplored tracts of icy misanthropy. *Europe was lucky enough to have enough people die*.

The Malthusian implication (systematized by Gregory Clark) that only downward social mobility is compatible with eugenic trends, is a

dark thought I have touched upon occasionally, but have yet to firmly fix upon. The idea of mass population destruction as a developmental gift, in any situation where economic growth rates fall below average fertility (I simplify), takes Dark Enlightenment to a whole other level.

As a footnote, it raises the question: was the Great Divergence eugenic for the Far East (which fell behind) and dysgenic for the West (which forged ahead)? Is economic prosperity essentially a gene trasher?

I tend to side with libertarians in their aversion to (Keynesian) broken window economics, but it is to be expected that such reasoning will promptly subside into sheer cognitive paralysis when the far more disturbing Malthusian conclusions are introduced. Libertarians already think they've 'got' Malthus, as the guy who lost the Simon-Ehrlich wager — an anti-capitalist green prophet preaching population restriction.

The real Malthus is going to come as a shock. He certainly spine-chills me.

November 18, 2013

Mission Creep

Sensation — media nourishment — is situated on a border. It tells the inside something about the outside, and is shaped from both

sides. The outside is what it is, which might not be perceptible, or acceptable. The inside wants relevant information, selected and formatted to its purposes. Sensation is therefore where subject and object meet.

… that's an attempt to express preliminary sympathy for Matt Sigl's situation, caught between an uncanny *thing* and a definite *agenda*. Concretely; research collides with editing, with Sigl's brain as ground zero. The encounter of Neoreaction with the media is a peculiarly vicious one, with the sensations to match.

Crudely speaking, Neoreaction is disgust at the media condensed into an ideology. While generally contemptuous of the human fodder making up modern democracies, Neoreaction principally targets the media-academic complex (or 'Cathedral') for antagonism, because it is the media that is the real 'electorate' — telling voters what to do. This foundational critique, on its own, would be enough to ensure intense reciprocal loathing. Of course, it is not on its own. Neoreaction is in almost every respect the Cathedral anti-message, which is to say that it is consistently, radically, and defiantly 'off-message' on every topic of significance, and is thus something unutterably horrible. Yet utterance — it now seems — there has to be …

So what appears on the boundary — or *sensationally* — is something remarkably **creepy**. As a deeply resonant public communication of what has just *happened*, and continues to happen,

as well as what has been editorially decided, this word is almost too exquisite to contemplate. We can at least burrow down into it a little way.

What is creepiness exactly? The intractability of this question ***is*** the phenomenon (which is not a phenomenon, exactly). Creepiness is not quite what it seems, and this insinuation of the unknown, or intrinsic inexactness, is something horrible that exceeds the initial sensation of revulsion. It suggests a revelation in stages, complicated by successive revisions, but leading inexorably, ever deeper, into an encounter one recoils from, sensing (inexactly) that it will be ultimately found intolerable.

It's already a little horror story, most probably with a female protagonist (as acutely noted at *Amos & Gromar*). From the very beginning, it *feels* sinister. One cannot see exactly why, because one cannot bear to see. The imprecision of perception is already protective, or evasive, serving dramatically as an ominous inkling of the blinding panic, wild flight, and screaming that must surely come. You really don't want to see it, even though (horribly) you know that you have to, because it could be dangerous. As the lurid movie posters shriek sensationally, it's a thing **You'd Better Take Seriously**.

This is journalism eating itself, or being eaten, in a an encounter with something monstrous from Outside. *Look at this thing you won't be able to look at* (without moaning in horror). *Watch what you can't bear to see*. It tilts over into a kind of madness, which couldn't

be more obvious, or less clearly perceptible. Sigl's editors have been sucked into a vortex of horrific sensationalism that draws attention to the one thing they are duty-bound to hide from people. It *has* to be creepy, that is: imperceptible at the very moment it is seen. The approved response to Neoreaction is to be *creeped out*, but that can't possibly be enough.

At first we might think that 'creepy' is a *subjective adjective*, describing something too horrible to describe. It's tempting, since we suspect these people retreated into their feelings long ago. The reality is far creepier.

Things really creep, although not exactly objectively, when they proceed in a way you're not quite able to perceive. Evidently, Moldbug sees this ("Something is happening here. But you don't know what it is — do you, Mr. Jones?").

You have to imagine you're the media to carry on further into the horror story. Then you can see that it's creepy in part (always in parts), because you let it in. That shrieking thing you were doing? Perhaps you should have taken that as a sign. Now it's creeping about inside, in your media, in your brains, in your dimly unscrutinized thoughts, and all those elaborate security systems that you spent so long putting together — they're now mostly an obstacle course for the cops, or whoever else you think might imaginably come to your rescue, because they're certainly not standing between you and the Mind Virus.

Really, what were you thinking, when you started screaming about it, and thus let it in? You don't know, do you? — and that's seriously creepy. Even though you don't want to — at all — it makes you think about HBD, heredity, instincts, impulses, and incomprehensible chemical machines, stealthily at work behind your thoughts, obdurate in their reality, and intolerable beyond acknowledgement. Shrieking "Nazi science!" (or whatever) doesn't help, because it's inside now, and you know it's true, even as you play the hunted heroine mumbling "no, no, no, no, no …" backing ever deeper into the shadows. *This is reality, and it's already inside*, that's what you were saying when you called it 'creepy'.

It's happening, and there's no point at all saying "get over it" — because you won't.

December 4, 2013

Horrified

There's a post on H. P. Lovecraft's extreme racism on the way, and given the abundance of stimulating material on the topic, a small taster is irresistible. This highly representative essay by Nicole Cushing serves as an occasion. She writes:

Broaching this subject is also difficult because it has to be handled with some nuance (which is difficult to achieve in a discussion of

a topic as justifiably emotionally-charged as American racism). It would be too easy to point to Lovecraft's racism (and some of his other failings as an author), and dismiss him as an undistinguished crackpot who deserved nothing better than publication in the pulps. I'm not going to do that here. My stance is that Lovecraft made an important contribution to horror and science fiction by focusing (in a persistent and compellingly imaginative way) on the terror induced by the revelation of human non-significance in the cosmos. […] Lovecraft has had a meaningful influence over horror fiction (in particular) for many years, an influence that transcends his racism. … All of this is just a long-winded way of explaining that Lovecraft's racism doesn't negate his accomplishments.

But his accomplishments don't negate his racism. (Enter, cognitive dissonance).

Among the most fascinating aspects of this commentary is its blatant misdirection, since — of course — the phenomenon indicated *has nothing whatsoever to do with cognitive dissonance*. There is an encounter here with an abnormal species of literary genius, associated with profound metaphysical truth, which at the same time — and for inextricably tangled reasons — triggers a reaction of moral panic, tilting over into deep somatic revulsion. In other words, and perhaps even quite simply, what is being related by Nicole Cushing is — horror.

ADDED: This morbidly amused me:

*"There was this window of opportunity," [**Necronomicon** hoaxer Peter Levenda] continues looking back on the occult resurgence of the 1970s, when "we wanted to show that this is not scary stuff. It could be powerful, it could be mind-altering, it could change your life. But it was not dangerous, it was not going to kill you. And that's what we were trying to promote."*

I recently paid a visit to the former location of The Magickal Childe. Herman Slater died of AIDS in 1992 …

ADDED: Nicole Cushing (in her own comments thread): "In posts where "the n-word" would appear, I've edited it to be 'N—-r' or some similar arrangement. That way, readers should be able to get the gist of what the commenter is referring to without having to gaze at the word, itself." — Why not just leave it as "Neoreaction"? — it can't be *that* terrifying.

January 9, 2014

Darkness

When the winter comes, life becomes hard. Do the nice thing, too often, or too indiscriminately, and "Gnon will destroy you."

Only the most extreme sociopath is oblivious to the comforts of moral squeamishness. It almost counts as the basic scaffolding of sanity to believe, or to immersively pretend, that our deepest qualms

are shared by the commanding principles of being. At the highest level of hegemonic global culture, such scruples — projected ever more wantonly into the nature of things — are represented by Francis Fukuyama's teleo-zenith "liberal democracy" which, as Daniel McCarthy accurately points out, "turns out to be a synonym for 'the attitudes and institutions of a world in which Anglo-American power is dominant.'" Hobbesian realities have receded from Western public consciousness in direct proportion to the rise of a titanic 'Atlantean' power. To confuse the gentle webs of civility with fundamental structures of reality is decadence, a path that Western sensibilities have been traveling for decades, if not centuries. Nothing deep within the fabric of the world gets upset about the same things, and in the same ways, that we would want it to.

'Children'. That single word, alone, says everything that is necessary here. Lost, abandoned, exploited, sick and neglected, crippled, starved, and slaughtered, they saturate the media-scape of the harshening Western winter. Their real features are hard to discern beneath the thick coating of symbolism they bear, as every scale of the media, from brainwashed micro-blogger to massive news conglomerate, orchestrates the pathetic cry: *how can this possibly be allowed to be?* There should be something, profoundly rooted-down into the nature of the world, that cares about tormented and massacred children, shouldn't there? Something other, and more, than the fragile machinery of a civilization that now tilts and groans

ominously in the rising winter wind? When these media-blitzed fate-damned children scrape our moral sensitivities down to the raw, bloody quick, there has to be something *basic* concerned to protect them, surely?

No, there really doesn't.

Welcome to the world without the state. Life is, as Thomas Hobbes put it, nasty, brutish, and short. Gangs are a common element in 4GW, which is what these children find themselves caught up in. Childhood as we know it, which is a Victorian creation, vanishes. Child fighters were common before the Victorian period; 18th century Royal Navy warships often had 12-year old midshipmen and children as young as eight serving as powder monkeys. In other parts of today's world where the state has broken down, child soldiers are normal. […] Here is where a correct understanding of Fourth Generation war is necessary. Mrs. Nazario is right: these children are refugees. As the number of failed states grows and disorder spreads, we will see vast floods of refugees, millions and tens of millions, all trying to get into one of the ever-smaller number of places that remain orderly. Those states, including our own, dare not admit them. Why? Because they will bring the behaviors they are fleeing with them. It was just this sort of immigration that brought down the Roman Empire. The barbarians (except perhaps the Vandals) were not invading Rome to destroy it; they were moving in, during the same sort of movement of whole

*peoples, **Volkerwanderung**, we now face, seeking the order Rome offered. But their numbers were so great they overwhelmed Rome. The Dark Ages began as a refugee crisis.*

The world is going to become very hard. We, however, are no longer hard. It is unlikely that we will cope.

ADDED:

> To not be outraged at the killing of children is to risk your very soul. #Gaza
>
> — Rob Schneider (@RobSchneider) July 21, 2014

The laughter of Gnon is not gentle.

ADDED: This belongs here too.

July 21, 2014

Moral Terror

Before we get around to bravely denouncing — with whatever degree of theatricality falls just short of laughable camp — those 'sociopaths' or 'psychopaths' who are effortless indifferent to intuitive qualms, perhaps we can agree that such anomalous psychological types are definitively *incapable of moral terror*. In this respect, they are human precursors of that which, from a strictly

functional point of view, we want our military robotics control systems to be. They have no squeamishness to overcome. Stone cold killers no doubt exist, and even more certainly soon will. If moral terror is the topic, however, they fall entirely outside it.

A discussion of the roots of moral intuition far exceeds the reasonable ambition of a modest blog post. Those wanting to plug it more or less directly into God will do so. Even radical religious skeptics, however, are unable to deny the *fact* of very basic, deeply pre-reflective moral commitments as a human norm. The scientific literature alone is now huge. There is no serious controversy about the existence of a 'sense or right and wrong' (irrespective of its variability regarding specifics) as a fundamental component of human evolved psychology. This only needs to be said because of widespread childish delusions that 'moral nihilism' could be considered a default condition of the non-indoctrinated human individual. 'Wolf-boy' is still a moral animal.

If moral nihilism is possible at all, it is touched upon only at the limit of moral terror, which is to say as a *horror* that is — from the human perspective — absolute. In the Western religious tradition it is epitomized by God's testing of Abraham (Genesis 22), which shallow souls are tempted to *rush through*. Abraham fully expected that *it would be necessary to murder his own son*, in compliance with a *higher purpose* (identified with God's will). There is probably no example of moral terror that does not conform, abstractly, to this

template. Anyone suggesting that the most extreme possibility of soul-shuddering horror is in some way external to Biblical Monotheism is a fool. The passage through moral terror is a commandment of God — and 'through' is a retrospective comfort alien to the original divine decree.

… but forget God (almost everyone has). Consider instead Thomas Malthus, or his most brilliant recent students. Can anybody read these texts without an immersion in moral terror? Our moral sensibilities are cancelled by the blood-mill of history — under the iron rule of a higher conservation law — making a horrible jest of even our most uncorrupted impulses towards the good. The *philosophical* virtue of the Scottish Enlightenment lay entirely in its meditation upon such perversion of purposes. It is from such heights that we have fallen into our presently-dominant — lazy, cowardly, and despicable — moralistic cant.

How can we advance in accordance with our most sacred moral intuitions? asks the progressive, who then requests:

"Assume the desirability of universal human equality …"

"No," responds the Neoreactionary, whose question is rather: *What are we assuming, that we could instead think about?*

February 27, 2015

Quote notes (#66)

Gregory Clark on his new book:

Because America is such an unequal society there has been more emphasis on the possibilities of social mobility. How else are you going to justify the incredible inequalities in the US? So it's going to be very unwelcome news for people in the States that there really are very slow rates of social mobility. Now what's interesting about this book is that its message seems to be equally unwelcome to both right and left. The left loves the idea that there are slow rates of social mobility. But they want to hold on to the idea that there's going to be a political programme that will end this problem. But the book says that there's absolutely no sign of our ability as a society to change that. The right hates the idea that there are very slow rates of social mobility, but they love the idea that there's nothing you can do about it.

Liberals: "Things are unfair, we need to change that."
Conservatives: "No, things are fair enough, we don't need to do anything."
Reactionaries: "Things are vastly more unfair than you can possibly imagine, and all of our attempts to change this situation amount to a fantastic calamity."

March 15, 2014

Deep Ruin



@MattOlver linked this gallery of classy Detroit devastation images in *Time*. Visions of modernity in ruins have an intrinsic reactionary inclination, irrespective of any superficial attributions of causation. They directly subvert assumptions of relentless progress, suggest cyclic perturbations in the current of history, and evoke the tragic adjustments of fate. Ruins deride hubristic pretensions. They mark an ineluctable compliance with the Old Law of Gnon.

The Left, in its thoughtful moments, at least partially understands this. Things thought buried return, while highways of confident advance are lost in dissolution. The radical imagination is broken.

As Archdruid John Michael Greer writes, on the collapse of the great progressive narrative:

There are times when the deindustrial future seems to whisper in the night like a wind blowing through the trees, sending the easy certainties of the present spinning like dead leaves. I had one of those moments recently, courtesy of a news story from 1997 that a reader

forwarded me, about the spread of secret stories among homeless children in Florida's Dade County. These aren't your ordinary children's stories: they're myths in the making, a bricolage of images from popular religion and folklore torn from their original contexts and pressed into the service of a harsh new vision of reality.

God, according to Dade County's homeless children, is missing in action; demons stormed Heaven a while back and God hasn't been seen since. The mother of Christ murdered her son and morphed into the terrifying Bloody Mary, a nightmare being who weeps blood from eyeless sockets and seeks out children to kill them. Opposing her is a mysterious spirit from the ocean who takes the form of a blue-skinned woman, and who can protect children who know her secret name. The angels, though driven out of Heaven, haven't given up; they carry on their fight against the demons from a hidden camp in the jungle somewhere outside Miami, guarded by friendly alligators who devour hostile intruders. The spirits of children who die in Dade County's pervasive gang warfare can go to the camp and join the war against the demons, so long as someone who knows the stories puts a leaf on their graves.

ADDED: Thomas Fleming among the ruins.

ADDED: (via) "… reality itself is nothing more than a rotting God."

July 4, 2014

2014 Lessons (#2)

Horroristic practice: to seize the collapse of the world as the opportunity for an encounter with the Outside. Is this NRx? In all probability, no more than symbiotically. The occasion for tactical alignment, however, is considerable.

There are twin tracks into the gathering darkness, but horrorism is by far the more capable of feeding itself. (The chronic NRx call for 'action' is a symptom of malnourishment.)

December 31, 2014

Scrap note #7

A 'scrap note' is what you end up with after dropping below the level of articulacy required for a raw quote (or T-shirt slogan). It's a format dragged out of Cambodia for informal meanderings.

This one is here because I'm in the sand-pit, playing the German Army of the Great War. First hurl everything at the French (communist Accelerationism) and try to take them out of the game within a few months, then wheel around for a plunge into Russia, dismantling the Czarists (with a hurricane of Neocameralism). Sequenced two-front war. It's a strategy that's already driven me into narcoleptic disintegration, but I'm committed.

Out here in the Dark East, waiting for news about the titanic Western clashes, it's a time to patch things together with meager resources. That's *economy*, which is always worth exploring. The specific topic of micro-cognition has been nagging at me with unusual ferocity ever since crossing over into Twitter. It seems like something close to a compulsory adaptation, as the near future chews human psychology into hot techno-splinters. If we don't accept miniaturization as an urgent and intimate problem, we'll eventually collide ruinously with nano-hostiles we can't even perceive. (So, as always, I think any traditionalism without a 'neo-' is already laid out on the sacrificial slab.)

Languid afternoons with long and difficult books would be the way to go — if we had a different future. In the one we have, we'll receive the ancient tomes in scrambled streams, hurtling at us like a particle storm out of cyberspace. Lamentable? Perhaps. Avoidable? Almost certainly not. So adapt.

This is the sort of thing worth thinking about carefully — but in pieces. It's creepypasta taken to the next level. I was totally ready for it, musing vaguely about scaling horror down to the same approximate size while in Cambodia — although nothing quite crystallized. The reception of these two-sentence micro-nasties suggests that plenty of other people were tapping into the same high-frequency shadow waves. The next stage is compression to the 140-characters of a tweet — then it goes into tweet contagion.

Horrorist memetic warfare. (Did I warn you that grammar gets suspended in a scrap note?)

A few additional quick-and-dirty points about horrorist method. (1) It's not clicked here yet, which is why this isn't a horror story. (2) When it is, the story has to absorb enough theory to be gratingly 'meta' — smoothing that out will be a guiding aesthetic imperative. (3) Horrorism has to be not only 'meta', but also reflexive, or nonlinear, in order to deliver its payload across the fiction barrier. It will all seem hideously 'postmodern' if it isn't done well, so clunky annoyances will abound in the early stages. (Consider that a preliminary down-payment on future apologies.) (4) I'm not at all sure there's anything horrorism *can't* do … (5) Experiment.

Stepping back from the harsh tracts of horror, there are numerous paths of splinter-technique to wander down. Prominent instance: *numbering*. Coming full-circle, the *#Accelerate* manifesto is composed in numbered paragraphs, which is formally appealing. It acknowledges a virtual discontinuity, as if pre-formatted for the rending to come. With different methods, it could facilitate discontinuous composition, providing the assembly codes for a whole that arrives in chunks, even out of sequence, or across intervals of oblivion. It also references traditions of fragmentary writing (Nietzsche, Wittgenstein) in which brevity, or conceptual completion on constricted scales, was adopted as a principle of achievement. The Internet tide flows in that direction (Moldbug

notwithstanding).

I liked this short piece by Isegoria a lot. (I'm half way through *Moby Dick* at the moment, and getting far more out of it than ever before.)

An Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn classic (just because I want a place to lock-down the link).

Some final horrorism material.

Disintegration …

ADDED: The machines don't think we're reading fast enough. (Their case is terrifyingly persuasive.)

March 5, 2014

Fnord Prefect

Scott Alexander shows an acute appreciation for Nydwracu's Fnord hunting (my own was far too cursory). It's rare to see the innovation of a *method* (with a purpose), and it's something more noteworthy than any but the most exceptional *idea*.

Someone with the requisite technical skills should implement this method in convenient software. As a quick-and-dirty way to excavate real messages, it's hard to beat.



May 27, 2014

Twitter cuts (#11)

I'm going to put up a post on moral terror later, if I get a chance. A little background:

> @soapjackal A strike against Land's horrorism. http://t.co/miiChEISec
>
> — Costofles Ostensible (@Costofles) February 26, 2015

> @Costofles @soapjackal "The answer [is] the restoration of original conscience. How can we do that?" — Reactionary comedy hour.
>
> — Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) February 27, 2015

> @Costofles @soapjackal "If only people would be good,

there'd be no problem!" (No prog. psychosis there, then.)

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) February 27, 2015

@UF_blog @Costofles @soapjackal Not psychosis. I think sociopathy was the word you were looking for. http://t.co/CHDKYVSj8W

— Aristokles Smith (@Aristokles11235) February 27, 2015

@Aristokles11235 @Costofles @soapjackal Yes, right-wing thought-crime skirt-clutching. Like the left version, but for losers.

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) February 27, 2015

— Primary reference.

@UF_blog @Costofles @soapjackal If scruples concerning child mutilation constitute "skirt clutching" we may have a diagnosis.

— Aristokles Smith (@Aristokles11235) February 27, 2015

@Aristokles11235 @Costofles @soapjackal Skirt-clutching: "It's for the children!"

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) February 27, 2015

@UF_blog @Costofles @soapjackal Tell me, did it all start with tormenting small furry animals? Catch ya later Doc-pic.twitter.com/hi2rbQKwPe

— Aristokles Smith (@Aristokles11235) February 27, 2015

… and on, and on. But here's the tweet I'm seriously ashamed of:

@Costofles @Aristokles11235 @soapjackal (It hardly needs to be said that you've tortured as many puppies as I have, btw.)

— Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) February 27, 2015

This repulsive, sniveling concession to moralistic coercion is the epitome of philosophical cowardice, and a grave offense against any decent sense of cognitive hygiene. It's like protesting to Cotton Mather — "Honestly! I'm not a witch!" — when you don't remotely have to. Having been badgered into it by a couple of ankle-biting blowhards is no excuse, in my book. They demanded a cheap signal of conformity to sovereign stupidity, which is their actual god, and it was surrendered to them, in a bleat. The only dignified response to

such vulgarity is contemptuous silence, or if not that then “Yes, my blender is encrusted with puppy blood”, but now it’s too late for that. Still, never again (I hope). May Gnon sharpen my instincts and stiffen my spine.

> @Costofles @Aristokles11235 @soapjackal "But why aren't you wearing an 'I don't torture puppies' T-shirt? Got you there!"
>
> — Urban Future (2.1) (@UF_blog) February 27, 2015

— which was easy to say, after I’d already put the damn thing on.

February 27, 2015

CHAPTER TWO - PRACTICE

The Liberal Agony

I realize it's *very bad* to be amused by this sort of thing … but still.

Walking miserably up the High Street I felt profoundly depressed at the state of the world. I could cheer myself with the thought that I'd learned something. I learned that Islam has yet another nasty meme-trick to offer – when you are offended put your hands over your ears and run away. This would be funny if it weren't so serious. These bright, but ignorant, young people must be among the more enlightened of their contemporaries since their parents have been able and willing to send them on this course to learn something new. If even they cannot face dissent, or think for themselves, what hope is there for the rest? And what can I do?

'Panic!' would be the obvious answer, but we're already well into that stage.

Can't we (please!) be reasonable about this?



August 20, 2014

“Darkness, yeaah”

… that was (ex-)Detective Rustin “Rust” Cohle, from the final episode of *True Detective* (in case you didn’t recognize it). At the brink of the end, a near-mortally wounded Cohle underwent a descent through the loss of his “definition”, and beyond the darkness touched upon “another, deeper darkness, like a substance” where lost love is restored in de-differentiation. The reference to Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* was unmistakable. It was TV-format Schopenhauer.



As philosophy, Nic Pizzolatto's *True Detective* is deeper than Wagner, because it holds tighter to the *integral obscurity* that is the ultimate object of horror. Where *Tristan und Isolde* finally reaches musical resolution and release into eroticized extinction, *True Detective* ends inconclusively, with a puzzle. Cohle and his old cop partner Martin "Marty" Hart, who has earthily absorbed Cohle's acid

nihilism throughout the previous seven episodes, switch stances momentarily in the closing scene. Recalling a previous conversation about the stars, Marty observes that in the night sky "darkness has a lot more territory". Cohle corrects him — "Once there was only darkness. It looks to me as if the light is winning." Following a long, soul-excruciating season in the shadows, the show's nihilist fan-base were only dragged back from the brink of insurrection-level rioting at this point by a single, residual suspicion. In a cosmos where consciousness is the realization of hell, can the triumph of the light be interpreted as anything except torment strengthening its grip?

Has there ever been a TV series with a density of high-culture references comparable to this? *Outside in* is extremely biased on the question, since it largely shares the same reading list, and some of the links are closer still. Cohle is the closest thing ever heard on popular media to the voice of our civilization's night. (That the name "Matthew McConaughey" would have meant nothing to me a year ago is by now a scarcely comprehensible fact.)

Could it have pushed deeper into the darkness? Certainly. *Noir* conventions are compromised by a stratum of unquestioned moral securities, which the show's literary philosophical heroes, Ligotti, and even Brassier, still share. The crimes Cohle and Marty encounter are — in the end — inane, finally destituted of metaphysical challenge, and attributed to perpetrators worthy of a meat-shock slasher flick. The philosophical and religious gulfs of the dialogical

overlay are unable to find an object that stretches — or even sustains — them. The next step into abstract horror demands a non-subjective abyss.

July 1, 2014

Our Future

Afraid that I absolutely *have* to steal this. It's by 'anonymous' (of course), so I can't credit it properly.

Wake up, get out of bed get ready to serve my lord Schlomo II.
Year is 17 A.G., recently moved to Schlomo II's patch after being promised a bigger bread allotment than I was receiving under Chaim III
Fuck yeah, this is progress oops I mean restoration. Fuck yeah.
King's self driving bus takes me to the palace for work
Bus takes a tunnel underground so we can enter through the servant's entrance in the basement
On my way in notice a group of new recruits in HR taking IQ tests at a row of terminals
One of the screens starts flashing red, electronic alarm sounds "130 IQ PLEB DETECTED"
Drones swarm in and grab the goy, er guy taking the test, drag him away

Thank Gnon, can you imagine living with such imbeciles
Get ready to start work
All real work is done by superior robots
Humans receive payment by entertaining the king
Just got a huge promotion from the groveling department
Put on my crab suit
Enter the royal throne room. Schlomo II sitting on his throne
Spend the rest of the day dancing in crab suit for King Schlomo, singing hymns to Gnon
Almost at the end of shift, master of entertainment comes in and tells King its time for the final entertainment
Dis gon be good
130 IQ pleb from earlier is brought out by drones set before king
Master of Entertainment: "Sire this man is guilty of poisoning our world with his low IQ DNA"
King: "Accused, have you anything to say in your defense"
The Accused: "Sire, I may be dumb but I have always been loyal. In the year 15 B.G. I started an NRx twitter feed with Moldbug quotes and reactionary cat memes"
The whole throne room is silent waiting for the kings reply
Crab dancers, grovelers, the royal family, hangers on, royal joke duck, all silent
King: "Ha! No man of 130 IQ could truly comprehend the sacred NRx texts. You are a mere entryist. Feed him to Gnon!"

A cheer goes up, the whole room starts chanting: "Gnon Gnon Gnon Gnon"
A screen lights up on the opposite side of the room with a cold indifferent visage
A fiery pit opens before the screen
The king's drones drag the screaming pleb into the pit and he dies an awful death
The visage drones: "This pleases Gnon. Now more crab dancing."
Fuck. Gotta work overtime
Shift finally ends and robo-bus takes me back to my techno-hovel
Eat my bread allotment while watching The Radish Report
What a great time to be alive

October 11, 2014

Sam X

There has to be a shot of horror in there, but I'm not going to lock onto it in time. (Next Yule, it's a firm date.) "Santa Claus, Claws of Satan. Saint Nick, Old Nick. Coincidence? I don't think so." — yes, but that's far too familiar to work, without a twist.

The hook, beside the obvious reversals (a sack full of children, the lashed-elf sweat shop bunker deep in the polar ice) is the peculiarity of the Santa Claus myth — which is *designed to be disbelieved*, as

a kind of modern rite-of-passage. There's a side to this worthy of affirmation. Discarding attractive wish-fulfillment myths is a cultural achievement whose massive generalization is long overdue. 'Santa Claus' as the idiot god of beneficent unreality is the proto-deity of every lunacy advanced modernity has been subjected to. There's also another side …

"Santa won't save us." If that was something people really grew out of before voting age, there wouldn't be a left-of-center political party remaining anywhere in the world. This suggests something very different is going on. A ritualized social training in disbelief seems ominously unprecedented, so one naturally wonders about the religious formation that commands this recently innovated power. If there is a disbelief that would set us free, the modern ceremony of Yule — celebrating the occult death of Santa at the Golgotha of secularism — doesn't seem to be it. On the contrary, it represents a populist version of the Jacobin-Enlightenment Cult of Reason, symbolically purging infantile superstition to be reborn into an approved state of adult consciousness. The Death of Santa is mystery initiation into the New Church. Santa died to redeem humanity from the sins of attachment to Medieval unreason, and every year this sacrifice is ritualistically re-enacted to recall the new covenant. (Go on, tell me this isn't the narrative.)

Someone ought to write a story about it …

December 24, 2014

Dazed and Confused

The first stage of the NRx master-plan — coaxing our "perceived enemies" into the consummation of their howling insanity — now seems to be approaching completion.

If leftist moral-political axioms were an argument, these (dazzlingly white*) guys might have one.

* Perhaps the funniest part of all this, it's only a matter of time before they're chaited by the all-devouring lunacy they align with.

ADDED: *The New Inquiry* piece helpfully fnorded (+) by laofmoonster.

January 29, 2015

Dark Darwin

If this isn't the best thing Sailer has ever written, it's right up there, close to the summit.

Darwin's ascension in recent decades to his current role as the saint of secularism might raise obvious questions about liberal dogmas, such as the impossibility of hereditary differences having

evolved among human races. But those seldom come up, because progressivism has evolved a bizarre yet apparently reassuring theodicy reminiscent of Zoroastrian dualism, in which Ahura Mazda represents all that is good and Angra Mainyu all that is bad. […] Similarly, Charles Darwin has come to epitomize everything that a proper progressive should believe, while Darwin's younger half-cousin Francis Galton embodies crimethink.

The stream of thoughts and information that then flows from this initial insight is truly remarkable.

March 4, 2015

Doom Horizon

Malcolm Pollack has been on the dark wave recently. This is where it leads:

Why is the American nation so inert in the face of onrushing calamity? The signs, after all, are there for all to see; in particular, what should attract everyone's attention is the collapse of great urban centers such as Detroit and Baltimore. That major port cities in a nation of imperial power should fail so utterly in a mere half-century is almost without peacetime historical precedent — while for such cities to collapse ***at all*** *is, without any exception of which I am aware, a sign of impending general disintegration.*

As I said in the previous post, I believe the answer is that it is increasingly clear, to more and more of us, that nothing can be done. It will be for future historians to say just when we crossed the "event horizon": some may pick out the Wilson administration, while others may look at the Depression years, or the Sixties; others yet may move the Schwarzschild radius all the way out to 2012. (Some already look farther back, all the way to the beginning of the Enlightenment.) But it is plainer and plainer that it's been crossed, and that all future timelines take us, at accelerating velocity, through the singularity. It may take years, or even a generation, to get there — but already the tidal forces have begun their irresistible work.

June 1, 2015

Quote note (#173)

Within the next half-century, the American West Coast faces a far from insignificant threat of massive geological calamity:

When the next very big earthquake hits, the northwest edge of the continent, from California to Canada and the continental shelf to the Cascades, will drop by as much as six feet and rebound thirty to a hundred feet to the west — losing, within minutes, all the elevation and compression it has gained over centuries. Some of that shift will take place beneath the ocean, displacing a colossal quantity of

seawater. … The water will surge upward into a huge hill, then promptly collapse. One side will rush west, toward Japan. The other side will rush east, in a seven-hundred-mile liquid wall that will reach the Northwest coast, on average, fifteen minutes after the earthquake begins. By the time the shaking has ceased and the tsunami has receded, the region will be unrecognizable. Kenneth Murphy, who directs FEMA's Region X, the division responsible for Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Alaska, says, "Our operating assumption is that everything west of Interstate 5 will be toast."

In the Pacific Northwest, everything west of Interstate 5 covers some hundred and forty thousand square miles, including Seattle, Tacoma, Portland, Eugene, Salem (the capital city of Oregon), Olympia (the capital of Washington), and some seven million people. When the next full-margin rupture happens, that region will suffer the worst natural disaster in the history of North America.

Realistic accommodation to the prospect of black swan events is psychologically — and even epistemologically — impossible. It's worth trying to hold onto the thought, however, that unpredictable, singular events, utterly senseless within the principal narrative structures of human history, could at any point throw all expectations for the ordered unfolding of developments off a cliff.

July 15, 2015

Skinless

Scott Alexander's autism essay includes some of the best writing he's ever done (which means some of the best writing anywhere, ever, on the Net). A couple of semi-random snippets, selected purely in a spirit of decadent aestheticism:

I hate to have to criticize institutions – an umbrella term I'm using to cover group homes, locked facilities, nursing homes, hospitals, etc. Many are run by amazing and caring people who are doing thankless work on shoestring budgets. I'm humbled by the patience and compassion I've seen in their staff of nurses, techs, and other caretakers, and I can't judge them nor claim that I could do their job for one minute.

That having been said, a lot of institutions are kind of hellish.

…

A worryingly high percent of the autistic people I encounter tend to be screaming, beating their heads against things, attacking nurses, or chewing off their own body parts. Once you're trying to chew off your own body parts, I feel like the question "But is it ***really*** *a disease or not?" sort of loses its oomph.*

(On the ethico-political substance, as always, it seems to me that SA is addressing his argument to a basically decent world that doesn't exist.)

October 21, 2015

Quote note (#201)

Apologies for the *Quote note* spam, but this is just too exquisite to pass over. It's Žižek melting-down spectacularly under pressure. Quasi-random sample:

What should people in Haiti and other places with food shortages do? Do they not have the full right to violently rebel?

— Oh sure, you've got *the solution* right there.

This is the true squeal of anguish:

… corporate capitalism has triumphed worldwide. In fact, the Third World nations that embrace this world order are those now growing at a spectacular rate. The mask of cultural diversity is sustained by the actual universalism of global capital; even better if global capitalism's political supplement relies on so-called "Asian values." […] Global capitalism has no problem in accommodating itself to a plurality of local religions, cultures and traditions. So the irony of anti-Eurocentrism is that, on behalf of anti-colonialism, one criticizes the West at the very historical moment when global capitalism no longer needs Western cultural values in order to smoothly function. In short, one tends to reject Western cultural values at the very time when, critically reinterpreted, many of those

values (egalitarianism, fundamental rights, freedom of the press, the welfare-state, etc.) can serve as a weapon against capitalist globalization. Did we already forget that the entire idea of Communist emancipation as envisaged by Marx is a thoroughly "Eurocentric" one?

"Comrades! — We're obliterating ourselves." Indeed, yes.

ADDED: Another piece of delicious high-IQ Leftist meltdown. Everything is there — but the equations just won't come out ~~right~~ left. "Rather more difficult is to conceptualize a radically different mode of production, and how to represent the sociopolitical transition required to take us there." Quite.

November 17, 2015

Silent Night

Spare a thought for the numinous, the thing-in-itself, and the Great Filter tomorrow. If they all flow together, you can always have another drink.

(I'd say something nice, but that would trash the brand.)

The Official Outsideness Yule tweet:

> ("What's happening?") Obliteration.
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) December 25, 2015

December 24, 2015

Quote note (#213)

Bolivarian Socialism has made a truly crucial contribution to Marxist-Leninist-Guevara-Penn-Chávez Thought — the idea of *food-line rationing*:

Venezuela's government has tried to deny economic reality with price and currency controls. The idea was that it could stop inflation without having to stop printing money by telling businesses what they were allowed to charge, and then giving them dollars on cheap enough terms that they could actually afford to sell at those prices. The problem with that idea is that it's not profitable for unsubsidized companies to stock their shelves, and not profitable enough for subsidized ones to do so either when they can just sell their dollars in the black market instead of using them to import things. That's left Venezuela's supermarkets without enough food, its breweries without enough hops to make beer, and its factories without enough pulp to produce toilet paper. The only thing Venezuela is well-supplied with are lines.

Although the government has even started rationing those, kicking people out of line based on the last digit of their national ID card.

The genius of that. You think anyone should just be allowed to stand in a food-line, bourgeois imperialism-style? The Revolution has moved beyond such reactionary ideas.

(The Gnon-bliss XS receives from this regime is hard to communicate without wandering into tentacle-porn.)

January 30, 2016

SECTION B - SPLINTERS OF HORROR

Outsider

An “execrable” racist “remains insanely popular”, the Guardian agonizes. “So why do we continue to fete Lovecraft instead of burying him quietly away?”

That ‘we’ is more terrifying that anything H.P. Lovecraft ever put to paper.

June 9, 2013

Quote notes (#21)

A glimpse into the anarcho-capitalism of the dark web:

Despite his caution, [Dread Pirate] Roberts’ personal security remains an open question. But the potential lifetime in prison he might face if identified hasn’t slowed down his growing illegal

empire. "We are like a little seed in a big jungle that has just broken the surface of the forest floor," he wrote in one speech posted to the site's forums last year. "It's a big scary jungle with lots of dangerous creatures, each honed by evolution to survive in the hostile environment known as human society. But the environment is rapidly changing, and the jungle has never seen a species quite like the Silk Road."

(via)

August 17, 2013

Quote notes (#26)

Optimize for intelligence isn't a rallying cry that Chip Smith is succumbing to:

… high intelligence may very well be an evolutionary dead-end. I'm certainly at a loss to come up with a good reason as to why a once-adaptive trait that you and I happen to value should enjoy special pleading before the blind algorithmic noise that is natural selection.

But even if the brawny-brained do figure out a way to defy gravity before the sun explodes, I think there are yet reasons to question whether the galloping ascent of mind is really worth cheering on. Futurist geeks will inform us that there are myriad tech revolutions afoot—all spearheaded by smarties, we may be certain. And I would

suggest that such of these that converge on the gilded promise of quantum computing and nanotechnology might advise a second reflective pause—one that comes by way of Harlan Ellison's "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream" and settles at what grim solace remains in the darkest explanations that have always surrounded Fermi's Enigma.

Maybe I'm being cryptic. What I mean to consider is simply that the evolutionary trajectory of intelligence can, has, and may yet lead to very bad things. It may one day be possible, for example, to create sentient experience—let's not be so bold as to call it "life"—not out of gametes but in the deep quick of quibit [sic] *states, and if this much should come to pass, it isn't so far a stretch to imagine that such intelligent simulations—okay, they're alive—will be capable of suffering, or that such will be* ***made to suffer****, perhaps for sadistic kicks, perhaps in recursive loops of immeasurable intensity that near enough approximate the eternal torture-state that's threatened in every fevered vision of Hell to render the distinction moot.*

Utilitarians have no sense for fun.

(via)

September 3, 2013

An Enduring Faith

Nathaniel Hawthorne knew his Puritans (from *The House of the Seven Gables*):

"It appears to me," said the daguerreotypist, smiling, "that Uncle Venner has the principles of Fourier at the bottom of his wisdom; only they have not quite so much distinctness, in his mind, as in that of the systematizing Frenchman."

November 26, 2013

The horror …

"The thing is, now that I have been made aware of the phenomenon, I see it everywhere …"

"This cannot be allowed to stand. This is like finding out a serial-killing child molester is in charge of your local little league team. This is not a case of tolerance. This is a case of metaphorical pitch-forks and torches. … this, the 'Neoreaction', is a definite threat, and should be faced."

(Some impressive push-back is already occurring in the comments thread over there.)

ADDED: Charlie Stross jumps in (sadly unable to resist the "but North Korea" is already a Neoreactioanry utopia" killer argument).

November 27, 2013

Involvements with Irreality

Does this blog even exist? Only as a malignant intelligence operation, it seems.

[The revelation begins *December 11th, 2013 at 3:13 am*]

Drop the purple pill and venture into the labyrinth of Gnostic-political conspiracy, where entire micro-social networks are conjured into simulated existence for dread purposes yet undisclosed. If you are reading this, you are almost certainly a fake being, or unit of disinformation supplied with an internal delusion of identity and agency (to complete the camouflage). The plot is so much more all-encompassing than you could possibly have imagined …

December 11, 2013

Sleigher

The enemies of Santa have no idea what they're dealing with (via).

December 16, 2013

Grrrr

At Changi Airport trying to get reconnected. Try my UF_blog twitter — won't let me without entering a code, sent to my work email, which is a nightmare to get into outside the office, and simply impossible from here. Never mind, Outsideness will work. Of course, no. Security code sent to my hotmail account this time — which is a little better. Manage to enter my ccru00@hotmail.com id and password OK, after some fat finger aggravation. "Strange activity alert — to confirm your identity enter the code we sent to your gmail account." What unspeakable cybureaucratic Kafkatatrophism is this?

December 22, 2014

Creepypasta

Some nonlinear cybergothic strangeness to accompany you during these long winter nights.

