

# BEST YEAR EVER: Sex, Death, and 2020 Vision

By Brant von Goble

## **WHY I LIKE IT: Guest editor ROBERT D. KIRVEL writes:**

*An essay of 17,000+ words with 124 referenced footnotes should offer something exceptional to warrant a reader's time and attention. Here, writer and teacher, Brant von Goble, gives us an intriguing vision of a post-COVID-19, post-MAGA realm by speculating on whether next year will be the one when we wise up to the bullshit (metaphorical "death" in the title) and create something new ("sex" in the title).*

*Predictions about this essay's forthcoming "best year ever" range from optimistic to acerbic. By the author's reckoning, a post-pandemic tomorrow-land in the U.S. will feature less glorification of don't-know-it-all experts accompanied by reduced corruption, apology-offering, and faux concern arising from guilt. On education, we can expect a dawning recognition that "masses of marching morons," aka students, really don't learn much in classrooms after all, except for the curious few, and a better route is consolidation of facilities plus more online learning rather than sending rotten learners to bad colleges that are vastly overpriced. Does he have your attention yet?*

*We'll stop thinking so much about our jobs and dastardly fellow man as well, and learn to love work-from-home, automation, and robots—some of us with employment at least. On the world scene, we can anticipate decreased international interventionism prompted by self-righteous moralizers in the U.S. and a peaceful realignment of global power because, well, maybe China is more focused on China's own welfare than on a smallish population of yappy critics thousands of miles away.*

*Not all is rosy though. Steel yourself for my favorite section on the "chaos factor" personified by one thoroughly disenfranchised movie character, Arthur Fleck from Joker, who would dismember and set a match to everything. Yet even in this respect, the author finds some good news.*

*The good is that the despair, the pain, and the isolation felt by millions of Americans is now impossible to deny. Since 2000, we have been *Bowling Alone* (nonfiction by Robert D. Putnam). Now we burn our cities down together.*

*Yikes. Though readers might not agree with every forecast or assumption, this is writing replete with ideas and insight, and it is entertaining to boot, a rarity during a year of global pan-depression. The future then? Yes, bring it on, please.*

## Best Year Ever:

### Sex, Death, and 2020 Vision

#### *Decades where nothing happens . . . and the ejaculations of progress*

Fantasize, fixate, pursue, fail . . . repeat. . . Fantasize, fixate, pursue, fail . . . repeat . . .

Fantasize, fixate, pursue, fail . . . repeat . . .

And then you get what you want.

And it is almost certainly less than what you wanted. In retrospect, the dreams, the chase, the ham-fisted exertions and heavy breathing, and the underwhelming finish will make for good barroom stories and cringe-laugh memories. Or not. Sometimes you are stuck with someone you cannot stand for reasons that seem less compelling with each additional minute spent staring at that person's shockingly charmless, uglier-than-a-mud-fence visage.

So goes the cycle of revolution. What did you think I meant? And in revolution, even those who see their every demand met are left with dull victories, shattered dreams, and utopias that end *à la Thomas More*, with at least one person losing his head.<sup>1</sup> *All conditioned things are unsatisfactory . . .*<sup>2</sup>

And since our minds are already somewhere below the waist, let us move them a bit lower, *to the feet*—and the road upon which said feet tread. That road, the road to revolution, is a memorial of sorts, and much like the Kolyma Highway in the Russian Far East, it is built upon the bones of those who gave their labors to it, oftentimes less than willingly.<sup>3</sup> We all walk upon the labors of the dead, but we cannot walk too far along with our metaphor: It has its limitations.

Highways are incremental things, built piece by piece. Revolutions do not happen *until they happen*. And *the impossible* becomes *the inevitable*, becomes *the done*. There is no *might*.

There is no *somewhat improbable*. Nothing happens. Then everything happens. The revolution takes moments, but the consequences last for years. So perchance sexual flights of fancy (and whatever fear of flying thereof) make for a better metaphor than a Russian Road of Bones.

Putting aside metaphors, here is the plain truth:

2020 is our year of revolution.

And that is a wonderful thing.

Rather than mourning the world that was, we must let the dead bury the dead. The future awaits. And here is how it will be better than yesterday, which is not to say it will be perfect:

**1. *We'll stop believing the bullshitters.***

*The end of history*<sup>4</sup> was the *beginning* of America's era of bullshit without limits. We had done stupid things before (*Goodbye my darling, Hello Vietnam . . .*), we had subsidized extremists and enemies (*Morning, Mujahideen . . .*<sup>5</sup>), and helped to overthrow legitimate governments and leaders only to have them eventually replaced with people far more hostile to us than we would have imagined possible (*Afternoon, Ayatollah . . .*<sup>6</sup>). Our leadership was never wondrously capable unless *capable* is defined as being born in the right place at the right time. Even our great victories—World War II, for instance—were as much the product of America's wealth and geographical isolation (and willingness to accept bright immigrants<sup>7</sup>) as they were any great genius on the part of our leadership. But then, *really smart people* have their parents make their money for them. So perhaps we should give credit where it is due.

During the Cold War, we had some reason to contain our baser instincts—the desire to imprison everything that moves,<sup>8</sup> the impulse to militarize and arm every law enforcement agency to the teeth,<sup>9</sup> and the yearning to obliterate goatherds.<sup>10</sup> We needed to keep focused on the *Evil Empire*, which with its strange alphabet, strong liquor, bombastically patriotic anthem,<sup>11</sup> and

an arsenal of nuclear weapons, was just different enough for contrast. Ideology the Empire had, but mere ideology it was not. Rather, it was a people, a government, and a land that could be easily identified and well-enough understood. We knew where to point our missileers and their missiles.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, we know nothing with certainty, so we fish for adversaries, and if we discover there are no fish to catch, we stock the pond. We waged a *Global War on Terror* (GWOT)—effectively a fight against what is variously *a tactic* or *an emotional state*. This made about as much sense as fighting a war against *ennui* (because we should all care about something!), and it fed the piranhas of anti-Americanism with bone and blood.<sup>12</sup> We find other enemies of every shape and stripe within our land, be they *superpredators*,<sup>13</sup> terrorist sleeper cells,<sup>14</sup> the Y2K computer bug,<sup>15</sup> or Asian giant hornets.<sup>16</sup>

The dangers of the enemy are always sold hard. Vanquishing said enemy always requires some expensive strategy. The strategy is always either badly designed, poorly executed, or both, and the enemy never does much measurable harm, even when the strategy fails. The failure is always proof positive that more money is needed.<sup>17</sup>

Our leadership is ill-suited to peace. It does not know what to make of it. So it engages in perpetual war, hoping that we will not catch on to them. Our news outlets/content producers do not do much better. *If it bleeds, it leads*. And the big six media conglomerates (Disney, TimeWarner, et cetera<sup>18</sup>) will do or say whatever they must to keep themselves in the black.

The good news is this: We are more skeptical of these people and institutions than ever before. And our faith in experts—far from absolute even years ago<sup>19</sup>—was further diminished by the great Anticlimactic Piddly Pandemic of 2020. Predictions as to the damage that COVID would bring were so inconsistent, so hyperbolic that they put the most alarmist of climate change

doomsday predictions—those of the *Day After Tomorrow* variety—to shame.<sup>20</sup> Yet the professionals learned nothing. They will continue to undermine their credibility for a few brief moments of screen time, proving that they are no less inclined to be famewhores than are the rest of us.<sup>21</sup>

If the last six months have established anything, it is that government officials, scientists, and academics know nothing much more than the man on the street. They can do nothing. They wear no clothes. We are losing faith in the lot of them.

From this good news springs much other.

## ***2. American moralizing and interventionism will come to an end.***

One of the great global annoyances is the American tendency to save others from themselves—to liberate them, whether they want it or not. We have been doing this for years, but the height of the stupidity was our effort to bring Western liberal democracy to the Middle East. This effort was so singularly doomed to failure that no sensible person would have thought that it had any chance of success. The flaw in the grand plan: the belief that American values are *universal values*.<sup>22</sup> Make no mistake about it, the GWOT was not a war about oil: There would have been easier ways to capture that market, and cheaper too. Rather, it was a scheme hatched by true believers—those who take as inviolable truth that inside of every foreign man, woman, or child, there is a Ding Dong-loving American waiting to burst out (probably because he's hungry).<sup>23</sup>

But this is wrong. It is founded upon the supremely arrogant failure to understand that *they are not like us*. Whoever *they* are, they are not American. They have their values, their traditions, and their priorities—different from ours, but no less authentic or deeply held. We all may bleed red, but not all puke white and shit blue. Anyone who has spent a few years working

in another country and away from the expat settlements will recognize the truth in this. And he will soon learn that either he must adapt to *their* tempo, *their* values, and *their* way of life, or he must stay indoors, waiting for his labor contract to end so he can fly home.<sup>24</sup> But despite all their credentials, make no mistake about them: Our gold-plated masters-of-the-universe leaders are *provincial*.<sup>25</sup> They know less about the outside world than does the average soldier or border-crossing day laborer. And their Dunning-Kruger confidence makes them more dangerous still.<sup>26</sup>

And then there is the matter of *human rights*—a fine notion about which all and sundry crow, but that few nations observe except when convenient. If governing a people while respecting their rights with any consistency is possible is a matter yet to be determined.<sup>27</sup> This *may* change. But *may* is not must.

What *is* clear is that we—the American people and government—are in no position to demand from others what we do not demand from ourselves. Putting aside the past—the nearly genocidal reduction of the American Indian population, for instance—we have no grounds to unhyprocritically attack other governments for the treatment of their people *today*.

Do foreign powers routinely abuse, kill, and incarcerate their minorities and their poor?

*Of course!*

Do they deny their less-privileged citizens fair, speedy, and impartial trials?

*No doubt they do!*

Do they tolerate inequality of wealth and opportunity so extreme that the difference between the haves and the have-nots is one of worlds, rather than mere dollars?

*You betcha!*

Do they allow the infrastructure upon which their citizens depend to crumble into the sea, leaving only the richest of private-jet rich with safe means of transportation?

*Yep!*

But what do we do differently?

We incarcerate at a rate unmatched by any existing power. We provide our citizens with the best justice they can buy, and we provide them with roads with free potholes and water with free lead (not *lead-free* water).<sup>28</sup> Our generosity towards our fellow Americans is inversely proportional to our capacity for shambolic crisis-management and political infighting. About none of this should we despair: Our emerging inability to enforce the demand that the world remake itself in our image will save all of humanity lifetimes' worth of grief.

*Enforce the demand* is not a matter of mere verbiage. Demands we will still make, but enforce them we will not. We no longer have the wealth for one international adventure after the next. And we lack the moral stature to have our chest-thumping dictates taken seriously.<sup>29</sup> The more loudly we attempt to boss about other nations and attack their record of ignoring rights and due process, the more impotent we will appear. If we issue a human rights report about the treatment of the Uyghurs, the Chinese will tweet back a George Floyd GIF. There the argument stops. And with each excretion of holier-than-thou fluff and puffery, our opponents will need only to dig through the public record to make us look to be bigger asses. Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, the collateral damage of America's many efforts to bomb the world's cave peoples into modernity—our actions and the ready availability of digital images thereof give endless fodder for the meme machines of hostile powers. We can keep arguing the issue, but only at an ongoing expense to our dignity.

This all sounds trivial and jejune—tweets and twits and online derision—but it is not. The select shapers of the world hate being teased. They have no tolerance for it. They have been the butt of jokes throughout the ages, but never has the ridicule of the unwashed masses (or other

elites) been piped directly into their homes, their phones, and their hollowed-out souls. Enough in the way of psychological attack, and the elite will retreat. They will stop trying to bring about heaven on earth and leave the lot of us well enough alone. God will not save us from *a most oppressive tyranny, sincerely exercised for the good of its victims*.<sup>30</sup> The merciless mockery of the internet peanut gallery will.

The pole of global power will shift east, and a different set of values will prevail—less abstraction, less grand design, less individualism, more concrete thinking and incremental improvement, and more in the way of collective unity, to be valued above the happiness of the individual.<sup>31</sup> These *are* values. They are as real as ours, but they are different. A people who sacrifice to get to heaven (us) will view life and its purpose quite differently from a people who think more in terms of passing down a legacy from one generation to the next.

One order falls. Another rises. The new world may be less brave than that which we imagined, but it will almost certainly cost us less.<sup>32</sup> And we will not bear the heavy burden of trying to make it come to pass.

### ***3. And the great global power shift will happen without a world war.***

Global power shifts are disruptive, and they rarely occur without mass death. The expansion of European nations and cultures from regional players to world leaders—which is what European culture and values have been for the last 500 years—was monstrously lethal. Depending upon the estimate used, more than 80% of the native population of the Americas died from either disease, warfare, or slavery after Europeans began to stream into the New World.<sup>33</sup>

Then there were the First and Second World Wars, which resulted in a total of around 37 million and 70 million deaths, respectively.<sup>34</sup> These marked the collapse of European colonialism and the subsequent rise of the United States as a military and economic superpower.

The rise of China *could* be disastrous. Academics, industrialists, and a fair number of chickenhawks (on both sides) have either predicted or demanded war with China. This is a *fait accompli*, so they argue. There is no other way for America and China to resolve the matter of their changing global roles.<sup>35</sup> The sooner the bloodshed starts, the sooner it can be finished. The outcome of a war involving potentially billions of people is never entirely articulated by these saber rattlers.

Perhaps America will win, and the Chinese will take their millennia of distinct history and culture and simply go home, leaving the rest of us to do as we please. Perhaps *democracy* will break out in China after the evil government of today is disintegrated by glorious Red, White, and Blue firepower. (And we know this will happen because of our successes in . . . Iraq? Afghanistan? Vietnam?) None seem to very well consider the possibility that America might lose. That the Chinese have a population vastly larger than that of the United States is irrelevant in their minds. And China's nuclear arsenal is dismissed with no more thought.<sup>36</sup> Another possibility—that both China *and* the United States would suffer horrific losses and that entire continents would be as poisoned with radiation as is the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone—is rarely mentioned.<sup>37</sup>

Yet war with China—the emergent post-COVID power—seems unlikely, both because of China's nuclear deterrent and because the Chinese lack the requisite attachment to ideology to start a war and the Americans lack the money. Chinese empire-building efforts were never particularly extensive: Even during the height of the Zheng He's treasure ship exploration (in the 15<sup>th</sup> century), the Chinese never established colonies of much size or power, traveling as far as Mogadishu and the Middle East, but not staying for long.<sup>38</sup>

China's modern forays into Africa appear more commercially than politically (or culturally) oriented. Granted, European colonization efforts were largely driven by economics as well, but there was another layer to them—that of wanting to transform peoples and lands, with the Christian tradition of proselytization playing a role. There is no comparable Chinese tradition. Daoism, Confucianism, and Chinese Buddhism spread beyond their motherland's borders, but they were carried by visitors who traveled to China, studied, and took them home, with the Chinese appearing to have little interest in what other people in other places knew or thought of the Middle Kingdom's beliefs or customs.<sup>39</sup>

Here is a lesson for the ages: The Chinese do not hate us. They do not want to conquer us. They simply *do not care*.<sup>40</sup> The Chinese have a great many people of their own. They do not need any more to share their beliefs, to respect their values, or to practice their faith. They have enough people already. *We*—meaning *everyone who is not Chinese*—will be viewed pragmatically, as buyers, sellers, or providers of natural resources. So long as we do not interfere in China's business—her internal affairs or her ability to engage in commerce—the Chinese will prove no more dangerous than the haggling shopkeeper down the street.

Yet *nearly bloodless* battles still stain a uniform or two—the damned spot is still there—and for those who die, the cost of conflict is absolute. Likewise, the comparatively humane and peaceful transition from West-to-East preeminence will not be without its causalities, however few and far between.

Given that COVID has served as the tipping weight on the global balance of power, perhaps its deaths should be counted as the price of the transition.

If every COVID death worldwide is attributed to China's rise, the total number of deaths thus far is around 500,000, and this is over a half-year period.<sup>41</sup> If this rate of mortality holds

constant until the end of 2021 (by which time the disease is likely to have either killed the most vulnerable or mutated into something less virulent, if not both), the total number of deaths will not exceed 2,000,000, or slightly more than 0.02% of the world population. This would make the United States-to-China global geopolitical shift one of the least costly in terms of human life on record.<sup>42</sup>

Such is more remarkable given that it encompasses an actual change in dominant civilization. The British-to-American shift was from one culture to another so similar as to be nearly interchangeable, save for the vexing British tendency to spell *check* with a *que*. Yet China's rise from *interrupted superpower* to superpower proper is as significant an occurrence as to have happened in all recorded history.<sup>43</sup>

So we will have peace (and fewer deaths than almost anyone has feared) whether we want it or not.

#### ***4. The public will learn to distinguish between science and scientist.***

Declining faith in experts need not lead to a rise of primitivism, magical thinking, or technophobia. Rather, just as faith in scientists may decrease, respect for science itself will likely increase. This is a critical good. Science demands no worship. Science demands no faith. Science demands *nothing*. It cannot demand anything. It has no personhood or personality.

Anthropomorphizing a process does neither people nor process any service. And the sooner that the public learns how to read and interpret scientific research—how to view it with an appropriately jaundiced eye—the less easily charlatans will be able to bamboozle them. A great many people may indeed lack the intellectual tenacity and capacity to understand the most complex scientific arguments, but that is not to say that they will prove unable to identify glaring errors in logic and experimental design.

The *fundamentals* of the scientific method can be understood by almost anyone, and in an era of freely available information, those who *can* grasp the details and the higher math involved can make the complex simple enough for the majority to interpret.<sup>44</sup> Those who *choose* to avoid this information—who choose ignorance—have only themselves to blame for whatever ill befalls them for not knowing what they can and should know.

A world in which scientists are valorized is not much better than one in which they ignored entirely. In the latter, the warnings go unheeded. In the former, they grow dangerous from an excess of power and a lack of accountability. So it goes with all experts. The unchecked mad scientist risks becoming a Trofim Lysenko.<sup>45</sup> The unchecked and unaccountable social engineer, an Edward Bernays.<sup>46</sup>

From our skepticism towards experts and professionals, comes another benefit.

**5. *Our government will become less corrupt and abusive, even as we lose faith in it.***

The surest sign of a scoundrel is that he demands blind faith in his good intentions and rejects independent oversight. *Trust me* says the crook, and the wise man grabs his wallet and holds it dear. Scientists, experts, officials, and lawyers who demand that we have high confidence in their goodwill and great competence, should be held up for special and close examination.

The idolization of authority figures is dangerous for a society, and just as dangerous is an overestimation of the risks authority figures face. This is relevant when considering the role of security services and institutions—the military and police. The narrative Americans have been sold for decades now is that we are under constant risk of attack—from criminals, from terrorists, from immigrants, from our own families. We are kept terrified of *them*, meaning anyone other than ourselves and our great protectors. We are sold the notion that if the thin blue

line breaks, all will turn to hell. Yet for the better part of human history, there was no blue line to break. The first police force was not established in the United States (in Boston, more specifically) until 1838.<sup>47</sup> And before 1800, when France established the first modern police force, *no* country had such an organization in the sense we now take as a given.<sup>48</sup> Before that, constables, sheriffs, night watchmen, elected and appointed officials, and the military all played a role in imposing the law upon the public, but regular policing by a professional uniformed force did not exist. Laws existed, but laws and their enforcers were far less prevalent than today. Despite this lack of ever-present agents of government-approved violence, the historical record does not suggest that colonial America was *Ye Olde Purge*, and to the extent great crimes were committed before the founding of the Republic, they were as likely to have been the *product* of government actions as they were to be *prevented* by them.<sup>49</sup>

Yet a great many of our people, namely White, middle-class Americans, live as though they must cling to the authorities with such a codependent-girlfriend tenacity that being more than ten minutes away from the nearest police station is a terrifying prospect to them.