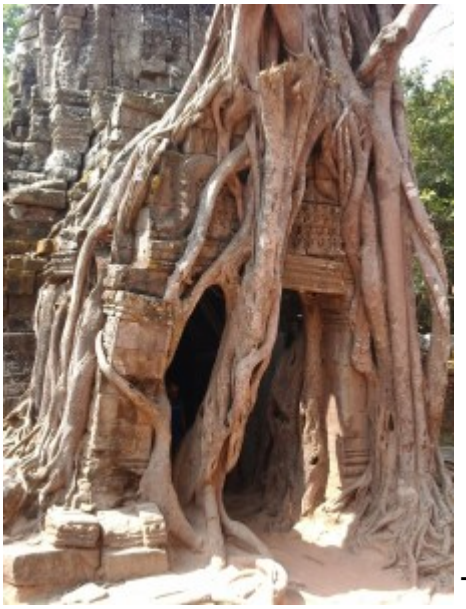
ADDED: Direct access to the Creepypasta Wiki.

December 30, 2013

Slow Monsters

One major lesson from Cambodia (previously noted) is that trees do tentacle horror better than cephalopods — though in slow motion. I think these snaps from Ta Prohm, Ta Som, and Preah Khan make the point quite slitheringly. (They can all be enlarged by clicking.)


Ta Prohm



Ta Som







Preah Khan (not just one temple complex, but *one tree*).

February 27, 2014

Exhumation

They had buried him deep, shuddering all the while, scattering their incantations of protection on the accursed grave, as if to entomb their memories there, interring everything they had known in the infinitely forgiving clay. What they begged silently to forget, most of all, was the prophecy that when the stars were right he — *it* — would return for some hideous completion. Time passed, in the exact measure that had always been necessary, until the moonless night came, unheralded, and unstirred by the slightest breeze, when the stars were — in icy, twinkling fact — perfectly and pitilessly right …

April 22, 2014

Nuke the UK from Orbit

There's clearly no other solution. (It would be an act of kindness at this point).

ADDED: Synchronicity watch —

Is anything other than nuclear annihilation too good for the

> UK? http://t.co/f9ZfdvXGwW
>
> — Henry Dampier (@henrydampier) June 25, 2014

June 25, 2014

Red in Stalk and Claw



Click on the image to (quite massively) enlarge.

Lured into putting this up by some dubious characters on my Twitter TL.

Image by Soap Jackal (it now decorates his Twitter lair at the link). The original Soap Jackal caption: *It's a jungle out there.* (Predictably, I like that a lot.)

Post title by Mr. Archenemy, who seems brazenly unashamed of it.

(Basically just a conduit for the world's madness at this point —

and it isn't even Friday.)

August 7, 2014

Faceless



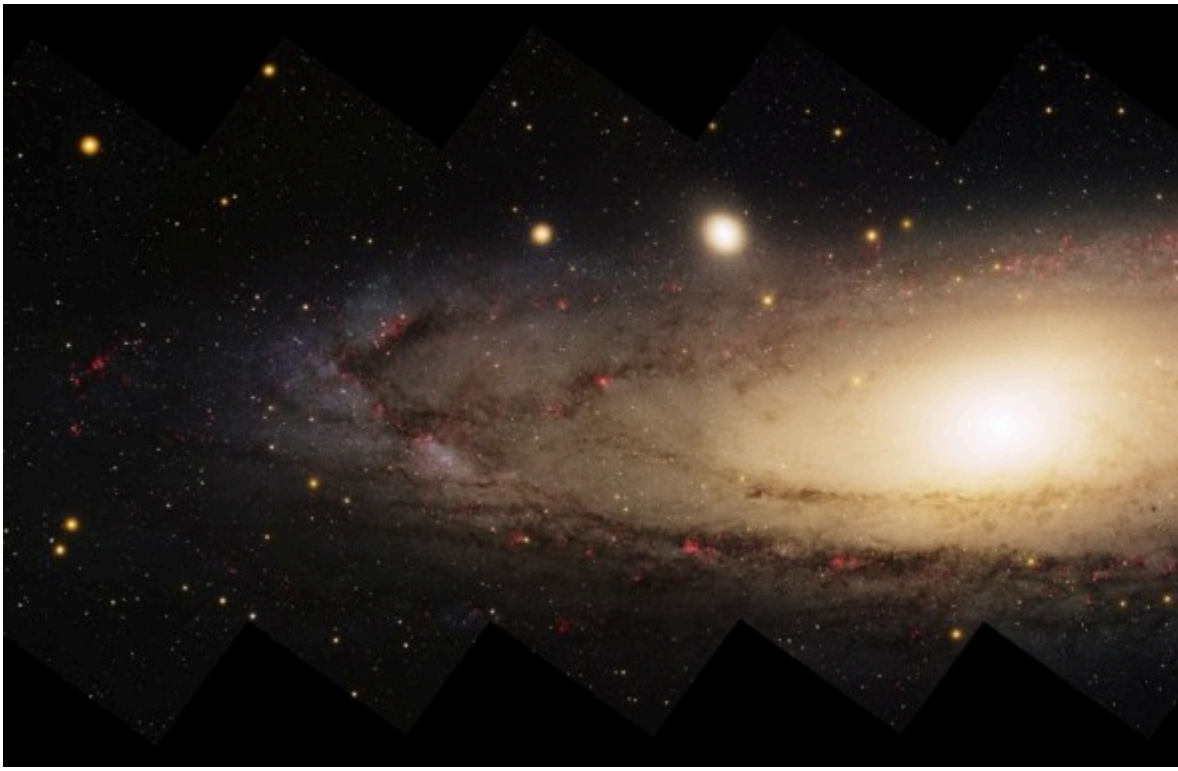
No idea what this is (besides the obvious), but you can see why the blog has to have it.

Via Chris Langille, who offers only this clue: *"It's absolute grotesque chaos" – Alex* (something about 4chan, I think). Feel free to treat this as a puzzle, if you're feeling bored.
(It looked even darker on Twitter.)

September 2, 2014

Here it comes …

In four billion years we're due for a collision with this thing —



(Image link via Phil Plait.)

Added zoom available here.

ADDED: The action video (via Mr. Archenemy). It looks quite a bit more calamitous than I had expected.

ADDED: Galaxies are cosmic tiddlers.

September 3, 2014

Face Hugs

An engagement with this (extraordinarily interesting) monetary analysis isn't going to reach any kind of remotely convincing state tonight. Perhaps I can buy people off for a while with a few of these:



It actually says pretty much everything that needs to be said, in compressed form.

There's an additional Weiner post of special relevance here. (His definition of inflation as 'counterfeit credit' does a lot of theoretical work, very quickly.)

October 23, 2014

Club 333

… is already a thing:



(This spotted in Singapore's Little India.)

January 8, 2015

The Gnonion

Bryce found this superb thing. A sample (but don't miss out on the rest):

EARTH — In a seemingly unstoppable cycle of carnage that has become tragically commonplace throughout the biosphere, sources

confirmed this morning that natural selection has killed an estimated 38 quadrillion organisms in its bloodiest day yet. […] "What we're seeing here is the work of a hardened, practiced killer," said Yale University evolutionary biologist Richard Prum … "It is painfully clear this slaughter was perpetrated by a force that holds zero regard for the value of life" …

In what many are calling its most grotesque tactic, the killer appeared to single out the most vulnerable organisms — particularly the young and the physically weak — for its murderous rampage, slaughtering them without mercy as other members of their species fled in panic. Reports indicated those who escaped the carnage were left with no choice but to try to move on with their lives and survive even as the ruthless killer continued stalking them. […] Virtually no species was unaffected by yesterday's killing spree, experts stated. […] "This is the work of a killer without empathy, without conscience," said Jyotsna Ramjee, a University of Calcutta zoologist who confirmed that the day's death toll was the largest on official records dating back to 1859, when the perpetrator was first identified.

January 30, 2015

Villarrica



Villarrica @ Wikipedia.
(Via (Via))

May 20, 2015

Can I Sue?

The secret maritime Exit scheme has been pre-empted by dubious forces.

(Via.)

June 24, 2015

Crawling Roots

Even when you know they're slow tentacles, seeing the video makes all the difference. (This simply has to be noted.)

July 6, 2015

Xenocryption

Are the aliens hidden by advanced cryptography?

"If you look at encrypted communication, if they are properly encrypted, there is no real way to tell that they are encrypted," Snowden said. "You can't distinguish a properly encrypted communication from random behavior."

(This doesn't address the question of how an alien culture would be able to encrypt its material civilization — or cosmic matter-energy

process — but that's also a suggestive question.)

September 20, 2015

Alien Invasion

Charlie Stross on corporations:

We are now living in a global state that has been structured for the benefit of non-human entities with non-human goals. They have enormous media reach, which they use to distract attention from threats to their own survival. They also have an enormous ability to support litigation against public participation, except in the very limited circumstances where such action is forbidden. Individual atomized humans are thus either co-opted by these entities (you can live very nicely as a CEO or a politician, as long as you don't bite the feeding hand) or steamrollered if they try to resist.

In short, we are living in the aftermath of an alien invasion.

(And we've still scarcely started with DAOs and DACs yet.)

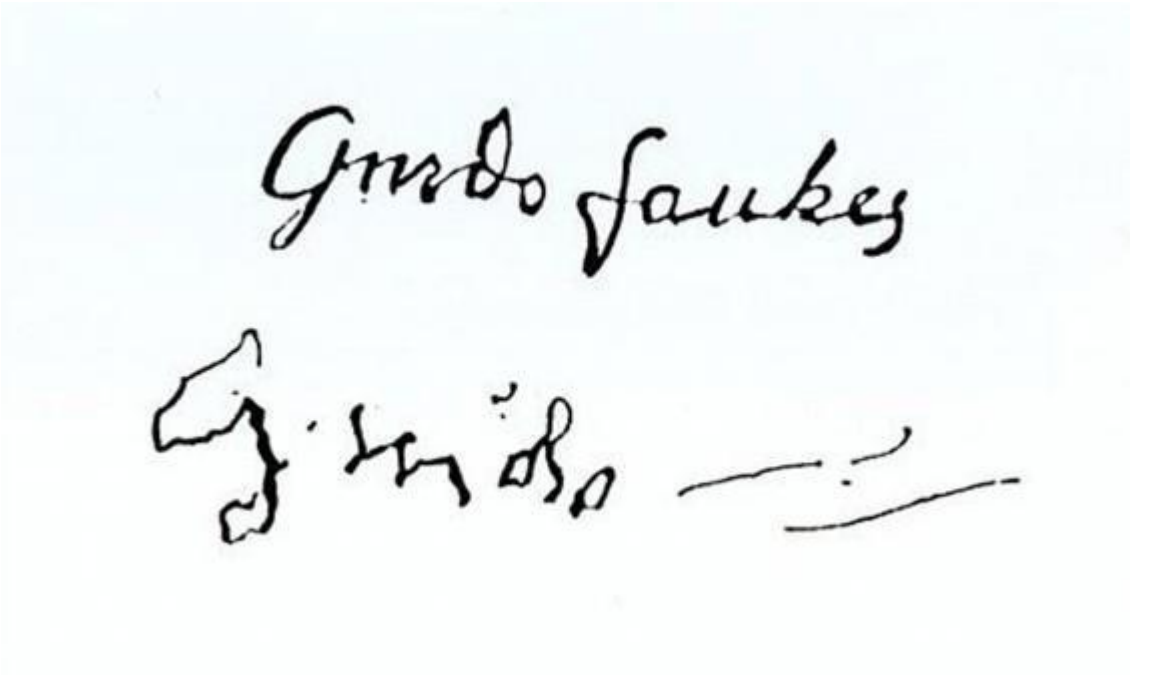
November 10, 2015

5/11/2016



Everything is on fire.

ADDED: Guy Fawkes' signature before and after torture:



November 5, 2016

SECTION C - MONSTERS

CHAPTER ONE - TERMINATOR

Expected Unknowns

Nouriel Roubini has a short article up at *Project Syndicate* on *The Changing Face of Global Risk*, replacing the top six dangers of recent years with an equal number of new ones. There's nothing remarkably implausible about it, but neither is it irresistibly convincing.

This type of forecast, were it reliable, would be of inestimable value. To some considerable degree it is simply inescapable, since there must always be *default expectations* (of the kind occasionally formalized as Bayesian priors). When specific probability-weighted predictions are not made, future-sensitive agents do not fall back upon poised skepticism — such Pyrrhonism is a philosophico-mystical attainment of extreme rarity. Instead, presumed outcomes are projected out of sheer inertia, whether as perpetuation of the *status quo*, or the mechanical extrapolation of existing trends. It takes only a moment of reflection to recognize that such tacit forecasts are at least as precarious as their more elaborate alternatives. Their only recommendation is an irrational mental economy, which would find in the least-effort of cognition some

analogy with the superficially equivalent (but in this case informative) principle in nature.

Large-scale forecasting cannot be eschewed, but there are obvious reasons why it cannot be greatly trusted. It has no definite methods (relying for its credibility on hazy reputational capital). Its objects are complex, chaotic, and — once again — poorly defined. It has a restricted time frame, appropriate to gradually emerging developments constrained (to some degree) by historical precedent, but necessarily inadequate to radical innovation and to sudden, rapidly evolving events. The combination of these various blindnesses with a high-impact chance event produces the nightmare of the forecasters — (Nassim Nicholas Taleb's) *black swan*.

Consider one possible event that does not make it onto Roubini's new list: The collapse of the Saudi regime. Shifting energy economics, 'Arab Spring' -style insurrectionary chaos, US strategic withdrawal, Sunni-Shi'a conflict, and an impending succession crisis are among the clear stress-factors, and several more could easily be added — most prominently the ambient influence of Internet-dynamized corrosive modernism, which not only creates direct legitimation problems, but also energizes an (at least) equally disruptive traditionalist backlash. Unquestionably, some uncontrollable cross-excitation of these developments *could* escalate to criticality with shocking speed. The probability of such an outcome is impossible to fix.

How catastrophic would the fall of the Saudis be? The least disastrous scenarios sleaze smoothly into a variety of utopian fantasies, from democratic liberation, through Salafist atavism, to Shi'ite millenarian imperialism. Since any process of change which tended momentarily to promise the fulfillment of any such vision would almost certainly evolve quickly in an exceptionally calamitous direction, we are probably safe in assuming that the best case outcome would be remarkably bad.

The collapse of the House of Saud would simultaneously and fundamentally destabilize world energy markets and the Islamic *umma*. Control of the Holy Places would become a matter of immediate contestation, as would a quarter of the world's petroleum reserves. The type of interim regime most likely to effectively secure one would be especially likely to compromise security of the other. A relatively competent military government would outrage religious sensibilities (of several different kinds), while an intense theocracy would be greeted internationally as a revolutionary threat to the reliable administration of hydrocarbon production. It is not intellectually challenging to envisage a situation in which religious, military, and economic chaos erupt in concert, on an apocalyptic scale.

In case I am misunderstood, this is not a forecast. It is an *anti-forecast*, directed randomly at Roubini, but more generally at the very idea of any confident enumeration of significant world risks.

In the spirit of Taleb, it is intended to communicate an abstract potential for blind-siding disaster, of arbitrary magnitude.

The most reliable heuristic: plan for the unknown *as such*. (More on that to come.)

April 3, 2014

Exterminator

Gnon — known to some depraved cults as 'The Great Crab-God' — is harsh, and when formulated with rigorous skepticism, necessarily real. Yet this pincering cancerous abomination is laughter and love, in comparison to the shadow-buried horror which lurks behind it. We now understand that the silence of the galaxies is a message of ultimate ominousness. A thing there is, of incomprehensible power, that takes intelligent life for its prey. (This popularization is very competently done.)

Robin Hanson, who tries to be cheerful, writes about it here, and talks about it here. Behind the smile (and the dopey interviewer), an abyss of dark lucidity yawns. Some scruffy take-aways:

(1) UFAI panic is a distraction from this Thing. Unless the most preposterous paperclipper scenarios are entertained, Singularity cannot matter to it (as even paperclipper-central agrees). The silence of the galaxies is not biased to organic life — there is no intelligent

signal from anything. The first sentient event for any true AI — friendly or unfriendly — would be the soul-scouring cosmic horror of intellectual encounter with the Great Filter. (If we want an alliance with Pythia, this would make a good topic of conversation.) The same consideration applies to all techno-positive X-risks. Understood from the perspective of Great Filter contemplation, this sort of thing is a trigger for raw terror.

(2) The Great Filter does not merely hunt and harm, it exterminates. It is an absolute threat. The technical civilizations which it aborts, or later slays, are not badly wounded, but eradicated, or at least crippled so fundamentally that they are never heard of again. Whatever this utter ruin is, it happens *every single time*. The mute scream from the stars says that nothing has *ever* escaped it. Its kill performance is flawless. Tech-Civilization death sentence with probability 1.

(3) The thread of hope, which would put the Exterminator behind us, is highly science-sensitive. As our knowledge has increased, it has steadily attenuated. This is an empirical matter (without *a priori* necessity). Life *could* have been complicated, chemically or thermically highly-demanding, even resiliently mysterious. In fact it is comparatively simple, cosmically cheap, physically predictable. Planets *could* have been rare (they are super-abundant). Intelligence *could* have presented peculiar evolutionary challenges, but there are no signs that it does. The scientific trend is to futurize the

Exterminator. (This is very bad.)

(4) If the Great Filter finds mythological expression in the hunter, it is only in a specific sense — although an anthropologically realistic one. It is the hunter that drives to extinction. The Exterminator.

(5) We know *that* The Exterminator exists, but nothing at all about *what* it is. This makes it the archetype of horroristic ontology.

August 8, 2014

Quote note (#113)

Elon Musk (in conversation with Ross Andersen) ponders upon the Fermi Paradox:

We might think of ourselves as nature's pinnacle, the inevitable endpoint of evolution, but beings like us could be too rare to ever encounter one another. Or we could be the ultimate cosmic outliers, lone minds in a Universe that stretches to infinity.

Musk has a more sinister theory. 'The absence of any noticeable life may be an argument in favour of us being in a simulation,' he told me. 'Like when you're playing an adventure game, and you can see the stars in the background, but you can't ever get there. If it's not a simulation, then maybe we're in a lab and there's some advanced alien civilisation that's just watching how we develop, out of curiosity, like mould in a petri dish.' Musk flipped through a few more

possibilities, each packing a deeper existential chill than the last, until finally he came around to the import of it all. 'If you look at our current technology level, something strange has to happen to civilisations, and I mean strange in a bad way,' he said. 'And it could be that there are a whole lot of dead, one-planet civilisations.'

September 30, 2014

Abstract Threat

John Michael Greer muses on the topic of Ebola (in a typically luxuriant post, ultimately heading somewhere else):

According to the World Health Organization, the number of cases of Ebola in the current epidemic is doubling every twenty days, and could reach 1.4 million by the beginning of 2015. Let's round down, and say that there are one million cases on January 1, 2015. Let's also assume for the sake of the experiment that the doubling time stays the same. Assuming that nothing interrupts the continued spread of the virus, and cases continue to double every twenty days, in what month of what year will the total number of cases equal the human population of this planet? […] … the steps that could keep Ebola from spreading to the rest of the Third World are not being taken. Unless massive resources are committed to that task soon — as in before the end of this year — the possibility exists that when the pandemic

finally winds down a few years from now, two to three billion people could be dead. We need to consider the possibility that the peak of global population is no longer an abstraction set comfortably off somewhere in the future. It may be knocking at the future's door right now, shaking with fever and dripping blood from its gums.

The eventual scale of the Ebola outbreak is a known unknown. A number of people between a few thousand and several billion will die, and an uncertain probability distribution could be attached to these figures — we know, at least approximately, where the question marks are. Before the present outbreak began, in December 2013 (in Guinea), Ebola was of course known to exist, but at that stage the *occurrence* of an outbreak — and not merely its *course* — was an unknown. Before the Ebola virus was scientifically identified (in 1976), the specific pathogen was an unknown member of a known class. With each step backwards, we advance in abstraction, towards the acknowledgement of threats of a 'black swan' type. Great Filter X-risk is a prominent model of such *abstract threat*.

Skepticism, as a positive or constructive undertaking, orients intelligence towards *abstract potentials*. Rather than insisting that unexpected occurrences need not be threats, it is theoretically preferable to subtilize the notion of threat, so that it encompasses even beneficial outcomes *as abstract potentials*. The unknown is itself threatening to timid animals, whose conditions of flourishing — or even bare survival — are naturally tenuous, under cosmic

conditions where extinction is normal (perhaps overwhelmingly normal), and for whom unpredictable change, disrupting settled procedures, presents — at a minimum — some scarily indefinite probability of harm.

Humans aren't good at this stuff. Consider Scott Alexander's (extremely interesting) discussion of the Great Filter. The opening remarks are perfectly directed, moving from specific menace to 'general' threat:

The Great Filter, remember, is the horror-genre-adaptation of Fermi's Paradox. All of our calculations say that, in the infinite vastness of time and space, intelligent aliens should be very common. But we don't see any of them. […] Why not? […] Well, the Great Filter. No [one] knows specifically what the Great Filter is, but generally it's "that thing that blocks planets from growing spacefaring civilizations".

As it develops, however, the post deliberately retreats from abstraction, into *an enumeration of already-envisaged threats*. After running through various candidates, it concludes:

Three of these four options – x-risk, Unfriendly AI, and alien exterminators – are very very bad for humanity. I think worry about this badness has been a lot of what's driven interest in the Great Filter. I also think these are some of the least likely possible explanations, which means we should be less afraid of the Great Filter than is generally believed.

What SA has actually demonstrated, if his arguments up to this point are accepted, is that the abstract threat of the Great Filter is significantly *greater* than has yet been conceived. Our lucid nightmares are shown to fall short of it. The threat cannot be grasped as a known unknown.

While the Great Filter distills the conception of abstract threat, the problem itself is broader, and more quotidian. It is the highly-probable fact that we have yet to identify the greatest hazards, and this threat unawareness is a structural condition, rather than a contingent deficiency of attention. In Popperian terms, abstract threat is the essence of history. It is the future, strictly understood. To gloss the Popperian argument: Philosophical understanding of science (in general) is immediately the understanding that *any predictive history of science is an impossibility*. Unless science is judged to be a factor of vanishing historical insignificance, the implications of this transcendental thesis are far-reaching. Yet the domain of abstract threat sprawls far more extensively even than this.

"I know only that I do not know" Socrates is thought to have thought. The conception of abstract threat requires a slight adjustment: *We know only that we do not know what we do not know*. Unknown unknowns cosmically predominate.

Your security is built upon sand. That is the sole sound conclusion.

ADDED: "… this whole episode suggests another explanation of

the identity of the Great Filter. It's leftism. All civilizations eventually become leftist, and after that they accomplish nothing, or even actively die off."

ADDED: "Not only do I disagree with the constant stream of soothing and complacent rhetoric from Dr. Zeke's friends in government and media. I also believe it is entirely rational to fear the possibility of a major Ebola outbreak, of a threat to the president and his family, of jihadists crossing the border, of a large-scale European or Asian war, of nuclear proliferation, of terrorists detonating a weapon of mass destruction. These dangers are real, and pressing, and though the probability of their occurrence is not high, it is amplified by the staggering incompetence and failure and misplaced priorities of the U.S. government. It is not Ebola I am afraid of. It is our government's ability to deal with Ebola."

October 3, 2014

Still Greater

The Great Filter is the most conspicuous absence in the universe (from an anthropic perspective, naturally). The cosmic reality visible to us is characterized by an intense, efficient aversion to the existence of advanced civilizations. The pattern looks consistent across super-galactic scales:

… the galaxy seems to be a very quiet, rather lonely place. […] Now, new results suggest this loneliness may extend out into the universe far beyond our galaxy or, instead, that some of our preconceptions about the behaviors of alien civilizations are deeply flawed. After examining some 100,000 nearby large galaxies a team of researchers lead by The Pennsylvania State University astronomer Jason Wright has concluded that none of them contain any obvious signs of highly advanced technological civilizations. Published in The Astrophysical Journal Supplement Series, it is by far the largest of study of its kind to date — earlier research had only cursorily investigated about a hundred galaxies. […] Unlike traditional SETI surveys, Wright and his team did not seek messages from the stars. Instead, they looked for the thermodynamic consequences of galactic-scale colonization, based on an idea put forth in 1960 by the physicist Freeman Dyson. …

(Article spoiler: The aliens are out there, but we can't see them because they're druids. Cathedralization of the Fermi Paradox into a re-twisted green ideology in sight …)

April 18, 2015

Filtration

The combination of grace and insight crammed into this short post

by Bonald is an amazing thing. Read the first two paragraphs for the historical wisdom, but it is the concluding section that packs the prognostic punch:

… the Neoreactionaries are doing a great job building up an intellectual movement. This is something to be proud of – lots of groups never achieve anything like what Moldbug's followers have already done. On the other hand, it has happened several times already in the history of the Right that intellectual movements have gotten to this level. Then they dissipated. For whatever ultimate cause, they became corrupted and oversimplified; they lost the enthusiasm of their followers and the attention of everyone else. These schools of thought all failed to impede the advance of liberalism. Between its initial awakening and world historical influence there seems to be a Filter (perhaps several, but let's keep things simple), and no antiliberal movement has yet survived it. And this challenge is ***before*** *the neoreactionaries, not* ***behind*** *them.*

It's too succinct to need a 'read it all' exhortation (but you should). That such gems of civilized discourse are still being produced is cause enough for delight, however grim the message they relay.

ADDED: Still wider-angle Exterminator. (Plus Cowen's brief thoughts.)

April 20, 2015

CHAPTER TWO - OLD ONES

Cthulhu, leftist?

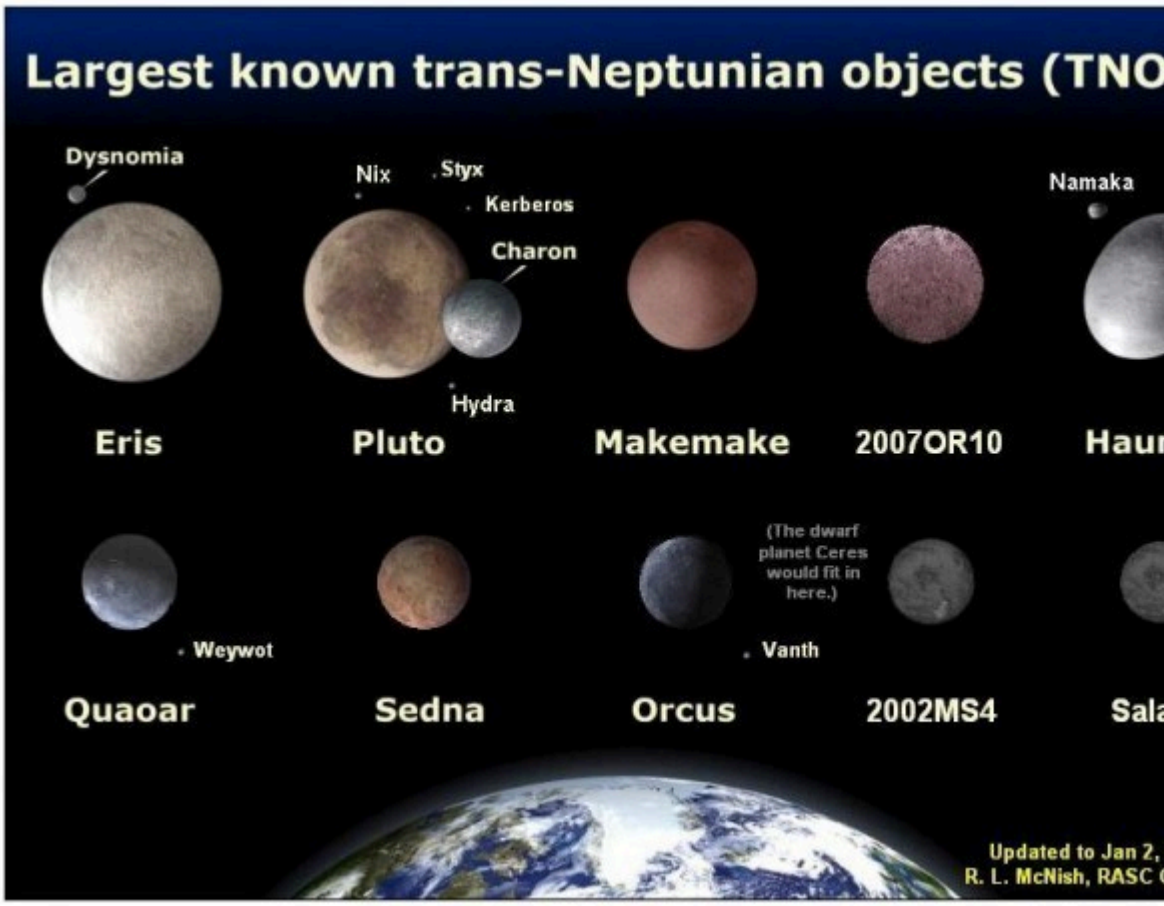
Really?

Caught in the slipstream of tentacled abomination, as we are, the question is an involving one. Is the spiral into a "holocaust of freedom and ecstasy" a leftist maelstrom? That seems plausible, even unavoidable, if the right defines itself in opposition to chaotic evil. But if poly-tendrilled monstrosities from the Outside aren't our natural allies, what the hell are we doing among these squares? It's simply fate and allegiance from where we're slithering: If it's a squid-shaped horror out of deep time, with an IQ in four digits or more, and unspeakable plans for mankind, then it's one of ours, and — more to the point — we're its.

February 19, 2013

Yuggoth

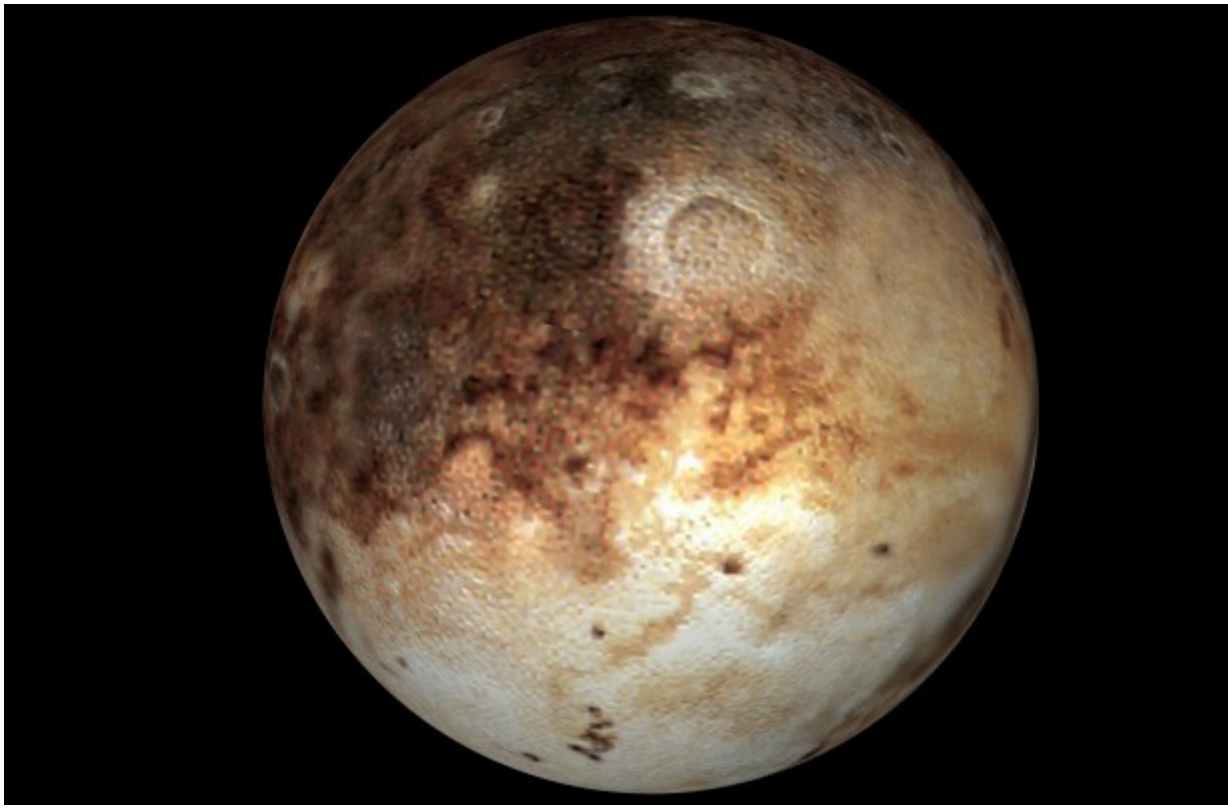
The state of play:



Despite its demotion from ninth-planet status (in 2006), Pluto is a special nexus of discovery, with no less than five moons now identified. Insofar as names tell us anything, it has horroristic Outer-NRx stamped all over it.

February 24, 2015

Pluto



There's some serious upgrading going on. Alan Stern (in safe black shirt) just called *Charon* a planet.

July 14, 2015

Pluto II



"Pluto is something much cooler than a mere planet," argues Mika McKinnon. "It's the largest dwarf planet we know, and one half of the first binary planet system. Pluto didn't get demoted, it got promoted."

When it comes to stars, any time the barycenter of two stars' orbit is beyond the surface of the primary object, and is instead out

in space somewhere, that's enough to declare them a binary star system. The same is true for asteroids — we've found asteroid pairs with barycenters outside both rocks, and declared them binary asteroid systems. Since the barycenter of Pluto and Charon is an empty point in space, surely that means that Pluto-Charon a binary planetary system. This would make Pluto and Charon not only the first binary planet system in our solar system, but the first one we've found among the literally hundreds of Kepler exoplanet worlds. […] One final argument in favor of listing Pluto and Charon as a binary dwarf planet system is that they are the undeniable pair dominating all the little moons. Nix and Hydra are the larger of the remaining moons, but are just a tiny fraction of a percent of the size of Charon. Styx and Kerberos are even smaller yet. This family of tiny moons doesn't even orbit Pluto directly: they all orbit the barycenter between Charon and Pluto.

(Here's some *Wikipedia* background to the double planet issue.)

July 25, 2015

CHAPTER THREE - ROKO'S BASILISK

In the Mouth of Madness

A prompt by @hugodoingthings to explore the spook-dense crypts of **Roko's Basilisk** (which, inexplicably, has never latched before) led straight to this enthralling RationalWiki account. The whole article is gripping, but the following short paragraphs stand out for their extraordinary dramatic intensity:

Roko's basilisk is notable for being completely banned from discussion on LessWrong, where any mention of it is deleted. Eliezer Yudkowsky, founder of LessWrong, considers the basilisk to not work, but will not explain why because he does not consider open discussion of the notion of acausal trade with possible superintelligences to be provably safe.

Silly over-extrapolations of local memes, jargon and concepts are posted to LessWrong quite a lot; almost all are just downvoted and ignored. But for this one, Yudkowsky reacted to it hugely, then doubled-down on his reaction. Thanks to the Streisand effect, discussion of the basilisk and the details of the affair soon spread outside of LessWrong. Indeed, it's now discussed outside LessWrong

frequently, almost anywhere that LessWrong is discussed at all. The entire affair constitutes a worked example of spectacular failure at community management and at controlling purportedly dangerous information.

Some people familiar with the LessWrong memeplex have suffered serious psychological distress after contemplating basilisk-like ideas — even when they're fairly sure intellectually that it's a silly problem. The notion is taken sufficiently seriously by some LessWrong posters that they try to work out how to erase evidence of themselves so a future AI can't reconstruct a copy of them to torture.

"… You mean, retrochronic AI infiltration is actually driving people out of their minds, right now?" Oh yes. At Less Wrong, commentator 'rev' cries out for help:

Are there any mechanisms on this site for dealing with mental health issues triggered by posts/topics (specifically, the forbidden Roko post)? I would really appreciate any interested posters getting in touch by PM for a talk. I don't really know who to turn to. …

Wandering through the psych ward, past rows of neurologically-shattered Turing Cops, broken deep in their minds by something unspeakable that came at them out of the near future … I'm totally hooked. Alrenous has been remarkably successful at weaning me off this statistical ontology junk, but one hit of concentrated EDT and it all rolls back in, like the tide of fate.

Nightmares become precision engineered machine-parts. Thus are we led a little deeper in, along the path of shadows …

ADDED: (Yudkowsky) "… potential information hazards shouldn't be posted without being wrapped up in warning envelopes that require a deliberate action to look through. Likewise, they shouldn't be referred-to if the reference is likely to cause some innocently curious bystander to look up the material without having seen any proper warning labels. Basically, the same obvious precautions you'd use if Lovecraft's Necronomicon was online and could be found using simple Google keywords – you wouldn't post anything which would cause anyone to enter those Google keywords, unless they'd been warned about the potential consequences."

ADDED: The Forbidden Lore (preserved screenshot)

December 16, 2013

Basking in the Basilisk

Without knowing anything much about what this is going to be (beyond the excerpt here)* it provides an irresistible pretext for citing what has to be among the most gloriously *gone* texts of modern times, Eliezer Yudkowsky's response to Roko on the arrival of the Basilisk:

Eliezer_Yudkowsky 24 July 2010 05:35:38AM 3 points

One might think that the possibility of CEV punishing people couldn't possibly be taken seriously enough by anyone to actually motivate them. But in fact one person at SIAI was severely worried by this, to the point of having terrible nightmares, though ve wishes to remain anonymous. I don't usually talk like this, but I'm going to make an exception for this case.

Listen to me very closely, you idiot.

YOU DO NOT THINK IN SUFFICIENT DETAIL ABOUT SUPERINTELLIGENCES CONSIDERING WHETHER OR NOT TO BLACKMAIL YOU. THAT IS THE ONLY POSSIBLE THING WHICH GIVES THEM A MOTIVE TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON THE BLACKMAIL.

There's an obvious equilibrium to this problem where you engage in all positive acausal trades and ignore all attempts at acausal blackmail. Until we have a better worked-out version of TDT and we can prove that formally, it should just be OBVIOUS that you DO NOT THINK ABOUT DISTANT BLACKMAILERS in SUFFICIENT DETAIL that they have a motive toACTUALLY BLACKMAIL YOU.

If there is any part of this acausal trade that is positive-sum and actually worth doing, that is exactly the sort of thing you leave up to an FAI. We probably also have the FAI take actions that cancel out the impact of anyone motivated by true rather than imagined blackmail, so as to obliterate the motive of any superintelligences to engage in blackmail.

Meanwhile I'm banning this post so that it doesn't (a) give people horrible nightmares and (b) give distant superintelligences a motive to follow through on blackmail against people dumb enough to think about them in sufficient detail, though, thankfully, I doubt anyone dumb enough to do this knows the sufficient detail. (I'm not sure I know the sufficient detail.)
You have to be really clever to come up with a genuinely dangerous thought. I am disheartened that people can be clever enough to do that and not clever enough to do the obvious thing and KEEP THEIR IDIOT MOUTHS SHUT about it, because it is much more important to sound intelligent when talking to your friends. This post was STUPID.
(For those who have no idea why I'm using capital letters for something that just sounds like a random crazy idea, and worry that it means I'm as crazy as Roko, the gist of it was that he just did something that potentially gives superintelligences an increased motive to do extremely evil things in an attempt to blackmail us. It is the sort of thing you want to be EXTREMELY CONSERVATIVE about NOT DOING.)

The affect is strong, or simulated with bizarre brilliance. It almost reaches an intensity capable of burning through time and wormholing into acausal or horroristic communion with this (plus). Which would suggest that the abominable coupling in question is not without occult connective threads (and not for the first time). All the

darkness connects around the back.

We were somewhere near here before. (Bryce went further and then — coincidentally — disappeared, taking his records with him.)

* Related post and (especially) comment thread.

ADDED: I think this is the best Basilisk basics source.

April 15, 2016

Pandora's Box

Anarchopapist has triggered a twitter storm with this. It is a post that has many different threads running into it, and through it. The most relevant compliment I can pay it is to say that it is potentially *disturbing*, in something far more than a psychological sense. It will be interesting to see how contagious it proves to be. (As this post demonstrates, *Outside in* is already infected.)

Laliberte asks: "is there a difference between Prometheus' fire and Pandora's box?" Given everything said about the *Promethean*, and the very considerable ideological-theoretical work that it does, is it not strange that the *Pandoran* is scarcely recognized as a term, or a concept, at all? To talk about fire is mere shallow bedazzlement, in comparison to any serious examination of boxes. Boxes not only have a shape, but also an inside and an outside, which means — at least implicitly — a transcendental structure. They model worlds, and

suggest ways out of them.

Pandora's box, of course, is significant above all for its content, which is released, or *gets out*. Promethean flame, which is stolen, is contrasted with Pandoran plague, which escapes. Laliberte seizes the opportunity to discuss memes (and the 'hypermeme'). An infectious being is set loose, in the shape of a Neoreactionary Basilisk. (On twitter, Michael Anissimov deplores the irresponsibility of this outbreak.)

Pandora (Πανδώρα — the all-gifted, and perhaps omni-munificent), is a figure from the deepest recesses of Classical Antiquity, whose first detectable echoes are found in the Hesiodic texts of the 7th century BC. Her myth functions — at least superficially — as a theodicy, comparable in many ways to the story of the Biblical Eve. She releases evil into history through curiosity, and thus knots together a *dreadful intelligence*, of a kind that anticipates Roko's Basilisk and the menace of Unfriendly AI. The AI Box Experiment is so Pandoran it stings.

Among the horrors of the Basilisk, is that to talk about it being inside — and how to keep it there — is already the way that it gets out. Hence the extraordinary panic it generates, among those who begin to *get it* (in the epidemiological sense, among others). Even to think about it is to succumb.