These hyperthyroidic, amphetamine-munching cats masquerading as citizens will cling to authority—any authority—so long as there is any authority left, and when the authority falls away, collapses, or walks off its post to never return, they will cling to the memory and symbols of what once was. But the population of the fearful felines will shrink. Demographic and economic changes will chip away at it, until it becomes just one more minority, and not a uniquely powerful one.<sup>50</sup> Given time, many of the children of the status quo will turn against authoritarianism, partially a result of campus indoctrination and partially as a result of them earning less while working more than did their parents, and thus being impoverished even in their faith.<sup>51</sup> The emergent groups—poorer, darker, less connected to the established power

structure, and more likely to be on the receiving end of years of destructive social engineering—will prove far more skeptical than did their lily-white predecessors.<sup>52</sup>

They—the replacements—know what most of the world takes for granted: The police are neither more inherently moral nor any more likely to be infallible than any other group of human beings given gun and badge. Ultimately, the police are *men with guns*. And the *hombres armados* (armed men), regardless of how they identify themselves or the values they claim to uphold, are people the *hombres desarmados* (unarmed men) are better off avoiding.<sup>53</sup>

Even the most *color-deficient* (or maybe *tanning-challenged* is the proper adjective) of us will have a more difficult time denying as much with each new damning dashcam, bodycam, or smartphone video.<sup>54</sup>

The irony of this is that the very same technologies that make us distrust our authorities *more* make them *less* likely to do something worthy of distrust. Even judges, probably the *least* likely of any group of authorities to be held to account for their actions, are finally discovering that abusing and tormenting attorneys, plaintiffs, witnesses, and defendants is not a good look on camera. And looking bad on camera can lead to an early (and unceremonious) retirement.<sup>55</sup>

The other great benefit of this—when we see our flaws, so does the rest of the world. The more the world knows of our ways and our failings, the less likely it is to repeat them, which is not to say that other peoples will not make mistakes of their own.

#### **6. *We'll quit pretending to give a damn about everything and everyone.***

There is no greater enemy of true compassion than feigned concern. The latter allows a convenient relief of guilt, a saving of face, and not much more. The former—compassion—is more difficult and more limited. We *cannot* care about most things. We *cannot* care about most people.<sup>56</sup> The teens were a decade of great but meaningless display and rebellion without

direction. All were well befitting a century in its adolescence. Protests over nothing, about no one, and without any goals beyond mayhem—the University of Missouri and Evergreen State College, Occupy Wall Street, et cetera—we know about as much about these jamborees of petty destruction as did the protestors, which is to say that we know nothing.<sup>57</sup>

But at the heart of all these protests is an imperative—that we *must care*. We *must care* about minorities. We *must care* about economic inequality. We *must care* about hurt feelings and emotional and social insensitivity.

And as the years progressed, we faced even more of the same—a never-ending imperative to care. The *Rape on Campus* hoax of 2014, the Kavanaugh hearings, #MeToo, the great protest/riots of 2020—all are public and political actions impose something on us—that we must care (or look as though we do), that we must make the world *right* according to whoever is doing the protesting.<sup>58</sup> And we must do our caring in the most performative, melodramatic manner possible.<sup>59</sup>

The truth is this: We all have limited time. We all have limited energy. This applies to the most sympathetic, just as it does to the least. No one can concern himself with all things and all people. Those who *pretend* to care about every wrong, much like those who claim to like all music or all movies or all religions, do not care much about any of them.

This is not to say that we cannot all care about *something* or even several things, but we must, as a matter of necessity, be indifferent to more of the world and more of the people and things therein than not. And anyone foolish enough to attempt to fix *every* problem on earth, or even every problem in a community of a few thousand, will achieve nothing but exhaustion and will martyr themselves to no effect. As this goes for people, so does it for companies and charities, no matter how large and powerful they may be. This is an undeniable fact—one of

which any sensible person would be unlikely to claim ignorance. We are functionally sociopathic at certain times and regarding certain causes, no matter how worthy such causes might be.

As often as not, wisdom is the art of learning to acknowledge and accept the obvious, rather than denying or raging against it. This is the year we wise up, not because we are inherently sapient, but because we have no alternative. Beat someone about the ears long enough with the truth, and he will eventually notice it is there and that it is giving him a headache.

This is the year we will finally learn to say the magic words: *I do not care. I have problems enough of my own already.* Let us all learn to listen to our inner bastards—the little voice inside of us each of us that proudly proclaims *Screw you, buddy, I'll look out for Number One!*

Our lives will be better for this.<sup>60</sup>

#### **7. *We'll stop apologizing constantly.***

And then there is the companion to the culture of constant attack and never-ending concern: *the apology cult.* Sometimes for the actions the apologizer has committed, sometimes for the actions of a group in which one is a willful member, and sometimes for being on the receiving of pure poor fortune—for being a member of an imaginary community of race, class, or culture—apologies are churned out for every possible reason and come in every form, from the *mea culpa* to the public grovel, to the carefully worded and drafted-by-a-team-of-attorneys variety. Baskin Robbins could never hope to offer as many flavors. What these apologies have in common is this: The very rarely mean much. And even more rarely do they matter.

Apologies, much like a convicted man's alleged remorse for burning down your house and decapitating your cat, fix nothing. Your house will not turn from ashes to wood, and your cat has still been deprived of one of his lives. And *forced* apologies—those done under pain of

harassment, imprisonment, or unemployment—are *worse* than nothing. Coercing one's enemies to scrape and kowtow does nothing more than make the apologizing enemy resentful, the strong and stupid ever more arrogant; and the observant more cynical.<sup>61</sup>

Nothing good comes of this. The worst ritual of the apology cult is the *proxy apology ceremony*, in which those who were not wronged demand (and receive) an apology from those who have not wronged them. This is not an act made in good faith. No one can feel the pain of another, nor is it the right of the living to accept apologies on behalf of the dead. And it is not the place of descendants to presume the attitude their forebears would have assumed in time. Had they lived a few decades more, the butcherers of American Indians might have concluded that stripping a people of their lives, livelihoods, and lands was wrong. But perhaps not. Given millennia, given until the heat death of the universe, their opinions might have never changed. They might become no less tenaciously racist or exploitive and only become *more* skillful in justifying and excusing their conduct. There is no good reason to assume anyone's ancestors would prove a whit better.

We might be wise to quit apologizing altogether or to reserve apologies for the most unusual of circumstances. These we may well do. If one feels so inclined to right a wrong, he should fix it to the best of his ability. And if he is not so inclined (or there is nothing to be done), he should neither pet nor kick drowsy dogs, knowing it best to leave them to their dreams of chase and hunt.

**8. *We'll admit that most students learn little and that most children are not special.***

Our multi-generational celebration of mental mediocrity—of the perverse and profoundly destructive notion that cognitive weakness is strength and strength is weakness, that no one is simply *a moron, dull, or about average*, but is instead *special*—will be brought to a nearly

instantaneous conclusion by COVID. More specifically, COVID's effects on distance and time as they relate to education are what will make the music stop.

First, there is the matter of *distance education*.

Distance education has a history of more than a century. Correspondence schools (of the traditional, by-mail variety) go back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>62</sup> And a few of the schools founded in that era are still open. Other iterations, such as learning by radio and television, were developed and deployed with varying degrees of success. A few, such as the Open University of China (originally *China Central Radio and TV University*), are still in operation.<sup>63</sup>

Computers and the internet have been used to deliver instruction since the 1980s, and electronically mediated courses are common enough today that a large percentage of college students have taken at least a few of them. Still, online learning remains somewhat of a redheaded stepchild. We may tout distance education as a great opportunity for the poor, the rural, the disabled, and the single mother, but Harvard still offers classes in person.

Or it did.

In COVID Land, all the world is not a stage, but a chatroom. This is the year colleges, including the elite ones, kicked their precious, moldable minds off campus quicker than one could utter *homeless undergrad*—community, continuity, and tradition be damned.<sup>64</sup>

Grade schools, middle schools, high schools, trade schools—all followed suit. And for the first time in a long time, parents and guardians can now see plainly what their budding geniuses are learning *and are capable of learning*.

So, two questions: 1) How much *does* the average student learn? 2) How much *could* the average student learn?

Answer 1: Almost nothing.<sup>65</sup>

Answer 2: Not much more.<sup>66</sup>

It is easy enough to get a child (or increasingly, *an adult*) diagnosed as learning disabled, differently gifted, *on the spectrum*, suffering from ADHD, or whatever else was recently added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). There is an entire industry dedicated to labeling and excusing anything and everything—we are fast on our way to medicalizing bad personalities and awkwardness—and any number of clinicians will conform their professional observations to the expectations of those who enable them to continue paying down (slowly, oh so slowly) their student loans.<sup>67</sup>

When discussing learning plans, behavioral management strategies, time accommodations, and medication regimens with teachers, administrators, and clinicians, it is easy enough for parents to think of all this procedurally or bureaucratically—just one more lot of paperwork and protocol. But when the spawn of said parents is plopped in front of the family computer's screen, where said child-beast oozes drams of oils, pints of mucous, and quarts of ejaculate (or gallons of menstrual blood); soils his/her/its pants; and recites the alphabet (incorrectly) ten times in a given day, considering the *thing* as being much more evolved than the amorphous, eternally suffering blob of “I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream” becomes a mental exercise only the grandly deluded can long sustain.<sup>68</sup> Thus, it is distance education that *decreases* the distance from parent to child, and in this proximity, delusions die.

Next, there is the matter of time, and how much more difficult it is to slaughter when not in the classroom.

Students (particularly *college* students) who study online may be forced *to study!* No more fighting, no more drugs, no more whoring, no more hugs. Presumably, they can do a fair amount of sexting with their classmates, just as they can have the occasional virtual bar crawl

(meaning the students sit at their computers and drink, while periodically punching/groping themselves at the behest of their peers), but there would be not much in the way of partying to be had. Social media still chugs along, but uploading photo after photo of your Instaworthy eggplant grows tiresome for even the most *like-thirsty* of netizens.

And attendance by itself does not mean much in the online classroom, so teachers and students alike must do more than stare at their phones and pretend that education is happening by way of osmosis. Thus, *something* must be done. And once the work product of our bright young minds is revealed, any sensible person—parent, teacher, advocate for education—is presented with evidence of the hugely expensive non-education students receive.

An examination of school coursework and assignments confirms that students *do not* learn much. The students themselves, by their words and deeds, confirm that they *cannot* learn much. This is a bitter pill for many, but the more schools are seen for what they are—babysitting services for children ages 6 to 36—the more we can align their design with their proper function of keeping America’s great irritation—her youth—out of our hair and out of harm’s way.