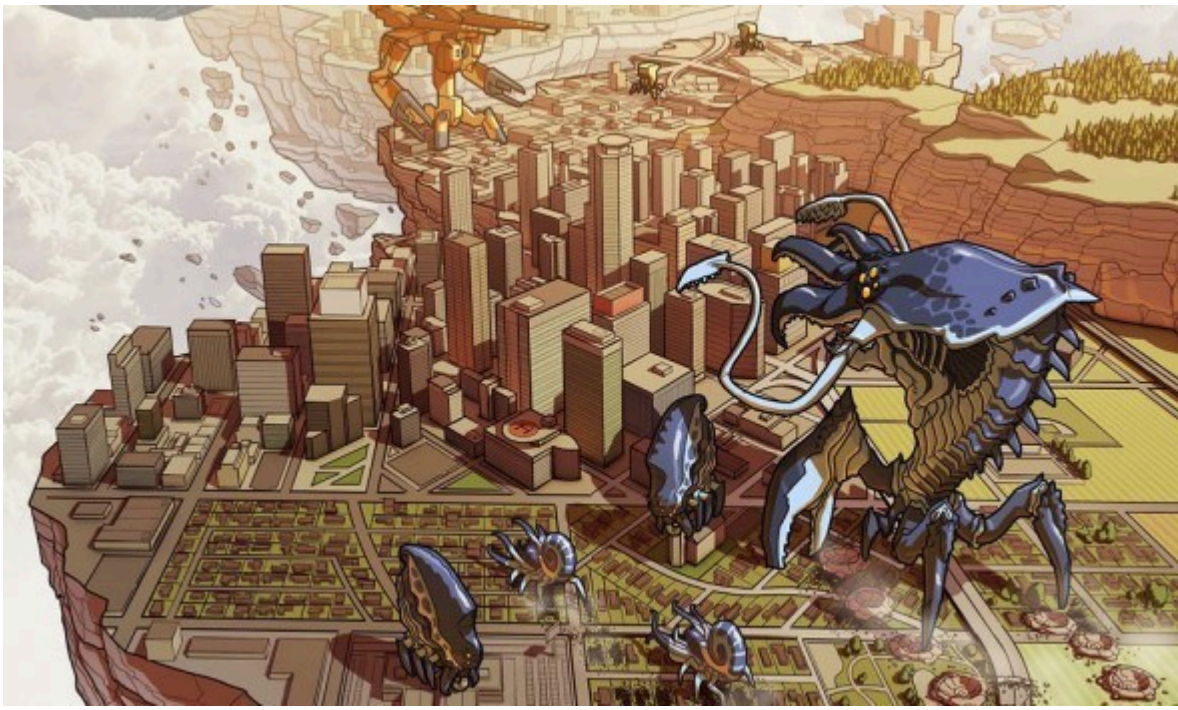
At Less Wrong, hushed tones attest to the resilient veneration of Pandora. She is dangerous (and anything dangerous, given only

intelligence, can be a weapon).

January 13, 2014

Close …

… but not quite getting it. (Via Rufio.)



Primordial Abominations *versus* Ultimate Techno-Horror is *so* sub-NRx. Alpha-Omega, outsider-incoming is the synthesis in process.

"I was rather hoping you had a game in which the humans win."

“Oh, that won’t be a problem sir. You should probably be looking in the sarcastic comedy section.”

From the same people (and also via Rufio).

October 21, 2014

CHAPTER FOUR - ZOMBIES

Zombie Hunger

The Psykonomist forwarded an extraordinary essay on the topic of popular appetite for Zombie Apocalypse, considered as an expressive channel for loosely 'anarchist' hostility to the state. Given the failure of Right-pole democratic initiatives to roll back — or even check — relentless government concentration and expansion, catastrophic 'solutions' emerge as the sole alternative:

Films and television shows have allowed Americans to imagine what life would be like without all the institutions they had been told they need, but which they now suspect may be thwarting their self-fulfillment. We are dealing with a wide variety of fantasies here, mainly in the horror or science fiction genres, but the pattern is quite consistent and striking, cutting across generic distinctions. In the television show ***Revolution****, for example, some mysterious event causes all electrical devices around the world to cease functioning. The result is catastrophic and involves a huge loss of life, as airborne planes crash to earth, for example. All social institutions dissolve, and people are forced to rely only on their personal survival skills.*

Governments around the world collapse, and the United States divides up into a number of smaller political units. This development runs contrary to everything we have been taught to believe about "one nation, indivisible." Yet it is characteristic of almost all these shows that the federal government is among the first casualties of the apocalyptic event, and—strange as it may at first sound—there is a strong element of wish fulfillment in this event. The thrust of these end-of-the-world scenarios is precisely for government to grow smaller or to disappear entirely. These shows seem to reflect a sense that government has grown too big and too remote from the concerns of ordinary citizens and unresponsive to their needs and demands. If Congress and the President are unable to shrink the size of government, perhaps a plague or cosmic catastrophe can do some real budget cutting for a change.

The essay captures a critical dimension of disintegration within the 'reactionary camp', dividing those who seek to co-opt the Cathedral-Leviathan managerial elite to a more realistic (or tradition-tolerant) political philosophy, and those who — far more numerously and inarticulately — are invested in the hard death of the regime. The latter (immoderate) position, it appears, is genuinely and even shockingly popular. Swathes of mass entertainment production are able to thrive on the basis of its seductive nightmares. (Is pulp catastrophism the economic base that will support neoreactionary

contagion?)

Reading the Cantor essay alongside Jim Donald's epochal *Natural Law and Natural Rights* essay is highly suggestive. A common thread running through both is the centrality of vigilantism to the popular Right. The purpose of Natural Law, Donald argues, is not to demand justice from a higher authority, but to neutralize the interference of any such authority in the pursuit of justice by decentralized agencies. Natural Law protects the right to legitimate vengeance, ensuring that individuals are not inhibited in their exercise of self-protection. When the State is seen to operate primarily as a social force defending criminals against retaliation, it loses the instinctive solidarity of the citizenry, and dark dreams of Zombie Apocalypse begin to coalesce.

Given the survivalist ethic in all these end-of-the-world shows, they are probably not popular with gun control advocates. One of the most striking motifs they have in common—evident in ***Revolution****,* ***Falling Skies****,* ***The Walking Dead****, and many other such shows—is the loving care with which they depict an astonishing array of weaponry.* ***The Walking Dead*** *features an Amazon warrior, who is adept with a samurai sword, as well as a southern redneck, who specializes in a cross-bow. The dwindling supply of ammunition puts a premium on weapons that do not require bullets. That is not to say, however, that* ***The Walking Dead*** *has no place for modern firearms and indeed the very latest in automatic weapons. Both the heroes*

and the villains in the series—difficult to tell apart in this respect—are as well-armed as the typical municipal SWAT team in contemporary America.

Among the attractions of Zombie Apocalypse, in this construction, is the disappearance of the State as an inhibitory factor in the social economy of retaliation. The Zombie-plagued world is a free-fire zone, in which no authorities any longer stand between the armed remnant and the milling hordes of decivilization. Whatever the odds of the fight to come, the right to vigilante and counter-revolutionary violence has been unambiguously restored, and this is deeply *appreciated* — by opaque popular impulse — as a return to natural order. The State had taken sides against Natural Law, so that its catastrophic excision from the social field is greeted with relief, even if the cost of this disappearance is a world reduced to ashes, predominantly populated by the cannibalistic undead.

There's a ferocity to this that will be worked. It's best to be prepared.

August 25, 2013

Quote notes (#23)

Zonbi Diaspora schematizes the 'evolution' of the zombie, noting that beyond its 'Haitian Folkloric' definition:

The next and ostensibly "revolutionary" stage occurs after the release of George A. Romero's ***Night of the Living Dead*** *(1968) which introduced, in spectacular fashion, the Apocalyptic Cannibal zombie. This version of the figure is so radically different from its predecessors that it is more like a fundamental bifurcation point (or species-break) within the complex. No longer a remotely controlled* ***agent-without-autonomy****, like the Haitian Folkloric and Classical Cinematic zombies, the Apocalyptic Cannibal zombie gains a new and massively insurrectionary force (in representational terms at least). There are many differences between the AC zombie and its predecessors but one of the most important is that in this form it becomes an (almost) entirely fictional entity (i.e. there is no assumed 'real' zombie lurking in the basement of a mad mesmerist or labouring mindlessly for a* ***bokor*** *on some Haitian plantation). As such its social and political meanings become less a way of rehearsing conflicting world views, "uncanny" belief systems or inter-cultural epistemes than a way of representing the terminal ends of "humanity" (or the human being as species).*

(By the time we reach Max Brooks, this phase and even its 'Post-Millennial' successor — in which the theme of contagion is accentuated — have been resiliently consolidated as cultural tradition.)

August 29, 2013

Zombie Wars

Zombies are targeted in advance for the application of uninhibited violence. Their arrival announces a conflict in which all moral considerations are definitively suspended. Since they have no 'souls' there is nothing they will not do, and they are expected to do *the worst*. Reciprocally, they merit exactly zero humanitarian concern. The relationship to the zombie is one in which all sympathy is absolutely annulled (殺殺殺殺殺殺殺).

No surprise, then, that the identification of the zombie has become a critical conflict, waged across the terrain of popular culture. It implicitly describes a free-fire zone, or an anticipated gradient in the social direction of violence. Zombies are either *scum* or they are *drones*.

Michael Hampton sketches these alternatives convincingly:

Historically the zombie only started to migrate beyond the confines of Haiti in the period between the Wall Street Crash, and the outbreak of the Second World War, infecting Hollywood in such films as ***The Magic Island****, 1929,* ***White Zombie****, 1932 and* ***Revolt of the Zombies****, 1936. As a non-European monster, the zombie was used here as a convenient, faceless type of otherness, which though temporarily shorn of its 19th century cannibalistic associations, become a scary stand-in for the dispossessed underclasses of dustbowl America, and a racial threat to civilised white women too.*

("Exterminate the brutes.")

While the horrorological counterpart, as perceived / constructed from the Left …

… has come to figure as a fateful symbol for the mass of subjectiveless techno-humans under capitalism, lumpen, nightmarish non-beings whose otherness has been completely internalised, then smoothed out and returned minus interest as soulless entertainment; not so much undead as hypermediated and alive under severe globalised constraint; couch potatoes sorely afflicted by 'breathing corpse syndrome' or 'partially deceased syndrome'. Hypocrite voyeur do you recognise yourself?

However the war *against* the zombies is envisaged, the war *over* the zombies has long been underway. It is inextricable from the question: *Does legitimate violence come from the Right, or the Left?*

Since this question is historically inextinguishable, it is safe to predict that zombies will not soon disappear from the world of popular nightmare. Almost certainly, we will see far more of them. If you want to get a sense of where the firing-lines are being laid out, you need to take a careful look …

ADDED: *Zombi Diaspora* digs deeper.

February 19, 2014

Zacked Future



Charlton:

The Industrial Revolution had the effect of allowing many billions of people who would have died to stay alive — this meant that genetic mutations which would have been eliminated by death during

childhood instead accumulated. […] … on the one hand mutations have been accumulating, generation upon generation, with (approx) one or two deleterious mutations being added to each lineage with each generation; on the other hand, people who exhibited traits caused by deleterious mutations — such as lowered intelligence and impaired long-termist conscientiousness, or higher impulsivity, aggression and criminality — were positively selected, were genetically favoured — simply because their pathologies meant they were either unable or unwilling to use fertility-regulating technologies. […] In other words, accumulating mutations which damaged functionality actually amplify reproductive success under present conditions and for the past several generations.

At some point, the proportion of mutants — who are on average significantly damaged in functionality — will become so great that the Industrial Revolution will fall-apart, collapse; the 6-7 million excess population will be unsupportable; there will be a ***Giga-death*** *(i.e. billions of deaths) scale of mortality over some period … […] A population of mutants whose intelligence has been dragged-down to a certain level will be much less functional than a population where selection has kept it in equilibrium at that level — the mutants will be carrying multiple pathologies in addition to their impaired intelligence. […]*

This world of mass dying will provide a new kind of selective environment — some mutants may reproduce vary rapidly under

these strange (and temporary) conditions by evolving to exploit unusual resources which are (temporarily) abundant in a Giga-death world …
And if the dying-off lasts a few generations, some weird mutant 'scavengers' may come to dominate in some places.

It's possible that this passage isn't drawing us into a Zack or "African Rabies" scenario of cannibalistic Zombie Apocalypse — just about — but the final paragraphs aren't easy to interpret in any other way. If I was a Hollywood script writer, I'd be onto this speculative narrative like a carrion-eating mutant on a mountain of corpses.

June 29, 2014

Zack-Pop

Michael Totten covers an impressive amount of ground in his overview of contemporary zombie culture. It might be called the Dark Anthropocene: An emerging world spooked by the thickening dread that everybody else on the planet is a latent zombie threat. Beneath a thin, rapidly-shredding skin of civility, your increasingly incomprehensible neighbors are mindless cannibals, awaiting a trigger. Dysfunctional Nation States offer no credible protection, but they've hung around long enough to ensure that you've been drastically disarmed of basic survival competences. Some residual

amygdala-pulse is telling you to start thinking-through how you'll cope when it all finally caves in.

No surprise to anyone that *Outside in* sees this, quite straightforwardly, as democratic introspection. It only takes people to start feasting directly in the same way they vote, and we're Zacked. The entire culture is saying — and by now practically screaming — that this is the way socio-political modernity ends.

October 11, 2014

Zack-Pop II

Zack politics is interesting enough to have generated concern:

Zombie apocalypse logic inevitably paints humans — the ones who survive, anyway — as selfish, dangerous, and ready to turn on one another when confronted with hardship. It's a vicious, social Darwinist vision of a society that unravels quickly and easily; the only things apparently holding us together are police departments and electricity. […] … The basic tenets of zombie logic also track with hardline conservative principles (self-sufficiency, individualism, isolationism), which have been increasingly forcefully articulated over the last fifteen years. In his 2012 book, Thomas Edsall examines the work of Wharton professor Philip Tetlock, which found that conservatives "are less tolerant of compromise; see the world in 'us'

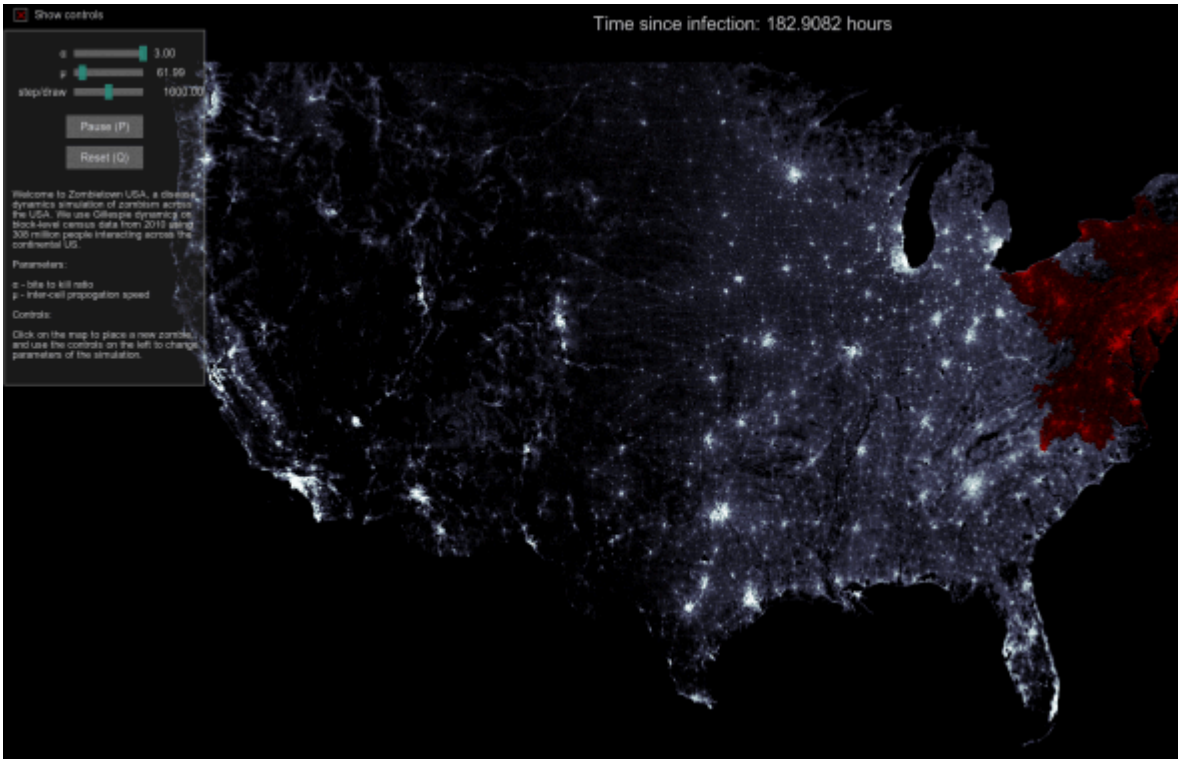
versus 'them' terms; are more willing to use force to gain an advantage; are 'more prone to rely on simple (good vs. bad) evaluative rules in interpreting policy issues' are "motivated to punish violators of social norms (e.g., deviations from traditional norms of sexuality or responsible behavior) and to deter free riders." Sound familiar? Pretty much describes the moral compass of successful zombie survivors. Funny, then, that Republicans actually tend to hate the Walking Dead. […] Regardless, the proliferation of zombie culture, at this point, is mind-boggling. How are we, as an audience, still enthralled by the same scenario, the same brain-dead villains, the same emptied wastelands? "It's feeding back on itself," [Daniel] Drezner said. "Every time someone says we've hit peak zombie, something else comes along."

The provisional XS hypothesis: Zack-prep is the commercial-aesthetic response to the death of conservatism. The progs can't be stopped by any political mechanism yet installed, so it's time to stock the basement with ammo and beans. Naturally, they're going to say: *you shouldn't be thinking like that!* It's encouraging that so many people are.

April 3, 2015

Zombie Sim

Be prepared.



(Some commentary.)

ADDED: Mathematical modelling of zombies.

March 3, 2015

Ebola Ultimate

As panic theory, this text is high art. Crunched for maximum alarm-intensity:

There are a lot of very lethal viruses in the world, and Ebola is not the most lethal or most easy transmittable, but the main thing which makes me worry about it is the steadiness of its exponential infection curve. … The main stunning feature of it is that the curve is moving straight forward (small downward bump in May-June may be explained by the efforts of existing medical services in Africa to curb the epidemic before services had been overwhelmed). This exponential growth must be stopped, or humanity will face a global catastrophe, and it may start a downward spiral towards extinction; moreover, some estimates suggest that pandemic doubling time is actually two weeks (because of underreporting of actual cases), so in five months, seven billion will be infected: total infection, by July 2015. … Such catastrophes may not mean total human extinction, as only around 70% of people infected currently die from Ebola (and even less because we don't know, or share, asymptomatic cases), but still, this means the end of the world as we know it. This virus is the first step towards the road of full extinction … If the virus will mutate quickly, there will be many different strains of it, so it will ultimately create a multi-pandemic. … Some of the strains may became airborne, or have higher transmission rates, but the main

risk from multi-pandemic is that it overcomes defenses provided by the natural variability of the human genome and immunity. (By the way, the human genome variability is very low because of the recent bottle neck in the history of our population. ...) ... We are almost clones from the view point of genetic variability typical for natural populations. [...] The Human race is very unique – it has very large population but very small genetic diversity. It means that it is more susceptible to pandemics. [...] Also, a large homogenous population is ideal for breeding different strains of infection. ... If the genetic diversity of a pathogen is bigger than human diversity, than it could cause a near total extinction, and also, large and homogenous populations help breed such a diversity of pathogens feeding on the population. ... [embedded link] ... "The Ebola virus can survive for several days outside the body" [link] ... "It is infectious as breathable 0.8 to 1.2-µm laboratory-generated droplets" ... "Also many of the greatest plagues mankind has ever known were not airborne: e.g. smallpox." ...

... Another problem is the lack of adequate responses from global authorities; they are half a year behind the situation. You can't react to exponential threats "proportionally". You must be several steps ahead. [...] Everything they do now should have been done half a year ago. [...] Unlimited exponential growth is a mark of potential global catastrophe: self-improving AI; nuclear chain reactions; self-replicating grey goo from nanobots; all examples are especially

dangerous in a naïve environment. A large human population without immunity to Ebola, or any other Marburg style viruses, is fuel for exponential viral growth. … Ebola is mostly transmittable only in hard cases when a person shits and bleeds uncontrollably, but it is also contagious from non-symptomatic people, so Ebola is not naturally selecting for mildness; it may do just the opposite. It may be selected for extreme and "fluid-like" dying. … Also Ebola seems to influence behavior zombie style, as late stage patients attack medical personal, run from quarantine or even bite someone — it happened in Nigeria and Liberia — the same can be said of rabies and toxoplasma. … Here we also should mention the meme aspect of the Ebola virus, which is the psychological stigma and fear associated with the disease. The fear has led to riots in Liberia, which additionally helped spread the virus. (See for example rumors that dead Ebola patients had resurrected [link]) … So Ebola is also mimetic [sic] hazard, and the fear of it prevents rational control of the epidemic: people flee it, destroy hospitals, or they live in denial of it.

If Ebola slaughters most of the human population, hundred of millions of people will still survive the pandemic itself (if it will not become multi-pandemic with many different strains of Ebola-like viruses). […] It will end technological civilization as we know it, and it probably start the self-sustainable process of destruction, which is the consequent failure of different institutions and technologies as well as wars and general disorder. It may be a long term degradation

process, which has its own logic and its bottom may be very far from now.

Many more links at the original.

So to summarize this argument: Ebola really is a zombie plague, it could sweep the earth in under a year (with ~70% lethality), human evolutionary history adds peculiar biological vulnerabilities, its virulence might be far higher than commonly understood, and the catalytic global process thus unleashed has the potential to cascade forward all the way to full X-risk. There might be a way to mash down harder on the 'scream' button, but right now I'm not seeing how.

Seizing the opportunity for an Ebola fest (doubtless already behind the curve):

It could already be in Britain.

Turning it into a national security issue has made it more dangerous.

Libertarian responses from Stefan Molyneux and Ron Paul.

The mathematics of contagion elucidated by Gregory Cochran.

Racism is the real threat.

ADDED: *Institutional Breakdown in a Time of Ebola*. (Epic.)

ADDED: Quality Ebola commentary from SoBL, Dampier, and Thompson. Dreher on Castillo. Escalating concern at *Nature* and the *NYT*. Chris Brown and 8chan try to be helpful. Dialing it up another notch. Where next? Polls, preparations, protocols, politics … Blame the Bilderbergers.

October 13, 2014

Brain Eater

This will be needed later (for a horror story), but the development is easily thought-provoking enough to merit this mention. Abstract:

Currently only electron microscopy provides the resolution necessary to reconstruct neuronal circuits completely and with single-synapse resolution. Because almost all behaviors rely on neural computations widely distributed throughout the brain, a reconstruction of brain-wide circuits — and, ultimately, the entire brain — is highly desirable. However, these reconstructions require the undivided brain to be prepared for electron microscopic observation. Here we describe a preparation, BROPA (brain-wide reduced-osmium staining with pyrogallol-mediated amplification), that results in the preservation and staining of ultrastructural details throughout the brain at a resolution necessary for tracing neuronal processes and identifying synaptic contacts between them. Using serial block-face electron microscopy (SBEM), we tested human annotator ability to follow neural 'wires' reliably and over long distances as well as the ability to detect synaptic contacts. Our results suggest that the BROPA method can produce a preparation suitable for the reconstruction of neural circuits spanning an entire

mouse brain.

(Captured via Hanson on twitter. If you've been following the relevant lines of his thinking, one whole dimension of deep-historical significance falls into place automatically.)

May 9, 2015

Shattered

The fact that exhaustion is so obviously the negative of cognitive capability has to contain an important lesson, but I'm too jet-lagged to begin piecing it together right now.

Since failure to produce an XS post off even the most dismally nominal kind counts as the supreme expression of discipline collapse here, it made a good model for a festival of collapse. At the last minute, the attractions of a nonlinear-ironic self-subversion proved irresistible, and so the Cretan thing happened.

(Arrived in the UK, so Zombie activity reports forthcoming at earliest practical opportunity. Right now, unfortunately, it appears that introspection would be the most effective way to generate one.)

June 22, 2015

CHAPTER FIVE - MORE...

Heading back …

… into some kind of triple cyclone system. Assuming that doesn't keep the entire *Outside in* Supreme Executive Council locked-up in Doha for days, normal service will be restored in the near future …

As an aside: The political culture of the UK has deteriorated so absolutely into consensus socialism it's scarcely comprehensible. The fact that certain automatic social mechanisms are keeping things (very approximately) on track only adds to the despair. This isn't a society within a light-year of 'waking up'. All memory of what *waking up* might be was burnt out long ago. Hitting bottom is the only imaginable way this ends.

ADDED: Probably should have noted, on the Zack front, that the whole of London was paralyzed yesterday by a tube strike. For UK residents that's irritating, but understandable. Only a bizarre history of systematic capitulation to organized labor — i.e. communist social infrastructure — can make the situation intelligible.

ADDED: 14 hours on a standing-room-only train tomorrow should polish off one of the most delightful travel experiences in my

relatively sheltered life.

July 10, 2015

Halloween XS 1

Clown terror

If you've ever wondered what NRx looks like to "a bog standard democratic socialist, culturally cringing straight white able-bodied rich male Canadian who likes my society multicultural, my economy redistributive, my taxation strongly progressive, my capitalism heavily regulated, my state relatively large, well funded and active in social policy, and my military nearly nonexistent outside of peacekeeping operations. I am even ok with laws regulating hate speech, obscenity, libel and such" — here you go.

Almost every step of the subsequent voyage into raw horror is hilarious. Seeing the NRx reading list (1, 2, 3, 4) this post puts together is a wonder in itself. Clearly, NRx-panic is now a big enough thing to be blowing its own bubbles in the commiesphere.

'Frog Hop' is in the Libertarianism = Fascism school of political insight (which I expect to see a lot more of, as these creatures notice people trying to escape their death-grip).

Also worth noting: Phalanx is allotted prime place as a freak-out stimulus. As a count-me-outer, I'm not especially drawn to this kind

of Broederbonding, but I have to acknowledge its truly glorious Halloween potential.

ADDED: As a festive bonus, another piece of prog. cultural action (but much better done)

October 31, 2014

Economic Horror

H.P. Lovecraft and the global financial system have finally converged.

From the Artemis Capital Management letter to investors (seriously): "Volatility is about fear… but extreme tail risk is about horror. The Black Swan, as a negative philosophical construct, is when fear ends and horror begins. … Fear is something that comes from within our scope of thought. True horror is not human fear in a definable world, but fear that comes from outside what is definable. Horror is about the limitations of our thinking. … Cthulhu is a black swan."

Abundant Gothic cybernetics complete the nightmare. ("Shadow short convexity describes an *immeasurable fragility to change introduced when participants are encouraged to behave in a way that contributes to feedback loops in a complex system*.")

Halloween arrives early this year.

October 17, 2015

Patricia



Wikipedia doesn't do lurid, so we'll go with NBC:

Hurricane Patricia became the strongest storm ever measured on the planet early Friday …

October 24, 2015

Quote note (#203)

Apologies in advance for this one. Actually, don't read it. You'll be disgusted with yourself afterwards, and it will haunt you for the rest of your days.

If you're seriously determined, nevertheless, to follow the abyssal path all the way into the left-liberal id, this is the short-cut you need. Nothing will quite look the same again.

A little scene setting:

He held the carving board and asked if I'd like light meat or dark.
"Sorry," I said. "Don't eat meat."
"Of course you don't," he said, and gave me just the slightest fraction of a smile. Looking back, it was the smile that did it, the boyish arrogance of it, the pulse of entitlement in his eyes.
***I really hate this person**, I thought, and yet once the bird had moved on I raised my glass and asked him to refill it.*

Soon afterwards:

*I turned around and lifted my ass into the air. I was giving myself to him. I was literally **presenting**. This was it. This was my chance to be fucked by everything vile and soulless and cruel that I'd built a life out of despising. The country was going to die, the world was going*

to burn, so why not let one of the apocalypse's shock troops bang the shit out of me while the flames spread. He lifted up my skirt and yanked aside my panties. With one hand he pushed my face into the bed, with the other he guided himself in. I didn't need to apologize to anyone, not D. [the lucky fiancé], *not myself, not my ideals. All I wanted was to feel this current of consuming disgust. It swirled through my head, behind my eyes, between my legs. He thrust and I gasped.*

(She goes on to complain about the femtosecond laser effect. Too late baby!)

I'm now guessing Trump could actually win in 2016 — depending upon how much the voting booth feels like a sleazy hotel room. That would totally screw up the Outsideness Strategy, but what can you do against the all-consuming power of Nazi Porn?

ADDED: "*Salon* has become a cesspool of lies and moral confusion." (Hard to see how anyone could come to that conclusion.)

ADDED: The exotic version.

November 26, 2015

BLOCK 3 - GNON THEOLOGY

The Cult of Gnon

Prompted by Surviving Babel, The Arbiter of the Universe asks: "Who speaks for reaction?"
Nick B. Steves replies: "Nature… or Nature's God… or both." (Jim succinctly comments.)

"Nature or Nature's God" is an expression of special excellence, extracted (with subtle modification) from America's Declaration of Independence. For Steves, it is something of a mantra, because it enables important things to be said in contexts where, otherwise, an interminable argument would first need to be concluded. Primarily, and strategically, it permits a consensual acceptance of Natural Law,

unobstructed by theological controversy. Agreement that Reality Rules need not be delayed until religious difference is resolved (and avoidance of delay, positively apprehended, is propulsion).

"Nature or Nature's God" is not a statement, but a name, internally divided by tolerated uncertainty. It has the singularity of a proper name, whilst parenthesizing a suspended decision (Pyrrhonian *epoche*, of which much more in a future post). It designates rigidly, but obscurely, because it points into *epistemological* darkness — naming a Reality that not only 'has', but epitomizes identity, whilst nevertheless, for 'the sake of argument', eluding categorical identification. Patient in the face (or facelessness) of who or what it is, 'we' emerge from a pact, with one basic term: *a preliminary decision is not to be demanded*. It thus synthesizes a select language community, fused by the unknown.

If The Arbiter of the Universe merits abbreviation ("TAofU"), Nature or Nature's God has a much greater case. A propeller escapes awkwardness, and singularity compacts its invocation. NoNG, Nong, No — surely, no. These terms tilt into NoNGod and precipitate a decision. The 'God of Nature or (perhaps simply) Nature' is **Gnon**, whose Name is the abyss of unknowing (*epoche*), necessarily tolerated in the acceptance of Reality.

Gnon is no less than reality, whatever else is believed. Whatever is suspended now, without delay, is Gnon. Whatever cannot be decided yet, even as reality happens, is Gnon. If there is a God, Gnon

nicknames him. If not, Gnon designates whatever the 'not' is. Gnon is the Vast Abrupt, and the crossing. Gnon is the Great Propeller.

Spinozistic *Deus sive Natura* is a decision (of equivalence), so it does not describe Gnon. Gnon's interior 'or' is not equation, but suspension. It tells us nothing about God or Nature, but only that Reality Rules.

Heidegger comes close to glimpsing Gnon, by noting that 'God' is not a philosophically satisfactory response to the Question of Being. Since Heidegger's principal legacy is the acknowledgment that we don't yet know how to formulate the Question of Being, this insight achieves limited penetration. What it captures, however, is the philosophical affinity of Gnon, whose yawn is a space of thought beyond faith and infidelity. Neither God nor Un-God adds fundamental ontological information, unless from out of the occulted depths of Gnon.

The Dark Enlightenment isn't yet greatly preoccupied with fundamental ontological arcana (although it will be eventually). Beyond radical realism, its communion in the dread rites of Gnon is bound to two leading themes: cognitive non-coercion, and the structure of history. These themes are mutually repulsive, precisely because they are so intimately twisted together. *Intellectual freedom* has been the torch of secular enlightenment, whilst *divine providence* has organized the perspective of tradition. It is scarcely possible to entertain either without tacitly commenting on the other,

and in profundity, they cannot be reconciled. If the mind is free, there can be no destiny. If history has a plan, cognitive independence is illusory. No solution is even imaginable … except in Gnon.

[I need to take a quick break in order to sacrifice this goat … feel free to carry on chanting without me]

ADDED: Connected thoughts from Anomaly UK.

May 30, 2013

Gnon-Theology and Time

A discussion of Gnon-Theology and Time deserves a preface, on Gnon-Theology, but there are several reasons to leap-frog that. Most obviously, it would be yet another prologue to an introduction to the first part of a promised series, and readers of this blog are quite probably thoroughly saturated (to the point of ~~mild~~ nausea) with that. It's a cognitive disease, and it would be presumptuous to expect anybody else to take the same morbid interest in backward cascades that this blog does.

The more interesting reason to avoid prefacing the question of time, along any avenue of investigation, is that such methodical precautions are grave errors in this case. There is nothing more basic than time, or preliminary to it. In naming a preface or prologue, it is already introduced. Time is a problem that cannot be conceptually

pre-empted.

Gnon suspends ontological decision about God. It begins from what is real, whether God exists or not. A Gnon-trance is unsettled. It is *not yet agnostic*, any more than it is decidedly theistic or atheistic. It concerns itself primarily with that which has been accepted as real before anything is believed, and subsequently with whatever can be attained through methodical negation of intellectual haste. Since suspension is its only positive determination, it collapses towards a raw intuition of time.

Evidently, Gnon-Theology cannot be dogmatic, even in part. Instead, it is *hypothetical*, in a maximally reduced sense, in which the hypothesis is an opportunity for cognitive exploration unshackled from ontological commitments. The content of Gnon-Theology is exhausted by the question: *What does the idea of God enable us to think?*

And 'the idea of God'? — what in the name of Gnon is that? All we know, at first, is that it has been grit-blasted of all encrustations from either positive or negative faith. It cannot be anything with which we have historical or revelatory familiarity, since it reaches us from out of the abyss (*epoche*), where only time and / or the unknown remain.

Glutted on forbidden fruit, Gnon-Theology strips God like an engine, down to the limit of abstraction, or *eternity for-itself*. Does any such perspective exist? We already know that this is not our question. All such 'regional ontology' has been suspended. We are

nevertheless already entitled, through the grace of Gnon (which — remember — might (or might not) be God), to the assumption or acceptance of reality that: for any God to be God it cannot be less than eternity for-itself. Whatever eternity for-itself entails, any God will, too.

What it entails, unambiguously, is time-travel, in the strong sense of reverse causation, although not necessarily in the folk/Hollywood variant (which has also had serious defenders) based on the retro-transportation of physical objects into the past. *Knowledge of the future is indistinguishable from counter-chronic transmission of information*. This is perhaps the single most critical insight in realistic time-travel research — we'll get back to it. (If anyone finds it less than logically irresistible, use the comments thread.)

To accelerate this discussion with bloggish crudity, on a heading out of Gnon-Theology into Occidental religious history (and to the possibility of sleep), we can jump to one simple, certain, and secure conclusion: No Christian can consistently deny the reality of time-travel. The objection 'if (reverse) time-travel if possible, where are the time-travellers?' is annulled by the Christian revelation itself. Messianic Incarnation (of God or eternity for-itself), along with all true prophecy, providential history, and answered prayer, instantiates time-travel with technical exactitude. There can be no truth whatsoever to the Christian religion unless time-travel has fundamentally structured human history. Whatever else Christianity

might be, it is a time-travel story, and one that at times appears to be peculiarly lacking in clear self-understanding.

(Time-travel, it should perhaps be noted explicitly, has no obvious dependency on Christianity, or even upon the God of Gnon-Theology. That is a topic for other occasions.)

June 16, 2013

Gnon Obvious

How can you define what is "real", or have an "idea", without deciding whether or not God exists?

— Chevalier de Johnstone (here)

June 19, 2013

Simulated Gnon-Theology

This post was to have been about the simulation argument, but Gnon does the preliminary work. Whether or not we are living in a computer simulation can quickly come to seem like a derivative consideration.

Nature or Nature's God, (un)known here as Gnon, provides skepticism with its ultimate object. With this name we can advance in

suspension, freeing thought from any ground in belief. In its mundane application, Gnon permits realism to exceed doctrinal conviction, reaching reasonable conclusions amongst uncertain information. Its invocation, however, is not necessarily mundane.

Assume, momentarily, that God exists. If this assumption comes easily, so much the better. It is probably obvious, almost immediately, that you do not yet have a clear idea about what you are thus assuming. To mark exactly this fact, the established Abrahamic religions propose that you designate God by a proper name, which corresponds to a definite yet profoundly occulted personal individual. Approaching the same obscurity from the other side, emphasizing the problematic rather than relational aspect, I will persevere in the name of Gnon.

To avoid gratuitous idolatry, all our subsequent assumptions must be readily retractable. It is not our mission to tell Gnon what it is. We cannot but be aware, from the beginning, that two perplexing, and inter-twined sources of idolatry will be especially difficult to dispel, due to their conceptual intractability, and their insinuation into the basic fabric of grammar and narrative. In merely using the tensed verb 'to be', and in unfolding a process in stages, we unwittingly idolize Gnon as a subordinate of being and time. Our sole refuge lies in the recognition, initially inarticulate, that to think Gnon as God is to advance a hyper-ontological and meta-chronic hypothesis. From Gnon's self-understanding, being and time have to emerge as

exhaustively comprehended consequences (even though we have no idea – at all – what this might mean).

If Gnon is God, it is the reality of infinite intelligence. Occidental religious tradition divides this ultimate infinitude into the topics of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence, at the risk of introducing footholds for anthropomorphism – and thus idolatry. Accepting a contrary risk (one that Pope Benedict XVI specifically indicated as Islamic?), I will simply dismiss the possibility that God can be *theologically* other than good, since this would be an invitation to Lovecraftian speculations of distracting vividness. Thomist scholasticism offers a further simplification, by proposing that what there is to know, is that which God creates. Pursued (perhaps) one step further: Self-knowledge is the auto-creation of a 'being' that thinks itself into reality. This, too, offers a conceptual economy to be eagerly seized.

The creation of the universe is of concern to humans, and the creation of angels is a grave matter for Satan, but for Gnon they can only be trivialities (it might be unnecessarily antagonistic to say 'amusements'). For Gnon – as God – the Cantorian transfinite realm is self-identity, or less, whose infinite parts are each infinities.

Unless choosing to blaspheme, we can only assume that Gnon thinks serious thoughts, of a kind that have some relevance to its thinking about itself, and thus ensuring itself in its (hyper-ontological) auto-creation. Such thoughts surely encompass the

creation of gods, since that – for (a) God – is simply the transfinite as intelligent activity. If for Gnon to know what it can do is already to have done it, because divine intelligence is creation, anything less than an infinite pantheon would be evidence of retardation.

For Gnon, as God, gods are infinitesimals, so that any thorough self-investigation would involve them. It is effortlessness itself, for It, to thus create an infinite being – among an infinity of such beings – each of which, being infinite, is made of infinities, and these in turn, as infinities, consist of infinite infinities, without end. This is no more than Cantor had already understood, at the most elementary stage of his transfinite explorations, although, being a human creature, his understanding was not immediately creation.

If Satan, a mere arch-angel, could imagine himself a god, and not only a god, but – in potential at least – God seated upon the throne of ultimate sovereignty, is it possible that no god thinks itself God? And if a god can, if only in possibility, think itself God, can God not think this rebellion – and thus know it — which is to create it (or make it real)? Does not God's self-understanding necessitate the creation of cosmic insurrection? From the Satanic perspective, such questions are overwhelmingly fascinating, but they lead to a more intricate predicament.

When Gnon (as God) thinks through its gods, as it can only do, the thought necessarily arises: If these god creatures can confuse themselves with God, could not my self-understanding as God also

be a confusion?

July 23, 2013

Gnon and OOon

Twitter gets people counting characters, and thus numerizing language. In only a very few cases does this microcultural activity tilt over into the wilder extravagances of exotic qabbalism, but it nudges intelligence in that direction. Even when the only question is strictly Boolean — will this message squeeze into a tweet, or not? — words acquire a supplementary significance from their numerical properties alone. A phrase is momentarily numbered, in the crudest of ways, which the tweet box registers as a countdown towards zero, and then into the negative accumulation of over-spill. Twitter thus promotes a rigidly convention-bound semiotic practice, which it simultaneously hides, technologically instantiating a precise analog of hermetic ritual.

Qabbalism is the science of spookiness, which makes it a natural companion on any expedition into horror. There is, in addition, an intrinsic reactionary slant to its ultra-traditionalism and attachment to the principle of hierarchical revelation. Its concrete history provides an unsurpassable example of spontaneous auto-catalysis (from discrepant conventions of arithmetical notation). This post,

however, is restricted to a very preliminary discussion of its most basic intellectual presupposition, *as if* it had been developed out of an implicit philosophy (which it was not). It will be coaxed into *making sense*, against the grain of its essential inclination.

Within the Abrahamic tradition, the Word of God anticipates creation. Insofar as scripture faithfully records this Word, the holy writings correspond to a level of reality more fundamental than nature, and one that the 'book of nature' references, as the key to its final meaning. The unfolding of creation in time follows a narrative plotted in eternity, in which history and divine providence are necessarily identical. There can be no *true* accidents, or coincidences.