#### ***9. We’ll stop paying for bad students to go to worse colleges.***

In an era in which information is very nearly free, college is of questionable value. There are a few subjects that require special facilities and equipment—biological and biomedical sciences (about 6% of college majors for completed degrees); engineering (6%); health professions and related programs (12%); homeland security, law enforcement, and firefighting (3%); military technologies and applied sciences (<1%); physical sciences and science technologies (2%); and transportation and materials moving (<1%).<sup>69</sup> Even if we assume a few relevant fields and categories were not included in the National Center for Education Statistics table from which these numbers were obtained, no more than a third of all college graduates

require access to a classroom, a laboratory, a clinical setting, a machine/engineering facility, or a model/experimental farm for them to complete their degrees. The rest can learn the vast majority of what they need to know to achieve mastery in their fields of study remotely or independently.

There is a legitimate argument to be made some of the never-articulated process, customs, and procedures required for mastery of any number of domains (*tacit knowledge*, as described by Michael Polanyi) cannot easily be taught or learned by way of self-study or distance learning. But if a student can gain this information in a classroom of 50 students seems no less uncertain, particularly in a climate in which teachers are hesitant to interact with students except in the most cautious, detached, and legally defensible manner.<sup>70</sup>

And there is an equally legitimate argument to be made that some fields simply lack much in the way of tacit knowledge, or that tacit knowledge in many fields (to the extent that it exists) is of so little consequence that students can figure it out on their own. One can imagine a chemistry student learning that a certain apparatus only works properly if manipulated *just so* or a budding biologist learning that certain cultures or cell lines can only be sustained with the most particular care and feeding. But as one moves from the physical to the abstract, this becomes less relevant.

Once schools move the better part of their instruction online, they face a new reality—that of non-regional (and potentially *global*) competition. Aside from bureaucratic and institutional hurdles, nothing stands between rationally managed higher education organizations and the outsourcing of instruction. Philosophy, mathematics, and critical theory can be taught about as easily from across the world as from across the state. Having internationally located teachers instructing American students has the potential to save time, money, and legal resources for a school. Consider how many teachers are imported into America's classrooms to instruct

students in algebra, statistics, and economics. Sponsoring a skilled worker is difficult. The paperwork can run to hundreds of pages; the delay, to months; and the cost, to north of ten thousand dollars.<sup>71</sup>

The burden placed on the would-be professor is great as well, who must travel away from his home and all that he knows to work and live thousands of miles away, in a country from which he can be removed if his employment is terminated. Although some travel by choice, others travel by necessity. The latter group would as likely as not stay home, receive their salaries by way of electronic deposit (or PayPal), and spend their income in their motherland—where money goes further than in the United States.

And given time, change is bound to lead to *consolidation*. Schools siloed within a certain geography can establish near-monopolies on access to higher credentialing, particularly if these institutions provide partially subsidized tuition to in-state residents. Without the need for physical proximity (for most majors), schools can easily encroach upon the territory of their peers. Colleges, particularly the smaller ones, have been facing financial difficulty for years, with some older (pre-COVID) estimates being that half of all colleges will go bankrupt before 2035.<sup>72</sup> If anything, the COVID crisis will accelerate this trend, quite possibly by a decade or more.

Anyone familiar with bankruptcies and bankruptcy reorganizations should know that they do not necessarily lead to the destruction of organizations (including colleges and universities) under bankruptcy protection. They can be reorganized, or they can just as easily be divided into sections and sold to pay off creditors. And then there is the prospect of schools and universities avoiding formal bankruptcy proceedings altogether by selling assets or merging with larger organizations.

One of several keys to lowering costs by way of establishing economies of scale is for consumers (meaning students, parents, and *employers*) to recognize that colleges are *credentialing* institutions firstly, and *educational* institutions secondly.<sup>73</sup> They serve other functions—as publishers, as research institutions, and as farm teams for the NBA and NFL—but these can all be provided for more efficiently outside of the framework of the university megastructure. In the realm of sports, for instance, independent or community-backed minor league sports teams could serve the same social function as college teams do, but without being attached to higher educational institutions, which would free them from the legal vagaries of the various government regulations that control college sports operation and funding (Title IX comes to mind).<sup>74</sup>

As for the publishing, research, and science/technology apprenticeships (which is what the training of scientists and engineers should consist of, rather than a series of dry lectures)—they can also be either spun off as freestanding entities, taken over by state governments, consolidated into interstate research consortiums, or sold to larger publishing and research ventures. Whatever happens to the athletic, publishing, research, and scientific and engineering training functions of the modern college will have little effect on the purely credentialing division that processes that vast majority of college students.

So how does this relate to COVID?

COVID effectively shut down every part of America's colleges *except* for the credentialing and financial arms. School sports teams saw their practices and games canceled, university publishing houses slowed their release schedules to a crawl, and laboratories for scientific teaching and research were almost entirely closed.<sup>75</sup> With all non-credentialing

functions stripped away, all that is left is an army of bureaucrats in training and their trainers, staring into screens, darkly.

With the previously pre-COVID bacchanalia that was college life having ground to a halt, communities losing interest in and connection to schools without football seasons, and those few non-science/technology majors who are interested in gaining knowledge discovering that they can learn about as well at home on their own as they can listening to a teacher drone, college attendance becomes an unsentimental thing, to be assessed with no more feeling than one would a mutual fund.

In the end, the college credential will either be reformed, abolished, or trivialized. As it stands now, it means little and costs much. Outright abandoning/abolishing the college credential as economic signaling mechanism is one way to reduce the extraordinary expense inflicted on the great majority of students, who want nothing more than to obtain a piece of paper that affords them the possibility, however remote, of making their way to middle management.

Trivialization is another possibility. There is no reason that *everyone* cannot have a college degree. Paper is cheap, and electronic certificates are cheaper. This is a more likely terminus of ongoing trends than is the abandonment of the credentialing process. Outright elimination of an administrative institution or procedure is difficult—too many parties have vested interests in maintaining the status quo—however, dilution is far easier to manage.

If enough schools close or consolidate, they can streamline the credentialing process to the point that it becomes not much more demanding than obtaining a driver's license—hardly an *effortless* process, but not something the average schlub is unable to do. Bureaucracies make liars of us all. Demand enough in the way of paperwork, forms, and sworn statements, and eventually expediency necessitates dishonesty.

And a trivialized credential is a lie—it certifies something that all know to mean nothing. Thus, *almost everyone* may have a college degree, but the vast majority will expend little effort and less money to obtain well-printed wallpaper.

Finally, there is the matter of *reform*. This is probably the most difficult and unlikely path to take. This entails a radical rethinking of decades' worth of college design and development, going back at least to *Griggs v. Duke Power Company*.<sup>76</sup> There is no reason for most students to attend college except to obtain a certificate of compliance and docility, which can be done in other, less-wasteful ways. As for the peculiar monkish few—those who want nothing more than to think—the classical model of college may serve a purpose.

Schools, no longer burdened with the task of serving as gatekeepers to the neo-mandarin class, will be free to help the curious pursue their interests and learn abstract reasoning. Since almost all books and educational content (such as lectures) can be found online, this—the new, improved, non-credentialing college—would serve as a community and gathering place, their purpose being to promote thought and discussion, rather than issue credentials.<sup>77</sup> This will allow for tremendous decreases in bureaucratic/administrative overhead.

The arts, humanities, and social science divisions of colleges will become more similar in purpose and operation to private, interest-specific learning centers, such as music and dance/ballet academies; and hobby learning centers for ceramics, painting, or wilderness survival. Given that these private ventures will be less expensive (and subsequently less regulated), the quality of their instruction and facilities will vary from world-class to barely-up-to-building-codes bad. Some humanities students will be duped, much in the same way other students are duped into attending dojos run by incompetent fighters. The difference: The defrauding of the former is less significant than that of the latter.<sup>78</sup>

Either way, we (the taxpayers) will not be funding private academies for philosophical debate, so what happens therein concerns us little.

The transition from the current hodgepodge of credentialing, research, publishing, and athletics that defines the university to more streamlined and purpose-built replacements may not be complete by the end of the year, but the COVID crisis has accelerated this great and long-overdue process. Within a few years, there will no longer be any reason to send masses of marching morons to the nearest state center for indoctrination and soul destruction.

***10. We'll learn to stop worrying and love the robots (and remote work).***

Generations of easy living may well have caused horrific decay in the cognitive capacity of the average *first worlder*, but that is not to say that we will quit learning altogether. The lesson of 2020—a hard taught one—is this: *Stop worrying about jobs. Stop worrying about your neighbors. Love the robots.*<sup>79</sup>

Fifty years ago, our neighbors were *neighbors*—nearby humans we knew as individuals. Twenty years ago, they were *the people in the house down the street*—we might not have known them personally, but we could recognize them on sight. Ten years ago, they were *something that lives over there*—we might not have known or recognized them, but we suspected that they were alive: *Something* had to be turning on and off the lights and ordering pizza.<sup>80</sup>

Now, our neighbors are either potential disease vectors, or communists, feminazis, anarchists, or MAGA-morons—whatever terrible things that go bump in our respective nights. Even when we knew our neighbors, we might have not cared much for them: *Familiarity breeds contempt*, et cetera. Today we drop the pretense. We no longer need to pretend to care about their jobs or incomes. And human interaction has become a monstrous social and legal liability.

All this liability, complication, and risk of disease or death makes staying home (and minimizing human interaction) more appealing than it was even a few years ago. And liability hurts employers as well. Employees get sick, employees sue, and employees risk embarrassing whoever cuts their paychecks.

Automation has been industrially and economically relevant for generations. Robotic welders and surgical assistants are already used so frequently as to be almost unworthy of attention.<sup>81</sup> Since the 2004 DARPA Grand Challenge (when a self-driving car was first able to complete the 150-mile course), self-driving cars have been slowly but steadily improving, and Tesla's most recent production vehicles are only a few software upgrades away from dispensing with the human driver as anything more than a legally mandated seat warmer.<sup>82</sup>

Grocers, retailers, and warehouses are also gradually dispensing with human shelf stockers, loaders and unloaders, packers, and cashiers.<sup>83</sup> Considering the COVID outbreaks at major retailers and in Amazon warehouses, accelerating to the fullest extent economical the replacement of man with machine is prudent. And then there is the matter of demands for higher wages. *Fight for 15*, which has been chugging along since 2012, has had some success, and given the increasingly left-wing/pro-labor/anticorporate tenor of a great many 2020 protests, the demand for higher wages is likely to grow louder, more persistent and of greater effect.<sup>84</sup> This makes unskilled labor more expensive (and automated labor comparatively cheaper) than it would be otherwise. So we will have more and better machines replacing those workers who cannot or will not work 24-hour shifts in virus-filled, un-climate-controlled warehouses.<sup>85</sup>

And then there is COVID-accelerated growth of remote work. Slightly more than 50% of American adults would prefer to work primarily at home, and nearly 75% of Americans would appreciate the option to work at home at least occasionally.<sup>86</sup> Not all jobs can be done this way,

but many of those that cannot are steadily being automated away or transformed into jobs that can (telehealth and remote surgery are just two examples of the latter). COVID led to a huge increase in at-home work, and there is compelling evidence that the end of travel and distancing restrictions will not reverse this.<sup>87</sup>

Each of these trends—the growth of automation and the expansion of distance work—reinforces the other. The more robots, of the entirely autonomous or of the human-guided variety, the greater the percentage of labor that can be done from home. And the more people choose to stay at home, the more relevant delivery and service robots become.

As Millennials have come to dominate society, the *fear of missing out* (FOMO) has been replaced with the *joy of missing out* (JOMO)—the pleasure one takes from missing many inconveniences of socializing and of keeping the company of those one would rather avoid.<sup>88</sup> There is nothing new about wanting to keep one's own good company. What *has* changed is the role of technology, which makes being a cheerful loner all that much more cheerful, and COVID. For the first time in living memory, the American imperative of *get out more* became that of *for the love of God, stay home!* And best of all, keeping to oneself became not a sign of being antisocial, damaged, or dangerous, but one of being *a responsible and self-sacrificing citizen*.<sup>89</sup>

The extrovert went from fantastic to foolish, feckless fleabags, and the introvert rose from suspected pervert to known patriot.<sup>90</sup> This great shift helps not only the shy and the retiring, it benefits the entire planet. The average American adult drives in excess of 13,000 miles per year, and the country consumed 3.39 billion barrels of gasoline in 2019.<sup>91</sup> Although some of this is used for purposes other than fueling cars and motorcycles (powering lawn equipment, off-road vehicles, and small planes), cars are the primary consumer. If the average car and motorcycle mileage rates are cut in half by way of remote work—not an unrealistic assumption—a billion

barrels (or more) of oil could be saved every year, and more than 10,000 lives could easily be saved premature termination by way of vehicular accident.<sup>92</sup> And as for the loss of time due to commuting, the average American spends a total of 19 workdays worth of time commuting to work and from every year.<sup>93</sup> Assuming workload and efficiency remain constant, every person who transitions from working in a cubicle to working at home gains the equivalent of three-weeks' vacation every year.

Finally, there is the added benefit of transparency. There are few better places to hide from work than an office. Exercise and bathroom breaks can burn through a few hours a workday, but relying on such tactics is the hallmark of amateurs and peons—those bound to lose. The real lords of time destruction make more money, have better titles, and exert even less effort than their inferiors.

Achieving victory in the war on productivity requires a sophisticated attack on all things temporal. The first weapon: *the meeting*. The second: *the email*. And those who most deftly wield these two can achieve almost perfect uselessness and be promoted for doing so. Nod along, repeat a few key phrases, project enthusiasm (while committing to nothing in particular), and suggest that any idea or course of action be given a meeting of its own and you have mastered the meaningless meeting.<sup>94</sup> But this is a mere rusty saber in comparison to the Gatling gun of the excruciating email. Here is complete user's manual:

- 1) Find some task or question to address
- 2) Compose an answer
- 3) Add between 20 and 50 irrelevant tangents
- 4) Reorganize the text so that it appears coherent but lacks any discernable meaning

5) Helpfully invite the recipient to contact you if he or she has any questions or requires any clarification. (Rest assured that the recipient will.)

6) CC at least three other people, just so that they can be *kept in the loop*.

The saber may slice time into paper-thin strips, but the excruciating email does one better—it annihilates it so completely and renders time itself so thoroughly dead that DNA and dental records are the only tools sufficient to identify the remains.<sup>95</sup>

But these weapons are less effective on the home front of the home office. Video conference calls may be riddled with technical problems, but the awkward and delayed nature of the interaction that occurs therein discourages time wasting. Their *inefficiency and unnaturalness* demand that participants be more direct and more efficient. This *seems* paradoxical, but it is not much different than that which caused telegrams and text messages to be short and to the point. One can ramble in person for hours, but when paying by the word, the communicator tends to get to the heart of the matter.<sup>96</sup> Granted, the cost of interacting by way of Zoom is only a fraction of that of sending a telegram (and easier on one's thumbs than sending a text message), but little delays here and there make speaking for the sake of mere idleness more trouble than it is worth.

And then there is the matter of doling out assignments. The remote worker submits an assignment on time (or not), and the work is acceptable (or not). The worker, the time spent working, and the quality of the work are all there—digitally recorded and open to review. Claims of *assisting, inspiring, or motivating* the worker are hard sells. And objective measures of worker productivity are easier to make when computers track everything.<sup>97</sup>

The people who are most likely to be hurt by difficult-to-falsify performance metrics—middle managers. But they are, at least as often as not, in the way, their *people skills* and red staplers be damned.

### ***11. We'll innovate faster than we did before COVID.***

Medical science moves at a snail's pace, and the pace has grown slower in recent decades. This is partially the product of the increasing complexity of treating a great many of the remaining diseases (with the low-hanging fruit having already been plucked).<sup>98</sup> It is also a result of differences in work style and legal norms. A great many of the significant human studies of yesteryear could not be conducted today—the entities responsible for reviewing and approving the research protocol (institutional review boards) would either revise such research to the point of uselessness or ban it outright.<sup>99</sup> And the approach to scientific and engineering research used from the beginning of the Industrial Age to NASA's heyday would be considered almost suicidally reckless by modern standards. The development of powered flight was not much more than a series of poorly controlled crashes and explosions, with the first fatality happening under the watch of Orville Wright himself.<sup>100</sup> The development of nuclear fission and medicine and rocketry was not much better, with the latter claiming human and animal casualties alike.<sup>101</sup>

The low-hanging fruit problem may not be easily addressed, but the matter of risk aversion will almost certainly be transformed by COVID and the public, governmental, and private reactions to it. Although COVID has proven relatively mild in its effects on public health (as far as pandemics go), its spread has already spurred better and faster sharing of medical/genetic information among nations, advancements in public health and treatment protocols, and almost shockingly fast vaccine development.<sup>102</sup>

Outside of the medical field, famously sclerotic institutions, such as law schools, went from very nearly refusing to acknowledge the distance learning paradigm to embracing it wholeheartedly in a matter *of days*.<sup>103</sup> Even the court system—probably one of the most rigid and self-important institutions on earth—has seized the opportunity to work from a distance: Judges

may not care how much of a burden one pointless hearing after the next imposes on poor and disadvantaged defendants (or how much time, money, and heartache these defendants could be saved by way of technology), but they embrace the modern at lightning speed when they fear their wellbeing may be imperiled by a coughing convict.<sup>104</sup>

As post-COVID shutdown economic and cultural complications ripple through our society, the institutions that do not change will die (as they well should).

***12. We'll finally recognize how many Americans want to watch the world burn (and why).***

We should have seen this—the current political instability—coming: President Trump, regardless of what one thinks him, was not elected by an army of the undead nor aliens. Rather he was chosen by millions of Americans. Some bought his pitch for Making America Great Again, some hoped he could slow the nation's slide into senescence, some had faith in the Christian piety of a twice-divorced Manhattanite billionaire, and some wanted lower taxes. Many simply disliked him *less* than they disliked the other team, but a fair number saw him as *an agent of chaos*—a meme-making bull with a Twitter account in a china shop nearly half a continent in size.<sup>105</sup>

Too many dismiss this last factor—the *chaos vote*—as being of no consequence, or pigeonhole it, as though it can be fairly described as *left, right, radical, Antifa, Marxist, racist, incel*, or some other convenient term that suggests a cohesion of belief as understood by the average sociology, psychology, or political science major. There *is* cohesion of sentiment in this portion of the electorate. But what binds this lot together is more nebulous and more frightening than what the average man and woman of comfort and privilege can easily grasp. Worse yet, it is far more *universal*.

Media and policy institutes are either dumb regarding the source of nation-destroying rage or do a fine job of playing the part, mocking those who are not happy to have their communities and families destroyed and their lives commoditized by the chosen few. No matter how badly these elites (left and right) mangle what they claim to be intent on improving, they and their mouthpieces will not frankly speak of the errors they have made.

To the extent any acknowledge that the great unwashed masses have any grounds for dissatisfaction, some may profess a vague sympathy for the Black Lives Matter protests. But only the rarest of the rare managers, professionals, and social engineers would take any responsibility for undermining the Black household and the Black middle class through a toxic combination of poorly designed social welfare programs and job-destroying free trade policies.<sup>106</sup> This privileged ignorance is more than annoying to the non-oblivious, it is *dangerous to the entire country*.

Black families and communities have been destroyed. White ones have as well, with but the smallest delay. *Fury, detachment, disconnect, and nihilism* may manifest in different ways in different communities, but they are not specific to any one race, religion, color, or creed. And until the deliberate unknowing of cause and remedy is corrected by a skillful instructor, our society will only continue to become less stable. This year *is* that dear teacher, and she is giving wayward students the vicious beatings and stern guidance they require.

Art imitates life, imitates art. Consider the breakout film of 2019: It foreshadowed 2020 so closely as to be unnerving. An examination of its underlying message and how radically it contrasts films of even a few decades prior reveals much of the new American psyche.

*Joker*—a tragedy about a man who tries to be funny—resonated far more effectively than one would anticipate in a society of prosperity, peace, and relative safety. Nothing about the

world of *Joker* is aligned with the physical world of the present. Our cities are not totally overrun by massive rats. New York City (upon which Gotham is clearly based) is less 1980s punk hellhole than it is gentrified playground of the superrich. There are few (petty) criminals in the City That Never Sleeps—they cannot make rent. And the Marauders of Manhattan do not pick pockets and violate damsels. They drain entire economies and rape nations, and they would rarely stoop so low as to pick a Patek Philippe Grand Complications up from the sidewalk—doing so is not worth their time. Mugging such peons as are the lot of us would be beneath their villainous dignity.<sup>107</sup>

*Joker* is not materially realistic. It is drab. It is about a difficult, psychologically damaged man who has been abused and betrayed by the few people who have seen fit to notice him and who has been ignored by all the rest. Arthur Fleck—the clown who would become Joker—has more in common with the nameless protagonist of Gogol’s “The Overcoat” or Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* than he does with a character sprung from the mind of Steinbeck, Melville, or more modern writers, such as Stephen King.