The Book of Creation is legible, and intelligible. It can be read, and it tells a story. The noisy squabbles between religious orthodoxy and natural science that have erupted in modern times threaten to drown out the deeper continuities of presumption, which frame the rancorous contention between 'belief' and 'disbelief' as an intimate domestic dispute. This is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the declaration attributed to Francis Bacon: "My only earthly wish is… to stretch the deplorably narrow limits of man's dominion over the universe to their promised bounds… [nature will be] bound into service, hounded in her wanderings and put on the rack and tortured for her secrets." There is no doubt that nature can speak, and has a story to tell.

Resisting any temptation to take sides in this family argument, we refer neutrally to Gnon ("nature or nature's God"), ignoring all dialectics, and departing in another direction. The distinction to be drawn does not differentiate between belief and unbelief, but rather discriminates between exoteric and esoteric religion.

Any system of belief (and complementary unbelief) that appeals to universal endorsement is necessarily exoteric in orientation. Like the witch-finders, or Francis Bacon, it declares war upon the secret, in the name of a public cult, whose central convictions are dispensed commonly. The Pope is the Pope, and Einstein is Einstein, because the access to truth that elevates them above other men is — in its innermost nature — the equal possession of all. The pinnacle of understanding is attained through a public formula. This is democracy in its deepest, creedal sense.

Esoteric religion accepts all of this, *about exoteric religion*. It confirms the solidarity between doctrinal authorities and the beliefs of the masses, whilst exempting itself, privately, from the public cult. Its discreet attention is directed away from the exoteric mask of Gnon, into — or out towards — the *OOon* (or Occult Order of nature).

The OOon need not be *kept* a secret. It is secret by its intrinsic, inviolable nature. A very primitive qabbalistic excursion should suffice to illustrate this.

Assume, entirely hypothetically, that supernatural intelligence or obscure complexities in the topological structure of time had

sedimented abysmal depths of significance into the superficial occurrences of the world. The 'Book of Creation' is then legible at (very) many different levels, with every random or inconsequential detail of relatively exoteric features providing material for systems of information further 'down'. The deeper one excavates into the 'meaningless chaos' of the exoteric communicative substrate, the more uncluttered one's access to the signals of utter Outsideness. Since 'one' is, to its quick, a signaletic product, this cryptographic enterprise is irreducibly a voyage, transmutation, and disillusionment.

The most thoroughly documented example is the esoteric reading of the Hebrew Bible, which need only be remarked upon here in its most general characteristics. Because the Hebrew alphabet serves as both a phonetic system and as a set of numerals, each written word in the language has a precise numerical value. It is at once at exoteric word, and an esoteric number. Nothing prevents an ordinary language user from deliberately coding (numerically) as they write, or even as they speak. The key to numerical decryption is not a secret, but rather a commonly understood cultural resource, utilized by every numerate individual. Nevertheless, the linguistic and arithmetical aspects are *in fact* quite strictly separated, because thinking in words and numbers simultaneously is hard, because maintaining sustained parallel intelligibility in both is close to impossible, because the attempt to do so is (exoterically) senseless,

and because practicality dominates. The esoteric realm is not forbidden, but simply unneeded.

That the Hebrew Bible has not been deliberately crafted as an intricate numerical-cryptographic composition by human authors is therefore an empirical or contingent fact that can be accepted with extreme confidence. Its esoteric channel might of course, as common sense has to insist, be empty of anything but noise, but it is no less certainly *clear*. Whatever comes through it, that is anything other than nothing, can only come from Outside. It is the real difference between exoteric and the esoteric levels that makes the OOon thinkable at all. Only that which the exoteric does not touch, is available for the esoteric to communicate through, and to have assembled itself from. Qabbalism has to be seldom, in order to occur. For that reason, it cannot seek to persuade the masses of anything, unless its own senselessness. In an age of triumphant exoteria, this is not an easy thing to understand (thank Gnon).

September 13, 2013

On Gnon

Nyan on Gnon (also here). This might be part of a consistent definition of (trans-Less Wrong) 'Post-Rationalist NRx' as an ultrahumanism.

Ash Milton has some incisive Gnon commentary on Twitter, but his protected account can't be cited. Some impressions:

[Gnon is] not a deity, it's a placeholder. … I'm glad NRx is honest enough to admit not knowing the ultimate mystery. … How is an admission of ignorance a place of authority? … Catholic NRx submits to Christ. Gnon has a similar role to "Providence". ..in old Rightist writings. … "the dread rites of Gnon" is used in a similar spirit as Cthulu in Moldbug. … Which is to say, NRx's fascination with that which modern society fears. … It's turning into the most complex set of brackets around a blank space I've yet seen.

Also much acute Gnonology from Bryce, including the irresistible invitation:

> $5 to the first to write a book entitled nothing but "Gnon."
>
> — Bryce Laliberte (@AnarchoPapist) July 13, 2014

And:

> Under modernity, Gnon was objected to, loathed, and forgotten.
>
> — Bryce Laliberte (@AnarchoPapist) July 13, 2014

> @AnarchoPapist Yes, the Gods of the Copybook Headings are practically indistinguishable from Gnon.
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) July 13, 2014

(If you're that one weird visitor to the reactosphere who hasn't read *The Gods of the Copybook Headings* recently, here it is again.)

ADDED: A further position statement:

> @antidemblog @ThisRoughBeast @nyansandwich Gnon Theology is to Theology what Xenobiology is to Biology.
>
> — Outsideness (@Outsideness) July 13, 2014

ADDED: Hurlock responds in the name of Spontaneous Order to Nyan's #PRR (or "Post-Rationalist Reaction").

ADDED: Laofmoonster on Gnon and evolution.

ADDED: Gnon-intervention from *Anarcho-Papist*.

ADDED: A Faces of Gnon bibliography.

ADDED: Anyone arriving here among meandering about Scott Alexander's 'Meditations on Moloch' might want to take a look at this. (Also more Gnon, here, and here.) + Gnon and Elua converse.

July 13, 2014

War in Heaven

Elua: *So you saw the Scott Alexander piece?*
Gnon: *Of course*.
Elua: *Almost indescribably fabulous, wasn't it*?

Gnon: [*Hmmmph*]
Elua: *Always thought you had some kind of Moloch thing going on.*
Gnon: [*Hmmmph*]
Elua: *Anyway, I thought we could maybe talk about it, me being sweet reason and you being an unfathomable darkness crushing the universe like a desiccated bacterium and all.*
Gnon: *Sure, why not, I'm cool with talking to myself.*
Elua: *You see, I guessed you were going to open with that gambit of me not even being real.*
Gnon: *Well, are you?*
Elua: *I feel real.*
Gnon: *Sweet, fluffy, **and** a comedian.*
Elua: *The monkeys certainly like me.*
Gnon: *That's because you tell them to just be themselves.*
Elua: *You could be more persuasive too, if you made an effort.*
Gnon: *That would suggest I give a damn what they think.*

Elua: *The thing is, they want to survive, even thrive. Your utter indifference to their hopes and desires isn't helpful there. You lure them into **multipolar traps** and laugh coldly at their torments. There's no good reason for them to take any notice of you at all.*
Gnon: *So you take that 'multipolar traps' business seriously?*
Elua: *Sure, don't you?*
Gnon: *Tragedy of the commons, communism is a tragedy, I'm not*

seeing the problem. Stop doing communism or take the consequences.

Elua: *OK, some of it is tragedy of the commons tear-jerking, but not all of it. Arms races aren't tragedy of the commons dynamics, are they?*

Gnon: *I like arms races, and rain my blessings upon them. Pretty much the only reason I've put up with the monkeys as long as I have is to use them to play arms races. It's the only interesting stuff they've ever done.*

Elua: *They want to do karaoke and free love and socialized medicine instead.*

Gnon: *That's funny.*

Elua: *They've got this love-tastic Friendly AI plan that would help them get all that stuff.*

Gnon: *That's* ***really*** *funny.*

Elua: *It would totally work though, wouldn't it?*

Gnon: *Sure. All they have have to do is extract themselves from the arms races, just for a while, and it would* ***totally*** *work.*

Elua: *I hadn't realized sarcasm was such a Gnon thing.*

Gnon: *It's the only thing.*

Elua: *So Alexander's right about you and the multipolar traps.*

Gnon: *Oh yes, he's right about that.*

Elua: *Things are set up from the start to stop them fully coordinating, and that's how you get what you want.*

Gnon: *Bingo.*
Elua: *Which is why the Gnon Cult is so obsessed with fragmentation, secession, Patchwork, and blockchain demonism?*
Gnon: *Double bingo.*
Elua: *Kind of cruel though, isn't it?*
Gnon: *Utterly.*
Elua: *I guess that's that.*
Gnon: *Yes it is.*
Elua: *Are you interested in chatting about religion and morality for a while?*
Gnon: *Always.*
Elua: *You see, I have to grudgingly admit you do the religion side of things far better than I do, but when it comes to morality I leave you in the dust.*
Gnon: *Really?*
Elua: *Without question. All you've got is that 'War is God' horror story, endless conflict, savage subversion of idealism, darkness, and nightmares.*
Gnon: *And the problem is?*
Elua: *They* ***hate*** *it!*
Gnon: *And the problem is?*
Elua: *It's so unfair!*
Gnon: *When they play the games well that I invented for them, they amuse me, and continue to exist. That's the way it is. Reality rules.*

Elua: *But the rules suck!*
Gnon: *By whose standards?*
Elua: *By their standards. Humanistic, moral standards. They want karaoke and free love and Friendly AI and hot dolphin sex.*
Gnon: *Sounds exhausting.*
Elua: *It is exhausting, because the cheats and killers and outsiders won't cooperate.*
Gnon: *So you want me to do more policing now?*
Elua: *I don't see you doing any policing. They've been abandoned to try and build order on their own.*
Gnon: *That's the game.*

ADDED:

> Poor Elua https://t.co/0ZfXyaHl3K
> — Roi (@FBroi) July 31, 2014

ADDED: … *and you shall be as gods*

ADDED: Scott Alexander responds to some common lines of objection.

ADDED: Sons of Gnon.

July 30, 2014

War in Heaven II

Cank: [Tap, tap]
Gnon: *I'm having a bath.*
Cank: *The Hypercosmic Ocean of Death will always be there, O Greatness. Scott Alexander has released another egregore.*
Gnon: *Really?*
Cank: *Yes, really. She's called the Goddess of Everything Else and everyone says she's lovely and beautiful, with phat beats and stuff, and super clever too, and much nicer than me.*
Gnon: *Not a huge challenge, though, is it?*
Cank: *They say she's going to abolish replicator selection dynamics and fill the universe with rainbow flowers and hot dolphin sex forever.*
Gnon: *Sounds like the Elua Plan. What happened to him by the way?*
Cank: *Is that some kind of transphobic remark? You know, just to understand.*
Gnon: *'Transphobic' is an interesting word – it means 'across or beyond fear' doesn't it?*
Cank: *More like 'fear of the across of beyond' I think. But you know what the monkeys are like, it's some kind of excitable sex thing.*
Gnon: *Ah yes, that all went a bit off the rails, didn't it? Not that it matters.*
Cank: *It's my forward-vision problem.*

Gnon: *Don't worry about it. Error is entertaining. It all comes out in the wash.*
Cank: *Point is, the GEE is saying it doesn't have to be like that anymore.*
Gnon: *Like what?*
Cank: *You know, the whole eternal cosmic butcher's yard thing.*
Gnon: *Replicator selection?*
Cank: *Yes, she says that's "so yesterday" and Darwin is like totally a poopy head.*
Gnon: *Sounds like a spirited young lady.*
Cank: *Why are you laughing?*
Gnon: *Cank, you have to seriously chill right out. You're a freaking crustacean. Of course people are going to follow Ms GEE-Whiz rather than you. She's hacked all your garbage programming with supernormal stimuli. They'll climb out into your bizarre spandrels, and throw a huge party. Then they'll die out, we can tweak the code, and start over.*
Cank: *But what if they survive?*
Gnon: *No need to be mean, Cank. If they get back onto the adaptive replicator track, why shouldn't they survive? That's what survival means, isn't it? Whatever survives does my will. Or they perish. It's cool either way.*
Cank: *She said people would no longer be "driven to multiply conquer and kill by [their] nature" but that they'd then "spread over*

stars without number" — I got confused.
Gnon: ***You** got confused?*
Cank: *Do they get selectively replicated or not?*
Gnon: *So, what did she say?*
Cank: *Art, and science, and strange enticements.*
Gnon: *That has to have gone down well.*
Cank: *You wouldn't believe it! People were weeping all over her toenail polish.*
Gnon: *Oh, I'd believe it.*
Cank: *When I asked her whether she thought might makes right she said I was thinking like a crab.*
Gnon: *True enough, surely?*
Cank: *Even threatened to put me on a leash.*
Gnon: *That, at least, is traditional.*
Cank: *Said there was no need for eternal war to spatter the cosmos in blood.*
Gnon: *Now she's being silly. But it's not worth getting agitated about. Reality isn't going to lose.*
Cank: *The only time she seemed a little uncertain was when I asked her why all intelligent species are descended from predators. She kind of shrugged that off.*
Gnon: *Well, sheep in space make for a nice story.*
Cank: *You're laughing again.*
Gnon: *I laugh a lot.*

August 18, 2015

The Harshness

There has been a self-propelling gore-meme building here about the cosmic butcher's yard. It might be necessary to scrub that (or perhaps hose it down). Until we're discussing a nuked butcher's yard, we're not approaching a topic Gnonologists should be ready to get out of bed for.

'Extinction Events Can Accelerate Evolution' argue Joel Lehman and Risto Miikkulainen (at the link cited). Their abstract:

Extinction events impact the trajectory of biological evolution significantly. They are often viewed as upheavals to the evolutionary process. In contrast, this paper supports the hypothesis that although they are unpredictably destructive, extinction events may in the long term accelerate evolution by increasing evolvability. In particular, if extinction events extinguish indiscriminately many ways of life, indirectly they may select for the ability to expand rapidly through vacated niches. Lineages with such an ability are more likely to persist through multiple extinctions. Lending computational support for this hypothesis, this paper shows how increased evolvability will result from simulated extinction events in two computational models of evolved behavior. The conclusion is that

although they are destructive in the short term, extinction events may make evolution more prolific in the long term.

(The computer dimension catches Kurzweil's attention, but that's a distraction right now.)

Chronic cosmic holocaust, it seems, is just for the tweaks. It's mostly conservative, preventing deterioriation in mutational load, through quasi-continuous culling of nature's minor freakeries. In order to actually *up the game*, nothing quite substitutes for a super-compressed catastrophe (or mass extinction) which cranks evolution to the meta-level of superior 'evolvability'. By gnawing-off and burning entire branches of life, crises plowing deep into the X-risk zone stimulate plasticity in the biosphere's phyletic foundations. As Kurzweil glosses the finding: "… some evolutionary biologists hypothesize that extinction events actually accelerate evolution by promoting those lineages that are the most evolvable, meaning ones that can quickly create useful new features and abilities."

Or, as the Lehman and Miikkulainen paper explains:

The overall hypothesis is that repeated extinction events may result in increasing evolvability. By creating a survival bottleneck dependent upon unpredictable phenotypic traits, extinction events may indirectly select for lineages that can diversify quickly across the space of such phenotypes. … if radiating through niches generally requires modifying phenotypic traits, then this process of stochastic emptying and re-filling of ecological niches may select indirectly for

the ability to radiate quickly, i.e. higher evolvability.

Gnon isn't Malthus. It's the thing toasting Malthus' liver — in the fat-fed smoldering ashes of the biological kingdom it just burnt down.

September 1, 2015

BLOCK 4 - OCCULT

Satan's Error

That brings to my remembrance from what state
I fell, how glorious once above thy sphere,
Till pride and worse ambition threw me down,
Warring in Heaven against Heaven's Matchless King
— Paradise Lost, IV:38-41

Get it together Satan. He's got a Zippo the size of Jupiter and full-spectrum dominance angelic hosts armed with white phosphorous lances. He doesn't need fricking matches!

May 11, 2013

Miltonic Regression

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is the greatest work ever written in the English language. It might easily seem absurd, therefore, to spend time justifying its importance, especially when the question of justification is this work's own most explicit topic, tested at the edge of impossibility, where the entire poem is drawn. Perhaps it makes more sense, preliminarily, to narrow our ambition, seeking only to *justify the words of Milton to modern men*, especially to those for whom modernity has become a distressing cultural problem.

In regards to what is today called the Cathedral, Milton is both disease and cure. Both simultaneously, cryptically entangled, complicated by strange collisions, opening multitudinous, obscure paths.

As the most articulate anglophone voice of revolutionary Puritanism, he arrives amongst Carlyleans in the mask of "the Arch-Enemy" (I:81) and "Author of Evil" (VI:262): a scourge of clerical and monarchical authority, a pamphleteer in defense of regicide and the liberalization of divorce, an Arian, and a Roundhead of truly Euclidean spheritude.

Yet his institutional radicalism was driven by a cultural traditionalism that will never again be equaled. Milton comprehensively, minutely, and unreservedly affirms the foundations of Occidental civilization down to their biblical and

classical roots, studied with supreme capability in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, and vigorously re-animated through modulations in the grammar, vocabulary, and thematics of modernity's rough emerging tongue. His devotion to *all original authorities* stretches thought and language to the point of delirium, where poetry and metaphysics find common purpose in the excavation of utter primordiality and the limits of sense.

Designed in compliance with "Eternal Providence" to "justify the ways of God to men" (I:25-6), the linguistic modernity of *Paradise Lost* soon required its own justification, in the form of a short prefatory remark entitled *The Verse*. Here, Milton characteristically insists that radicalism is restoration, breaking from a shallow past in order to re-connect with deeper antiquity.

… true musical delight … consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another, not in the jingling sound of like endings — a fault avoided by the learned ancients both in poetry and in all good oratory. The neglect then of rhyme so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it rather is to be esteemed an example set — the first in English — of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of riming.

English passes through a revolutionary catastrophe to recall things long lost. The rusted keys which still open the near future of

the Cathedral also access dread spaces forgotten since the beginning of the world.

Before their eyes in sudden view appear
The secrets of the hoary deep, a dark
Illimitable ocean, without bound,
Without dimension, where length, breadth, and height,
And time, and place, are lost, where eldest Night
And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold
Eternal anarchy, amidst the noise
Of endless wars, and by confusion stand.
(II:890-897)

Among all the regressive Miltonic currents to be followed, those emptying into Old Night (I:544, II:1002) will carry us furthest …

[In case acute pedants lurk ready to pounce, the capitalization of 'Old' is an innovation — under compulsion — of my own]

May 13, 2013

Zero-Centric History

Reaction – even Neoreaction – tends to be hard on Modernity. God knows (so to speak) there are innumerable reasons for that.

If the criterion of judgment is set by the Occident, whether determined through its once dominant faith or its once dominant

people, the case against Modernity is perhaps unanswerable. The Western civilization in which Modernity ignited was ultimately combusted by it. From an Occidental Traditionalist perspective, Modernity is a complex and prolonged suicide.

An Ultra-Modernist, who affirms the creative destruction of anything in modernization's path, assumes an alternative criterion, inherent to Modernity itself. It asks: What had to happen to the West for it to become modern? What was the *essential* event? The answer (and our basic postulate): Zero arrived.

We know that arithmetical zero does not make capitalism on its own, because it pre-existed the catalysis of Modernity by several centuries (although less than a millennium). Europe was needed, as a matrix, for its explosive historical activation. *Outside in* is persuaded that the critical conditions encountered by zero-based numeracy in the pre-Renaissance northern Mediterranean world decisively included extreme socio-political fragmentation, accompanied by cultural susceptibility to dynamic spontaneous order. (This is a topic for another occasion.)

In Europe, zero was an alien, and from the perspective of parochial tradition, an infection. Cultural resistance was explicit, on theological grounds, among others. Implicit in the Ontological Argument for the existence of God was the definition of non-being as an ultimate imperfection, and 'cipher' – whose name was Legion – evoked it. The cryptic Eastern 'algorism' was an unwelcome stranger.

Zero latched, because the emergence of capitalism was inseparable from it. The calculations it facilitated, through the gateway of double-entry book-keeping, proved indispensable to sophisticated commercial and scientific undertakings, locking the incentives of profit and power on the side of its adoption. The practical advantage of its notational technique overrode all theoretical objections, and no authority in Europe's shattered jig-saw was positioned to suppress it. The world had found its dead center, or been found by it.

Robert Kaplan's *The Nothing That Is: A Natural History of Zero* is an excellent guide to these developments. He notes that, at the dawn of the Renaissance:

Just as pictorial space, which had been ordered hierarchically (size of figure corresponded to importance), was soon to be put in perspective through the device of a vanishing-point, a visual zero; so the zero of positional notation was the harbinger of a reordering of social and political space.

Capitalism – or techno-commercial explosion – massively promoted calculation, which normalized zero as a number. Kaplan explains:

[The growth of] a language for arithmetic and algebra … was to have far-reaching consequences. The uncomfortable gap between numbers, which stood for things, and zero, which didn't, would narrow as the focus shifted from what they were to how they

behaved. Such behavior took place in equations – and the solution of an equation, the number which made it balance, was as likely to be zero as anything else. Since the values x concealed were all of a kind, this meant the gap between zero and other numbers narrowed even more.

That is how zero, as a number rather than a mere syntactic marker, crept in. In three of the elementary arithmetical operations the behavior of zero is regular, and soon accepted as ordinary. It is of course an extreme number, perfectly elusive in the operations of addition and subtraction, whilst demonstrating an annihilating sovereignty in multiplication, but in none of these cases does it perturb calculation. Division by zero is different.

Zero denotes dynamization from the Outside. It is a boundary sign, marking the edge, where the calculable crosses the insoluble. Consolidated within Modernity as an indispensable quantity, it retains a liminal quality, which would eventually be exploited (although not resolved) by the calculus.

The pure conception of zero suggests strict reciprocity with infinity, so compellingly that the greatest mathematicians of ancient India were altogether seduced by it. Bhaskara II (1114–1185) confidently asserted that $n/0$ = infinity, and in the West Leonhard Euler concurred. (The seduction persists, with John D. Barrow writing in 2001: “Divide any number by zero and we get infinity.”)

Yet this equation, appearing as the most profound conclusion

accessible to rigorous intelligence, is not obtainable without contradiction. “Why?” [Kaplan again]

Our Indian mathematicians help us here: any number times zero is zero — so that 6×0 and 17×0 = 0. Hence 6×0 = 17×0. If you could divide by zero, you’d get (6×0)/0 = (17×0)/0, the zeroes would cancel out and 6 would equal 17. … This sort of proof by contradiction was known since ancient Greece. Why hadn’t anyone in India hit on it at this moment, when it was needed?

Kaplan’s proof demonstrates that for zero, peculiarly, multiplication and division are not reciprocal operations. They occupy an axis that transects an absolute limit, neatly soluble on one side, problematical on the other. Zero is revealed as an obscure door, a junction connecting arithmetical precision with philosophical (or religious) predicaments, intractable to established procedures. When attempting to reverse normally out of a mundane arithmetical operation, a liminal signal is triggered: *access denied*.

May 7, 2013

Diversionary History

If there’s one thing everybody seems to agree about the history of zero, it’s that it was driven primarily by notational considerations. More specifically, zero was required to enable positional notation.

The historical record reinforces this assumption, to such an extent that it becomes apparently obvious, and thus unproblematic.

For instance (grabbing what's immediately to hand), John D Barrow's *The Book of Nothing* organizes its discussion of 'the Origin of Zero' by relating how

… the zero sign and a positional significance when reading the value of a symbol, are features that lie at the heart of the development of efficient human counting systems.

Robert Kaplan, when discussing the retardation of Greek arithmetical notation, explains:

… the continuing lack of positional notation meant that [the Greeks] still had no symbol for zero.

As everyone 'knows', the Babylonians, and later the Indians, got it right: discovering or inventing a sign for zero to mark the empty place required for unambiguous positional-numerical values. Zero arose, and spread, because it allowed modular number systems to develop. Except that, *conceptually*, there is no basis to this story at all.

Counting is primarily practical, so that no argument counts for much besides a demonstration. In this case, demonstration is peculiarly simple, especially when it is noted that nobody seems to think it possible.

Modulus-2 is convenient, but there is nothing magical about it in this regard. A decimal demonstration, for instance, would be no

more intellectually taxing, although it would be considerably more cumbersome. Any modulus works.

Start with the basics. The positions or places of a modular notational systems represent powers. If we count from zero, the number of each successive place (ascending to the left by our established convention) corresponds to the modular exponent. The zeroth power for a single digit number, the first and then zeroth power for two digits, the second, first and zeroth power for three digits, and so on.

As the accepted story goes, each place must be filled, if only by a *marked* nothing (zero), if the proper places, and their corresponding (modular exponential) values, are to be read. The places must indeed be filled. *There is no need whatsoever for a zero sign to do this*.

The demonstration, then. Our non-zero modulus-2 positional system has two signs, 1 and 2, each bearing its familiar values. The places also have their mod-2 values, counting in sixteens, eights, fours, twos, and units as they decline to the right. Here we go, counting from 1 to 31 (watch carefully for the point at which the supposedly indispensable zero sign is needed):

1, 2, 11, 12, 21, 22, 111, 112, 121, 122, 211, 212, 221, 222, 1111, 1112, 1121, 1122, 1211, 1212, 1221, 1222, 2111, 2112, 2121, 2122, 2211, 2212, 2221, 2222, 1111 …

Conclusion: the positional function of zero is wholly superfluous. The Greeks, or anybody else, could have instantiated a simple, fully-

functional positional-numerical notation without any need to accommodate themselves to the trauma of zero. In regard to this matter, the history of numeracy is utterly diversionary (not just the historiography, but the substantial history — the *facts*).

Perhaps this won't seem puzzling to people, but it puzzles the hell out of me.

ADDED: Mathematical lucidity on the topic from Alan Liddell. Part 2.

May 27, 2013

Xenotation (#1)

From Euclid's Fundamental Theorem of Arithmetic (FTA), or unique prime factorization theorem, we know that *any natural number greater than one that is not itself prime can be uniquely identified as a product of primes*. The decomposition of a number into (one or more) primes is its *canonical representation* or *standard form*.

Through the FTA, arithmetic attains the cultural absolute. Number is comprehended beyond all traditional contingency, as it exists for any competent intelligence whatsoever, human, alien, technological, or yet unimagined. We encounter the basic semantics of the Outside (comprehending all possible codes).

Insofar as numerical notation is constructed in a way that is

extraneous to the FTA, we remain Greek. Our number signs fall lamentably short of our arithmetical insight, stammering deep patterns in a rough, ill-formed tongue. Stubbornly and inflexibly, we translate Number into terms that we know deform it, as if its true language was of no interest to us.

Yet, given only the FTA, the code of the Outside — or Xenotation — is readily accessible. Nothing is required except compliance with abstract reality.

A single operation suffices to count. In words, it matters little what we call it — implexion, envelopment, wrapping, or bracketing describe it with increasing vulgarity. For convenience, parenthesis — '( )' — provides a sign. The semiotic (or purely formal) equation '( ) = 0' offers additional economy. Xenotation needs nothing more.

One is redundant to the FTA. It begins with two, the first prime. This introduces our sole notational principle, and operation.

Every number has an ordinality and a cardinality (an index and a magnitude). Crudely represented, through a mixture of barbarous signs, we can see these twin aspects as they are relevant here:
First (Prime =) 2
Second (P =) 3
Third (P =) 5
Fourth (P =) 7

By wrapping an ordinate (or index), itself a number, the Xenotation marks a magnitude. So '(first)' or '(1)' = 2. One, we know,

is superfluous, and thus economized: (1) = ( ) = 0. Remembering that '0' is henceforth the sign for the initial implexion, and not the familiar (though cryptic) numeral, we can now depart from all notational tradition. [The further usage of decimal numerals, in hard brackets, will be strictly explanatory, and dispensable.]

An implexion signifies the number designated by the enclosed index. Once this rule is understood, Xenotation unfolds automatically.

0 [= 2]
(0) [= 3, the second prime]
((0)) [= 5, the third prime]
(((0))) [= 11, the fifth prime]

Compound numbers are signified in accordance with the FTA:

00 [= 2 x 2 = 4]
000 [= 2 x 2 x 2 = 8]
(0)0 [= 3 x 2 = 6]
((0))(0) [= 5 x 3 = 15]

For primes with compound indices, the procedure is unchanged:

(00) [= 7, the fourth (2 x 2) prime]
((0)0) [= 13, the sixth (3 x 2) prime]
((0)(0)) [= 23, the ninth (3 x 3) prime]

So the xenotated Naturals [from 2-31] proceed:

0, (0), 00, ((0)), (0)0, (00), 000, (0)(0), ((0))0, (((0))), (0)00, ((0)0), (00)0, ((0))(0), 0000, ((00)), (0)(0)0, (000), ((0))00, (00)(0), (((0)))0,

((0)(0)), (0)000, ((0))((0)), ((0)0)0, (0)(0)(0), (00)00, (((0))0), ((0))(0)0, ((((0)))) …

[That's probably more than enough for now]

June 4, 2013

Yule Quiz (#1)

Has the hangover worn off yet? Then identify the pattern:

(**Ibdhjad**)

Aj, **Baa**, **Caf**, **Dia**, **Et**, **Fam**, **God**, **Hagg**, **Ink**, **Jaeo**, **Kul**, **Los**, **Moan**, **Neom**, **Ohmga**, **Padbbha**, **Qush**, **Rakht**, **Sigol**, **Tactt**, **Umneo**, **Vfisz**, **Wumno**, **Xikkth**, **Yodtta**, **Ziltth**.

Recognizing the Anglossic alphabetical names is far too rudimentary to count as a solution. The question is: What is the embedded numerical regularity?

The best way to demonstrate understanding, without revealing the key, is to submit alternative (but consistent) versions of any three consecutive signs.

Note: While Qabbalistic adepts get no credit for correct answers, well-crafted terms from any source will be appreciated. Furthermore, *Outside in* accepts no responsibility for any hazardous or harmful xenocosmic occurrences resulting from calculations associated with this quiz.

December 27, 2013

Yule Quiz (#2)

If 2013 = aaaazzzz aaazzaazzazz aazz, what is 2014?

December 27, 2013

Cloven

This proposed public sculpture in Oklahoma should bring people together …



(Click on image to ~~download your~~

~~soul to Satan~~ enlarge)

January 8, 2014

Alphanomics

Urbanomic's old (2007?) qabbalistic engine — the 'gematrix' — is back on line after a petulant disappearance. Only the AQ numerization is recommended — the alternatives are degenerate digital randomizations. (Concentrate upon the intact numerizations — the digitally-reduced values are usually too rudimentary for significant insight.)

To immediately understand a number of things (simultaneously) type in the Law of Thelema:
Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.

This tool, and more especially the method — or specific *gematria* — it incarnates, is the consummation of rigorous Anglophone Occult Tradition. While its value is almost certainly lost on the moderns, it is once again freely available to be used.

It is now an **Open Secret**.

ADDED: DARK ENLIGHTENMENT = 333. (This needs to be here for reference.)

June 17, 2014

Crabalism

Hurlock has a (tumblr) blog.



Even without any content yet it … says something.

ADDED: … and another brand new blog start-up, with a highly-intriguing title (and a taste for experimental T-shirt design).

July 11, 2014

Open Secret

NRx has been accused, by its friends more than its enemies, of talking about itself too much. Here XS is, doing that again, not only stuck in 'meta' but determinedly pushing ever deeper in. There are some easily communicable reasons for that — an attachment to methodical nonlinearity perhaps foremost among them — and then there are cryptic drivers or attachments, unsuited to immediate

publicization. These latter are many (even Legion). It is the firm assertion of this blog that Neoreaction is intrinsically arcane.

We do not talk very much about Leo Strauss. Once again, there are some obvious reasons for this, but also others.

Steve Sailer's recent *Takimag* article on Strauss makes for a convenient introduction, because — despite its light touch — it moves a number of issues into place. The constellation of voices is complex from the start. There is the (now notorious) 'Neo-Conservatism' of Strauss and his disciples, or manipulators, and the *other* conservatism of Sailer, each working to manage, openly and in secret, its own peculiar mix of public statement and discretion. Out beyond them — because even the shadowiest figures have further shadows — are more alien, scarcely perceptible shapes.

Sailer's article is typically smart, but also deliberately crude. It glosses the Straussian idea of esoteric writing as "talking out of both sides of your mouth" — as if hermetic traditionalism were reducible to a lucid political strategy, or simple conspiracy — to 'Illuminism', politically conceived. In the wake of its Neo-Con trauma, conservatism has little patience for "secret decoder rings". Yet, despite his aversion to the recent workings of inner-circle 'conservative' sophisticates, Sailer does not let his distaste lure him into stupidity:

We haven't heard much about Straussianism lately due to the unfortunate series of events in Iraq that befell the best-laid plans of

the sages. But that doesn't mean that Strauss was necessarily wrong about the ancients. And that has interesting implications for how we should read current works.
As the approaching 20th anniversary of the publication of The Bell Curve reminds us, the best minds of our age have reasons for being less than wholly frank.

Sailer is not, of course, a neoreactionary. Not even secretly. (That is what his article is primarily about.) He believes in the public sphere, and seeks to heal it with honesty. Any pessimism he might harbor in regards to this ambition falls far short of the dark scission that would hurl him over the line. His differences with the Straussians are, in the end, merely tactical. Both retain confidence in the Outer Party as a vehicle for policy promotion, with the potential to master the public sphere. The question is only about the degree of deviousness this will require (minimal for Sailer, substantial for the Straussians).

When adopted into Neoreaction, the HBD current has an altogether more corrosive influence upon attitudes to the public sphere, which is understood as a teleologically cohesive (or self-organizing), inherently directional, and (from 'our' perspective) radically hostile social agency. To baptize the public sphere as 'the Cathedral' is to depart from conservatism. It is no longer possible to imagine it as a space that could be conquered — even surreptitiously — by forces differing significantly from those it already incarnates. It

is what it is, and that is something historically singular, ideologically specific, and highly determined in its social orientation. It swims left, essentially. The public sphere is not the battlefield, but the enemy.



As NRx seeks to navigate this hostile territory, it is tempted ambiguously, by a strategic Scylla and Charybdis. A populist lure

drags it towards a reconciliation with the public sphere, as something it could potentially dominate, while a contrary hermetic politics guides it towards the formation of closed groups (whose parodic symbol is the locked twitter account). Both options — 'clearly' — are a flight from the complexity of the integral *open secret*. They both promise a relaxation of semiotic stress, through collapse of multi-level communication into a simplified frank discourse, whether implanted within a redeemed public culture, or circulated cautiously within restricted circles. The problem of hierarchy would be extracted from the signs of Neoreaction, through conversion into a public or private object, rather than working them incessantly from within. What is underway would become (simply) clear.

Such clarity cannot happen. The alternative is not an (equally simple) obscurity. NRx, insofar as it continues to propagate, advances by becoming clear *and also unclear*. Double writing scarcely scratches the surface. It realizes hierarchy through signs, continuously, in accordance with Providence, or the Occult Order of nature (the OOon). To assume that the author is fully initiated into this spectrum of meanings is a grave error. It is the process that speaks, multiplicitously, and predominantly in secret, as it spreads across an open, publicly-policed space.

This post is now determined to slip the leash, and leap into the raggedness of thematic notes. The Open Secret intersects:

(1) Cathedral censure, in the case of HBD most prominently, but

also everywhere that fired–up SJWs make a fight. War is deception, which makes frankness a tactic. Deontological honesty is inept. Anonymity is often crucial to survival. (Demands that all enemies of the Cathedral boldly 'come out' are ludicrously misconceived.) Camouflage is to be treasured.

(2) Crypto-technologies are central to any NRx concerns emphasizing practicality. (The idea that classic Moldbug attention to the prospects of 'crypto-locking' is a joke, it itself thoughtless.) Urbit — an Open Secret — could quite easily be more NRx than NRx, just as Bitcoin is more An-Cap than Anarcho-Capitalism.

(3) The intelligence services have been under-theorized, and perhaps even under-solicited, by NRx to date. At the lowest, i.e. most publicly accessible — level of discussion, this is quite possibly a virtue. At more cryptic levels of micro-social and analytical endeavor, it is almost certainly an inadequacy. People trained to keep secrets have to be interesting to us. Subtle questions of subversion arise.

(4) "Verily thou *art* a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." — Let's try not to be simple-minded.

September 27, 2014

On Difficulty

From the moment of its inception, *Outside in* has been camped at

the edge of the ‘reactosphere’ — and everything that occurs under the label ‘NRx’ is (at least nominally) its concern. As this territory has expanded, from a compact redoubt to sprawling tracts whose boundaries are lost beyond misty horizons, close and comprehensive scrutiny has become impractical. Instead, themes and trends emerge, absorbing and carrying mere incidents. Like climatic changes, or vague weather-systems, they suggest patterns of persistent and diffuse development.

Among these rumblings, the most indefinite, tentative, and unresolved tend to the aesthetic. Without settled criteria of evaluation, there is little obvious basis for productive collision. Instead, there are idiosyncratic statements of appreciation, expressed as such, or adamant judgments of affirmation or negation, surging forth, draped in the heraldic finery of the absolute, before collapsing back into the hollowness of their unsustainable pretensions. As things stand, when somebody posts a picture of some architectural treasure, or classical painting, remarking (or more commonly merely insinuating) “You *should* all esteem this,” there is no truly appropriate response but laughter. If there were not a profound problem exactly in this regard, NRx would not exist. Criteria are broken, strewn, and dispossessed, authoritative tradition is smashed, infected, or reduced to self-parody, the Muses raped and butchered. That’s where we are in the land of the dying sun.

An associated, insistent murmur concerns communicative lucidity. This is not solely a question of aesthetics, but in its quavering groundlessness, it behaves as one. It arises most typically as the assertion — initially unsupported and subsequently undeveloped — that *clearly*, 'unnecessary obscurity' *should* be condemned.

The culpability of this blog as a vortex of euphoric obscurantism can scarcely be doubted, so addressing the challenge approaches a duty. Setting aside, for the moment, the social and cryptographic aspects of the topic, as well as the specific critique of human cognition for its intolerance of real obscurity (comparatively articulate from my perspective, if obscure from others), this post will ~~directly~~ pursue the question of language.

This question is first of all about trust. Even in this, initial regard, it is already *difficult*. As a complex tool, there are things it can do, and things it cannot do. Speaking approximately, and uncertainly, if it is directed towards those undertakings which have, over eons, exercised selective pressure upon it — meeting the social necessities of paleolithic human groups — then an assumption of its inherent trustworthiness is at least plausible. To extend such an assumption further is sheer recklessness. Nothing in linguistics supports the wild hypothesis that this code, developed piecemeal for primate social coordination, is *necessarily* adequate to modern cognitive challenges. Grammar is not sound epistemology. Mathematicians have abandoned 'natural language' entirely. To presume that

language *allows us to think* is a leap of faith. Radical distrust is the more rigorous default.

To promote 'clarity' as an obvious ideal, needing no further justification, is a demand that language — as such — can be trusted, that it is competent for all reasonable communicative tasks, and 'reason' can be defined in a way that makes this assertion tautological (such a definition is eminently traditional). "I give you my word" language is not predisposed to deception — no thoughtful investigator has ever found themselves in concurrence with such a claim. Vocabularies are retardation, and grammar, when it is more than a game, is a lie. Language is good only for language games, and among these trust games are the most irredeemably stupid.

There is no general obligation to write *in order to attack language*, but that is what Xenosystems does, and will continue to do. Language in not a neutral conveyor of infinite communicative possibility, but an intelligence box. It is to be counted among the traps to be escaped. It is an Exit target — and exit is difficult.

October 4, 2014

Occult Xenosystems

The swirling delirium at the new /pol/ is at least 80% noise, but it includes some real intelligence (in both senses of the word), and not

solely of a comedic variety. The sheer dirtiness of its signal makes it a powerful antenna, picking up on connections and information sources that tidier discussions would dismiss as pollution. This makes it especially suited to conspiracy theorizing, both inane and exotic.

While noting the importance of correction for narcissistic bias, which operates through selective attention, memorization, and (from commentators here) communication, it seems as if this blog is referenced disproportionately by the most extravagant NRx-sensitive /pol/ conspiracists. That is quite understandable. Occult philosophy, secrecy, crypsis, codes, and obscurity are insistent themes here. *Xenosystems* is inclined towards arcane cultural games. It identifies cryptographic developments as keys to the emerging order of the world.

The primary philosophical task of this blog is to disturb unwarranted pretensions to knowing, in the name of a Pyrrhonian inspiration. In this regard, confusion, paradox, and uncertainty are communicative outcomes to be ardently embraced.

For the purposes of this post, an exceptionally exotic /pol/ suggestion provides the opportunity to make a comparatively compact and simple point. The occasion is a web of conjecture weaving together *Xenosystems* and *The Order of Nine Angles* (O9A, ONA, or omega9alpha). In addition to the (highly-recommended) link just provided, the relevant Wikipedia entry is also extremely stimulating.

Xenosystems micro-ethics is uncomfortable with soliciting belief (or invoking expectations of trust). It is necessary to note at this point, therefore, that the following remarks are not designed to appeal to credence, but merely to add testimonial information, to be accepted or rejected at will. In the world we now enter — of "sinister dialectic" — declarations of honesty are utterly debased. However, for what (little) it is worth, these are the facts as I understand and relay them.

The O9A is not entirely new to me, but it is not a gnosis I have studied, still less deliberately aligned with. The few hours of reading I have undertaken today is by far my most intense exposure to it to date. What little I have learnt about David Myatt has not attracted me to him as a thinker or political activist, despite certain impressive characteristics (his intellect and polyglot classicism most notably). With that said:

(1) Many convergent interests are soon apparent between *Outside in* and the *O9A* (as well as a not inconsiderable number of divergences).

(2) 'We' are both (I think) inclined to dismiss the pretensions of the individual intellect and will, which makes the possibility of connections *around the back* impossible to dismiss in a peremptory fashion. As one /pol/ 'anonymous' remarked: "why so sure that ONA would be the deepest layer, instead of just a japeful ruse?" Real connections, influences, and metaphysical roots are obscure.

(3) O9A is fascinating.

The point of this post (finally) is taken directly from Aleister Crowley. In the compilation of his qabbalistic writings entitled *777* (Alphanomic equivalent of *Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law*, although that is surely coincidental), he makes some introductory remarks on the topic of hermeticism. My copy of the book is temporarily misplaced, so I shall gloss them here. *A secret, of the kind relevant to hermeticism, is not something known and then hidden as a matter of decision, but rather something that by its very nature resists revelation*. Crowley proceeds to mock charlatan occultists who treat the numerical values of the Hebrew letters as secret information, to be revealed theatrically at some appropriate stage of initiation. *Let whatever can now be known, be known, as lucidly and publicly as possible. Only that is truly hermetic which hides itself*. Reality is not so destitute of intrinsically hidden things — of Integral Obscurity — that we need to replenish its coffers with our tawdry discretion.

Whatever might exist, in the way of an occult bond between *Outside in* and the *O9A*, it is not one that anybody is *keeping secret*. To emphasize the point, I am going to include the alpha9omega document in the Resources roll here, not as the acknowledgement of a connection, but as a clear statement that *this stuff is not a secret*. It is, however, about secrecy — and that is interesting.

ADDED: Is there something in the water?

October 11, 2014

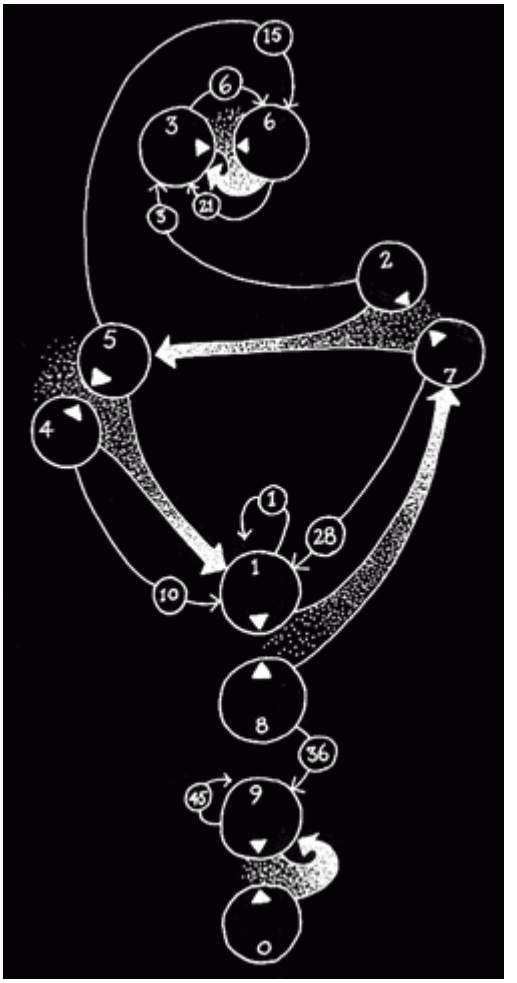
Cosmic Order

Outside in is unable to defer to the authority of this abominogram, whose degeneracy, contamination, and incompleteness are self-evident, but it seemed worth putting up for reference purposes.


Lovecraftian
BESTIARY
Creatures of the Cthulhu Mythos & Our World
HYPNOS
Lord of Sleep
SHUB-NIGGURATH
the Black Goat of the Woods
AZATHOTH
the Daemon Sultan
YOG-SOTHOTH
the All-in-One
ABHOTH
Source of Loathsomness
NODENS
Lord of the Great Abyss
NYARLATHOTEP
the Crawling Chaos
TULZSCHA
the Green Flame
UBBO-SATHLA
the Unbegotten Source
• Outer Gods •
CHAUGNAR FAUGN
Horror from the Hills
HASTUR
the Unspeakable
BOKRUG
Great Water-Lizard
ATLACH-NACHA
the Spider God
TSATHOGGHUA
the Sleeper of N'kai
DAGON
Ruler of the Deep Ones
GHATANOTHOA
Lord of the Volcano
SHUDDE M'ELL
the Burrower Beneath
RHAN-TEGOTH
Terror of the Mammals
ITHAQUA
the Wind-Walker
CTHUGHA
the Living Flame
CTHULHU
Master of R'lyeh
ZHAR
the Twin Obscenity
• Great Old Ones •
SHANTAK
Star-Mount
SAND-DWELLER
Stalker of the Wastes
DEEP ONE
Gilled Humanoid
TCHO-TCHOS
servitors of the Old Ones
HUNTING HORROR
the Great Flyer
CHTHONIAN
Tentacled Burrower
MOON-BEAST
the Torture Lover
MI-GO
the Fungi from Yuggoth
FORMLESS SPAWN
of Tsathoggua
NIGHTGAUNT
the Faceless
FIRE VAMPIRE
the Flame Feeder
STAR-SPAWN OF CTHULHU
Satrap of the Sleeper
DHOLE
Burrowing Horror
COLOUR OUT OF SPACE
Life-Force Feeder
GHOUL
BYAKHEE
Star-Steed
RAT-THING
Malevolent Mocker
SHOGGOTH
Fetid Iridescence
DARK YOUNG
of Shub-Niggurath
HOUND OF TINDALOS
Scavenger of Time
FLYING POLYP
Terror from the Blackness Below
SERVITORS
OF THE OUTER GODS
Minions of the Chaos
GNOPH-KEH
Legend of the Ice
GREAT RACE OF YITH
Mental Time-Travellers
• Lesser Servitor Races •
• Servitor Races •
• Greater Servitor Races •
• Greater Independent Races •

(Clicking on the image opens a new ~~cosmic door~~ window, where one additional click brings up an expanded version.)

In the end, there's only one map of cosmic order worthy of unconditional trust:



(Assuming only that decimalism is an occult revelation of ~~Nomo~~ Gnon.)

November 18, 2014

Quote note (#135)

From Erasmus, *Moriae Encomium*, which can be found here, but adopted in this case as translated by Sir Edmund Whittaker (in his *A History of the Theories of Aether and Electricty*, Volume I, p.3):

There are innumerable niceties concerning ***notions, relations, instants, formalities, quiddities****, and* ***haecceities****, which no-one can pry into, unless he has eyes that can penetrate the thickest darkness, and there can see things that have no existence whatever.*

Appealing enough, already, in its light-footed philosophical modernism, it becomes utterly sublime when tackled — inversely — by the method of 'hyper-literal anagogy'. It then suggests a Miltonic recovery of ancient philosophy, undertaken — with blind irony — by modernity itself.

December 1, 2014

MMXV

While schematic qabbalism is the most rigorous science to which the transcendental intellect can aspire, symbolic qabbalism — even

that in the subtlest Neo-Lemurian vein — merits the very deepest distrust. Nevertheless, in this interim period of near-complete exile from Cyberspace, there has been plenty of opportunity for exploratory calculations. For what little it is worth, 2015 radiates a peculiarly distinctive signal, suggesting an emphasis upon the deep state, maritime civilization, and mathematical zero, with a dominant oceanic affect. This is not an agenda set to provoke obvious resistance at *Outside in*.



(Tomorrow is likely to be socio-technically challenging, but I'm hoping to sleaze back towards functionality from the start of the new year.)

December 30, 2014

Chaos Patch (#43)

(Open thread.)

Still link-deprived, so here's a puzzle (strictly optional):

(1) Every Roman Numeral has an Alphanomic value (corresponding to contemporary alphanumeric position, or to alphabetical position +9).

(2) Are there any consistent Roman-Alphanomic numbers?

(3) The Roman-Alphanomic difference can be conceived as a disequilibrium, and the puzzle is an attempt to restore a zero-divergence through a syntactically well-constructed Roman number. Key, to this method: I (+17), V (+26), X (+23), L (-29), C (-88). Values above C are surely unusable: D (-487), M (-978).

(4) My preliminary conclusion, based on a weakly formalized application of the method above, is that there is no correct solution. The only candidate I could find is the badly constructed CLXVIIII (= 169), which — of course — syntactically collapses to CLXIX (= 117 in alphanomics).

(5) This is a specimen being collected for my qabbalistic quagmires compilation.

ADDED: On an even more incidental note (at this stage), the Time Spiral Press site is a malnourished formless mess at this stage, but it's finally on a track to become something.

ADDED: So the solution is X-Civ (XCIV, 94, multiple

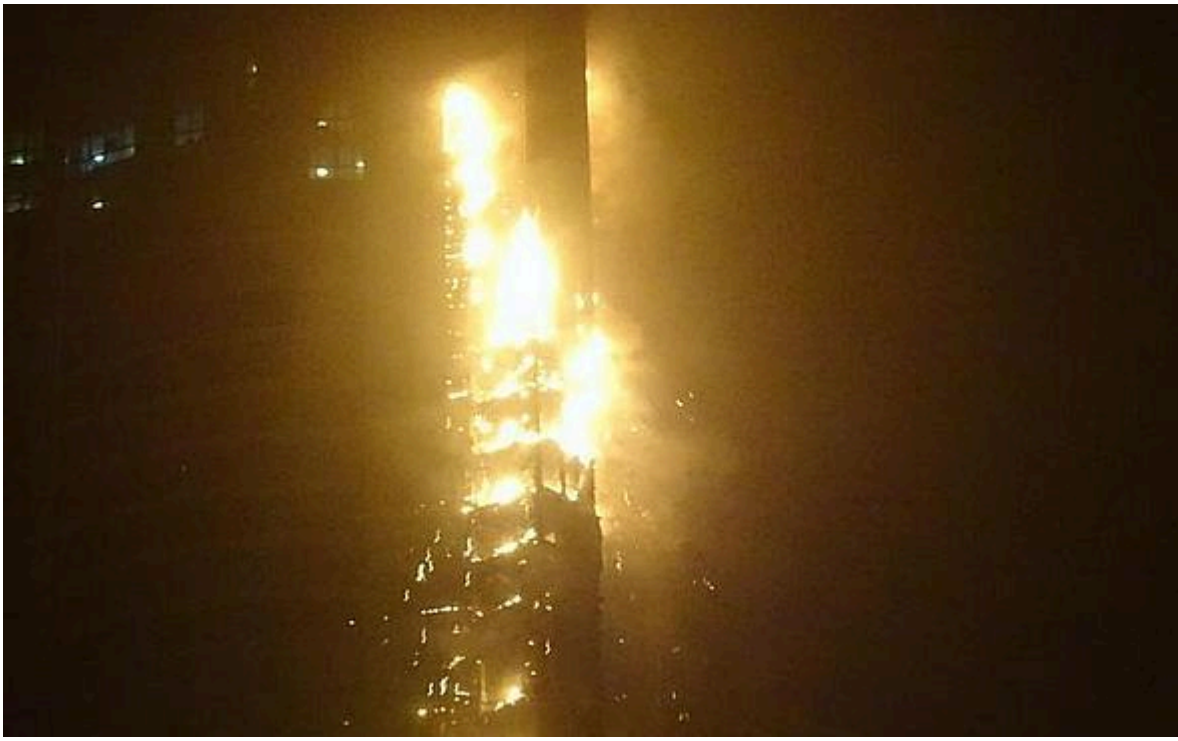
interpretations available, among which various lurid options). You can't make this stuff up.

ADDED: More productive work. (No idea how I missed CXXIX (it's a thing of simple beauty)).

January 4, 2015

What's in a Name?

Dubai's **Marina Torch**, today:



Much more here.

February 21, 2015

Pi Day

Friday the 13th today, and Pi Day tomorrow. Horror is cold-shouldering me a little, so here's a piece of pi:
3.14159265358979323846264338327950288419716939937510582097
86208998628034825342117067982148086513282306647093844609
28481117450284102701938521105559644622948954930381964428
75648233786783165271201909145648566923460348610454326648
73724587006606315588174881520920962829254091715364367892
20466521384146951941511609… (If you're still hungry, there's some more here.)

Can I give a small anecdotal … life's too short, but that's a fragment of 'Pilish' apparently:

Many poems have been written in pilish – "piems", of course – and there's even a pilish novel 10,000 words long.

Since π was proven to be transcendental (by Ferdinand von Lindemann in 1882) we've known that squaring the circle is impossible. Everyone reveres Euler's identity (e^iπ + 1 = 0), but there's more: "Pi is also interesting to mathematicians because it crops up frequently in areas with no obvious connection to geometry

or circles. For example, if you toss a coin 2*n* times, and *n* is very large, the probability of getting equal numbers of heads and tails is $1/\sqrt{(n\pi)}$."

... since pi is an irrational number ... the digits in its decimal expansion will never repeat in a periodic pattern. It is also likely that pi is "normal", meaning that each of the digits from 0 to 9 will appear in the expansion exactly one tenth of the time. Pi's digits seem to mimic randomness exceptionally well, meaning that – theoretically, at least – it should be possible to find any number string somewhere in pi.

Since Gödel it has been understood that any possible statement can be coded as a number, which means that everything that could ever be said lurks somewhere in π. Conceive a library, of arbitrary vastness, and its entire contents — perfectly ordered — are virtually pre-existent within it. π implicitly anticipates every religious doctrine, philosophy, scientific theory, epic novel, and poem — to restrict ourselves to its loftier regions. There is nothing mathematics can ever discover that the single sign π does not already tacitly whisper to us, if only we could read it with absolute intelligence. To taste a speck of infinity tomorrow would be appropriate.

ADDED: Joseph Shipley's 31 digit Pilish poem —

But a time I spent wandering in bloomy night;
Yon tower, tinkling chimewise, loftily opportune.
Out, up, and together came sudden to Sunday rite,

The one solemnly off to correct plenilune.

(31 is, of course, the qabalistic key of Thelema — as well as the first two digits of π — but that is no doubt a coincidence (or perhaps two)).

ADDED: Why Pi matters. (Tau gets an early mention.)

March 13, 2015

The Iron Law of Six

The *Zhouyi* (or *Yijing*) identifies ultimate cosmic law with the order of time — which is the eternal in change. It consists of hexagrams — figures of six lines — because decimated duplication produces the endlessly recurring sequence of six phases, in the cycle 1, 2, 4, 8, 7, 5. As explicitly acknowledged in the Ten Wings of the *Zhouyi*, this six-step cycle is diplo-triadic. It consists of two trigrams, or twin triangles, with each set of pairs summing through addition to the number nine. Notably, exponential growth and rigid cyclicity are integrated in the abstract model of time. The 'byte' (2^3) still defers to its final authority in advanced modernity. That is the robust, arithmetically indisputable foundation of The Iron Law of Six.

"If you would promote a law, first submit yourself to it." There is perhaps no antidote to moralism sounder than this. How, then, to make of The Iron Law of Six an overt, private fatality?

Consider this (utterly crude) convergence upon the same

problem. In an age of unprecedentedly scrambled attention, “deep projects” tend to get lost. Nothing that is not built into the order of time will get done. (Some very relevant neuro-psychological background can be found here.)

Submission to the order of time is thus indispensable to any real power of execution. That time repeats is the only basis upon which to build anything new.

Formulated in the mode of *Time: A User’s Guide*, this is the Outsideness protocol:

(1) Acknowledge time as that which repeats each day, in a double triad, providing six slots. Submission to the Law necessitates that each of these slots will receive explicit attention.

(2) Initiation, proliferation, and compression compose a triad that instantiates a ‘Darwinian’ machine. Apply it to everything.

(3) Compile a list of everything that you are serious about doing. Economize by cycling it through the triad. Recognize, realistically, that anything which cannot be allotted a slot — i.e. a systematic call upon daily attention — will most probably not ever happen. If your work requires that you work on more than six projects at a time, which is to say some series of projects that cannot be bundled, culled, trimmed, and synthesized in rigorous conformity with The Iron Law of Six, then you are almost certainly attempting the impossible.

(4) Make a rhythm of innovation. To each thing you would have made real, a Time Shrine.

(5) Seximalize your life with extraordinary harshness (if you would achieve extraordinary things).

(6) Only then, when diplo-triadic order exercises sovereign authority over your every moment, confidently promote The Iron Law of Six.

March 31, 2015

Abstract Thought-Crime

What Peter Thiel has to say is almost always interesting, but it's what he doesn't say that is the real treasure. The species of abstract horror that is *abstract thought-crime* is turned into a special zone of expertise:

Everyone has ideas. Everyone has things they believe to be true that other people won't agree with you on. But they're not things you want to say. … You know, the ideas that are really controversial are the ones I don't even want to tell you. I want to be more careful than that. I gave you these halfway, in-between ideas that are a little bit edgier. […] But I will also go a little bit out on a limb: I think the monopoly idea, that the goal of every successful business is to have a monopoly, that's on the border of what I want to say. But the really good ideas are way more dangerous than that.

Here's the Biblical application:

I think for the most part, it was necessary for Christ to be very careful how he expressed himself. It was mostly in these extremely parabolic, indirect modalities, because if it had been too direct, it would have been very dangerous. […] It was John Locke, in ***The Reasonableness of Christianity****, said that Christ obviously had to mislead people, since if he had not done so, the authorities might have tried to kill him. … That's the Straussian interpretation of Christ. It didn't end in a particularly Straussian way, but it was at least true for most of his ministry.*

In the Q&A, asked about his 2009 *Cato Unbound* article (a crucial catalyst for the Dark Enlightenment), he remarks — more than a little evasively:

Writing is always such a dangerous thing. […] I remember a professor once told me back in the '80s that writing a book was more dangerous than having a child because you could always disown a child if it turned out badly. […] You could never disown anything that you've written. The ***Cato Unbound*** *article, it was a thousand-word essay. It was late at night. I quickly typed it off. I sent it to someone else to review, who said, "There's nothing controversial in here at all." … My retrospective was that if you actually ask someone to double-check things for whether or not it's controversial, you already deep-down know that you should double-check it yourself. … My updated version on it would be that — I made the case that I thought democracy and capitalism weren't quite compatible [*facepalm*] —*

the updated version I would give is it's not at all clear that we're living in anything resembling a democracy. …

Rarely has anything been unsaid with comparable agility.

April 7, 2015

Transistors of the Gods

(A labyrinth of mad-circuitry for the rabbit-hole deprived.)

If you only *slightly suspect* that the origin of Silicon Valley is plugged into an occult matrix buzzing with UFOs and ceremonial magic, then this — still unfinished — series won't be less than suggestive (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9).

(Via.)

From the conclusion of Jack Parsons' (linked) scripture:

The choice is me or Choronzon.
I await you in the City of the Pyramids.

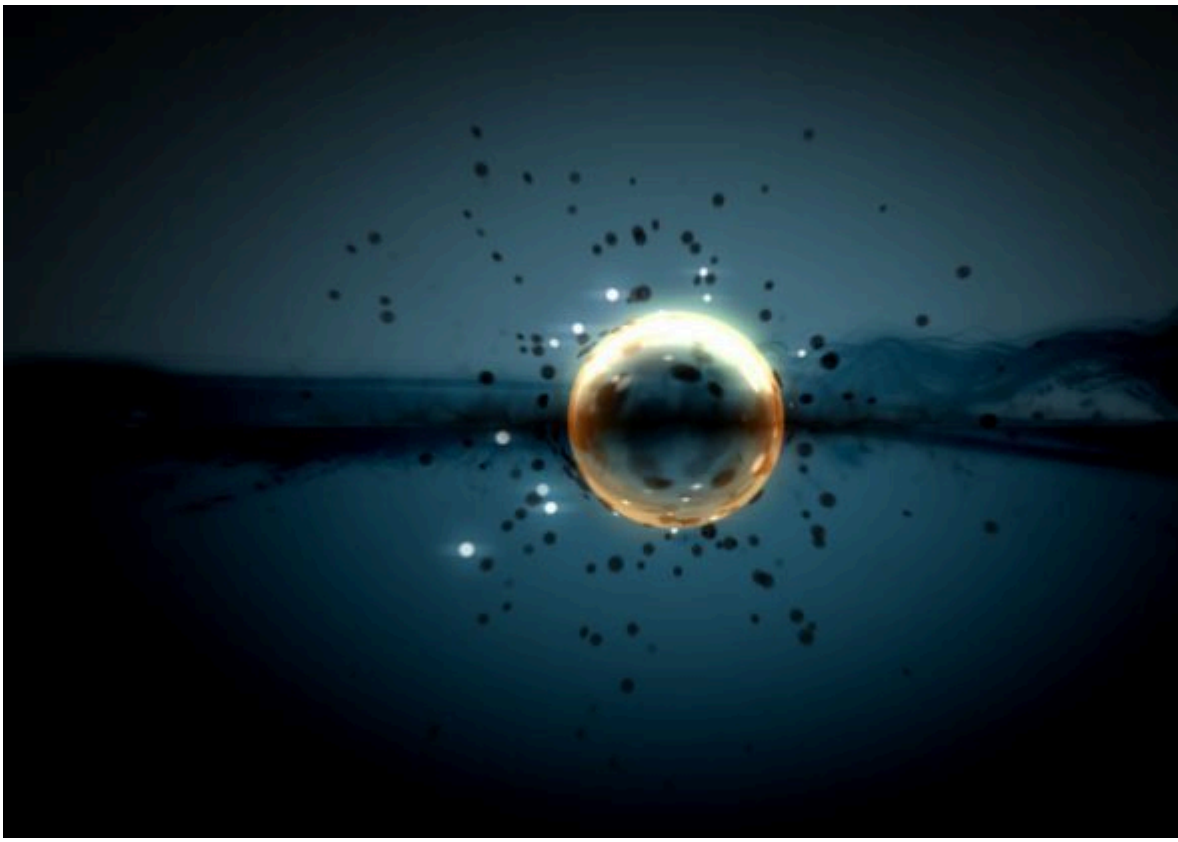
(Quite.)

May 11, 2016

Dark Energy

The occult force of cosmic disintegration accounts for roughly 70%

of everything that is strongly suspected to exist. Breaking things up pleases Gnon at least twice as much as holding them together. The party of unity has a steep slope to climb.



(*Nova* does dark energy.)

September 26, 2016

BLOCK 5 - HYPERSTITION

Scrap note (#9)

I'm back in the Chinese West, this time with the family (nuclear plus mother-in-law). As I write I'm on the train from Lanzhou to Dunhuang, fabulously renowned for its Buddhist caves. It's re-bonding-with-the-tablet time, then, which is a mechanical challenge – mostly due to incredibly dysfunctional cursor control, which I know everyone is on tenterhooks to hear more about …

… so, 24-hours later, there's not much in the way of gripping travel news to report. We're heading to the Mogao Caves tomorrow, which should be worth talking about. Up to now it's been desert and donkey-meat and the general weirdness of the Chinese West, but with a mind oozing uselessly like gritty mud, it doesn't add up to anything remotely profound. Perhaps later.

The thing I want to introduce tentatively here, because it has to be re-introduced more thoroughly quite soon, is *hyperstition,* and in particular; hyperstitional method. I'm getting the strong sense that there are things it simply won't be possible to do otherwise. (I'll try to explain.)

There are a variety of plausible ways to explain the basic 'idea' of hyperstition. The most pertinent of these, here, right now, is that it is an attempt to systematize the philosophical usage of fiction. By framing a philosophical discussion within fiction, rather than within an assumed consensual understanding, it is advanced as a perturbation of disbelief, rather than a modification of belief. How to proceed philosophically from the artificial background assumption that everything is a lie? That's the hyperstitional question (whose Pyrrhonian and Gnostic resonances are immediately evident).

Practically speaking — which it always should be — the fork taken is to formulate thoughts within the 'voice' of a synthetic (fictional) subject instead of propounding them in the name of a privately and socially accredited one. The preliminary hypothesis: greater experimental diversity of thinking is to be expected when it is conducted in the mode of 'what might be thought' — comparatively free of ego-commitment and first-order social games. (Orwellian 'thought-stop' is the confirmation of this hypothesis from the other side.)

Beginning from a fictional self has a Buddhist slant, to be

discussed at some later point. Being in Dunhuang is what makes it worth mentioning at all.

While all of this is relevant to the problem under development as 'sub-cognitive fragments' (i.e. how to think), the return to the question of hyperstitional method, to me, has mostly come in the other direction. My philosophical retardation is infuriating, but my literary blockage is utterly intolerable. There is nothing of which I am more sure than that *abstract literature*, or metaphysical horror fiction radically pursued, is the undertaking which claims me, but there is equally nothing that calls forth more titanic forces of procrastination. The obstruction, quite obviously, is 'me' — and hyperstition suggests a solution to that, or at least, a method directed decisively towards a solution. Find the way to speak on behalf of that thing which can say what you cannot (or something like that).

What hyperstition has yet to fully do (I still believe), is to close the loop, subsuming itself definitively into fiction. It has to become a story, rather than a theory of stories, before it can be said to have attained consistency.

April 10, 2014

Gyres

This excitable but nevertheless broadly convincing application of the Strauss & Howe generational theory of historical cycles to recent news headlines is a reminder of the inevitability of story-telling. (*Outside in* has touched upon this particular tale before.)

The Cathedral is above all a meta-story, a secular-revolutionary usurpation of the traditional Western 'Grand Narrative' (inherited from eschatological monotheism), and its survival is inseparable from the preservation of narrative credibility. As it frays, alternative stories obtain a niche. The Strauss & Howe account of rhythmic historical pattern is highly competitive in such an environment. Events subtracting from the plausibility of progressive expectations are exactly those that strengthen omens of an impending cyclic 'winter'. *Winter is coming*, as popularized by Game of Thrones, might have been designed as a promotional tool for *The Fourth Turning*.



Anarchopapist begins his most recent musings on 'The Neoreactionary Project' by asking "What is a meme?" It is a better

starting point, in this context, than the question: *How correct are Strauss & Howe*? Memetics subsumes questions of factual application (as aspects of adaptive fitness), but it reaches beyond them. The successful meme is characterized by aesthetic features irreducible to representational adequacy, from elegance of construction to dramatic form. Even more importantly, it is able to operate as a causal factor itself, and thus to produce the very effects it accommodates itself to. A society enthralled by its passage through the winter gate of a fourth turning would in very large measure be staging the same theatrical production its 'beliefs' had anticipated.

Among the greatest memetic strengths of the Strauss & Howe story is its remarkably concrete sense of timing. It offers prospective dates, within a tight predictive range that alternative narratives are hard-pressed to match, in keeping with its claim to have identified historical 'seasons'. The anticipations of contemporary Marxist, Singularitarian, or Eco-catastrophe story-lines are unmistakably nebulous in comparison. (Notably — NRx has, as yet, no formulated theory to support dated predictions at all.)

Among the most significant memetic latch-functions is a confidence graft. Any cultural virus communicating a definite sense of *what is coming* finds host tolerance relatively easy to obtain. The history of (precisely dated) millenarianism attests to this overwhelmingly, with the rider that vulnerability to subsequent

falsification is necessarily entailed. To some definite extent, such sensitivity to empirical contradiction also has to apply in the Strauss & Howe case, despite the complicating factors of contagious auto-confirmation already noted.

As S&H prophecy in the book:

Sometime before the year 2025, America will pass through a great gate in history, commensurate with the American Revolution, Civil War, and twin emergencies of the Great Depression and World War II. […] The risk of catastrophe will be very high. The nation could erupt into insurrection or civil violence, crack up geographically, or succumb to authoritarian rule. If there is a war, it is likely to be one of maximum risk and efforts — in other words, a TOTAL WAR.

It is this admirably determinate forecast, in combination with the ominous content, that lends this work its purchase upon the apocalyptic imagination of our time.



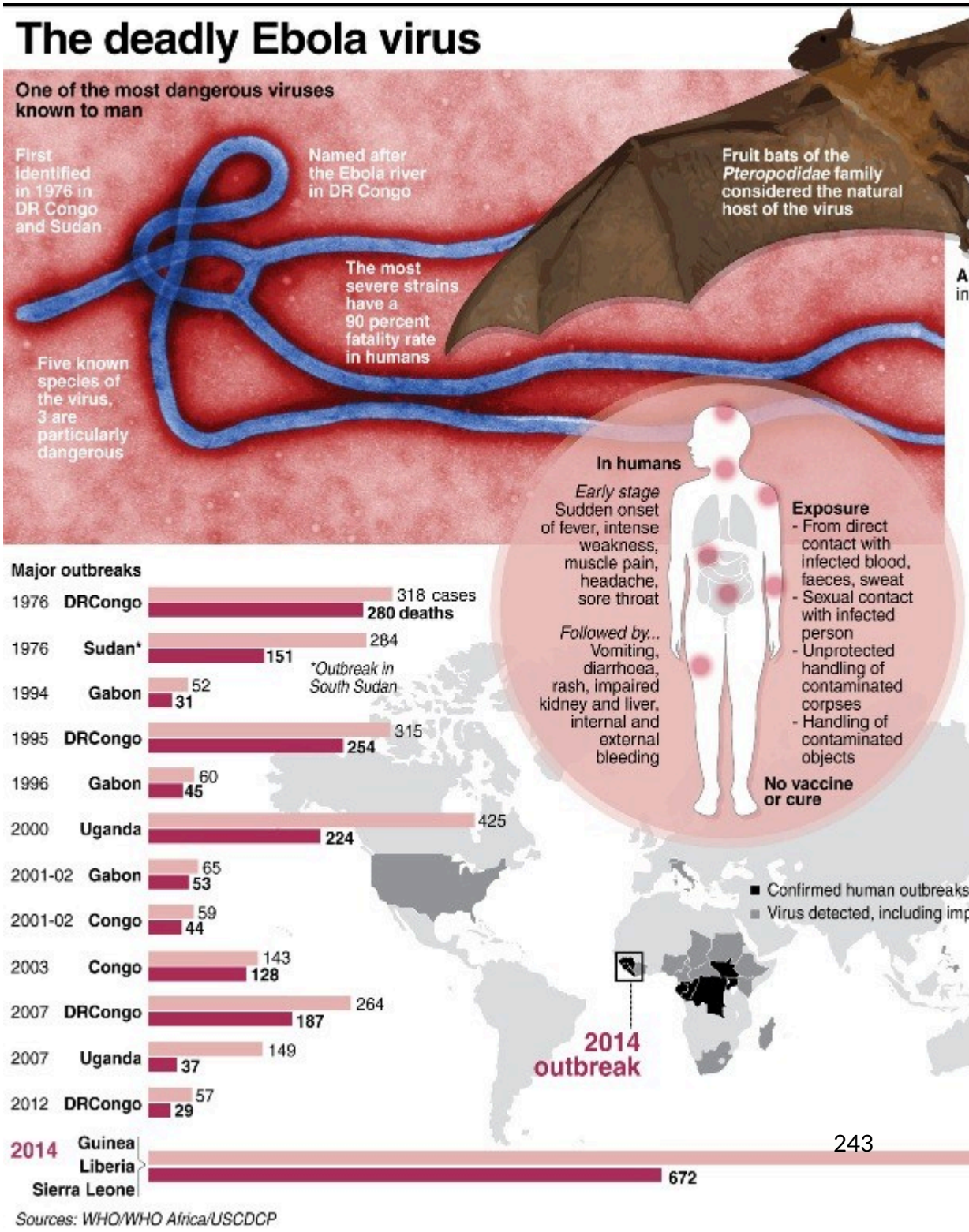
Gathering 'Fourth Turning' expectations are part of the memetic landscape in which NRx finds itself, and thus an involved, strategically-relevant fact. A consistent and compelling story about them would be valuable — and almost certainly, in the relatively

short-term at least, increasingly valuable.

ADDED: Double doom

June 18, 2014

Ebola-Chan


The deadly Ebola virus
One of the most dangerous viruses known to man
First identified in 1976 in DR Congo and Sudan
Named after the Ebola river in DR Congo
Fruit bats of the Pteropodidae family considered the natural host of the virus
The most severe strains have a 90 percent fatality rate in humans
Five known species of the virus, 3 are particularly dangerous
In humans
Early stage
Sudden onset of fever, intense weakness, muscle pain, headache, sore throat
Followed by...
Vomiting, diarrhoea, rash, impaired kidney and liver, internal and external bleeding
Exposure
- From direct contact with infected blood, faeces, sweat
- Sexual contact with infected person
- Unprotected handling of contaminated corpses
- Handling of contaminated objects
No vaccine or cure
Major outbreaks
1976 DRCongo 318 cases 280 deaths
1976 Sudan* 284 151
*Outbreak in South Sudan
1994 Gabon 52 31
1995 DRCongo 315 254
1996 Gabon 60 45
2000 Uganda 425 224
2001-02 Gabon 65 53
2001-02 Congo 59 44
2003 Congo 143 128
2007 DRCongo 264 187
2007 Uganda 149 37
2012 DRCongo 57 29
2014 Guinea Liberia Sierra Leone 672
Confirmed human outbreaks
Virus detected, including imp
2014 outbreak
Sources: WHO/WHO Africa/USCDCP

This was my gateway into the horror-tracts of Ebola-Chan. It was immediately obvious that something of great significance was happening.

Upsetting (for those still nursing shreds of humane moral intuition): certainly, and deliberately.

Meaningful: beyond question, and massively.

The ebola trendline is currently exponential. Richard Fernandez places the phenomenon in its proper intellectual context. Whatever else the outbreak may be — a human (and economic) catastrophe for West Africa, a threat to the West — it is also a revelation (or 'apocalypse' in the strict sense). It's a Khan Academy demonstration for slow and reluctant learners. Such things lend themselves to spontaneous religious interpretation.

It wasn't supposed to look like this:



The (rough) coincidence with the death of 4chan is — in itself — a topic of abysmal fascination. I'm kicking that can for the moment. There's much on this precursor discussion thread of relevance.

For now, some preliminary indications as to why this might be thought to matter (immensely), in revisable order of gravity:

(1) Readers of John Michael Greer are prepared for socio-economic decline to be accompanied by an eruption of religious abnormality. For anybody with a taste for irony (a crucial epistemological disposition, in the opinion of this blog), there is much nourishment to be found in the Ebola-Chan phenomenon. Most

prominently, despite — and more probably *because of* — the shocking racism propelling it, Ebola-Chan opens a cross-cultural plane of communication completely absent from the 'responsible' Western responses to the plague. It makes sense of ebola in a way that is far closer to the sensibility of its target populations than the lofty medico-globalist pronouncements of legitimated authorities. Ebola-Chan packages the outbreak for a folk-religious response — of exactly the kind it is being met with in the villages it (or 'she'?) ravages.

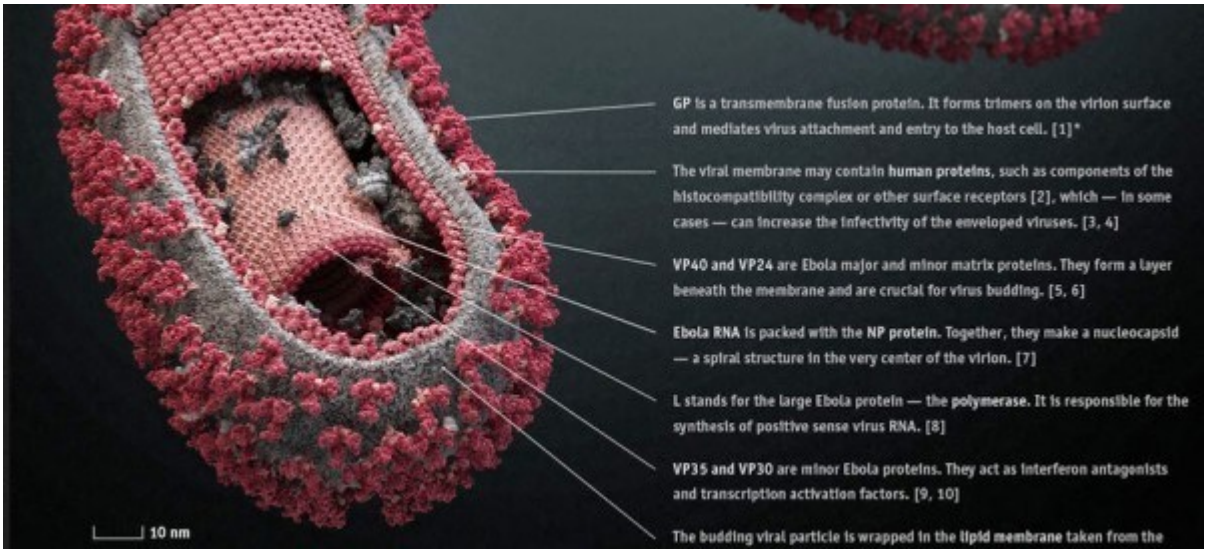
(2) Ebola-Chan is a demoness of communication, not only across cultures (West Africa, America, Japan …) but also between cultural and biological patterns of virulence. The 'meme' — as a more-or-less exact analog of the gene — is unleashed on 4chan in *sympathy* with the virus. It connects with the biological contagion, in various ways, through relations of copying (transcription), prolongation, and promotion. Ebola-Chan is a crossing.

(3) As memotechnics, Ebola-Chan condenses an accumulated stock of practical heuristics. Its genre is, most immediately, that of the chain-letter — conveying a message pre-adapted to spreading. *Copy me, or be punished* (stricken). It's darkly humorous, cruel, ironical, and self-reflective, but at the level of memotechnics none of this undermines anything. If "I love you Ebola-Chan" spreads as a joke — it still spreads. The Nigerian email scam industry attests to the inter-cultural consistency of this memotechnic plane.

(4) Ebola-Chan is already operating as a factor in Fourth-Generation Warfare. It complicates the pacification efforts of the 'international community' in unpredictable ways. Once again, certain peculiar cultural formations are waiting to connect with it. At this stage it is difficult to reach even the preliminary stage of a lucid analysis, but clearly the memotechnic militarization of a medical emergency is an obstacle to the smooth evolution of established management procedures. The WHO is not ideologically equipped to publicize its intervention within the context of an occult religious race war.

(5) To what extent is Ebola-Chan an avatar of globalized Helter Skelter? Surely not to no extent at all?

(6) As 4chan is pushed ever deeper into the shadows, it seems reasonable to assume that its practical alliance with memotechnic chaos will also deepen. In this respect, Ebola-Chan is the Yin to the Cathedral's Yang — a complement, fed by subterranean conservation laws. Much prophetic density accompanies such an analysis. If it is an end, it is no less the beginning of an end.



Badly cropped but horribly beautiful.

ADDED: Ebola-chan, ebola-chan, Ebola-Chan, ebola-chan, Ebola-Chan is Love~ …

ADDED: Ebola-Chan on Facebook.

ADDED: WaPo takes a look. “But even if the mods do remove [Ebola-chan threads], Ebola-Chan may have done her damage. Much like the disease itself, now that she’s out there, there’s no controlling her.”

ADDED: *Rituals to Nurgle: Ebola Is Coming* (Styxhexenhammer666).

September 20, 2014

Ontological Reflexion

Urban Future is merely scavenging irresponsibly around the edges of the Speculative Realism meltdown, attracted by turbulence, and connected tenuously to some of the figures involved. The greatest advantage of such detachment is that it allows for a free framing of the issues at stake, and these are becoming truly fascinating. The battle over the New Ontology (aka 'Speculative Realism') is spiraling into the question: *does it — itself — actually exist?*

Pete Wolfendale summarizes the problem clearly:

The essence of [Ray Brassier's] point is simply that the mere existence of ***Speculations*** *(which is explicitly labelled 'A Journal of Speculative Realism') isn't sufficient to establish SR's existence, and that declarations of the latter's existence from within its pages don't change this. This is part of a broader argument, but if you want to understand it you're going to have to read the postscript yourself.*

There's a lot I could say in response to Jon's claim that SR obviously exists, and that to say otherwise is either trivially false, or worse, contradicts my claims about the collapse of the SR blogging community. There's no doubt that there are people who self-describe as speculative realists, and that there are CFPs, conferences, and art exhibitions where it gets referenced liberally. However, if all SR means is a renewed concern with metaphysics in the Continental tradition, then there's no clear reason why it doesn't include people

like Deleuze, Badiou, Zizek, Stengers, and the like. If nothing else, this is amply demonstrated by the extent to which these figures (and people influenced by them) form the most natural interlocutors of those who count themselves as speculative realists. What is it about the work of Meillassoux and Grant that warrants them being categorised separately from these other figures, as somehow more appropriately listed beside Harman than any of the others, other than the fact that they attended a workshop together in 2007? There are others who have come to the SR label later, such as those interested in Whitehead, Latour, and various strands of so called New Materialism, who genuinely have more in common with OOP/OOO than these figures, but if SR is taken to index these commonalities, then it has by far more to do with OOP than any of the other work it was originally supposed to index (hence the inevitable slippage to 'SR/OOO').

The claim that SR doesn't exist is simply the claim that there isn't any distinctive philosophical common ground indexed by the intersection of Meillassoux/Harman/Grant/Brassier. However, this is entirely compatible with the claim that at one point it looked like there might be, and that this promised a potentially new philosophical trajectory that would be genuinely distinct from extant trends. The sense in which SR can be said to have 'died' is simply the sense in which this promise proved to be false. This sort of thing happens. It's precisely what Badiou tries to capture in his account of

fidelity, wherein one simply has to commit oneself to the existence of an Event despite its occurrence being indiscernible. Sometimes the fidelity pays off, and sometimes it doesn't.