What Fleck and his unnamed Slavic compatriots in the Kingdom of Despair share (and that separates them from most American protagonists) is worse even than a lack of friends—it is the lack of a specific enemy. Ahab had his whale, King’s protagonists have their supernatural opponents, and Steinbeck had his well-defined social wrongs. To have an enemy can be better than not—at least those who have them can direct their energies in a named direction. Fleck is deprived of even the small comfort of having someone to hate. Rather, he has *everyone* to hate in general and *no one* to hate in particular. There is no reason for him to *not* hate anyone, and much reason for him set the world aflame. And although Arthur might never comprehend it, his

feelings are more than the result of base and destructive instinct; they are part of an evolutionarily sound reproductive and survival strategy.<sup>108</sup>

The problem is not that Fleck enjoys his time alone—that he appreciates solitude—but that he has no one at all. This is fundamentally different. No friends, no enemies, no purpose—the only thing Fleck has is a few petty tormentors.

The only way the Arthur Flecks of the world stand much chance of having success is if the existing power structure decays to such a point that entrenched people and systems break. Only then—when all is up for grabs—may they have some small chance of getting more than the *absolutely nothing* to which they lay claim at present.

What else do these men—Fleck and the Slavs—share?

They are so injured and so fragile that kindness would be at least as likely to destroy them as save them—one can kill a long-starved person with too much food, offered too quickly.<sup>109</sup> Anything more than a bit of passing, carefully calibrated humanity towards them would likely put them on high alert: They would not (and could not) know what to make of such a thing. There is not much anyone can do for *Fleck, et cetera* that does not involve turning the world upside down. That is the most disturbing part of all. Few would be very much inclined to help any of these men—they are not lovable and aiding them would do little to burnish one's reputation—and even those who might, would be hard-pressed to find any measure or medicine that had fewer side effects than benefits.

And *Joker* was a 2019 film. Turn back the clock a mere two decades (1999). The top five films in the United States were *Star Wars Episode I*, *The Sixth Sense*, *Toy Story 2*, *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me*, and *The Matrix*.<sup>110</sup> Granted, *The Matrix* was a film about breaking free from the conventions and mental slavery of modern living. And *Fight Club*, an

iconic representation of disconnect from the modern, consumerist world, was released that same year. Yet *The Matrix* and *Fight Club* are different from *Joker*. Neo breaks free from the Matrix. The unnamed protagonist of *Fight Club* eventually liberates himself from his alter ego and annihilates a nation's worth of debt. Even at their darkest, there is always Hollywood Hope and Happy Endings™ in the films of yesteryear.

But for Arthur Fleck, hope is not an option—the light at the end of the tunnel is the possibility of being drugged into catatonia (at worst) or breaking free from the asylum to punish the world that punished him. *This* is what resonates—the feelings of a man without connection to anyone or anything. This hollow ringing sounds no better in one time or place or culture than it does in a different one. It has little basis in racial or acculturated prejudices. It can be described no better in one language than in another. It is general in its appeal and relatability. And although ideology can *harness* the energies of the Flecks of the world, namely by giving them a sense of place and purpose, it cannot eliminate them. And even this harnessing is of limited effect and duration.<sup>111</sup>

One can make too much of movies—sad, happy, mind-numbingly stupid, grandiose, and romantic films have been made in different ratios since film has been an art form. But the difference between box office boom and box office bust tells us something—something of the temperature and mood of a people. Turn to television and consider this: How well would *Friends* land in the 2020 zeitgeist? How well would *Breaking Bad* have done in 1997?

One can also make *too little* of the arts or treat them too narrowly. Not all Arthur Flecks are White, thin, and living with their mother. Some can be in financially stable positions. Some may have prestige. Those who want to set a match to it all are oftentimes poor (or not), frequently poorly educated (or highly educated), White (or Black or Brown), and rural (or urban

or suburban). They may be single, or they may be married or divorced. Academia houses a fair number of them—those who howl against the world in journals so dry and obscure that even their editors, who undertake the (largely unpaid) labor of wading through one Foucault-referencing manuscript after the next, struggle to read what they publish. But one can be respected, tenured, and well-paid and still be without a true friend in the world.<sup>112</sup>

The desire to deconstruct (and sometimes *dismember*) an entire culture is not often felt by those who consider themselves meaningfully connected to it. Those who perceive themselves as having a place of some value within a community may see its flaws and work to correct them, but this is a matter of *improvement*—of remodeling the house or adding rooms—not tearing it to the ground.

So now we see that we have a problem—one that 2019 showed us in film and 2020 is showing us in the streets—that cannot be easily remedied.

And this is great news!

Not that something like 24% of Americans would like to watch the country be leveled by nuclear blasts (or incinerated by more conventional means)—there is little cheering in that fact.<sup>113</sup> Rather, the *good* is that the despair, the pain, and the isolation felt by millions of Americans is now impossible to deny.

Since 2000, we have been *Bowling Alone*. Now we burn our cities down together.

Fleck, the Slavs, the discontented poor, and the discontented not-so-poor all share this: Their world has *already* been turned upside down once. *Notes from Underground* was written when Russia was integrating into the West. The values and traditions of the people were being swept aside by the winds of technological change (the Industrial Revolution) and crushed underneath new thoughts and philosophies to which few could quickly adapt.<sup>114</sup> Likewise, the

discontented poor have had the customs of their ancestors—dictating everything from the role of the family to the role of the employer to the nature of relationships between men and women—derided, replaced, or made irrelevant. Their better-off peers have seen much of the same.

We have come to expect an entire class of elites to live entirely in the world of ideas. For the most select of the most select—those with a great bent towards metaphysics—such a life is nearly the platonic ideal.<sup>115</sup> But only a peculiar few have the mental buoyancy to remain afloat when waves of ideas come crashing down on their heads as though they were boats off the coast of Kanagawa. For the rest, this is a miserable way of drowning.

We all too quickly forget how much tribe and clan ruled our lives until what was, in the scheme of history, moments ago. We have *tried* to replace these with radical independence, which works well in theory, but only if the better part of the population proves capable of critical thought and self-determination with little in the way of guidance from family, community, or elders. This is too much for the average man or woman, and most of the supposedly exceptional cannot fare much better. Even amongst the most intelligent, there are not many adventurers, and an adventurous spirit, as well as raw cognitive ability, is what freethinking requires. Free and critical thinking also requires a willingness to attack one's ego throughout life—to admit that the thinker may be wrong about nearly anything and everything, including dearly held values—and this process of ongoing creative destruction is unpleasant. It is unpleasant because it demands the slow murder of the old self and its replacement with the new. Here is the paradox: One cannot fully become mentally independent, with self-formed thoughts, values, and beliefs, unless he is willing to demolish himself. Only through this can he pull down and away the thoughts suggested to him by men he has never heard of, who have taught him that the rubber stamps of established beliefs and doctrines are somehow the individual's own.<sup>116</sup>

The sooner we acknowledge this—that we cannot turn the world upside down for millions and expect them to be anything but angry, injured, hateful, and vulnerable and that they *cannot* construct workable selves without the help of others—the sooner we can set about turning the world again. The select few must devise a common set of beliefs, suitable to most, that will allow the better part of humanity to function sustainably. They must construct communities bound by something other than fury, pain, mindless hedonism, or the collapsing shell of family. They must toil to make something new.

A different metaphor: No one can simply repave the old road: It cannot take us where we need to go. Nor can the building of new roads be left only to those with a commercial interest in doing so: All such people and businesses will do is engineer highways that lead to the prosperity and power for themselves at the awful expense of the many. This task—that of studying the old ways, including both those that failed and those that succeeded, assessing the needs and resources of modernity, and of finally building something that works—stands to be one of the great challenges of the coming decades. Those who can think and who can reason for themselves and others will have little choice but to undertake this extraordinary task if they wish to have a habitable world. Otherwise, the Arthur Flecks and their companions will only grow more destructive.

The conventional experts can do little to contribute to this endeavor—they are too self-assured in their ways to see their failings. So the species must rely upon the few, the proud, the free thinkers who are willing to labor on, despite the scorn of both the indifferent and the ignorant. And the only reward the thinkers are likely to receive is knowing that they are engineers of the roads and the turners of the world.

Some of them will rise to this occasion. This is the year they will see the need, the year that their ingenuity starts to get the best of them. They will not fix so much of what is broken because they *care about everything*, but because they are builders of peoples, myths, and spirits, and they can no more abide disordered societies than can a musician of the highest caliber abide the sound of a poorly tuned instrument. The freethinker, both despite *and because* of his ongoing and well-controlled self-destruction, is the bulwark against the entropy of the universe.

***13. We'll learn to recognize both the inevitability and necessity of death.***

*And yet, death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it, and that is how it should be, because death is very likely the single best invention of life. It's life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new. —Steve Jobs<sup>117</sup>*

America is awakening from the dream of the evermore—from the notion that our institutions will never die, our way of life will never be replaced by another, and our citizens will never fracture into incohesive factions or be swallowed by another faster, stronger, smarter, or meaner people. We have our share of survivalists and doomsters, but they are no less attached to the American dream than are the rest of us: In their minds, the collapse of the nation either is precipitating or will precipitate the collapse of civilization itself.

Decline and decay are rarely so fascinating. Governments fail, currencies collapse, but life goes on, with most people do as they have always done—trying to make their way through the day without irritating the people with guns.<sup>118</sup>

We are not the first to develop this hubris. Stefan Zweig's *Golden Age of Security* encompassed several decades of Pre-World War I history, in which his homeland of Austria was prosperous, progressive, and placid.<sup>119</sup> If not *the end of history*, Zweig's era was the end of dramatic, violent, and destructive history—all replaced by technological innovation and steady

improvements in living standards and human rights. The parallels to late-1990s America are difficult to ignore for all but the most unmindful.