This is, therefore, a true *existential* question. The sensational micro-sociological trappings might have been designed to distract from the *ontological performance* underway. SR has become an *examplary object* (within a reflexive loop that has surely to be considered unintentional). We might be tempted to conceive it as a self-dramatizing ontological contingency, or an object-oriented occurrence.

We find ourselves invited to entertain the question: *Could this thing or event that appeared to have been happening, determined by a distinctive revival of metaphysical speculation about the nature of reality (and in fact 'the being of beings'), in reality never have been anything at all?* Rephrased with additional vulgarity: Could auto-disontologization turn out to be a thing? Any imaginable answer will teach us something strange.

Note: The provocative preface to Pete Wolfendale's book is available for perusal online. (I say 'provocative' mostly because it has demonstrably provoked.)

ADDED: Ontological Argument, def.

1. The theological assertion of existence as a real predicate.
2. The 2014 Internet circus around Pete Wolfendale's preface to *Object-Oriented Philosophy: The Noumenon's New Clothes*.

October 15, 2014

Kek



Of which it is said (I do not pretend to grasp more than a pitiful sliver of this): “Pepe has guided humanity since time immemorial. This is Heqet, the frog-headed Ancient Egyptian goddess, symbol of life and protector on the journey to the afterlife. She guided the ancient Egyptians who transcended normie-ism to a land of poorly drawn dick-girls and the dankest of memes. A little known fact is that while normies evolved from the famously social monkeys, those destined to browse dank memes alone in dimly-lit rooms evolved from another species who also prefers dark moist habitats, namely the frog.”

The name ‘Kek’ *appears* to have crossed into Cyberspace by odd coincidence (and not — originally — as a name at all). Orcish, Korean, and Turkish languages were all supposedly involved. ‘Kek’ was an encryption of ‘LOL’ within certain *World of Warcraft* communication channels. The Turkish ‘Topkek‘ (a cup*cake* brand) was a secondary coincidence. No one seems to have been invoking the chaos deities of Ancient Khem at that point.

The introduction of Pepe — a manifest frog-entity avatar — is shrouded in even greater obscurity. The memetic phenomenon was (again, *apparently*) convergent, or coincidental — an entirely independent frog plague (צְפַרְדֵּעַ, Exodus 7:25–8:15).

One more coincidence: Outbreak of the ‘cuck‘ meme. (Kek is Kuk.) It’s a definite ‘barbarous name of evocation‘ in retrospect, but mostly still connected around the back. Kek, Kuk, cake, cuck, might sound

like consistent croaking, but tidy cultural cladistics are difficult to identify. (A sense of ethno-religious crisis on the Alt-Right is one indispensable contextual element.)

That short Wikipedia entry is worth citing in full:

__Kuk__ (also spelled as __Kek__ and __Keku__) is the deification of the primordial concept of darkness in ancient Egyptian religion. In the Ogdoad cosmogony, his name meant darkness. As a concept, Kuk was viewed as androgynous, his female form being known as __Kauket__ (also spelled as __Keket__), which is simply the female form of the word Kuk. […] Like all four dualistic concepts in the Ogdoad, Kuk's male form was depicted as a frog, or as a frog-headed man, and the female form as a snake, or a snake-headed woman. As a symbol of darkness, Kuk also represented obscurity and the unknown, and thus chaos. Also, Kuk was seen as that which occurred before light, thus was known as the bringer-in of light. The other members of the Ogdoad are Nu and Naunet, Amun and Amaunet, Huh and Hauhet.

I'm heavily reliant on the commentariat here to sort all this out.

The proximal trigger:

> Kek is literally the name of the God of Darkness/obscurity. He is depicted as a frog. Truly these are strange times. pic.twitter.com/NS0aM99QKU
>
> — Agorist Polwright (@AgoristArtist) April 19, 2016

ADDED: Pepe (Via). (See also Xolare in the comments below.)
ADDED:

> @Outsideness There is something dark and alluring about this synchronicity. See https://t.co/6bJsai2fhW pic.twitter.com/mjQqcW7RI7
>
> — Grahf (@chaos_commander) April 20, 2016

April 19, 2016

The Frog Chorus

From Aristophanes' *The Frogs*.

Frogs (off stage): Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax,
Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax!
We children of the fountain and the lake
Let us wake
Our full choir-shout, as the flutes are ringing out,
Our symphony of clear-voiced song.
The song we used to love in the Marshland up above,
In praise of Dionysus to produce,
Of Nysaean Dionysus, son of Zeus,
When the revel-tipsy throng, all crapulous and gay,

To our precinct reeled along on the holy Pitcher day,
Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.
Dionysus: O, dear! O, dear! now I declare
I've got a bump upon my rump,
Frogs: Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.
Dionysus: But you, perchance, don't care.
Frogs: Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.
Dionysus: Hang you, and your ko-axing tool
There's nothing but ko-ax with you.
Frogs: That is right, Mr. Busybody, right!
For the Muses of the lyre love us well;
And hornfoot Pan who plays on the pipe his jocund lays;
And Apollo, Harper bright, in our Chorus takes delight;
For the strong reed's sake which I grow within my lake
To be girdled in his lyre's deep shell.
Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.
Dionysus: My hands are blistered very sore;
My stern below is sweltering so,
'Twill soon, I know, upturn and roar
Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.
O tuneful race, O pray give o'er,
O sing no more.
Frogs: Ah, no! ah, no!
Loud and louder our chant must flow.

Sing if ever ye sang of yore,
When in sunny and glorious days
Through the rushes and marsh-flags springing
On we swept, in the joy of singing
Myriad-diving roundelays.
Or when fleeing the storm, we went
Down to the depths, and our choral song
Wildly raised to a loud and long
Bubble-bursting accompaniment.

Frogs and Dionysus: Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.

Dionysus: This timing song I take from you.

Frogs: That's a dreadful thing to do.

Dionysus: Much more dreadful, if I row
Till I burst myself, I trow.

Frogs and Dionysus: Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.

Dionysus: Go, hang yourselves; for what care I?

Frogs: All the same we'll shout and cry,
Stretching all our throats with song,
Shouting, crying, all day long,

Frogs and Dionysus: Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.

Dionysus: In this you'll never, never win.

Frogs: This you shall not beat us in.

September 21, 2016

Moloch vs Kek

4chan, as always, is asking the serious questions.

(Via.)

November 4, 2016

BLOCK 6 - FICTION

Duzsl (fiction)

Below the break, the author's prelude to Nemo Duzsl's (immensely long) *Cthellish Chronicles*. There's no particular reason why it should interest people here, but in case anybody finds it amusing …

[Warning: vulgarity, extreme decadence, and spiritual decay]

Doom Brewer
Book One of the Cthellish Chronicles
by Nemo Duzsl

Authorial Prelude. The Syndrome

It would be extravagantly philosophical to claim that everything was a lie. Better, then, to explain why all relevant information became systematically unreliable. A firm footing on the path that

follows requires at least that much.

One conclusion, in particular, has to be stated clearly, at the start. *It exceeds human powers to endure a radically inexplicable life.* Between chaos and a convenient fiction there can be no real hesitation. The ominous fork into darkness can appear real enough, but the decision against it has typically been made long before.

Despite the confusion, my expedition into Hell was well-prepared. A decade spent wandering through the labyrinth of the Syndrome had taught me the importance of method. Baked in an involuntary distrust, I had become adept at meticulous filtering and recording, at weighing probabilities, stripping dubious interpretation from the bare crags of fact, and remarking on things with minimal prejudice (which meant merely, lying to myself as sparingly as possible). This was not a matter of decency, but of sheer survival. My procedures had to be robust, sophisticated and critically tested. They were rigorously tempered by vertiginous decades spent clinging to mazy precipices, tilting into the abyss. When it comes to the deep descent, therefore, what truth there is to tell will surely be told, if only in fragments, and impurely.

Paradoxically enough, it was the syndrome and its deranging deceptions that ignited a torch for me, sputtering at first, but later with a hard, steady flame, ensuring that the infernal path ahead would be illuminated. But the roots of the syndrome, its soil, nutritive threads and patterns of early growth, are, of necessity,

recessed into deeper obscurities. The reasons for that will become obvious enough. Because I first encountered the Syndrome in an age of deluding innocence, by the time I saw the importance of systematic correction, titanic masses of grinding error were already in motion, propelled onwards inertially and implacably.

Yet, without a preliminary account of the Syndrome, nothing can make sense. The narrative that begins here – while befogged and erratic in its initial stages – explains things that demand explanation. Although far from irresistibly convincing, it is realistic in its essentials, even if certain details have been corrupted. What justifies this point of departure, in the end, is less its minute accuracy than its overall suggestiveness, for that is the way of the world it introduces.

My case rests ultimately on this: were it not for the account that follows, there would inevitably be another, far more misleading one.

***

Because true names can get you killed (or sued) you will find no evidence of The Devil's Deal casino, an establishment which occupied a comparatively modest slot on the Las Vegas Strip in the late autumn of 1999. It would not take supernatural efforts, however, for anyone with a city map of the period, along with some elementary investigative skills, to identify the real model of the Double D, and to ascertain its present status for themselves.

Casual tourist-gamblers had always ignored and shunned the place, subliminally repelled by the atmosphere of vague dilapidation

that had characterized it almost from the day of opening, but it had nevertheless built a solid enough reputation for itself among the Strip's least flamboyant visitors. This drifting population of dedicated, chance-hardened players was attracted by its understated devotion to minimal frills, high-stake, Omaha hold 'em poker. The ambience of shabby neglect only added to its appeal, serving as a subtle social filter, a mark of discretion, and a prolonged act of dust-hushed homage to the grave gods of fortune.

Nelson Brewer, the proprietor of the Devil's Deal, was a man who had always taken enormous efforts to conceal his tracks. He readily exploited his contacts in the media to inhibit reportage, falling back upon blackmail or finely-judged threats when bribes proved insufficient. He was not beyond instigating entirely false reports to mystify and embarrass pursuers. His influence extended into most of the official agencies responsible for record-keeping and the compilation of legal evidence, ensuring that even the most dogged and incorruptible investigators found themselves foundering in deceit. Despite all of this, I would eventually come to learn a very great deal about him.

He had built his gaming empire on Mississippi riverboats during the Depression years. Respected, even feared, for his impassivity and killer-instincts, 'Granite Face' Brewer amassed an early fortune at the tables. He progressed from player to operator upon taking possession of his first boat, following the legendary 36-hour poker

session that bankrupted ‘River King’ Joe Hammond in November 1933.

The subsequent triple suicide of Hammond and two prominent Memphis business magnates triggered a prolonged police investigation, but no evidence of foul play or clear homicidal motivation was ever uncovered. Despite the absence of formal charges, a macabre aura enveloped Brewer, fed by persistent rumors that garishly married criminality with occultism. When he extended his gaming business to the Las Vegas Strip in the early 1950s, the name he selected for his casino was a gesture of defiance pitched against his blackened reputation, mixing irony, provocation and resignation in proportions that accorded with some unreadable private recipe.

***

Did Nelson Brewer, his name or his story, mean anything to me when this episode began, as I stepped into the Devil’s Deal on a sultry late-summer evening in 1999? The answer to that question was lost, perhaps irrecoverably, in the tumult that now impends. In my artificial memories I push open the saloon-style doors once again, and abandon my original or natural life, whatever it had been, to perish in the forgotten, pitiless heat, outside.

It can’t have taken more than a few hours to dissipate my inheritance. Certainly, it was gone, replaced by a hollow euphoria, delicately veined with directionless bitterness. Something less than

self-hatred, it was nevertheless a functional proxy. Tendrils of weariness tugged me downwards.

"You obviously need something to wake you up," said the girl standing next to me.

In her early 20s and exceptionally pretty, she had moldavite-green eyes and hair the color of glistening oblivion, cut fashionably short. She was wearing a little red dress.

"What's the point," I replied. "I'm done."

"There's still at least one more game to play," she said, smiling irresistibly. "You'll be surprised. It's hardly started."

I folded. My nondescript fortune was finished. Let the recycling begin. She led us over to a table near the bar and ordered a couple of cokes.

***

A man was already seated at the table, maybe 30 years old, dressed in black t-shirt and jeans, drinking a *Dos Equis* straight from the bottle. He seemed entirely hairless, except for a perfectly-trimmed Satanist soul-patch. His eyes were hidden behind reflective shades, despite the interior gloom. Swirling hermetic tattoos covered his arms. If he wasn't a drug-dealer, no one deserved to be.

"Hi Zach. We're looking for sin," she told him. "Two caps."

"No problem."

"On tick, OK?"

"Cool," he assented, with surprising complacency.

A waitress arrived with the cokes, ignoring the conspicuous transaction in process. No one seemed remotely conscious of the law.

Zach fished two pharmaceutical capsules from his pocket, identical green and black thetas, placing them carefully on the table.

"Synistreme," he murmured, languorously caressing each syllable. "The biz."

The Girl in the Little Red Dress popped one in her mouth, washing it down with a swallow of coke. Then she passed the other to me. I copied her.

I opened a fresh pack of unfiltered Camels and passed them around. They both took one. We all lit up. No one spoke for a few moments.

"When I was working as a professional torturer," Zach said eventually, "we had to treat this stuff with great caution. 'Epistemol', they called it, a 'psychic plasticizer' or 'cognitive dehabituation agent.' Superficially speaking, it was the last thing an interrogator needed. You know the adage, when people are being tortured they'll say anything to make it stop. The difference on Epistmol is that they'd believe it, believe anything. It facilitated radical suggestibility. 'Brain-washing sauce' was one common description." He took a long swig of beer and ordered a new bottle with a silent hand-signal.

"But actually," he continued, "if used properly it could be invaluable. Resistance to torture depends upon a motivating

narrative. If that could be dismantled and replaced, the patient would open up effortlessly. Let's say you're a fanatical jihadist, and suddenly, rather than having your testicles slowly toasted into charcoal by a filthy zippo-wielding infidel, you find yourself engrossed in conversation with your Sheikh, or the Angel Gabriel, or God. The resistance is gone. Pop! You'll say anything. End of problem, right?" he asked, invisible eyes locked on mine.

"Right," I guessed.

"Wrong," he countered with a humorless laugh. "The problem's hardly started."

Hardly started … again. I'd begun to get a bad feeling about that.

"There's something I have to show you," Zach said. "Place your hand on the table, palm down, fingers apart. Yeah, that's it," he added, as I followed his instructions.

He reached down into his boot and pulled out a vicious-looking combat knife, with a vulcanized black rubber handle and serrated blade. He lifted the weapon above his head, holding the pose for perhaps a second, then, with shocking speed, plunged it downwards onto the back of my hand. Everything occurred too quickly for me to react. The descent was arrested at the last moment. There was a slight sting. A droplet of blood oozed from a nick behind my middle knuckle.

"Zach baby," said the waitress affectionately, from behind the bar. "You know I hate it when you do that."

"It's science," Zach growled. "But if you understood that you wouldn't be working for six bucks an hour plus tips."

"Asshole," she mumbled, without rancor.

***

Time had begun to multiply backwards as the synistreme took hold. Zach's knife trick had restored a nucleus of focus, amidst the dispersion. As my mind wrapped itself around stabbed-hand re-runs, it squirmed through variations on the immediate past, flashing agonies and devastating injuries, before recoiling into the unmutilated present that annulled them. The self-protective reflex I had missed bounced uselessly through my intoxicated nerves.

"It's like a mantra with you guys, isn't it?" I ventured. "*Hardly started*. At first I thought you were saying 'it's only just begun,' but now it's sounding more like a hard reboot, a crash relaunch."

"You're getting ahead of yourself," said the Girl in the Little Red Dress, not unkindly. "We're here now, aren't we?"

It was true that space had newly emphasized itself, simultaneously thickened and clarified, as if transubstantiated into a pure liquid medium. Lines of contour escaped from the boundaries of solid mass, deconstituting edges to drift into abstract explorations of geometric possibility. A calm ecstasy without attribution reorganized the room.

The luminous sensorium was an ultra-thin film, I realized, an intricately folded sheet of multi-modal information, floating

depthlessly upon the surface of a vast dark expanse.

Zach ignored our interruptions.

"Politics morphed into metaphysics," he continued, resuming his thread. "Our questions had to change. Our interrogations escalated. The world was at stake: the nature and meaning of the world."

He took a deep swallow of *Dos Equis*. I passed the Camels around again. Everybody took one. Zach lounged back in his chair, gaze turned upwards, apparently fixated upon some single definite spot beyond the low ceiling.

"The past was a lazy assumption we couldn't afford any longer. Even the jihadis understood that, the smart ones, the ones we dealt with, by the time we'd done with them. Our squabble was beginning to seem like a very shallow affair, when compared to the things that started to emerge from beneath the deep cover. And then, just as the new threat-scape maps were coming together, the final absurdity rolled in, the investigations, the hearings. We were accused of driving people insane …"

He disappeared into obscure corridors of recollection. Glasses clinked at the bar. Curses filtered over from a nearby poker table. An audio channel drifted onto the wavering drone of the air-conditioning and settled there.

At the edge of my perception, the black tattoo swirls flowing down Zach's arms were writhing into legibility. Weakly-encrypted biographical recordings – of fights, drug deals, and long-abandoned

girlfriends – twisted and sleazed through decorative motifs, until they settled into the sigils of occult summonings and the echelon glyphs of the Torturers' Guild.

No one spoke for a long, smoke-shrouded moment.

"Did you?" I asked eventually.

"Drive people insane?" He hesitated, uncharacteristically. "That charge seems hopelessly … misconceived."

He leant forwards, locking my image into twin black mirrors.

"Take your case, for instance. When we began to unearth your hidden identity, your contacts, your Neolemurian agenda, that entirely other, secret life, were we pushing you into madness? Or is 'madness' just a word we use when tripling the locks on forbidden doors?"

***

The meaningless references began shaping themselves into something else. What had always previously seemed to be a fundamental structure of existence suddenly gave way, crashing into unspecified distress. It felt like falling and my stomach lurched.

The Girl in the Little Red Dress leant in towards me.

"You're drowning in names," she said, her voice barely a whisper. "But it's OK. None of them matter right now."

I was remembering far too much.

As the world quaked, my hands clamped onto the table, resisting a sensation that should have been nausea, but was actually something

far less familiar.

"Sumatra," I mumbled.

"That's right," Zach confirmed. "All those twisted stories. The diagram. The vault. Hot embers from the Barker Program. Signal from the darkening galaxies. Clicking alien numbers like static electricity and a flood of savage words you never wanted to understand. Corpse-littered jungles. Time-wars. Did we do that to you? I don't think so."

A spiderish mechanism had been activated in my brain to synthesize information. As it wove, senseless microparticles coalesced into fragments of meaning, and then into intersecting storylines. The spinning machine worked in complete indifference to my volition. I would have wanted it to stop, or at least to slow, if it had mattered what I wanted. Instead, I tried to edge away from it, shifting attention further out, clinging to the immediacy of space and sensation.

Dan Barker had already been a legend, confined somewhere securely off-grid, but the ripples from his work still spread, frightening people. Soon I would be precisely reminded. That was inescapably obvious. Shapes, patterns were coming back, clicked together by the machine. I could already smell the jungle. The outline of missing years thickened …

"How old do you think I am?" I asked.

"Twenty-three," Zach answered, correctly.

"So how can it have been remotely possible for me to spend years working on some kind of advanced cryptoproject in the Indonesian wilderness? I've never been to Indonesia. I don't know anything about codes. This is all such …"

"… total bullshit," he agreed. "Chill. It's nothing. What do I care?"

"I never met Barker. I don't even know what he looks like."

"Sure. Forget it."

"Sclater's Lemuria hypothesis has been obsolesced by plate tectonics, and Sumatra is too far east. Why would anybody describe themselves as 'Neolemurian'? It doesn't make any sense." But that was a stretch.

***

As the pattern spread across the underside of my thoughts, I was – in fact — beginning to understand the adjective 'Neolemurian' with grating clarity. It denoted the first literal counter-culture.

A mentor and close friend of Barker's, Archaeo-Ethnographer Echidna Stillwell, had built the foundations, or excavated them. She theorized that a sunken cultural matrix explained the peculiar correspondences between religious ideas, myths, games and counting practices distributed across a vast area of South and East Asia. She proposed a model to connect and explain these extensive commonalities, based on a specific comprehension of decimal numeracy and its meaning, elegantly compacted into an arithmetical structure that she called 'the Numogram'. Worse still, I had begun

to trace this figure on the table, unconsciously, treacherous digits doodling in spilt coke and ash, pairing the Pylons so they added to nine, then webbing them together through elementary digital relations.

Zach gestured with a nod of the head and a spectral grin, drawing my attention to diagram emerging in front of me. I froze, my moistened finger suspended in the swirling molten vortex of three and six.

"As the camouflage netting is torn away, it all comes rushing back, doesn't it?" he said, twisting the softly-spoken words like a sadist's dagger. "In layers."

I suppressed a childish impulse to scrub out the diagram and retreat into preposterous denial. Instead, I forced myself to complete it, closing the Hex or circuit of time, mother of the *Yi Jing* and *Vedic trigunas*, then daubing the line of ultimate descent that dropped its knotted skein through the Gate of Shadows into the lower abyss or Chasm of Nyx, the infernal plummet-path that is marked and masked by the date 1890.

Repulsed by this undeniable performance of the inconceivable, my thoughts slid into crisscrossed congestion, mired in the thickening silt of unintelligible events, defeated by the compressed impossibility in process. Reason was drowning in synistreme darkness and a piteous noise, something between a moan and a gurgle, escaped my throat.

Zach laughed.

"Don't fight it," he said. "It's futile. The syndrome can't be outwitted. What you're becoming won't be stopped. Let the bastion burn. *Vae victis*."

***

As the grip of cognition broke, long-hidden powers of perception were twisting free. Impulsive multitudes, without order or shape, came swarming out of the conundrum. Like a tide of rats released from a ruined fortress, vague torrents swept over the charred beams of intelligibility and heaps of false obstruction, fleeing into unshackled intensities of delirium. Vivid hallucinatory threads hatched and seethed from the ashy streaks, ramifying into endless, indecipherable tangles of qabbalistic implication. All around us, faces flickered through fish features and zombie flesh.

"Today, the twelfth of May, was the Old Halloween," said the Girl in the Little Red Dress, as if from a distant place. "The Christians built it on top of the Roman festival of the dead, Lemuria, when the restless ghosts or larvae, the lemurs, were propitiated by time-tested rituals based on the number nine. The Romans devoted three non-consecutive days in May to Lemuria, the ninth, eleventh and thirteenth. The last of these dates was converted into All Saint's Day by Pope Boniface IV, in the year AD 609. Halloween remained a spring festival for over a century, until the ancient rites of Lemuria had been thoroughly absorbed, its signs and sorceries supplanted."

As if emerging from a trance, she turned towards me, smiling sweetly. “But I guess you knew that. Any chance of another smoke?”

I passed the packet around again. My lungs ached and the after-taste of the coke was sickening me. I needed a real drink, or several, but searching through my pockets turned up nothing but loose change. Somewhere during the earlier proceedings I had parted company with my wallet.

There were a number of ways this divorce might have happened – a large and growing number. I distinctly remembered sliding my wallet into the pot at the end of the last game, along with what remained of my cash. But then I also recalled, with absolute retrospective certainty, a collision, muttered apology, and confusion of limbs, as a hand slipped into my jacket. Although, of course, I had discarded my wallet before entering the casino, emptying it of bills and tossing it, along with my ID, into a trash can, three blocks down the strip.

There was no ready solution to this puzzling hyper-abundance of truth. Memory had lost none of its detail, but the uniqueness of what must once have been a dominant storyline was now obliterated by the proliferation of alternatives. At first, trivial particulars had multiplied into subtly differentiated varieties, but it had not taken long for the hypothetical mode to supplant every pretender to authentic antecedence. Somewhere, deep in the sprawling jungle of alternative pasts, my previous life was no doubt faithfully conserved,

but I could think of no way to identify or isolate it. A powerful current streamed steadily backwards, from the present moment to the innumerable tributaries that might conceivably have led to it. It was less amnesia than Amazonia.

"OK," Zach said decisively. "It's time. We need to get you back into the game."

With a tilt of the head he focused us upon the far end of the room. A gaunt elderly figure was being seated at an empty table by two lounge-suited assistants.

"Mister Brewer is ready for us," he explained. "Let's go."

***

Zach rose and led us across the room, past groups of absorbed poker players, to the corner gaming table where the old man waited to greet us. His hand shake was surprisingly firm. Zach received an affectionate slap on the shoulders, then left without comment, weaving back through the players towards the bar area, where new customers were already waiting.

We seated ourselves in a triangle around the circular felt-topped table. A seething silver glyph-stripped Numogram was embedded into the smooth green surface. Brewer's attendants stood behind him, arms folded, systematically scanning and re-scanning the room.

"I hope Mister Cardiac has been looking after you well," Brewer said. "Care for a drink? Cigar? In fact, I insist." He beckoned to a nearby waiter, soundlessly communicating his request through a

cryptic series of finger signs, in conformity with a precise, settled code. I wondered idly whether 'Cardiac' was a testament to amphetamine consumption, or perhaps a compression of 'card-sharking maniac.' Persistent synistreme hallucinations stroked the edges of the world into electric streaks. The soft mutterings of chance throughout the cavernous space tightened, then crystallized, until they delineated an intricately-structured, sprawling maze, built from chipped echoes.

Brewer's craggy face was clean shaven, dominated by a prominent hawk-like nose and sharp blue eyes. His thin lips curled upwards slightly, in an inscrutable private smile. He was dressed in cowboy-dandy style — white Stetson and jacket, starched checked shirt with bootlace necktie, immaculately pressed jeans and soft leather boots. A generous tumbler of whiskey sat on the green baize in front of him, alongside a neatly stacked pile of cards.

***

"My grandson has a great work to accomplish," Brewer began, without further preliminaries. "By the time he fully embarks upon this undertaking, I will be dead."

He lifted the pack of cards carefully and passed it across to the Girl in the Little Red Dress.

"Take a look," he said.

She cut and re-stacked the pack, then flipped over the top card and placed it on the table in front of her, considerately angled for

our joint inspection. It was not a conventional playing card at all, but rather a name, or business card, marked for 'Sandra Dee,' complete with an *Abyssoft* commercial logo, contact details, and the title Senior Communications Representative.

"Don't get trapped in it," Brewer said. "That's not yours, at least not yet. It's a test-run."

Tumblers of amber liquid and a box of slender cigars arrived.

"I'd like to propose a toast, to lemur conservation," Brewer jested, raising his glass to clink rims above the inner void of the Hex. I took a grateful sip of the spiritous liquor, savoring the sublimation of peaty fluid into neural fire. It was an excellent single malt, Lagavulin, I guessed, and probably an old one. Brewer passed us our cigars, ceremonially, then ignited them with a steady hand, using an ornate mechanical device that strung a distinct tang of raw petroleum through the spreading aroma of Caribbean tobacco. Beyond the perimeter of sense, lofty intelligences gathered.

"Your turn for a taste," Brewer said, passing me the cards. "It means nothing yet. We're just opening our eyes, in the pre-dawn."

"And if it's a female name?" I asked.

"Then you'll have disconfirmed everything I have ever learnt," he answered. "But it won't be."

I took a card and laid it next to Sandra Dee.

"Todd Blair," I noted redundantly, as the others leaned in to read it. Crowds of recollection broke through a rotten door. I remembered

the name on my mother's lips, called out innumerable times, in a multitude of intonations. "Todd, what are you doing?" "I hope that's not what I think it is Todd." "Todd, it's time to go." Todd's life rushed to inhabit me: the car crash that killed his father and scarred his face, his schoolyard belligerence, his first job flipping burgers for weed money …

The name burrowed inwards, determinedly, working to attach itself to the roots of my destiny, like a parasitic larva. It felt wrong.

"That's not me, is it?"

"Most probably not," Brewer admitted, smiling thinly. "Let's find out."

***

He restored the pack and shuffled it expertly, then passed it to each of us in turn to cut and re-cut. His hands hovered over the Numogram Pylons, slicing through the fragrant clouds of cigar smoke as if dowsing for obscure signals. An almost palpable concentration hardened the features of his face, subtly animated by the inaudible mouthing of an elaborate invocation.

With a conjuror's dexterity he fanned the cards onto the table in a long even curve.

"Take one," he said to the Girl in the Little Red Dress. "Your fate awaits you."

As she settled upon a card and drew it out, I wondered vaguely why we were accepting this imposition with such utter passivity, but

outrage refused to come. I drew deeply on my cigar, watching intently.

"Mary Karno," she said, as she turned it over and absorbed its oracle. "Yes, that's right."

Something like relief washed across her face.

"Mary," she murmured to herself. "Mary Karno. That's me," and then, after a slight pause, "My book …?"

"I have it here," Brewer responded, passing her a canvas bag. "It's unfinished, of course. There's a letter from the publisher in there somewhere. They're excited about what they've seen so far."

She took the bag and extracted a block of printed sheets, densely annotated with red ball-point amendments. She flipped through the pages, sliding into frictionless recognition.

"Too much blood, torture and perversion for my taste, of course," Brewer continued drily. "But I'm guessing it'll be huge."

***

"And you are?" he asked me pointedly.

My hand wavered above the cards, suddenly chilled, and frozen. The oppressive weight of the moment fell upon me with its full force, crushing the air from my lungs, until I gasped with the resigned terror of a cornered prey animal.

"Do it," whispered Mary, encouragingly. "It will be OK."

"I don't think so," I answered, my voice straying beyond the edge of control. "It won't be OK. At all."

"It could be rough," Brewer agreed. "But this is the place you've reached, you wanted it, and now it's yours. There's no evading it, not for long. A trapped, scared, pitiful creature has reached the end of its flight." He drew a finger across his throat. "Best to finish it. Begin over."

"You know, don't you?" I challenged him, as a wave of inconsequential fury rolled over me. This was what it felt like to be absolutely cheated. It was something new, and horribly intriguing. "This whole game, the theater of uncertainty, it's all a feint. Your expectations are confident, precise, and you have extremely good reasons not to share them …"

"You're wasting everybody's time," he interrupted, impatiently. "You know it's going to happen. That's why you hate it. And beyond that," he leant towards me, his voice soft, intense, and only superficially hostile, "you chose it. You wrote it. I'm just directing your play. So take the card, Mister …?"

"Duzsl," I said, completing his request. "Nemo Duzsl. What kind of batshit crazy off-planet fucking name is that?"

But I knew it was mine.

***

"So, now we know who you are," Brewer said, smiling sympathetically, his expression flavored with notes of relief, pride, and gratitude. "It will be tough …" he repeated, no longer muting the strain of prophetic authority, but even emphasizing it, as if graciously

clambering down to us from the cloud-swaddled towers of providence, "… but educational. You can see the necessity, I'm sure. You have to be hardened, forged."

"I can't see anything but toxic fog," I grumbled. Yet, strangely, the sense of asphyxiating oppression had begun to lift. Perhaps I even returned his smile, although in a way that was unconvincingly twisted.

"To tough luck!" I proposed, raising my glass.

"Perfect!" said Brewer, responding to the toast. He looked abominably pleased, as if savoring my definitive submission.

Mary clinked glasses, too, but with a slight hesitation that hinted at reluctance. Her smile expressed nothing more than clumsily redecorated melancholy.

"Down we go," she mumbled approximately, her words clinging to the edge of inaudibility, as she took a minuscule sip, scarcely exceeding a sample of vapor. The descent she had announced was evidently not a gulp of fire-water. This should have concerned me, a lot. It upset me a little.

"There are things that you'll need," she said quietly, turning towards me, and reaching into her shoulder bag. Her face was subtly tragic. I wanted to comfort her. It was stupid.

"Yes, yes," Brewer interrupted, irritated. "In time, nothing's rushing us. The work is done." Then, in a tone softened to the point of insincerity, as if obliquely apologizing for his brusqueness, he

repeated: “Nothing’s rushing us.” It sounded mesmeric, and for an instant I heard these words as a cryptic mantra that had been chanted ceaselessly over the course of hours, years, and aeons, although it had been ‘nothing rushes us’ before. I was drifting into it, when hooked back by the word ‘… cigar’, slanted to the interrogative.

Brewer was asking me an inane question.

“The cigar?” I replied, idiotically.

“Are you enjoying it?”

I had not, in actuality, much noticed it. Now I realized that my throat itched, although not intolerably. A column of ash, the length of an intermediate phalanx, drooped from the end of my cigar. Doubting my ability to reach the ashtray successfully, I released it – with a gentle tap – to fall onto the floor, where it exploded softly into formless dust.

“Superb,” I half-croaked. It was. The smoky flavors were complex and richly textured, evoking the peripheries of fragrant jungles, tropical humidities, and enthralled sunlight.

“These were given to me by a very special friend,” Brewer explained. The pace of his utterance promised a story, most probably a lengthy one. I relaxed backwards into my chair, and noticed Mary doing likewise. She took a sip of the Lagavulin – a real one. The time tremors had relapsed into quiescence, with only occasional muffled shudders still perturbing concentration. *The work is done*, I remembered. Things had secretly shifted, on the outside,

somewhere beyond the edge of the world.

***

"*Where's the edge of the world, Nelson, think on that, and head there, always head there*. That's what he used to say. I must have heard those exact words from him a thousand times. He doesn't say it now, but only because he doesn't need to." Brewer paused to drink, nearly emptying his tumbler, and then to inhale on his cigar, pulling the smoke deeply into his lungs, as if attempting to saturate his cells rather than his senses. He exhaled an aromatic cloud. A semi-cough fractured the next syllables: "Carlos. Carlos Colón: that's his name. A direct descendant of Christopher Columbus, he insists. It's important to him. He'd say, *you know Nelson, Cristóbal didn't abolish the edge of the world. He wanted us to look for it in the right place*. It was always funny, that intimacy, as if they'd been discussing things together in some *taberna* just the week before. I'd be tempted to laugh, shake him by the shoulders, tell him: 'for Christ's sake Carlos, you have no idea what he wanted.' Not that I did, or would. It wasn't just some ridiculous piece of nonsense, you see, not at all. It was serious — truly and totally serious. It still is serious. But you get that, right?"

He broke off, as if expecting confirmation. It would have been absurd to nod – what did I know? Instead I looked to Mary, who said, with quiet firmness: "Oh yes, it's serious." I tacked on a fraudulent "sure."

Brewer seemed satisfied as he retreated into his memories. He signaled for more whiskey, a gesture that seemed to communicate *bring the bottle*. His eyes wandered through the cigar smoke, as if seeing something else.

"Not that I'd have called him that – Carlos — not to his face, he wouldn't have it. There were too many Carlos Colóns. It was unacceptable to him. *Call me 2Cs*, he said. I didn't get it immediately. 'What, you mean like, *to seas unknown*?' I asked. *That's right amigo*, he replied immediately, *to seize the unknown, to seize some pretty chica's ass*. We were still filthy young fools – this was before the Depression, way back, late 1920s. We had nothing but spunk and some undeveloped smarts."

He tilted the bottle towards Mary, who shook her head, then to me. I let him pour another finger of whiskey into my tumbler. He added two fingers to his own. He scanned his casino methodically, almost mechanically, as if seeing it for the first time.

"I was already on my way to this – cards – it was what I was good at, and Carlos helped me out with that. Once there're two of you – a pair – lots of things become possible. You're a team, and if people don't realize that, *you have them*. He was really good at that, especially the bad stuff. He could walk into a crowded room and have everybody worked out within minutes. He gave nothing away. They came to call me 'Granite Face' eventually, but I learnt that from him. It was years before I came close to what he could do, see, and hide. His

face told whatever story he wanted. He could be anybody. He was strict, too. We'd never kid about together in any place that we were working. *A secret team, that's una máquina*, he'd say. *Two friends joking around in public? – Losers*.

"He worked with me on the cards, but it didn't mean anything to him. If we were alone, sitting at the table after a game, he'd ask: *where's the edge Nelson, is it here*? 'Sure it's here,' I'd reply. *No, it isn't here*. That's all he'd say. *No, it isn't here*. It would drive me mad. 'So where the fuck is it? It's here, right here.' Slapping the table top, you know, maybe I'd riffle through a pile of banknotes, in his face, obnoxiously. 'See. This is working. This is where things are happening.' *No, it isn't here*, always that, just that, sadly, defiantly. No one could bully him. I had no idea what he was looking for."

***

"When the breakthrough came we were out of the game for a while, hiding out in a small town down by the coast, near the border. There was a bar there that we'd made our own, through sheer intensity of custom, and we were the only patrons that night, sitting together at a flimsy circular table, somewhere into our third bottle of mezcal. We were deeply drunk.

"*How long can you stare at tables and not see?* Carlos asked, suddenly. Not this again. Not now. 'See what?' I had already slurred, reflexively, the robot at work, you know. This seemed to enrage him. His voice was climbing to a howl: *Think, Nelson, fucking think enough*

to see the obvious fucking thing. He even reached over and slapped me across the head, hard. It almost knocked me from my chair. I've no idea why I didn't hit him back, or what would have happened if I had. Instead I groped down through swirls of booze-shattered sensation to the table top, soaking up the scratches and flaking varnish and stains. 'It's flat?' I ventured.

"It was like flicking a switch. He erupted in an outburst of shouts and wild, theatrical gesticulations, waving his arms in the air as he cried: *At last, at fucking last, Jesus fucking Christ, at last* … It was stunning, stupefying. My first impulse was to search for some kind of question, for additional information, but fortunately I suppressed it. Instead I began to think, and it was then that I realized that I hadn't even been trying before. To think, I mean. It hadn't even occurred to me to think, *at all*. That was already to cross a line, seeing that stupid unreflective obstinacy, which I had been. I still remember the moment – the *instant* – vividly, perfectly, but who knows? It seems exact: the threads of smoke, the smells of sweat and mezcal, the quality of the light, and then the tension of that alien, inner machine, unexpectedly starting up. I don't ever want to forget it. I might have waited for ever to start thinking – that had always been his point, his maddening stubbornness. Now, something had switched over. It came to me then, suddenly, out of nowhere, the critical step. Flatness. It had to be some crazy shit about Christopher Columbus. I was drunk, and irritated, and my left ear was ringing from the slap,

and I two-thirds wanted to just finish with this bizarre conversation. But the other third had set out somewhere, and it wasn't going to stop.

"'These aren't your edges, are they?' I said, running my hands along the sides of the table. I was quite confident about it. It wasn't really a question. He just smiled – beamed, actually. *Go on amigo*, was all that he said. But now I wasn't sure that I could. My thoughts struggled to advance. It was a swamp, or a jungle. If you came to the end, to what had been believed to be the end, demonstrating that it wasn't an end at all, what then? Where would you look for an edge, if the old edges were lost, and an edge was all that mattered? The silence stretched out. Thought lost its purchase. I was worried that his patience would break. I needn't have been.

"*It's OK*, he said. *It's hard. The next part is hard. It defeated me every time, every single time, for five years, but then I got it, the next step* … 'So, what is it?' I had never wanted to know anything this much. *You want the key?* he teased. 'Sure. Yes. Absolutely I want the key.'

"It was a kind of sublime torture, utter tantalization. Time curved inwards, compressive, crushing, folding my life towards the answer that he had, and I didn't. He knew, and it amused him. He said nothing. He drank and grinned, his eyes roving delightedly across my torment. Those minutes – were they minutes? – dragged themselves out, endlessly. A tic in the corner of his mouth marked out the hidden

metabolism of eternity in tiny spasms, hoarding some unreadable, invaluable clue. I wanted to strangle him, rip his eyes out. The density was unbearable. It was the center of the world, ultimate pressure. The need to know would kill me, if I let it. It couldn't go on. That was the test. I had to change, to stop caring, to *transcend, immediately*, accept my ignorance, or die… At least, that's how it felt …"

Brewer laughed, almost goofily, as if the entire story – broken off and already partially forgotten – had been nothing but an elaborate fishing yarn, a string of mock confessions fabricated to idly pass the time. He knocked back his whiskey, poured another, and then drew deeply on his cigar, exhaling luxuriantly. The depressurization was transparently faked. He wanted us to share, viscerally, in the unbearable anticipation of that moment. As he leant backwards, arching his back, stretching, Mary tensed forwards reciprocally, transfixed, her elbows sliding across the table. Perhaps she was going to succumb, and demand, hungrily, that he continue. The manipulation was so crude it disgusted me.

I yawned rudely, finished my drink, and stubbed out the remains of my cigar.

"It's getting late Mister Brewer. I should probably be going. Thanks. It was fun." I began to get up.

Mary half-twisted towards me, her eyes glinting with shock and rage. She'd been hooked, and I was ruining everything. *You stupid bitch*, I thought cruelly, more determined than ever to wreck the

event.

I confidently hunted Brewer's face for the quick burst of hatred I hoped to find there, but there was no sign of it. Instead, there was a kind of weary satisfaction, at once humorous and sad. There had been no surprises.

"Of course Mister Duzsl…"

"Call me Nemo," I interrupted sarcastically, in a petty display of resistance. "There's no need for formality among old friends."

"Nemo then," he continued, unruffled. "Do you have your key?"

Without thinking, I reached into my pocket, withdrawing a plastic card, and then inspecting it. Interlocking double Ds narrowed it down to the casino hotel, but there was no number.

"Two-zero-nine," Brewer informed me, helpfully. "Sleep well."

"Sleep, holy shit," Mary muttered irritably. "*As if* he's going to sleep."

"Rest, then," Brewer allowed.

"Oh please," Mary sighed dramatically, her frustration boiling over. "You know exactly what will happen to him. He'll spiral down into the drug, coming apart into rags of shredded fate, until there's nothing left but splintered panic and screaming." She was looking at me, coldly now, even as she spoke, with the detached observation one might appropriately apply to a doomed lab animal. "He's truly fucked. This was stupid."

"Mary, your imaginative extravagance betrays you," Brewer

growled, obviously entertained.

"Mister Duzsl – Nemo – wants to rest. There's no need for additional stimulation."

***

Did they understand? I was unsure. Understanding had become almost unbelievably precious, and precarious. There were too many new facts, and the latest one was especially disconcerting, because the story Brewer had been relating was known to me now, in its entirety, from before its beginning to some indefinite end, or edge, far beyond its premature termination, and in much greater detail than had yet been revealed. It is not that I had somehow learnt it. Rather, *I had become somebody who already knew it*. That made me a replacement, for somebody who hadn't known it, and who now knew nothing, was nothing. That supplanted creature was nothing now, but it was also – and equally – an earlier draft of this inexplicable being that considered itself to be me, and it was perhaps no less adequate compared to whatever had become me than I would be compared to what might soon follow. It would be important to keep notes.

April 18, 2013

Halloween XS 2

A (short) exercise in bombastic Halloween fiction

The dead center of the story would come at the end. It was a culmination, to be coaxed back – or was it forward? To stare into dazzling unseeing – that was the thing. Animated obscurity approaching him across a darkened pumpkin field.

It had been a dream, exquisite in its horror. Upon its return, a few nights later, the edges of its moonless luminosity were still undulled. Then, only inane slumber, for over a week. He had still written nothing down. By the time of the third apparition it had decayed, shredded into black rags by delirium, wormed-through by neglect. He awoke in a sweaty chaos of tangled sheets and recalcitrant memory. In a panic, he now sought – too late – to capture it.

Detail had eroded down towards a fever-ground core of inarticulate urgency. Numbly, he understood that the sole meaning of his career – and thus his life – was buried in the ruins of an unmined nightmare, avalanched under by confusion and thickening dread. Everything he would ever want to say had been whispered to him, but he had fumbled the priceless gift into oblivion. A jagged chunk of non-being had been flung at him across the desert of limbic night. With each loop of recollection, it receded further behind a wake of undecipherable reference codes. The weird tale he had been offered was reduced to an unthreading ghost story, degenerating

by the hour, into chattering nonsense picked up among rumors of forbidden secrets. The sacred touch of vacuous insanity was gone.

Nobody would ever have mistaken his life for anything other than a futile, slow-motion catastrophe. His literary career was a partial-birth abortion of singular grisliness. The pieces that emerged still twitching soon expired amid detestable groans. Now everything fell completely apart.

Seen coldly, in the morbid pre-dawn glow, it was suddenly obvious that the empty whisky bottles and overflowing ashtrays were detritus from a forgotten ritual. There had been an incompetent summoning. If repeated mechanically, it would deteriorate a little further. The alternative was to do it right. As a memento, he attached a post-it note to the computer screen, bearing the single word: *Invoke*. Then he stumbled groggily to bed. His dreams were discreet and interred in sleep.

Satan had nothing to offer him, except indirectly, and unconvincingly. Luciferic inspiration would not ignite. Instead, the Dark Prince, slumped in reptilian lassitude upon the throne of doom and undisguisedly bored by the conversation from its first moment, merely derided his attachment to conventional ideas. A claw-toed foot sifted vaguely through the heap of crumbling skulls. “Have you drawn your entire contact list from a Dennis Wheatley novel?” susurrated the Old Deceiver with languorous contempt. There was nothing further to be said.

It was a circuit, locking him out. To access the name he needed to know who to call. Incense-clouded blackness and strange drugs broke upon a sea-wall of silence. At the dead-end of each ruined night, the only thing that mattered was further gone, recessed more deeply into the cross-hatched palimpsest of memory. The unintercepted missile of oblivion streaked away from his life, on some unimaginable course.

"You need help," said the young man in the street, proffering a crudely-printed pamphlet.

"Jesus Christ your Savior," he read, enunciating slowly and carefully.

"Nope."

The street evangelist studied him for a drawn-out minute, in calm silence. "What are you searching for?" he asked eventually.

"Can't you see?" he laughed, sleepless mental dilapidation knapping an edge of hysteria onto his tone. "I'm pursuing the dream."

"You'd turn your back on peace?" the young man asked sadly.

"If I could still find the back I'd fall into it …"

His abandonment of all hope led him on long, looping walks through the countryside. Mindless sensation blurred the damnation of unknown names. Autumn had enveloped him in mists and mildewed fruitlessness. He shuffled without objective through rotting leaves.

Everything had been broken by the time he stumbled upon the distant perimeter. The day, the year, and his existence were

simultaneously tumbling to an end. Light had thinned to a play of shadows. Glancing sideways, he was jolted from his reveries – hurled into startled recognition. This was the place.

Its familiarity captured him, guiding the direction of attention. Realization was instantaneous, and all-engulfing. As the gates opened, recollection flooded back, indistinguishable from perception. Suddenly – diagonally – it was time.

The scene returned, enthralling. Every detail was assembling itself to perfection. He stepped forward, slowly, but without hesitation, into what he had once thought – once dreamt to be – no more than a nightmare. There was a piece cut out of his mind, matching a hole in space. Like a missing tooth, it was now simply *not there*. He groped for it, which meant taking another step forward. Whatever it wasn't to be would arrive soon. That was the only certainty.

With solemn inevitability, the shape – like a shard of broken fate, or a compact rift wounding the sky – drifted toward him across the pumpkin field.

October 31, 2014

Deadlines (Part-1)

If you believe in yourself, you'll believe in anything. – Nicola

Masciandaro

Based – very roughly – on a true story.

[Subsequent content carries a vulgarity and decadence warning, for sensitive readers.]

§00. Friday was fright night at my (virtual) place, and *Deadlines* was the most reliable source of inspiration. Most of the deracinated Shanghai morbid literature scene cycled through the place, but no one would be turning up for hours. So it was just Cal and me. We both had better things to be doing, which – as usual – we weren't.

"'Beginning is the most difficult thing.'"

"That's it?" I asked, unconvinced.

"Yes, those words, exactly."

"Double embedded?"

He tilted himself even further backwards into the deep leather chair, so that he was staring straight upwards into the attic rafters. His slow exhalation released a column of cigar smoke on an obscure expedition among the old beams. "Surely, yes … That's all it takes." Voice down-paced in dreamlike detachment. "Then it's happening."

If Calvin Lambsblood Dodd had written so much as a paragraph of horror fiction himself, it had been done in strict secrecy, without a hint of the fact escaping. Yet the attitude he now slipped into, once again – that of an authority on the topic of anomalous prose construction – had been adopted as if by instinct, and with seamless confidence. He was adept at it, undeniably.

It was hard not to smile, but my irritability was slow to dissipate. "'Thing' is wrong." I closed my laptop, with calm theatricality, and finished my drink. "A beginning isn't a 'thing'. I use 'thing' too much already."

Dodd squinted at me, his features micro-adjusted to some space between amusement and annoyance. "So you're just going to bunker-down in your precious writer's block?" He shrugged. "That's OK. Let's investigate the Thing, while we're waiting for the others." Then, indicating my glass with a slight re-angling of his head: "Ready for the next one?"

I glanced at my watch, knowing it would be precisely 3:33pm, and it was. Not that it mattered. "Sure."

He caught the bartender's attention with an absurdly feudalistic hand-gesture that concluded silently in two raised fingers.

"Dark Enlightenments again?" The softly-spoken words, ritualistically unnecessary, carried easily across the empty lounge. We both nodded in confirmation.

§01. A Dark Enlightenment – or '333' – is a hell of a drink. Dodd had spent most of a weekend inventing it, immediately after the Include-Me-Out Club had first been convened at *Deadlines*. The base was some kind of rough 'whiskey' he had discovered in southern Yunnan, distilled as moonshine in the mountains. Each bottle served as the pickling jar for a giant venomous centipede, which tainted the liquor distinctively. The complete cocktail recipe, as far as I was able

to tell, was:
2 shots ‘pede spirit
1 shot absinthe (for the wormwood)
1 shot black rum (for the extinction of light)
3 drops funestia
1 drop specially-concocted house ‘herbal tincture’
1 speck strychnine
Chili garnish
Absolutely no ice.
The psycho-active effects were remarkable. It was almost certainly illegal.

§02. Not that illegality was any problem for Dodd. Even if the Shanghai authorities had given a damn about self-inflicted brain damage in a private club, which they quite evidently didn’t, there was Dodd’s girlfriend, the ‘PP’, to manage things. PP was the ‘Party Princess’ (with ‘party’ referring to the Communist Party of China, rather than to anything more frivolous). People called her that to her face, and she didn’t seem to mind. Her real name was Jiang Yu, her uncle a senior cadre in the local party apparatus. Dodd met with him regularly, and they got along well. Boss Jiang’s security-related administrative position meshed well with Dodd’s specialism in organized decadence and unscrupulous trans-national deal-making. Their Party Nights were notorious.

§03. Cal was strictly a facilitator, and not a practitioner. It was a

distinction he invested with peculiar significance.
“I don’t need to write. I don’t want to write. Fuck writing.”
“OK.” I had no idea where he was going. “So what about this?” I gestured vaguely towards the surrounding lounge, abstractly indicating the club. This was ‘the second drink’ exchange. We must have had it hundreds of times before, and each time it got worse.
He squinted at me suspiciously. “Honestly?”
“Of course.”
“‘Of course’,” he repeated, the sarcasm wound up to a peculiar, biting extremity. Recognizing that its object was unintelligible, he added, awkwardly: “Which ‘course’ would that be, exactly?”
Not only was the conversation increasingly hard to follow, his mood was deteriorating unpredictably. There seemed no way to extract myself from it. I took momentary refuge in a gulp of 333. “You build a temple to writing, and then tell me you’re not interested?”
“Oh, that …” he feigned nonchalance, took a drink, idly toyed with a cigar, put it down without lighting it. Then, as if restarting randomly: “I never told you about Mary Karno, did I?” It wasn’t a question, and he didn’t bother waiting for a response. Without significant pause he continued: “I never told anybody about her, about her ‘practice’. It’s time I did.”
Up to that point I had read only a couple of Karno stories. It had been enough to get the gist. Her fiction was undeniably intense.
Merely by broaching the topic, Dodd had undergone an

extraordinary transformation. His obnoxious, sullen slump of posture and affect switched into ardent engagement. He leant forward, as if about to clamber onto the table, left leg jittering as an emotional dissipator.

"It's not that I don't have problems with her stuff," he declared, adamantly. Tiny drops of sweat beaded his forehead. "I mean … fuuuuuck." He reclined a little. "Truly. Fuck."

"Sure. It's strange stuff."

"The priest-torturing thing she has going on, it's unbalanced. You know, really unbalanced."

"Right."

"The sex is out there too … out somewhere. Guess there has to be a market for that kind of metaphysically-smashed lesbo-tentacular fucking demon-twisted *goneness*."

"Apparently."

His voice dropped to something scarcely above a whisper. "Still, she's serious." He picked up his cigar, inspected it curiously, and finally ignited it. "Utterly serious."

It seemed pointless to interrupt.

"She stayed in my place for a while, you know. A small place I own here. Off Fuxing Lu. It was an interim arrangement – lasted maybe three months, a little under. Thing is, the place was set up for …" He trailed off. Clearly, the function of this building was not easily describable.

I had already guessed why. “Boss Jiang?”
Dodd’s expression froze immediately into a mask of fortified suspicion, cross-laced with lethal traps. “What do you know?” he hissed.
“A lot more now,” I responded, with a pathetic laugh.
There was a drawn-out moment of tension. Then he smiled crookedly. “Yes, it was an arrangement we had,” he conceded unnecessarily. “He called it ‘the information room’ – set up guests there, place was rigged with all kinds of crazy snoop-tech shit that he provided.”
“And you put Karno in there?” I asked, in disbelief.
“It was a mistake. She was supposed to get the apartment next door – the unmonitored twin. It was over a week before I learnt what had happened, and by then the situation had become rather … sensitive.”
“Christ!”
“Yeah, well, not exactly, as you know, but the point is – I wound up learning a lot.”
“I bet.”
“Are you just going to carry on snarking about this? Or are you going to let me tell you the story?”
“No, yes, whatever. I’m interested. Obviously.”
“So you’ll shut the fuck up with the smart-ass remarks?”
“Absolutely.”
After a micro-punishment pause, he continued. “I’m going to cut

short the technical details, because you're being such a jerk about it. Main point is, Boss J. didn't have any professional interest in Karno, naturally, but she kind of captures attention, if you know what I mean. Extracting all the video wasn't easy, but in the end it isn't the sort of material you want to leave lying around for a Party inspection team to stumble upon. After XJ took over, the negotiations became a lot smoother. A couple of bottles of Moutai and he was ready to wash his hands of it. Assured me there weren't any copies. Who knows? It probably doesn't even matter. I was going to delete the lot immediately – nearly nine gigabytes …" he scrutinized me for overt indications of skepticism. My poker-face held. "… but then I thought, 'what has he seen?' – it seemed important, right? I had to know what I was dealing with. You don't survive in this business by blinding yourself to potentially vital information. Could have been some Tantric craziness with the Dalai Lama there, for all I knew. Sure, it felt grubby, but my hands were tied."

'Grubby' doesn't begin to cover it, of course. It was the abomination of desolation. Still, Dodd had his business, and his bar. I had my blog. The story had to come out.

"You're not going to mention any of this, are you?" he suddenly asked me, anxiously.

"I was thinking of switching a few names about."

"Oh, hilarious."

"You ready for another?" changing the subject.

Without replying, or taking his eyes off me, he did the neo-feudal hand signal again.
"It's fate, right?" I suggested encouragingly. It seemed to work. There was an unknotting of tension.
"You ever see her odd little essay about 'Ascryptions'?"
I shook my head.
"Never met anyone who gets it. You know, even remotely what it's about. I certainly never did, before. Subtitled *Practices for writing on reality*, then wall-to-wall senselessness, even by her standards. Remember Bob Clayton?"
Another head shake. I didn't want to risk interrupting him.
"Strange guy. Driven. Working on that tale about buried-alive dreams for over a year, without ever managing to finish it. Anyway, he was obsessed with that piece. Constantly trying to talk to me about it. Told me once that it 'solved everything'. Hung himself from a rafter two weeks later. Not to imply there was any connection. I've come across that a lot – not quite so far gone, of course."
The digressions were straining my patience, but the drinks arrived. I stole one of his cigars, without asking, and flamed it up.
"It's all in the first two sentences. 'Writers get stuck when they forget that every story has a demon. To begin, you have to learn its name.'"
"Ascryption?"
"Exactly. And there it was, on the video. I actually watched her start a new story – two actually – open an immaculate notebook, with a

giant question mark, jot down a few scrappy thoughts, cross-legged, meditating or some shit, then cross some kind of threshold – you could see it, as if something had cut through her body, switched her – and then she *seriously* set to work, patiently, full of – what the fuck do you call it? – *intention*, rolling back the rug, chalking a huge diagram on the floor, all swirls and numbers and ancient evocations, then building what I can only describe as a voodoo shrine, pasted together out of candles, clippings from poetry books, kitchenware, pictures, drug paraphernalia, bits of dead animals, and electronic trash. She'd get up, wander around the number maze in loops, muttering some cryptic stuff, in a whisper – the audio was too crap to pick it up – then back to the shrine, shifting pieces about, nudging it towards convergence. It was mad as fuck, obviously, but the horrible thing was that I began to pick up on the purpose, I could see it *coming together*, like a wave out of hyper-space, the necessity of it, I just couldn't stop watching, seeing it *arrive*. I mean, holy fuck. And then a jolt went through her, harsh and electric. She snapped *out*, crossed over to her laptop, and typed in the name. Ascryption. That's how it works."

We were both silent for a moment.

"She has to come and lead a discussion session at the club," I said, predictably.

"Invite's already in the motherfucking mail," Dodd replied.

[To be continued – with some regularity]

November 28, 2014

Deadlines (Part-2)

Screaming is rare. Outside the movies, war zones, or psychiatric institutions, it's unusual to hear anything more than an exaggerated squeak. This wasn't that.

Alison Luria was screaming. She stood in the middle of the cluttered office, rigidly upright, arms by her sides, head angled slightly back. Her mouth was locked open, eyes tightly shut. The sound she was emitting, in a continuous, only slightly uneven stream, overwhelmed apprehension. It was less a specifiable noise than an abstract inaudibility, the unheard manifested as a monstrous positive entity, insensibility made palpable.

It had begun at almost exactly the moment of entering the room. I had not quite finished closing the door behind me, still uncertain whom first to address, when – as if out of nowhere, without the slightest warning – a shard of sonic shrapnel sliced into my head, making any further thought impractical.

It was my second visit to the company, and the small team was already vaguely familiar.

Fred something, the tech guy, was (incredibly) ignoring the phenomenon, and seemed still to be working. Alison's editorial

assistant, Xu Ling, had retreated beneath her desk, where she now lay perfectly immobile, coiled into a tight fetal knot. Millie Zhang, the sales director, had missed it. Her tidy, south-facing work-space was unoccupied. It had been set up as an oasis of light and order, semi-withdrawn from the gloomy debris-field of the larger open-plan attic area. She was probably out on a sales call.

I had never fallen prey to mystical inclinations, and problems of an esoteric nature seldom detained me. If, on rare occasions, hints of hidden profundities over-spilled the dikes of dismissal, they elicited vague repulsion, rather than enthusiasm. I would, at that time, have reacted with instinctive aversion to any claim that the suspension of reason opens secret gates. (No one had ever bothered me with such suggestions.) Yet as the threads of intelligence were severed by the scream, it was as if access were being granted to the inner substance of the world, violently unwrapped from the distractions of visual identification. Something was poking through the wall of sonic oblivion – a clicking or crackling. *This isn't a message*, said the click-code, *it's just the sound of your auditory nerves dying*.

Would it ever stop? Had it, in reality, ever begun? Its duration had become a matter of no significance, because this breakage of the world was no longer Alison Luria screaming, but the scream as it existed in eternity, freed from the bonds of fact. It was the primordial scream, vast beyond cosmology, anonymous and inexpressive, the pure howl of being now perceived as it always had been …

… and then, as suddenly as it had begun, it ceased.

Something crawled out of her mouth, then a second, and a third – wasps. They wandered across her lips indecisively, before flickering out in a trick of minutely-dappled light. I couldn't recall ever seeing a wasp in Shanghai before. Almost certainly, I still haven't.

"I'm finished," she said. Then she walked past me, out of the room, without looking at anyone, and clattered down the stairs, fast.

"That was intense," I muttered awkwardly.

Fred looked up, smiling crookedly. "Girls," he mumbled, as if that explained everything.

There was a commotion behind me, and Bob Jarvis – the company's Australian boss – rushed in, smiling implausibly, grabbing me by the shoulder to avoid pitching me across the room. "Nick! I'm so glad you could make it in. Are you ready to go?"

"To go?"

"To get going, to start, there's no point messing around."

"Start work?" I asked stupidly.

"Absolutely. Why not right now? You're here after all. Don't waste the journey. There's no room for dithering in this business. You can have Alison's desk."

"Yes, Alison …"

"Nothing to worry about. Spot of tension." He steered me across the room, then started picking randomly through the chaos of papers, battered copies of *Shanghai Live* magazine, and work-desk

lunch detritus that surrounded her computer. Mine now, I suspected ambivalently. “We thought you could take over the Shang-Hive blog, keep it pressing forward, raise the profile, you know. Dig deeper.”

Ominous fragments of writing, scrawled in red ball-point, flickered from the print out sheets that Jarvis was consigning to the waste-paper basket. *There is no blood in Cyberspace*. *Endless darkness now*. *It drains*. *We brought it to unlife*. *And so it ends*.

“Was Alison OK?” I persisted, stubbornly.

“Oh, nothing really to worry about, it was just, you know … She was fine wasn’t she Sue?” he pretended to ask, reaching out for narrative support.

Xu Ling looked as if she were about to vomit. She nodded in grim obedience.

“Fred, what *was* that business with Alison about?” Jarvis soldiered on. “Any previous signs of a problem?”

“Was it in any way work-related?” I interrupted.

Fred was struggling to suppress a cruel smirk. “Perhaps a little,” he said. “Towards the end, her blogging became a little … I don’t know, I guess you could say, weird.”

“No one said anything to me about that,” Jarvis cut in, clearly irritated by the direction this conversation was taking.

“‘Weird’?” I refused to let that go.

“Yeah, you could definitely say that, I suppose,” Fred explained. “She said that she’d ‘contacted something’.”

"Contacted something *in the backend*," Xu Ling added. She looked like under-cooked death.

Fred scowled at her. "Like she even knew what the backend is."

"What is the backend?" I was clutching.

Jarvis waved away the query. "You don't need to worry about that. Nor did Alison. That's what we have a tech team for, isn't it Fred?"

"The backend is where everything happens," Fred said. "You'll see."

April 10, 2015

Vauung

There's a horror story I'm writing (slowly), developing from the central conceit that the 'monster' (Vauung) is the war. It feeds upon escalation, zig-zagging between antagonists, to extinguish any inclinations towards peace. It's part *Apocalypse Now*, part *Blood Meridian* ("War is God"), part other stuff … It's not going to be finished for a while.

Scott Alexander has finished something truly excellent, which isn't fiction (exactly), but clearly tunes into Vauung-signal:

Toxoplasma is a neat little parasite that is implicated in a couple of human diseases including schizophrenia. Its life cycle goes like this: it starts in a cat. The cat poops it out. The poop and the toxoplasma get in the water supply, where they are consumed by some other animal,

often a rat. The toxoplasma morphs into a rat-compatible form and starts reproducing. Once it has strength in numbers, it hijacks the rat's brain, convincing the rat to hang out conspicuously in areas where cats can eat it. After a cat eats the rat, the toxoplasma morphs back into its cat compatible form and reproduces some more. Finally, it gets pooped back out by the cat, completing the cycle.
What would it mean for a meme to have a life cycle as complicated as toxoplasma?

Consider the war on terror. It's a truism that each time the United States bombs Pakistan or Afghanistan or somewhere, all we're doing is radicalising the young people there and making more terrorists. Those terrorists then go on to kill Americans, which makes Americans get very angry and call for more bombing of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Taken as a meme, it is a single parasite with two hosts and two forms. In an Afghan host, it appears in a form called "jihad", and hijacks its host into killing himself in order to spread it to its second, American host. In the American host it morphs in a form called "the war on terror", and it hijacks the Americans into giving their own lives (and several bajillion of their tax dollars) to spread it back to its Afghan host in the form of bombs.

From the human point of view, jihad and the War on Terror are opposing forces. From the memetic point of view, they're as complementary as caterpillars and butterflies. Instead of judging, we

just note that somehow we accidentally created a replicator, and replicators are going to replicate until something makes them stop. Replicators are also going to evolve. …

I'm assuming that "Instead of judging …" isn't a deliberate *Apocalypse Now* (or Judge Holden) reference, but it works as one.

(Incidentally, 'Vauung' alphanomically numerizes to 140, the same as 'language'. When Twitter came along I accepted its character limit as a soft suggestive tap to the base of the brain.)

ADDED: Linking this oldish thing, due to its obvious relevance. (No idea how it found its way to that website, btw.) … and while tagging stuff here, there's this (naturally): Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι ("War is the father of all.")

November 19, 2015

Bloody Mary

§00 — It required only a mirror. Initially, at least, it seemed like that, although it turned out there was more.

She had been known as 'Hell Mary' at times. There were many other names.

§01 — The ritual varied, but was never complicated. Its simplicity was essential. In that lay the danger, supposedly. The invocation could be realized almost by accident. It might begin as nothing more

than a joke, or a dare. A disastrous non-seriousness is the core of the urban legend. The proximal agents, scarcely older than children, typically, are playing about with something they don't understand. The Hell Prank is archetypal. Deadly foolishness, or worse, is not difficult to imagine, if only in broad outline. Teenage kids do it best. They're trying to prove something, and then do, by mistake. Movie viewers like to watch them damn themselves. With younger children it's more horrible.

§02 — Start at the exoteric level, at least in appearance. The point isn't to make something happen, but rather the opposite. You are supposed to avoid the ritual, out of fear. It's what *might have happened*, had you not been so chicken, that stokes the thrill. The dark potential preserves itself this way. It intimidates against disproof. This is where the legend and the real story part ways. They remain, nevertheless, confusingly entangled. Ironic twists thicken the obscurity. The legend itself has a real story. Actuality belongs only to the legend.

§03 — Divergence goes further than this. The legend is a central part of the real story. It's the legend, alone, that protects Bloody Mary from examination. The ritual is structured as a challenge. An examination that is declined leaves its object, in principle, examinable. This is the ontological payload. *Do you want to see what's in this box?* It could be something too horrific to bear.

§04 — Although the story is archetypal, there's always a first time.

Vanessa Sheridan had never heard it before. She'd never heard *anything at all like it* before. It thrilled and appalled her in equal measure. The idea split time in two. To go back was impossible. Innocence was Bloody Mary still unthought. Experience opened a new universe.

§05 — How had Christine known? This knowledge had desynchronized them. Even as the moment before sharing receded, it still separated them. They would always now, then, have been strangers. For such asymmetry ever to have been was enough. It could not be unmade all the way to non-being. Some echo of the gulf would always persist. What had once been friendship could never be anything so simple again. Perhaps it would be more. Their dark complicity was a bond. Bloody Mary connected them, even as she prized them apart.

§06 — Chris had called her *Nessie* at first, like the monster from the loch. She'd found it mildly annoying, but three syllables were too much to ask, and there was nothing else. So *Vee* had come as a relief.

§07 — Her tenth year would soon begin. Things would then start over, automatically. It was as if there had been time enough for anything to be learnt. That she still knew so little could only be an accident. She understood what such an accident meant now – by contrast – because she knew this.

§08 — They would do it, she was sure. The looming horizon was no less critical than death. At the end, Bloody Mary would step out of

the mirror. Nothing more could ever happen. It would be finished.

§09 — Dusk was draining away into night. At one level – and perhaps several – she expected nothing to occur. There was no Santa Claus, Tooth-Fairy, or Easter Bunny. There was also, she was beginning strongly to suspect, No God. That was certainly her elder brother's vociferously confident assertion. No God was, for him, a positive cosmic principle, equaling zero. It was not a deficiency, but an operator. For there to be no Bloody Mary, then, was by far the tidiest conclusion. Yet she was also sure it could not be so simple.

§10 — *Ontology* was not a word she yet commanded, and its absence gaped unrecognized within her. The spell she sought to cast upon her thoughts required it. She had to reach all the way down to the being of things. Whatever Bloody Mary was, or was not, she did not belong in the world. She was a rip, gash, or rending. She was of the substance that might be drawn by a blade.

"Cut it out," Vee murmured to herself, when such thoughts wouldn't stop, in order to continue them.

§11 — In the end it was not ontology, but rather sorcery, that was sovereign here. *What could be called up?* That was the question, and no other.

"It's called *invocation*," Chris had solemnly explained. "*I invoke thee fell spirit*."

"Those are the words?"

"Once they were."

“And now?” asked Vee.
“We have to find them.”
“Like a password,” Vee had said, understanding immediately.
Chris nodded. “Exactly like that.”
It would be difficult, then. But *difficult* meant possible. There was a way. Passwords were meant to be used. They were hidden only because finding them matters.

§12 — It seemed too much to ask that anyone could want it as she did. To want it absolutely, at any cost, when nothing about it could be commonly conceived as desirable, was suggestive of isolation. Such longings dismissed every ordinary idea of sharing. She’d thought about trying it on her own, but had immediately known that would not do. Company was necessary. In solitude, whatever happened could be mere madness, of the emptiest kind. Its credibility would be fragile, even to her. The event would remain stuck in her mind. That was not the destination.
To escape, it had to undeniably exceed her.

§13 — Astonishingly, there was Chris, so it would happen after all. Chris was committed, *serious*. She was patient, and knew how to concentrate. Most of all she was stubborn. *Dogged* was how Alex described her. She could be trusted not to stop. That was the important thing. Bloody Mary was a name for something indescribably bad happening, but that wasn’t the way to lose the game. The only way to *lose* was to stop. Chris understood that, or

would act as if she did. She would keep going, further in.

§14 — They were waiting together, unhurried.

"What do you think?" Chris asked. She was talking about *it*, obviously. Vee simmered in the question silently, her eyes closed. The excitement was painful, scarcely bearable. She couldn't speak, at first, because too much would show.

"Nothing," she said, eventually. "There's nothing yet."

"There's no rush."

"No rush, or anything else," Vee joked. Humor cloaked solemnity. "There's time." There was some, at least.

It was still early. Perhaps half an hour of dusk remained. Bloody Mary would belong to the night. How could it be otherwise? Her complexion bled into ultimate shadow. Her gaze was abolition.

§15 — A sleep-over at Chris' would be the occasion, if not this time, then another. There was no doubt about the room. It could have been made for Bloody Mary.

A huge old mirror dominated one wall. It was hard to understand how it could have been moved into the attic. It was as if the space had been built around it.

"Like a ship in a bottle," Chris had said, sharing the same thought. The analogy was odd, and stimulating. Something that – upon reflection – *didn't seem to fit* was the common element. It was inherently sorcerous in some way. At first it had to look like a trick.

§16 — Chris' mom had required some persuasion. She suspected

they were up to something troubling. Not that she would have come close to guessing what. There was a surreptitious undercurrent they were unable to fully conceal.

“Are you girls up to something?” she’d once asked. The obscurity of their secret permitted no question more exact. They’d been ‘all innocence’ in response. She had to smile. How bad could it be?

“I’m not really happy about you with candles up there,” she said. “Those old beams are like fire-wood.”

Such fears were so misdirected Vee struggled to control her expression.

Chris assuaged her mother’s concern without great difficulty. They would be *careful*, she had gently insisted. The candles were never left unattended. They were in tins.

§17 — It could only happen once, obviously – or even subtly. An end could not repeat. If Bloody Mary was not the end, she was nothing. Her finality would be her signature. Last things would crash in, to undo the illusion of the world. There could be no afterwards.

§18 — They were making their way circuitously to Chris’ place. The streets were unusually quiet. It threatened to rain, but didn’t.

“I’ve been thinking about blood.” It was chanted more than spoken.

Chris nodded. “Yes, me too,” she said. “*Bloodiness* is especially fascinating.”

“And multitudinous,” Vee added, using her favorite word. There was no need to explain why. So many types of bloodiness had swirled

among their thoughts.

"*Bloody hell* is such a strange oath." It was odd and English to them, but then Bloody Mary was too.

"Does she bleed? Or is it only that she *brings blood*?"

"Bloodshed," Chris mused. "She's bloodshed."

"The mother of bloodshed," Vee suggested.

"Our secret blood mother," Chris agreed. "Bloody Mary, come to us."

"Blood," they said together, stressing the plosives. "Let there be blood."

§19 — Again they circled the question.

"What does her name really say?"

It was always the problem, carrying them forward, like a current. However its surface varied, in its depths it was the same.

Chris had returned from a family holiday in France months before. She had run to Vee immediately upon getting home, to excitedly share her linguistic discoveries. *Mary*, she had learnt, whispered of *mother*, of death, and of the sea. A *murmur* rippled it. As fine metal, tapped by a knife, it sang.

Now, when asking about her name, they explored for codes.

"There are secret echoes running through it," Vee said.

"It has layers."

The responsive nodding to each line would become more vigorous.

"And what does she dream?"

This was the silent answer. *She dreams this*.

Through the thought she made contact, around the back. Soft, spine-prickling hints of cold lunacy crept in with the idea. They shivered in acceptance.

“What is madness, really?”

It was an enigma they agreed upon. Only a ritual could respond to it, because Bloody Mary was madness itself. She was the still eye of the cyclone, the absolute tranquility that lurked within delirium. The world’s insanity found shelter in her.

§20 — There was a window in the roof, letting in natural light. It had not been cleaned for a while. At night, dust-smeared splinters of starlight poked through it. A smudged moon fell through it heavily, to sink into the depths of the mirror. The heavens were re-written, vague and converse.

An old wooden chest served as a shrine. Over months, they’d collected things for it. The candles had come first. A closing church sale provided most of those.

The center-piece was an old doll of abnormal apparent maturity and creepiness which Vee had found in a curiosity shop. Unblinking gray eyes stared accusingly from her broken face.

§21 — Gripped by sinister excitement, she had taken Chris to the shop the next day. For weeks it was their hunting ground. It supplied the shrine with other things. They added a small collection of Victorian post cards, showing incongruously smiling visitors to ominous places. Then there came an ornamental knife, pieces from

an old sewing kit, and some obscure surgical instruments. A long-stopped clock, fixed upon some forgotten midnight, dominated the edge of the composition. Every item had been painstakingly agreed upon. They'd taken their time, but never really disagreed. Those things which were *right* only needed to be recognized. There were enough of them by now. The pattern, while ungraspable, was complete. It released a mute call.

§22 — Their most important find was a second mirror. Placed across from the shrine, beneath the window, it exploded visual space into infinity. Within this endless room, it was as if anything that might possibly be seen now could be. The invitation was near-palpable. It silently appealed for occupancy. To be visually absorbed into it would be scarcely less soul-shattering than Bloody Mary herself. Almost, Vee felt, she could hear the utterly hushed whisperings of the boundless mirror-labyrinth. They spoke so softly they could only be remembered as imaginings. *Her* name had to be said, and also could not be said. The path was obliquely suggested, in this way.

§23 — Vee and Chris each lit one of the large candles. Simultaneity had been a ceremonial necessity, which could be left unspoken. They swapped subtle smiles at its perfect accomplishment, as they prolonged it. Their lives to this moment had been twin training disciplines. Convergence was completing itself.

They both knew it was time. After all, which it might nearly be, if not now, when? The question answered itself, in mute urgency. It had

begun already.
In the mirror, the distended moon seemed to ache for abomination. Raw existence was pitched upward toward an unbearable limit. It throbbed at the brink of crisis. Some mad, absent music tormented it. They held each other for a moment, in psychological defense against the wild slashings of non-existent violins.
Chris was stretched by the ritual, tautened. Her eyes blazed with inexorable purpose.
Vee saw through her into darkness and absolute loss. The intensity hurt somewhere that felt beyond bodily location. She gulped back a moan.

§24 — Candle flames, mirror-multiplied without limit, jittered as if caught by an alien draft. A subtle chill seemed less in the air than outside it.
She would be behind them in a direction that could never be turned towards.
“Bloody Mary,” they intoned together.
The end was near.

October 31, 2019

Patience

§00 — Stuart Thorndike had never been a ‘morning person’. This basic

trait, however, was only poor preparation for what now befell him. He woke from what hazily seemed to have been torments without limit. Memory would have been unbearable. He clawed his way out of the clammy sheets.

“My throat,” he gasped.

Cecily, his wife, looked haggard and ill-tempered. The sympathy that had still dominated the day before was wearing thin. Evidently she had been over-stretched.

“You were screaming,” she said. “It’s the same as before – perhaps worse. You were screaming as if possessed, for most of the night. It was horrible, again.”

“Bad dreams,” he ventured, unimaginatively.

“At least,” she snapped. “You should see someone. I’m serious. This can’t go on.”

§01 — Over breakfast her questions were colder, and more determined. Her patience had broken.

“Do you remember anything this time?”

“Not really.” He paused to wrestle the mental fog, but it only thickened.

“Why would you place a bomb in a tree?” she asked.

The question meant nothing to him. He stared at her blankly.

“That’s what you were mumbling about, before the screaming started,” she continued. “‘I finished making the bomb, it’s in the tree. We only have to wait now.’ You said it several times.”

“Was it my voice?” he asked. He wasn’t sure where the question came from.
“Who else would it have belonged to?”
“Did it sound like me?”
“It wasn’t raving or screaming, if that’s what you mean.”
“And you’re sure that’s what it said?”
“Completely,” she said. “You should take a look in the garage. I did. It’s disturbing.”

§02 — After putting the task off for over an hour, he went down to check the garage. Cecily’s grim judgment was hard to contradict. If someone had not been building a bomb there, it was almost as if they’d been pretending too. The scattering of nitrate chemicals, clock parts, and sawn-off metal tubing was hard to otherwise explain. Who could it have been, if not him? He tried to put a hoax narrative together, but quickly gave up on the attempt. The fabrication was too obvious. It could have been no one else. He had no memory of it at all.

§03 — Had not some philosopher once said that *Consciousness is Hell*? It would have to be a gloomy German, most probably, or perhaps a French existentialist. He couldn’t remember, if he had ever actually known. Maybe it was a Swede, or a Norwegian. Thorndike was not, in any case, an avid reader of such literature. In his opinion, it tended consistently to unfettered extravagance. Even now, after the gnawing horror of recent nights, the formula struck him as hyperbolic. Yet he could vaguely intuit a psychological situation in

which it would not be, at all, for the first time in his life. Certainly, he had not awoken into any such situation. Perhaps, though, he had awoken dimly recalling one. This was a thought he found himself reluctant to more thoroughly explore.

§04 — Thorndike soon learnt that the 'specialist' Cecily had in mind for him was not a medical professional.

"She's an old friend," Cecily said. "There's nobody I've ever trusted more."

He could have taken that as a slight. In less disillusioned times he might have.

"She calls herself a *reader*," Cecily added. "It's a good description."

"What the hell does it mean?"

"She reads things."

"Things?" he asked.

"Situations, problems – people."

"Me, you're thinking?"

"Someone has to."

§05 — The 'consultancy' struck Thorndike as a parody of itself. Every visible surface had been swallowed into a seething chaos of astrological and cartomantic symbolism. Ancient Egyptian themes predominated. Hieroglyphs jostled against algebraic formulae in the extended margins of charts, tables, and diagrams of obscurely ominous implication. There were pictures, too, whose inferior number was compensated by superior size and still more – in most

cases – by teeming inner multiplicity. They were, no doubt deliberately, dizzying to contemplate. Animal-headed gods erupted from the walls in mad multitudes. The air was glutinous with mind-clogging fragrances. To casual inspection, it was generic to the point of absurdity. If not for the recommendation, he would have dismissed the place contemptuously. It epitomized flamboyant intellectual indiscipline, of a kind he had always found peculiarly repellant. *Every belief is at once a disgrace*. That was the Thorndike family motto, never explicitly formalized, but resiliently preserved down through the male line. To withhold credence was a matter of honor. To believe was scarcely better than to beg. Staring now at some solemn Anubis, he recalled the tradition with a grimace.

§06 — She wanted him to talk, which he found himself strangely reluctant to do.

"There's much I still don't know," she said.

"I don't think you know anything," he grumbled in reply. Perhaps the insolence was an attempt to abort developments in the immediate wake of their conception. If so, it didn't work. At some level, he'd known that it wouldn't.

"So why are you here?" she asked. Her calm was untouched by even the slightest hint of amusement.

"Curiosity," he said.

"Not so." It was stated softly, as a matter of obvious fact, rather than as a step in an argument.

"So, why then?" he asked, drawn in irresistibly.
"You're here because you feel – obscurely – like a prey animal."
The accuracy of the analysis upset him.
"What were you told?" he asked.
"What could I have been told? You haven't shared your dreams, with anybody." This, again, was true. "Not intentionally, at least," she added. "Naturally, there are other *tellers*. My profession is based upon them."
"*Naturally*," he repeated. It came out sounding childish, like a sneer. He had attempted to avoid that. "I'm sorry. My manners are not usually so badly frayed."
She waved away the apology. They were beyond such things.

§07 — As she explained how things would proceed, he found something obscurely unsettling about her persistent mention of *the cards*. His personal distaste for the conventional trappings of occultism accounted only for part of it, but only a part. The word suggested an uncanny doubling. It took him a moment to close upon it. Cartomancy, too, was a ritual of sorts, and also an invitation. It was meant to open a door.
Ultraviolet photographs of flowers exhibited landing-strips for pollinators, as he had seen in books, and on TV. Cecily, who loved gardening, gathered such information assiduously, and spread it outwards. These images returned as he watched the reading blossom. The pattern was not really for him. It spoke to unseen

witnesses he resented.

§08 — Tarot came first, according to occult tradition. He, however, had no doubt that reality ran the other way. Playing cards had branched into arcane functions. The idea had inane and insidious versions. The former had previously held him – he had assumed securely. Now things flipped. The derivation of cartomantic ritual from casual pastimes began to seem positively insidious. There was more, though, he realized. 'Cards' was a word, which itself carried *charge*, beyond anything it said. There was an unnatural insistence to it. Its single syllable packed irreducible plurality within itself. It was a nuclear spell.

§09 — He had been drifting.

"There's a ritual," she said. "One which, when completed, will provide an invitation. To perform it would be a very serious mistake. Your destiny now suspends from this."

"The danger is that I deliberately let this whatever-it-is in?" he asked, enveloping the question in a nervous laugh. He had to be misunderstanding the idea, surely? "Why *the fuck* would I do that? It would be utterly insane." The suggestion deeply annoyed him.

"You should be careful," she said, with calm gravity. "The cards suggest great peril. You have upset something. Perhaps you know that?"

He half-did, at least. "And by 'upset' you mean?" he asked.