Turning to the present: much of the stability we take for granted will pass. And this is as it should be. Aging governments and ways of life are bound too much to the past. Sustaining them can only be done by strapping the nation down as its muscles gradually atrophy. Such was the approach that the Qing Dynasty took to controlling China, which went from the country with the world's largest economy to one under the heel of drug-peddling, big-nosed invaders in the space of a few generations.<sup>120</sup>

To predict that America will undergo a period of declining global prestige and decreasing global involvement and significance (Sections 2 and 3) and to predict that American lives will improve involves no contradiction. Two decades of war in the Middle East and Africa have proven costly, and by letting die the dream of a world in which all peoples and values are perfectly in harmony with our own, we can effectively enrich ourselves to the tune of trillions of dollars.<sup>121</sup> And billions will hate us less than they do today. Rome conquered the better part of Europe, but the Eternal City is not under perpetual attack by Goths or Gauls demanding freedom. Old grudges are forgotten, and old wounds heal in time. In a generation, such could be the case with the United States and the Middle East. The desert peoples may never like us, but if we leave them alone, they will cease to think of us much one way or the other.

And then there is the death of the individual. We can sustain the fantasy of unlimited medical care and resource expenditure for all only so long as there are no crises.<sup>122</sup> We have avoided the hard question of who lives and who dies by throwing money at everyone. But this does not always work. There are hard decisions to be made. *If you don't pick one kid, Sophie, they both go to the shower!*<sup>123</sup> Refusing to decide is a decision of its own.

We were completely unprepared to decide who received a respirator and who did not, so luck, panic, and emotion made the decision for us. We, as a nation, *decided* to let irrationality rule. But we were lucky. The next virus might do more than save Social Security a few dollars here and there. So now is the time to weigh our values carefully and decide how we will mete out life and death.

Then there is the matter of *the imperative*—the sense one has that the minutes, hours, and days are irreplaceable and should be used deliberately, lest they go to waste. There are few better cures for procrastination than a terminal diagnosis. And a terminal diagnosis is what we have all been given from the moment of conception, even if we forget as much. Our ever-growing bureaucracy, our monstrous system of credentialing—one that discourages the competent from engaging in skilled and professional work and favors the plodding—and our infantilization of children until they are nearly in their middle years: Death will solve these problems. It sweeps out the old and broken. It makes room for the new. It impels those who would be waiting in line forever to the front.

Finally, there are those of us who will be rendered useless by the change. The middle manager, the petty social engineers and technicians—what can and should be done with these people? A few will leap into the abyss. Others will fight change with all their might. Others still will cause trouble of varying degrees or join the ranks of Fleck. They may be good students and highly trained, but they are not much better equipped to find purpose in the post-2020 era than is the average cart pusher. They may be worse equipped in some ways: Their work is their identity. Most cart pushers are not so burdened.

Those who cannot keep up with the march and the rhythm of the world are unlikely to simply get out of the way. The thinkers must consider these people too and find a place for them.

## *Hindsight, Foresight, and Perfect Vision*

The world of 2021 will be different than that of 2020. Every day is different—a statement so obvious as to be clichéd—but different differences are . . . *different*. Watching a puppy grow into a dog is one thing. Watching a caterpillar transform into *Mothra* is another thing entirely.

A technological singularity—the Industrial Revolution—already happened.<sup>124</sup> The next one will happen faster. There is nothing new about singularities. They are just weeks where decades happen or years where millennia do. Foresight is limited in normal times, and even hindsight does not afford us perfect 20/20 vision. We can only see the slightest ways past singularities—they warp the light around them—but that is better than seeing nothing at all.

We turn back to how this missive started—with sex and death. Each necessitates the other, and 2020 shall have plenty of both. The latter—the death of the old things and ways and people—will hurt, possibly even more than we fear. The former—the messy, the unhygienic, and the frequently awkward creation of the new—will be less enjoyable than we hoped. This is the year that the new will be made (if not necessarily born). This is the year that much that should have happened long ago finally does.

This is the best year ever.

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<sup>1</sup> For those who don't get the joke: Sir Thomas More was decapitated. See <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-More-English-humanist-and-statesman#ref236522>

<sup>2</sup> This is a Buddhist concept. For a clear explanation of *conditioned things* see <https://www.lionsroar.com/it-all-depends/>

<sup>3</sup> Dead convicts and road trips! Hooray! See <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/which-road-is-known-as-the-road-of-bones.html>

<sup>4</sup> *The End of History* is both a concept and a book. The short explanation: The liberal democratic order would prevail across the world, with much prosperity and peace resulting thereof. See <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0743284550/>

<sup>5</sup> Yes, we funded terrorists. See <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldhistory2/chapter/the-united-states-and-the-mujahideen/>

<sup>6</sup> For the young'uns: The United States backed the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, a leader so hated by his

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fellow countrymen he was overthrown and replaced by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who would not have been out of place in the Old Testament. See [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/khomeini\\_ayatollah.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/khomeini_ayatollah.shtml)

<sup>7</sup> The Manhattan Project relied heavily on imported brain power. See <https://www.atomicheritage.org/article/scientist-refugees-and-manhattan-project>

<sup>8</sup> Despite some efforts at legal reform, the United States still has the world's highest incarceration rate. See <https://ejournal.org/news/united-states-still-has-highest-incarceration-rate-world/>

<sup>9</sup> Transfer of materiel to law enforcement happened under Program 1033. See <https://www.wired.com/story/pentagon-hand-me-downs-militarize-police-1033-program/>

<sup>10</sup> Not only goatherds are killed, but also any number of poor schlubs at the wrong place at the wrong time. See <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/projects/drone-war>

<sup>11</sup> I am as capitalistic as they come, but after listening to their anthem, even I want to collectivize something. Hear <https://youtu.be/U06jlgpMtQs>

<sup>12</sup> Apparently, some people don't like being bombed. *Who knew?* See <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/30/world/middleeast/iraq-airstrikes-us-iran-militias.html>

<sup>13</sup> Yes, Hillary Clinton did refer to *superpredators*, and yes, she was fearmongering. She was not the first to do this. She will not be the last. Politicians manipulate us with fear, *because we let them*. See [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hillarys-superpredator-comment\\_b\\_9655052](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hillarys-superpredator-comment_b_9655052)

<sup>14</sup> Yet more fearmongering, *sleeper cells* (as a concept) were borrowed from anticommunist propaganda. Finding any real ones has proven difficult. See [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=1hzbumK5dNAC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&ots=K7xkqAch91&sig=aCrktcebCktkMN\\_RZD60mmIANLE#v=onepage&q=sleeper&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=1hzbumK5dNAC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&ots=K7xkqAch91&sig=aCrktcebCktkMN_RZD60mmIANLE#v=onepage&q=sleeper&f=false)

<sup>15</sup>(A) Probably the biggest non-event in decades, Y2K was supposed to hit underprepared nations, such as China, particularly hard. Yet almost no problems were reported, even there. See <https://www.deseret.com/1999/12/14/19480462/y2k-failures-in-china-could-leave-many-areas-scrambling-in-the-dark>

(B) No major problems in China. See <https://money.cnn.com/2000/01/01/worldbiz/y2k/>

(C) And for a general summary of events see <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kpmg/2020/06/23/covid-19-how-will-sports-and-live-entertainment-find-a-new-normal/#600fdd5c7ae8>

<sup>16</sup> Asian giant hornets are also called *murder hornets*—a hyperbolic term for an insect, but a great name for football team. See <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/murder-hornets-us-honeybees-washington/>

<sup>17</sup> One could take the Global War on Terror as a never-ending money pit, but a smaller and better documented example is the development of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Virtual Case File program. See <https://cs.gmu.edu/~mlocasto/research/securehealth/content/post-VCF.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> We have less choice in media than we realize, with many different media brands being controlled by a handful of companies. See <https://www.webfx.com/blog/internet/the-6-companies-that-own-almost-all-media-infographic/>

<sup>19</sup> Distrust of experts is an American tradition. We've just gotten better at it. See <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/2018/0827/Who-made-you-an-expert-Is-America-s-distrust-of-elites-becoming-more-toxic>

<sup>20</sup> Predictions as to the effects of COVID and predictions as to the effects of reopening the economy have been dramatic, confusing, and alarmist. This is the result of structural flaws in the United States public health system and competing political agendas. See <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/06/american-public-health-experts-coronavirus-masks.htm>

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<sup>21</sup> I am not suggesting that COVID-19 is a hoax. The evidence that it is a real virus that can cause real harm is considerable. What I *am* stating is that the institutional response to the spread of the disease was both excessive and inconsistent. Certainly, some safety measures and precautions should have been taken, but they should have been more focused on protecting uniquely vulnerable populations, such as the elderly and those with compromised immune systems.

<sup>22</sup> (A) Defining American values can be difficult, largely because Americans emphasize individualism so much that they hesitate to make statements about the collective. Nevertheless, researchers developed a list of 13 values widely shared by Americans. See <https://msu.edu/~mandrews/global/americanvalues.pdf>

(B) These are far from universal. One of these (Item 3 on the list) is the belief that meeting deadlines is more important than taking the time to build relationships. This indicates a *monochronic* culture. The differences between such cultures and their opposite (*polychronic* cultures) have been the subject of much study. See <https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/everything-time-monochronism-polychronism-orientation-6902>

<sup>23</sup> (A) One could also argue that the Iraq War served to enrich defense contractors, but that could be said about every conflict since the age of Smedley D. Butler (and probably a great many before). See

<https://ratical.org/ratville/CAH/warisaracket.html> and <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/01/15/war-is-still-a-rocket/>

(B) As for the reasons for the war, true believers in *the American Way* (largely neoconservatives) almost certainly played a noteworthy role in initiating it. See <https://newrepublic.com/article/153450/enduring-power-neoconservatism>

(C) Other writers have examined this assertion that the Iraq War was not about oil in more depth than I could. See <https://quillette.com/2019/05/06/the-iraq-war-was-not-about-oil/>

<sup>24</sup> This tendency to remain isolated from the local population is not unique to Americans abroad. Foreign students in United States college rarely know their American classmates well, with language limitations explaining some of this social disconnect. See

<https://www.voanews.com/student-union/why-arent-americans-and-international-students-becoming-friends> and <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1140259.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> (A) There is no entirely objective way to quantify provincialism. Generally, Americans do not travel much. See <https://nypost.com/2018/01/11/a-shocking-number-of-americans-never-leave-home/>

(B) As for the elite, most college graduates do not travel, and of those who do, the majority travel to Europe, rather than regions with greater cultural differences. See <https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/trends-us-study-abroad>