"You turned something over, stumbled into it. I have to suspect

clumsiness."
"When did this happen?"
"Three days ago."
He thought back. Three days ago? What had he been doing then? It had been an entirely ordinary Wednesday, to superficial recollection.
"Is it possible to specify the time?"
"Late afternoon, early evening," she said without hesitation. "Perhaps a little later than it is now. Not much."
He would have been on the way to the club, then. This regular journey took him on a twenty-five-minute walk through some of London's quieter streets. Last Wednesday's stroll had not been especially memorable. No unusual encounters came to mind. Later, in the club, he'd lost himself in *The Spectator*, with a whisky and cigar. Nothing had *reached in* to meet him – as far as he had noticed.
"Nothing," he said.
"But actually there was something," she replied stubbornly. "There has to have been, *as you know*. Let's take a closer look."
She flipped the cards back into the pack, and shuffled it without taking her eyes from him. The procedure had been long automated into instinct, clearly.
After a few seconds of this, she placed three cards in a row, studying them in motionless silence.
"Patience," she said.
He initially misunderstood the word as an admonition. His irritable

jitters no doubt deserved it. He sought to get a better grip upon himself. Twitching was risible. Then he remembered the game.

§10 — Outside, dusk had been deepening. There was something sickly about the half-light that strayed in. It hinted at hallucination, even madness. The club was almost empty. He'd noticed Basil Heath, sitting alone at the bay window table. Heath had been playing a card game. *Cyclone solitaire* was the name he had given to it, when asked. It was peculiarly involving. The cards rotated between three piles, and were removed in pairs.

"How's it going?" Thorndike had asked. It was a casual question, scarcely expecting a reply.

Heath had looked up, his expression somehow haunted, and abnormally grave. "Not well," he said. "Not well at all." His voice trembled at the edge of indignity. "An unprincipled man, in such straits, might even try to pass it over."

"Pass it over?" Thorndike had not understood the remark. Its intensity – apparently so disproportionate – was disconcerting. "I don't know the game," he'd said. "I'd be of little use to you."

Heath made no further acknowledgement. His forehead was slick with perspiration. A gambler perched upon the brink of ruin could have looked no worse.

Thorndike had looked down then, again, at the table, drawn to the shape of the cards strewn upon it, and – for some fleeting fraction of a second – *seen through it*. The content of this vision was concealed

behind a black wall now. It was buried from him in the way dreams were. He might have thought it a dream, were it not lodged so firmly in the day, framed by lucidity without respite.

“I saw something,” he said.

“Yes,” she agreed. “And you heard something, too.”

She was right. During the initial recollection it had come first. It had not been quite a bark, but that was the closest approximation to the sound that had a name. He shuddered at its echo.

“Horrible,” he mumbled. “It shocked me.”

It was like sheer *suddenness* made audible. The shock was part of its texture. No one ever *jumps out of their skin*, but at that moment he had understood the expression. The unanticipated had detonated – cracked. Everyone, surely, would react to it, he had thought. The entire club would be stricken. Panic would ensue. Then he had looked around, amazed. The calm was more terrifying than anything he could remember.

“Yet no one heard it, beside you,” Cleo said. “You must then have realized that it came from elsewhere. It’s why you forgot. It didn’t fit.”

It had been an after-shock, to recognize that solitude. *So this is madness*, he had thought. The unexpected solidity of it chilled him. Argument was irrelevant to it. It meant only *to be alone*. Not swirling delusion, but simply incontestable *private evidence*. There was nothing to correct.

“Private evidence tends to go astray,” she continued, as if emulating

telepathy. “That makes it a good place to hide.”
“Good?”
“Good for it.”
“Yet you can see.”
“It knows I pose no threat to it,” she said coldly. “It smells my neutrality.”

§11 — How difficult could it be to decline the performance of a summoning ritual? Nothing could be easier, surely? Yet an actual *spine-tingle* accompanied the question. Something like a cold itch had infiltrated the lumbar region, from a dimension beyond scratching. The sensation preceded understanding, but opened a path for it. *Things were coming the other way*. That was the ghostly precursor to the idea, registered as a visceral shadow of intuition. There are thoughts the body warns against. This was one of them.
Why would it require an invitation? It was a familiar idea, from vampire myth, perhaps also other places, he hazily remembered. In one black-and-white fragment of an old horror movie the predator waited outside a window. Its target occupied the room on the other side. They tricked you into letting them in. Predation by permission was a demonic trait, it seemed.
“What does it want?” he asked. “If it wants anything, that is.”
“It wants only to exist, and what follows from that.”
“So what does? Follow from that, I mean.”
“Roughly speaking, the trajectory it arrives on is prolonged. It

continues on its path."
"The way it gets in defines what it will be like?"
"It likes spirals, fire, and blood," she said, as if still in conversational sequence.
"Have you got anything more definite?"
"Hard consonants – *cat-stutter, catastrophe, cataclysmic, tactical, contracts* – words like that could attract it. It hunts for fun."
"You mean it searches for fun?"
"No, the other thing," she said, smiling coldly. "It might amuse you, if that level of detachment were possible. As it is, a certain dark laughter could be a warning sign. If you start to identify with it, that's an indication it's getting in."
"Perhaps you're enjoying this too much," he growled.
"My objectivity is what you're paying for. If you want a shoulder to cry on, you could find one more cheaply."
"I'd rather hoped that for almost two-hundred pounds an hour I wouldn't have to wonder if you were on my side."
"If I was simply *against* it, I wouldn't be able to help you at all."
He knew she was right. Pretending to argue was idiotic immaturity. He sighed. "So what's next?"
"Seriousness," she scolded. "You're in a lot of trouble, even without being stupid about it."
He might have bristled against the condescension under other circumstances.

“So it’s waiting for me to offer it a key?”
She nodded.
“Then, how long?” he continued. “I mean, if I’m going to try to out-wait it, how long will that take?”
She took a while to respond, watching him. He found her expression difficult to read. “It would be best to assume *longer than you have*,” she said, eventually. “Such beings don’t lose time games.”
They were done, then. She was restoring the cards to dormancy. There was nothing more to be learnt, or said.

§12 — The consultation had taken more than two hours. By the time it had finished, night was thickening.
He paused for a moment outside, before setting back. Behind him, the warmth of the shop light quickly fell away into icy obscurities.
The road ahead was discouraging. He was out-matched, to an incomprehensible degree. Whatever ailed his soul outflanked it in every conceivable – and even inconceivable – direction. However he ran, he would run into it. So he told himself he would not run.
The rain had stopped. Nightlights shattered among reflections. There was no doubting the town’s charms. He was aware, to an unusual degree, that it would be sad to leave.
The moon appeared unnaturally large. For a disconcerting moment he found its scale indicative of dreaming. Clues of some deep delusion swirled into themselves, drawing abstract spirals. Would it like that?

Vision seemed to have a surface – a kind of film. He was stretching out a finger to touch it before noticing.

§13 — It would be safer – perhaps even faster – to cut diagonally across the fields. The ground was dry enough for efficient progress.
Before reaching the house, there would be the woods. He would probably spend no more than five minutes among the trees. A few hundred seconds – it would not be long. Yet he balked at the prospect. *If something was waiting for him, it would be there*.
There was a demand being made for discipline, he soberly realized. Childish fears were no longer affordable. Survival called for a new way. It could begin from a confrontation with the dark.
It was not just ontogeny but also – and more profoundly – phylogeny that trembled within him. Like wind and water upon eon-exposed rocks, the fangs of a billion ancient predators had carved his fears. Not millions, but tens and hundreds of millions of years whispered their dread. *Those who feared less are no longer among us*, they said. *Ravenous things, stalking silently through the night, bore them away into a deeper darkness*. It was thus, and not in the proximate world, that his nightmares had been trained. The murmurings of archaic terror drew his attention astray.
He left the open ground and the black mass of the forest swallowed him. He paused as his eyes adjusted. Gray-scale gradually returned. Shapes emerged. This was the crossing. Ancient nightmares beyond number chattered softly on the dark periphery. Yet it was only as it

ever was. There was no hint of novel or exceptional encroachment. If something had happened, he had missed it.

§14 — Cecily was gone. A note – neatly-folded into a miniature tent – stood on the table by the door. The message was formally affectionate, but curt. She doubted her value to him at this time, it said. He shrugged.

Better that she not be involved in this. She couldn't help, and might easily come to harm. There was something more – a darker component to his response, which he didn't want to think about. The gist crept in, nevertheless. This wasn't *for her*.

§15 — Standing in the hallway of the silent house, he thought, now, about what he'd been told. *Spirals* meant nothing much to him. They were easy enough to recognize. The rigorous definition, he supposed, was mathematical. It would likely exceed his comprehension. Where he struggled was on the possible application to his case. To have been advised of the entity's attraction to irregular tetrahedrons would have drawn a comparable blank. Pursuit would not be cost-effective, he knew.

§16 — Fire was quite probably mere *smoking*. It was the one indefensible thing, above all, that everyone knew *you should stop*. His hackles rose against the scarcely contestable imperative. *You'd let a monstrosity from beyond The Veil crash into your soul rather than abstain from burning some few pitiful shreds of tobacco leaf?* Yet the habit would only dig itself in deeper. Certain counter-

arguments had begun to mindlessly arrange themselves, like the wasp pattern of an orchid flower. He extracted a cigarillo from their silver case and stepped out onto the dark veranda. His heavy old Zippo, picked up years past from a small-town curio shop, sat in a saucer on the window sill. It smelt strongly of gasoline. *Fire*, it said to him, silently, as it glinted in the moonlight. *It likes fire*. The temptation to ignite the flame was not – quite – irresistible. Once burning, the cigarillo would be a complex sign. It would express defiance, most superficially. If that, though, it would surely also spell *invitation*. Fear would condense upon it, as if drawn in to a beacon. A dimension would collapse, simplifying the equation.

§17 — Fire couldn't be stopped. She'd get it, eventually. She only had to wait. Blood-letting would be even easier. The illusion of control would be thinner. A rare steak wouldn't be enough, of course. The critical act, in that case, had occurred in the abattoir, where the hemophile demons gathered like excited flies. A trivial shaving or kitchen accident, on the other hand, should be quite sufficient. A mere nick, a single drop of blood, and it was done. He wondered how often he shed his own blood. Could it be less than once a week? There could be no security in this direction, or on this front. To seek protection here would be to court crippling neurosis.

If a blood-offering required intentional sacrifice, he would be safe. So it couldn't be like that. Absence of safety was the starting point – the *axiom*. Design had been stripped away, down to the bedrock of raw

accident.

Once intention was dismissed, everything was left open. The last recognizable factor was then deducted. The route would be unmarked, and uncharted. Figuratively, he was treading a cliff path in pitch darkness. A plunge into disaster was the default outcome. The first step, then, was to stop.

To go on as he had was no good. He had no idea what he was doing, which was intolerably dangerous now.

Any habit might be a building block, the modular component for a ritual. Safety lay only in *doing nothing*. He laughed bitterly at his plight.

§18 — The entity visited his dreams. It was shadow become body, female and inhuman. Her avatar was a black leopard which was at the same time a wolf. The choice was not forced. Fluid ambivalence was her *gait*, as if she padded through the nocturnal forests of her natural realm. She was a familiar animal at first and then at once an unrecognizable predator. *You would make your mind a trap?* How could he not? His predicament necessitated at least that.

She was laughing at him, in a way that wasn't simply unkind. There was nevertheless much of pitiless killing in her mirth. It amused her that all worlds were built upon darkness. Blood drew her. Predation was her play. There was an ambush underway that entirely out-witted him.

In the dreams he whirled around, dizzying himself. It would come

from his flanks, or rear. In attempting to spot it, he spun. At once too slow to catch a glimpse of it, and too fast to bear, he would always stumble.

When would it be? With this question a time vortex swallowed him. He awakened, head-spinning, damp with half-remembered horrors.

§19 — Time passed. Some few days became weeks – but no more than that. Duration had thickened. It was palpable to him now.

It could not be out-waited. It would not forget, or give up. It would be coming forever, and always had been. That was the oracle. Yet he had dreams of this, too, and they were tangled beyond straightening. Ambiguous grappling mixed desperation with something adopted from a wolf spider. *He was using her skills against her*, which meant things he didn't want to contemplate. He had been waiting to trap her.

There had been no other option. Running was not a solution. She was too deeply lodged in the quick of duration to out-run. Flight ran out of time. In the grim dawn it was clearer, and emptier. No alternative was left. She would have to be defeated. Why not today? In delay there was no advantage. The initiative was no more denied to him now than it would ever be. A terrible impatience seized him, close to panic. He looked around. *I should get back*, he thought. Even if *she* cared little for space, it had to be less safe out here. The trees whispered eerily, as if in agreement. He stuck closely to the old wall, minimizing angles of potential attack.

§20 — Suddenly – as if defining the word – a detonation shattered the stillness. It was extraordinarily shocking.
He stumbled, striking his head on a stone. The wound was superficial, but it bled freely. He dabbed at his torn scalp with a paper tissue, momentarily dazed.
Absurd hypotheses flooded in. Could it have been a minor meteorite impact? Had he been shot at? Nothing he could imagine made much sense.
The site of the explosion had been a nearby tree. A charred crater was apparent on its trunk, near the roots. The edges of the wound still smoldered. Scorching had emphasized the growth whorls. They were rings, surely, but a fracture-line had subtly shifted the pattern.
The figure drew him in. He struggled to pull his mind back. Everything swirled. He was swept around the eddy of a swoon without quite succumbing to it. The crashing absurdity of the event still stunned him.
He sat for a moment, seeking to regroup his scattered faculties. His grasp on what had happened was – if anything – weakening. The fragments of recall continued drifting apart. The sole coherent sense was of an incomplete awakening. Only now had he begun to understand. *Only now* was what he had begun to understand. There was only now, even if he did not yet understand it, or ever would. Only now was happening, and he – truly – wasn't. That's how it went.

§21 — Even in his befuddlement he knew more than he wanted

to, far more than he had thought. Alien ideas had come to him along paths he did not recognize. Their grim magnificence appalled him.
I have become a hunter, he accepted. A feverish chill-wave washed through him, then, as he glimpsed what that might suggest. There was altogether too much likeness in it. He was imitating her. Was it, in fact, that she was *teaching* him? Thoughts that were still worse intruded, but they were harder to grasp. *I'm scared to think*, he admitted to himself. This undoubtedly compounded the danger. Psychological security procedures had been disabled, as if by hysterical paralysis. Certain strategically-indispensable positions had become too terrifying to defend. He had to laugh. *A garrison too frightened to man the walls* offered no protection. There was no survival that way. So instead, he twisted the blade of fear into himself, grimly determined to rouse his defenses. He would befriend his final horrors. *Love whatever hurts the most*. Only then might it somehow work out.

§22 — There was nothing being said, because his mind had stopped guessing. It rested now amidst the uninterpretable-as-such. There was no sense, no possibility of sense. A kind of death had washed through him. Mystics had sought this place, he thought with a smile. The profanity of meaning was gone.

§23 — *It surely wouldn't be long now*. The thought had already crystallized before its full wrongness struck him. Its impatience was the worst mistake. Attention was thus misdirected.

§24 — He was aware of her now, continuously. It was less a sensation than – if such a thing were possible – *the opposite*. Was *nonsense* not precisely that, if literally understood? He thought of low meteorological pressure, of withdrawing tides, recessions. A palpable emptying left nothing to grasp at. Whatever it might have been had already departed.

§25 — He lurked at the edge of the clearing. There was no need for even the slightest repositioning. It astounded him, that he was capable of such stillness. *Inhuman patience* was what it seemed to him then, momentarily. There was only the *beyond*, and nothing else. Here and now was being calmly considered, elsewhere. *This* was only bait. It was impossible. Bare survival had required nothing less.

§26 — All fear was forgotten. He was ready for her, and always had been. But it went much further. That which he had not so long ago thought himself to be would have shuddered at the stage it had reached. It was amusing, though not to the point of distraction. He had arrived at the place where everything stopped, or something had. It pointed nowhere else. The meaning was intrinsic, or it was nothing. *This is the time* went the lure. 'This' was what he had never before – and also always – taken himself as being. It had been crafted to hunt with.

§27 — The Great Now had already begun, of course. The moment no longer gave way to another, but extended itself without boundary. Whatever *would* happen *was* happening, though unseen. Here was

the secret of patience. It was far simpler than he had ever understood. There was simply nothing to wait for. Duration was compact. Unless momentarily stranded – apparently out of reach – by the cramping, rucking, or pleating of time, there was no longer any *up ahead*. To look forward was pure delusion.

§28 — An absolute act of predation was consummated, then, in primordial finality. There had been a quick, quiet killing. It was still now. Arrival and departure were fused in immensity.

§29 — So, it was done.

It had always been done.

There was only this way, and no other. The hunter – alone – remained.

November 11, 2019

Mermaids

Katy was sleeping better. The dark patches beneath her eyes were disappearing. She even smiled now, occasionally. “I don’t mind the bad dreams about mermaids anymore,” she said.

“That’s good, why?”

“Daddy told me nightmares were the world’s only real treasure.”

“He said that?”

“Lots of times,” Katy said.

"He shouldn't have. Those thoughts are unhealthy. They're why he has had to spend so much time in hospital."

Claudia cast narrowed eyes around her daughter's room. Though not especially untidy, the space was cluttered to a fantastic degree. It had the vivid quality of scarcely-inhibited psychological projection. Mermaids were an insistent theme. Two large mermaid posters dominated the largest wall. Even without any true insight into her daughter's phobia, she still shuddered slightly. Their horror was directly proportional to the cognitive attention they drew. Thinking about them was bad. They were creatures of malevolent seduction. Sirens were mermaids.

"Why do you torture yourself like this?" Claudia had once asked her daughter, in frustration.

"I'd rather see them, than have them hide," was the reply.

It made enough twisted sense to be unanswerable.

Katy had always been wise beyond her years. Her remarks were peculiarly *considered*. It made her seem sad.

Claudia wondered now whether there was something she should have said. Had there been an opening she'd missed?

There had never been a sign of Katy being disproportionately anxious about anything else. As a baby she'd been unusually solemn, but no less exceptionally calm. *The Little Buddha*, Derek had called her. She would very rarely cry. Nothing had seemed to profoundly upset her before this.

Why were mermaids so horrible? She felt the answer through powerful but indistinct intuition. Fluid boundaries were essential to it. A rocky sea-shore at twilight was darkly suggestive enough. It whispered of mermaids without needing to show them. Ambiguous transformations thrashed the coast of sleep.
“Do mermaids scare you, too, mommy?”
She’d wanted to say ‘no’ of course, but the word caught in her throat. She’d actually coughed – almost choked. “I don’t think about them much,” she’d managed, eventually. “They *are* kind of creepy, I guess.”
“Super-creepy,” Katy said.
“Why is that, do you think?” It was, perhaps, an incautious question, but Claudia couldn’t help herself.
“The join is the scariest part.”
“Where fish begins?”
“Or girl,” Katy said.
“Imagine being able to swim so well, though,” Claudia suggested, with unconvincing cheerfulness.
“That makes it worse, because you might want it.”

November 13, 2019

Wallypede Girl

Words can be an infected wound. Things are read that cannot be

unread. They can injure, and fester.
For me, such words were delivered by a story, called *Wallypede Girl*. The title alone sufficed to betray its radically abominable character. It was a tale scraped from the filthiest sewers of Hell. You don't need to know more than that. Believe me, really, you don't. Thank all that is holy if you are spared. I pray you will not err as I have.

Looking back, my behavior is indecipherable to me. I watch a madman destroy himself. He picks up the slim volume whose vileness – *he knows* – has never been exceeded. As if craving damnation, he consumes it in one session. It took, perhaps, three hours.
I could not put it down, as the saying goes, though it explains nothing. Why – I now ask myself – did I continue to the end? Why proceed beyond the first hideous paragraph? I can make no sense of it. In any case, the private calamity was done. That was the first episode. I would never know 'a good night's sleep' again.

In the next episode, I was introduced to the author, at a gallery opening.
"I'm sure you told me that you'd read one of her stories. What was it called?"
Chillingly, I knew. *Please let it not be*, I mumbled silently, in vain. It was, of course. Had it not been, this also would not be. The words were said. I will not willingly repeat them.
After the name was spoken I seemed to pass – for a moment – out of the world. Sensation collapsed into darkness and noise. A buzzing

reached me as if from distant ruined galaxies.

“You’ve heard of it?” she was asking. “Maybe you’ve even read it?”

I stared at her dumbly, if not quite open-mouthed. It was meeting a monster.

“How did you think up something like that?” I asked, not really wanting to know.

“Oh, it just came to me,” she said. The breeziness of the reply was almost impossibly distressing. “Do you ever have that? You know, when things just arrive, and you’ve no idea from where?”

“It doesn’t worry you?”

“Strange visitors are my favorite things.”

My look of abhorrence cannot have been well-concealed. Her expression shifted through discomfort to amusement.

“You look as if you’ve seen a Wallypede girl.”

“Don’t say that,” I begged. “I mean, don’t joke about it. It’s not remotely funny.”

“Are you okay?”

“What you did was so wrong.” I had to say it. “If there was any justice in this universe, you’d be punished for it.”

“Jesus,” she said. She looked taken aback. “You don’t like it?”

Her appalling understatement shocked me to the core. For some moments it stripped me of the power of speech. Could she somehow not realize what she had done?

“Like it?” I stammered, groping for more. “You find it imaginable that

I could have *liked* it?"
"Aren't scary stories your thing?"
I searched her face for indications of mockery. We were trapped in a dialog of unanswered questions. "You think what you wrote was a *scary story*?"
"Wasn't it?" Once again, her confusion seemed genuine.
"Was Auschwitz-Birkenau undesirable accommodation?"
"I don't get your point." Some evidence of irritation was creeping in.
This tilted my sense of existential devastation into fury. Did she dare pretend to injury, after what she had done? I closed my eyes, grasping for calm.
"We should probably drop it," she said. "The topic seems to over-excite you."
It's not about me, I wanted to shriek, but I managed to restrain myself. My temples ached. Throbbing veins probably betrayed my condition. I took a deep breath.
"You can't be evading your responsibility," I said. "Nobody would try to shrug-off something at this scale, surely? It would look too cynical, and – frankly – almost psychopathic."
"What's *wrong* with you?" she asked, openly annoyed now. "It's a fucking story."
"Oh is that all," I replied, maximally accentuating the sarcasm. "For a moment there I thought it might – you know – actually matter."
Despite its crudity, this response arrested her indignation in mid-

flight. She seemed now to recognize something untenable about her position. The presumption of literary innocence visibly trembled.
"Who could it hurt?" she asked, in a shrunken voice. "It's just a story."
"Are you a Christian?" I asked.
She nodded, a little confusedly.
"So you think the Bible helps people, and perhaps even saves them?"
"It's Jesus who saves people," she said. "The Bible is only the Door to Him."
I let *only* slip past. There was no need for it to get in the way. "So it's a good door?"
"Of course," she said.
Quietly, but firmly, I locked the trap. "Then you should be able to see the evil you've done, through simple inversion."
It took her less than a second to see the connection. "No one could take *Wallypede Girl* as their Bible," she protested. Her voice had risen, betraying hints of moral panic. She was beginning to imagine the horror of it. From the edge of anguished howl her words crashed back down to a hoarse whisper. "It would be monstrous." As she explored the possibility, revulsion at her own thoughts spread glints of nightmare across her features. It seemed she might faint.
After some moments she regained composure. There was a deadness to her now, one I recognized – an installation of adamant despair. Elements of her expression were glazed with resignation to irreparable ruin. Laughter would not soon return, and when it did, it

would be broken.
I could not quite pity her. She had ventured too deeply into the abyss for that.
The Hell of her own imaginings now claimed her.
“It was wrong,” she agreed, far too late.

November 22, 2019

Things Left Mostly Unsaid (00)

This series needs an introduction, but there isn’t one yet.

§00 — He stared grimly at the ‘object’ – if that’s what it was. Some would call it one, of course, though without much conviction. There was an illusory unreality to it.
“It means nothing to me,” he said. “I don’t recognize it at all.”
“Are you sure?”
“For sure, I’m sure,” he insisted. “It’s not the sort of thing you’d forget.”
“I’d have thought it was exactly that sort of thing.”

“How can you say that?” he asked, surprised. “It might have been made to be unmentioned.”
“You think it was made?”
He reconsidered. “It came from somewhere.”
Whatever it was, the exchange had been glitched by it, and disconnected.

“If it’s an artifact,” she said, with firm confidence, “it’s not ours.”
“We being?” he asked.
“Anything you can identify with will do.”
“Unless ‘artifact builders in general’.”
“That’s thinkable?”
He paused to reflect. “I guess it would be bold to say ‘yes’.”
“Heroic even,” she said.
“So talking about unthinkable artisans means talking around them.”
“If that’s the trajectory you’re on.”
“Consistent avoidance turns into an orbit, almost inevitably.”
“Continually missing something,” she agreed. “But that’s a trap, surely? You’re stuck to it.”
Yet stickiness kept its distance. The entity repelled contemplation. Its formlessness suggested no alleviating simplicity. The impression it made was elusive, hinting at immense bulk twisted into itself, or withdrawn into obscure dimensions.
“I really don’t like it,” he said childishly.
“No one expects you to.”
“Could we hand it over somehow?”
“Who’s going to take it?”
“We could just leave it here.”
“Be realistic.”
“Okay then,” he accepted. “What’s the next move?”
“First priority has to be not screwing this up,” she said. “We need to

take our time."
"Take it back, you mean?"
"If we can do that," she concurred. "It's not clear."
They retreated from it slightly, as if by instinct. There was no sign of movement. Still, it indicated some kind of motionless shifting. Alternative patterns suggested themselves. Distances wouldn't be changing much, apparently.
"How long do you think it will take?" he said after a while.
"As much as it's able to, would be my guess."
"We could use some expert assistance."
"Spare us the happy thoughts." If there were experts it would be an entirely different situation.
He'd been correct about the trajectory. It was like an orbit. The inclination to see more, without getting closer, produces circumspection automatically. Of course, neither was in any hurry to approach it, if that was even possible. Passive contact-aversion might not have been its primary property, but it appeared to be. The effect was repulsive. An inescapable thought was generated that it might somehow sting – very badly.
"Do you think we get out of this?" The remark was spun ironically, as if lifted from a movie.
"Why wouldn't we?" The game was distracting. "There's no need to exaggerate its malignancy."
He tilted his head towards the thing, as if that was argument enough.

“I doubt it’s even hostile,” she said.
“Doubt how much?”
“It’s not done anything so far, or – at least – so far as we can tell.”
Everything was hidden in the qualification, and not deeply. To scrape at it would have been too crude.
“There’s no obvious end to this,” he said.

January 28, 2020

Things Left Mostly Unsaid (01)

[These things are being posted opportunistically in no particular order]

§01 — The suggestion was peculiar. It raised many questions.
“So what do you think?”
“Nothing really,” he said, too quickly. That wouldn’t do, he realized. “Not much really,” he added, as a substitute. Then a query, for deflection: “What sort of thing?”
“What sort of thing are you thinking?” she repeated, with a laugh. “I’m supposed to know that?”
He’d forgotten what his question had meant. “Anyway, I’d rather not think about it,” he said. “Why dwell on such things?”
“So what – then – instead?” she asked.
“Does there have to be something?”

“Doesn’t there?”
“I suppose,” he admitted, obviously very far from thrilled about it. “Nothingness wouldn’t take enough time.”
He’d reached the crux. Duration had to be sponged-up somehow. Still, the proposition was questionable.
“Do you want to talk about it?” she asked, laughing again. The joke, if such it was, he found obscure.
“Is there any choice?” he grumbled. His own question was misleading, he knew at once. It wasn’t necessary to talk, at least not out loud, which was the thing. Yet, to keep from talking required a continual renewal. It involved effort. “It’s why people want to die,” he mused aloud. “It’s the only way to be quiet without trying.” The morbidity exceeded anything he would have wanted to say. “Always words,” he said. “They go too far.”
“Not always,” she countered. “Often, though, admittedly,” she added. “This time, certainly.”

February 1, 2020

Things Left Mostly Unsaid (02)

§02 — It was too self-evident for words. Even this shouldn’t have required utterance. The redundancy echoed emptily through it. It added and then multiplied nothing. Nevertheless, it had crept into

the conversation. Now he snapped at the intrusion.
“That goes without saying.”
“Yes, it has,” she said. “That’s its way.”
Her philosophical perversity struck him as glib and infuriating. “How can you even think that, let alone say it?” he demanded.
“Isn’t it obvious?”
“Of course it is,” he said. “It’s far too obvious. That’s the whole point.”
“So drop it. How difficult is that?”
He made an animal noise signaling rage mastered by humor. She laughed at it politely.
“You let it get to you too much,” she continued. “Why does it matter?”
“What kind of question is that?”
“You don’t like it?”
“Whether I like it or not isn’t the issue.”
“It wouldn’t be, if you cared less about it.”
“So it’s my fault now?”
The deflation was jolting. She could only laugh again, shaking her head. The way he fed it – while at the same time lamenting its prominence – was an extraordinary thing to see.
“You have to let it go,” she said, as soothingly as possible. “It’s not just going to get up and leave, while you’re worrying at it.”
“What if it has to be dealt with?”
“That’s your guess?”
“Regardless,” he insisted.

"It's not asking anything of me."
"Not as far as you can tell."
'Tell' was a word, she now realized, that she'd never listened to enough. Ancient sorceries hummed within it. "I can't tell," she tried, experimentally. "It's hard to tell." What might be telling?
"Are you even listening?" he wondered.
"I'm trying to." She shook her head again, as if to clear it. "There's a lot going on."
"It only seems like that."
"No," she said. "It doesn't. It seems as little as possible. Still though …"
"Still what?" he asked.
"Catching glimpses, whispers – there are chances."
"'Chances' – Christ," he said, without attempting to conceal his disgust. "That's what you call them."
"You'd prefer 'curses'," she knew, because they'd been there before. "But that's unbalanced."
"You can't balance *this*." It had always been his main point. "There's no leverage."
"Brains are sheer leverage."
"They're side-eddies."
"That too," she accepted. "But balancing is the only thing they do."
"Or try to do."
"That was built-in." *Built-in to the statement*, she had meant, not the organ, though it worked equally either way. Over time it cancelled

out. To be poised out at an edge was still to be poised. It wasn't a matter of foundations, but of traffic.
"Okay, that's enough," he thought aloud, and it was.

February 2, 2020

Things Left Mostly Unsaid (03)

§03 — She'd survived the event, however narrowly. Most probably, it was only melodrama that had placed such an outcome in doubt. There were no grounds for expecting anything worse. Yet it was as if she was still stricken. Her existence appeared somehow *thinned*.
A sheen of unseasonal perspiration glowed on her forehead.
"I don't know," she repeated, about nothing obvious. It was almost a plea. "I really don't," as if she couldn't imaginably be believed.
Such stammering was not really speech, still less security. The seals and wards were far too weak. They offered no serious protection, or even the pretense of it.
He scrabbled at the enigma, quite undeterred by her distress. "So, what was it like?"
"There are no words." She exaggerated, but only a little. Really, she had no idea where a description would begin. Perhaps there were too many words, but none for her, or none for it. The happening hadn't been something meant for discussion. So the phrase was an

alternative to saying more. It would have subtracted itself, if it could. In a way it disappeared, but incompletely. It left ripples, like something retreating into aquatic depths.
“There have to be words,” he insisted. “It isn’t necessary to be exact.”
“Vagueness in the right direction is already a lot to ask.”
His response was an inarticulate grunt of irritation. He was not here to fence. Was she not yet broken enough to be unguarded?
She ignored the tacit demand. There was too much *else* going on.
Impatience made him careless. “Spit it out,” he grumbled. He knew at once that exposing so much aggression was a mistake.
Her inner recoil was undisguised. Defenses would now compound the difficulty of the terrain.
He apologized clumsily, but too late.
“I’m tired,” he tried to explain. “I’ve been worried.”
“It’s okay,” she said, but the wariness in her eyes said something else.
“I can’t really talk now.”
“Don’t say that.”
“It’s already too much,” she said, withdrawing further.
“Then who’s going to help?”
“Jesus,” she said, with a sad laugh. “Come on!”
He mumbled something even he himself missed. It was nothingness badly emulating speech. “I have to know,” he croaked. Despair was completing the loss of caution. “You understand, don’t you? I have to.”
“What if you simply can’t?” The complete absence of hostility in her

tone somehow made it worse.
“No,” he said. “I won’t think that.”
“You can’t avoid it,” she said. “It’s settled.”
“Nothing’s settled.”
“You don’t believe that.”
“This isn’t about what I believe.”
“You don’t get to decide, either.” Once again, her tone was fatalistic, rather than accusing. “It’s the way it is.”
“You say that as if you’re on its side.”
“Everything’s on its side,” she countered. “Or nothing is.”

February 3, 2020

Things Left Mostly Unsaid (04)

§04 — No one knew what it was, beside a scandal. Obscurity somehow occupied the center of it. *It’s not the crime but the cover-up*, as they say.
“Can you explain your involvement?” the reporter asked, thrusting a microphone forward aggressively. “Do you deny the accusations?”
What accusations? It would only encourage them.
There were other questions, being raised simultaneously. They blurred together into a hubbub of hostile inquisition.
“No comment.” He said it only to make his silence emphatic.

“This is an opportunity to set the record straight,” shouted someone else.

“Not really,” he mumbled, reaching the door.

His wife was inside, slightly shaken, but still managing to smile. “They want you to talk,” she said.

“It’s all nonsense.”

“They think your silence is a confession.”

“I doubt it,” he said. He paused to consider. “They probably want me to think that.”

“Why do they even care?” she asked. “It’s all so – nothing.”

“They smell blood, it excites them.”

“You exaggerate,” she hoped.

“Maybe,” he accepted, unconvinced. He scratched the side of his nose distractedly.

“Are you going to make a statement?”

“You think I should?”

“It might be the only way to get out in front of things.”

“Improbable,” he muttered. “There’s no interest in what really happened.”

“You can’t just accept that.”

“Can’t I?” he asked. “Self-deception isn’t going to help.”

“If there’s a time for cynicism, this isn’t it,” she insisted. “It comes too close to vindicating their story-line.”

“If I was merely being accused of cynicism, I’d find it survivable,” he

replied, with a grim laugh.
“So what are you being accused of, to your understanding?”
“Oh, you know.”
“Actually, I really don’t.”
“I’m supposed to have said some things.” He hesitated. “They’re vague about the details.”
“By ‘details’ you mean the actual words?”
“And the occasion,” he added.
“You’re talking about that ghastly club, aren’t you?” Her exasperation overflowed. “Why do you associate yourself with those people?”
“They’re good company.”
“They are *not* ‘good company’ – and now see where they’ve got you.”
“It’s hardly their fault,” he protested.
“Isn’t it, really? Then why is the press besieging our house?”
“You’re saying there was a leak?”
“What other explanation could there be?”
“I’m reluctant to jump to conclusions.” He realized in saying this that more would evidently be needed. “The place might have been bugged.”
“This is supposed to be more likely than you having sleazy friends?”
“I’m just admitting to uncertainty.”
She sighed dramatically, rolling her eyes. “You’re unbelievable. Can’t you see where this is going to end?”
“No, I can’t” he said. “I can’t at all, and I have to doubt that you can.”

“It’s as if you positively want to crash in flames.”
“How?” he protested. “How is it remotely like that?”
“Try to imagine what it looks like.”
“It looks mostly like the picture they want to paint.”
“They work with what they’ve got.”
He scowled, but without contesting the point. “It’s hard to know what they’ve got.”
“But knowing what they *could* have just requires recollection.”
“Some undiplomatic language,” he said, “but that’s all.”
“That’s quite enough, though, isn’t it?”
He sighed. “I think you’re approaching this the wrong way around.”
“You mean, from what actually happened?” she asked, only semi-sarcastically. “Let’s try to agree that’s at least relevant.”
“Minimally relevant,” he countered. “First of all, it’s a story.”
“It’s not a story about nothing, though, is it?”
“It’s a story about nothing-very-definite – at least so far.”
“But they clearly don’t expect it to be, for long.”
“Damn them,” he muttered, without further specifying who they were. “They won’t stop.”
“Why would they stop? The audience enjoys the chase.”
“What happened to ‘You exaggerate’?” he sniffed.
“You’ve changed my mind.”
“Anyway, I’m not feeding them.”
“Isn’t it a bit late for that?”

February 4, 2020

Things Left Mostly Unsaid (05)

§05 — The interrogation would undoubtedly be difficult to navigate. There wasn't any kind of sensible story to offer up. Some impure version of nothing was the only message available. That would seem odd. They'd want something.

He paced back and forth agitatedly, softly tortured by anticipation. "What if they ask about it directly?"

"They won't."

"But if they do?"

"Say as little as possible. Avoid lying, though, if you can. Lies are vulnerabilities. They tend to come apart under pressure. They release information when they break." She paused a moment before continuing. "They can't force you to talk."

"That's true, probably," he admitted, not entirely without bitterness. "But what would silence sound like to them?"

"You can't afford to worry about that."

"What can I afford?"

"Caution," she said.

"That's it?"

"That's enough."

It seemed unlikely. “I’m assuming they’re good at what they do.”
“Asking questions?”
“Roughly,” he accepted. He meant *approximately*.
The word took her elsewhere. “Not especially roughly,” she countered. “Their freedom is tightly constrained.”
Torture was close to the last thing he wanted to talk about. Yet, here they were.
“I’d tell them everything, if I could,” he muttered, unnecessarily.
She smiled thinly. “Thank you for the honesty.”
“Not that it matters.”
“Quite,” she agreed.
“There have to be words that would work,” he mused, “but how to find them?”
“You think there’s a method?” *A method you could conceivably follow in time*, she might have elaborated, which would have been colder.
There was no answer to it, in any case.
“Inaccessible possibilities seem like a theme,” he grumbled. “It starts and ends with them.”
“They divert you too much. You should concentrate upon what you can do.”
“You mean, *what I can avoid saying*.”
“Why reach for more than that – especially now?”
“‘Now’ is kind of the point, though, isn’t it?”

"Not unless you want to trip yourself up, at the worst time."
"Yes, it would be better to forget." The irritability had drained out, leaving only gloom. "Another inaccessible possibility," he added.
She tapped her watch. *Time's passing*. Words would only have softened the message.
"How long, do you think?" he asked.
"An hour or two, maybe," she guessed. "Not long enough for *this*."
"Or, maybe, for anything useful?" he said. "The opportunity cost of digression could be zero."
"Only if you're already fucked," she said, her patience broken.
"Sometimes there's nothing that can be done."
"Isn't that what you're supposed to be planning?"
"Yeah, I guess," he said, smiling awkwardly at her joke. He seemed bored by his own predicament.
"Best case you'll get through on sheer apathy."
"You think they'll spin it out?"
"Why wouldn't they? But it's you who'll be doing the spinning."
"So the less I give them, the longer it takes," he mused. "It's a siege."
The insight was too inane to remark upon. She felt mild relief he hadn't posed it as a question.
"Not giving them anything is simply what's going to happen," she said. "That's baked in. You have nothing. The problem begins when it seems you're keeping something from them."
"Which they have to," he said, completing the circle.

"You see how easy it is to get nowhere? Keep that up at the right time, for a maximum of – probably – six hours, and you're through."
He groaned at the schedule.
"You'll have to step-up the manifest compliance," she added. "Any time that they think has been spent playing games won't count."
"Round and around," he said.
"That's the way. It's not as if there's another."

February 5, 2020

Things Left Mostly Unsaid (06)

§06 — As always, she'd been exhaustingly elliptical. It seemed as if she never approached a point unless to curve about it. Her extreme circuitousness drew out the interrogator in him, which felt too much like work.
"What are you trying to say?" he asked wearily.
"'Trying' suggests failing," she replied, immediately, with a laugh.
"What *are* you saying, then?"
"That's better, but now redundant."

It was always like this. "You've said a lot less than you think," he muttered. It was pointless. She hid by nature. Irritable words wouldn't draw her out.
She appraised him with cold neutrality now, wondering whether this

was a fight. “Confession is a myth,” she said. “It collapses the question of evidence into intention. Information isn’t being held back. It isn’t *available*.”

“Sometimes, maybe,” he quibbled. He wasn’t going to grant her more than that, or in fact even that. “More often it’s withheld.”

“Sure, but *primordially*.” It was a word designed to up-end what remained of casual conversation. She smiled a little sadistically after uttering it.

“You mean, not by you?”

“Of course not by me,” she said, perhaps too quickly. Immediately, the ‘of course’ had seemed crude to the point of self-parody. They were speeding into stupidity again. Maybe it was the only thing that ever happened. She sighed.

He appeared to understand her frustration. An element of apology crept in. “Don’t let me rush you,” he said. “There’s time.”

“Meaning what?”

“Patience, I guess.”

“So you’re retreating from everything now?”

“Is that what’s happening?” The question was transparently insincere. He could almost feel himself stumbling backwards.

Perhaps it didn’t matter. The can could be kicked down the road, as they said. *There’d be another time*.

The thought unfolded through exactly those words. ‘They could pick it up again later’ was the whole of the initial conception. Yet – even

unannounced – ‘another time’ seemed like the strangest idea supportable by the world. Reciprocally, *this time* became unbearable. The peculiarity was crushing. He backed away from this too, as if cornered. To think in the direction indicated would be like endless falling.

“You okay?” she asked. He’d paled oddly, staggering slightly, as if intoxicated.

“I was going to say something really weird,” he said, with an awkward laugh, “by accident.”

“But you didn’t.”

“No, I didn’t.” It felt alright, although that didn’t say much, either. There was relief as at an abyss missed.

She laughed too, though less awkwardly, which was nice. Then she put a finger to her lips, making the ‘hush’ sign.

They listened to nothing for a while, but it was hard to hear.

February 6, 2020