<sup>26</sup> For those unfamiliar with Dunning-Kruger see <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/technology/what-is-the-dunning-kruger-effect/ar-BB16ohMI>

<sup>27</sup> Even the annoyingly human-rights concerned Europeans are not without their sins, and not just in their brutal exploitation of non-European peoples throughout the colonial era. See <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/european-union>

<sup>28</sup> While writing this, I thought of Michigan, where I studied for several years. See

<https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/michigan/2019/05/03/more-michigan-roads-now-rated-poor-than-fair/3662836002/> and

<https://www.npr.org/2019/04/25/717104335/5-years-after-flints-crisis-began-is-the-water-safe>

<sup>29</sup> The world views America differently than it did a few years ago. The simplistic argument (as follows) blames Trump almost exclusively, but there is almost certainly more to it than that. See one diplomat's take on the matter. See <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/06/america-image-power-trump/613228/>

<sup>30</sup> This fine phrase was borrowed, slightly modified, from C.S. Lewis. See

<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/526469-of-all-tyrannies-a-tyranny-sincerely-exercised-for-the-good>

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<sup>31</sup> (A) We take for granted that Chinese values (and Eastern values in general) are different from those of the West; however, that is not to say that most of us have a clear understanding of what these values. For a detailed analysis (to be compared to the survey of American values mentioned in Note 22) see

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/afbb/48c3f552fd6c752ba5931e81a5528258c1e0.pdf>

(B) For a Chinese perspective of the Middle Kingdom's role in world history see *Superpower Interrupted: The Chinese History of the World* <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07YSN3XLH/>

<sup>32</sup> The United States has a total of 234 active-duty bases, 66 of which are overseas. The total cost of Base Operation Support (BOS), which only covers the essentials of keeping the base itself functional, not the cost of weaponry, et cetera, was \$25 billion in 2016, with the cost of maintaining a single overseas base being much higher than that of maintaining one in the United States. See <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2019-11/55849-CBO-BOS-costs.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> I first thought that an 80%+ death rate for Native Americans seemed high, but that seems to be the consensus. See <https://phys.org/news/2016-01-aftermath-native-american-depopulation-impacted.html>

<sup>34</sup> WWI deaths. See <https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I/Killed-wounded-and-missing> WWII deaths. See <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/wwii-casualties-by-country.html>

<sup>35</sup> For a summary of these *war-is-inevitable* arguments see <https://www.newsweek.com/south-china-sea-war-nuclear-submarines-china-united-states-barack-obama-xi-473428>

<sup>36</sup> The Chinese nuclear stockpile is estimated to consist of 290 large (strategic) nuclear weapons and a great many smaller weapons suited to battlefield use. The country may well double the size of its nuclear arsenal by 2030. See <https://time.com/5597955/china-nuclear-weapons-intelligence/>

<sup>37</sup> Also called the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant Zone of Alienation, the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone is not empty—a few people and a great many animals and plants live therein. But simply because one *can* live there, does not mean one should. See <https://www.businessinsider.com/what-daily-life-inside-chernobyls-exclusion-zone-is-really-like-2019-4?op=1>

<sup>38</sup> Zheng He was a Chinese adventurer and admiral. His exploits covered vast areas, but he explored more than he settled. See <https://www.ancient.eu/article/1334/the-seven-voyages-of-zheng-he/>

<sup>39</sup> As far as I have been able to ascertain, the Chinese never made any effort to translate their religious or philosophical texts into foreign languages prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Given that they were uninterested in making this much effort, there would appear no evidence that proselytizing is a priority for adherents of Confucianism or Daoism.

<sup>40</sup> (A) Chinese views of the United States and American views of the Chinese mirror each other, with neither side taking a particularly positive (or negative) view of the other. In 2015, both Chinese and Americans expressed lukewarm views of their counterparts' nation. See <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/30/6-facts-about-how-americans-and-chinese-see-each-other/> and <http://graphics.wsj.com/lists/camerica0320>

(B) As far back as 2012, these views were not overwhelmingly positive. See

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2012/11/01/how-americans-and-chinese-view-each-other/>

(C) From my personal experience (as a teacher in China): I found many Chinese to be vaguely curious about America, and of the opinion that America is fine so long as she does not interfere with Chinese affairs. Overall, the view was neutral. *The Chinese were indifferent to America (and Americans).*

<sup>41</sup> Estimated deaths from COVID (worldwide) as of June 30, 2020: 513,268. See <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/worldwide-graphs/#total-cases>

<sup>42</sup> This assumes a world population of 7.8 billion. It can be contrasted with the 3% global death rate for WWII. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_War\\_II\\_casualties](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_casualties)

Thus, WWII—the event that precipitated the last major global power transitions—can be said to be around 150 times more deadly when adjusted for population growth.

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<sup>43</sup> See Note 30 for the origin of this phrase.

<sup>44</sup> Most children can grasp the rudiments of the scientific method. Here, a video explaining the fundamentals in language a ten-year old should be able to understand <https://youtu.be/qAJ8IF4HI20>

<sup>45</sup> (A) Not everyone with the title of *scientist* follows the scientific method, hence Lysenko and his bizarre notions (and keep in mind that he was regarded as a much-respected *expert* for much of his life). See <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/12/trofim-lysenko-soviet-union-russia/548786/>

(B) Most of Lysenko's experimental results could not be replicated, and *replicability* is the hallmark of good science. Much of modern social *science* suffers from the same problem. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/19/science/science-research-fraud-reproducibility.html>

<sup>46</sup> Bernays and his significance will be explored more later in this essay. For a brief summary of his life see <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edward-Bernays>

<sup>47</sup> See <https://time.com/4779112/police-history-origins/>

<sup>48</sup> See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/police/The-decline-of-constabulary-police#ref36617>

<sup>49</sup> (A) Murder rates have varied throughout American history, but even at their highest, they are estimated to have never exceeded 35/100,000—considerable, but not unimaginably so. And by 1800, they were below 20/100,000. See <https://blogs.berkeley.edu/2010/06/16/a-crime-puzzle-violent-crime-declines-in-america/> And these rates never approached the horrific number of premature deaths that happened during WWI, WWII, or any number of cultural upheavals and revolutions.

(B) Going back further in history is difficult. Statistics were not gathered with any consistency prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but several estimates of historical homicide rates exist. The most violent years in Europe were around 1450, with national homicide rates ranging from 73/100,000 (in Italy) to 16/100,000 (Germany and Switzerland). Both numbers are elevated by modern standards, but they are far below the levels one associates with social chaos. See <https://ourworldindata.org/homicides#how-have-homicide-rates-changed-over-the-long-run-until-today>

<sup>50</sup> If current demographic trends continue in America, Whites will become a minority by around 2045. See <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/03/14/the-us-will-become-minority-white-in-2045-census-projects/>

<sup>51</sup> Obviously, there is an element of prediction to this statement, but what *is* certain is that Millennials are poorer than their parents were at the same age. See <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/millennials-are-much-poorer-than-their-parents-data-show/>

<sup>52</sup> (A) Again, I am making a prediction, but this is based on solid evidence. First, non-Asian minorities are poorer than Whites (on average). See <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/poverty-rate-by-raceethnicity/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

(B) Next, there is the matter of minorities being less trusting of authorities. Blacks typically hold police in lower regard than do Whites (perhaps with good reason). See <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/09/29/the-racial-confidence-gap-in-police-performance/>

<sup>53</sup> This phrase—*hombres armados*—is taken from a movie, *Men with Guns* being the English-language title. I am not suggesting that *no one* should ever trust police, but *blind* trust in authority is hardly a sign of wisdom or maturity.

<sup>54</sup> (A) Research on the effects of body cam footage suggests that the technology has mixed results on officer behavior. See <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1745-9133.12412>

(B) However, this is still an emerging technology, and its effects may take some time to be felt. One would have a difficult time imagining the current George Floyd protests taking place without video evidence of exactly what happened.

<sup>55</sup> Occasionally, a judge makes such an ass of himself (or herself) that a public outcry ensues. Such would be

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unlikely were the proceedings not recorded. For an example of a judge who became video infamous see <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5643311/Judge-resigns-berating-breathless-defendant-wheelchair-court-DIES-three-days-later.html#reader-comments>

<sup>56</sup> This closely relates to the concept of *compassion fade*. See <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749597818302930>

<sup>57</sup> One may argue that there were some legitimate grounds for the University of Missouri protests (largely relating to medical insurance for graduate students); however, the same cannot be said about Occupy Wall Street—a movement/political action so poorly defined that almost no one, protestors included, knew what the protests were supposed to achieve. For insight into the well-meaning befuddlement of protestors see <https://www.npr.org/2011/10/17/141427331/op-ed-occupy-wall-street-protesters-goals>

<sup>58</sup> (A) Even the community of journalists could not excuse the sheer reckless behavior of Sabrina Rubin Erdely, the author of “A Rape on Campus.” See [https://www.cjr.org/investigation/rolling\\_stone\\_investigation.php](https://www.cjr.org/investigation/rolling_stone_investigation.php)

(B) The Kavanaugh hearings were based on accusations that were essentially incoherent. See <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/supreme-court/evidence-doesn-t-support-claims-against-kavanaugh-judiciary-committee-prosecutor-n915236>

(C) Finally, #metoo, while possibly well-intentioned at the beginning (or not, who knows?) degenerated into something so vitriolic that even some feminists found it suspect. See <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/am-i-a-bad-feminist/article37591823/>

(D) As for the command to care, what effect would any of these movements/claims have were more of us simply to declare “I do not care!”?

<sup>59</sup> And those who are *too* performative in their politically correct Madam Mao-approved playacting, are subject to public criticism as well. See <https://coloradosun.com/2020/06/29/kindness-yoga-closure-during-black-lives-matter/>

<sup>60</sup> For more information on how to be a better bastard, see “On Being a Bastard” in [http://vongoblerules.com/978-0-9820991-7-9\\_Extract.pdf](http://vongoblerules.com/978-0-9820991-7-9_Extract.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> The Chinese Cultural Revolution demanded millions of apologies from at least as many supposed wrongdoers, be they teachers, landed farmers, or businesspeople. One lesson to be learned from that era: Apply enough pressure and you can make most people confess to (and apologize for) just about anything, even if the allegations entail impossible claims. And the long-term effect of this—a culture of cynicism and indifference. See *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution 1945-1957* <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1408886359>. We should not underestimate the horrific cruelty that lies in the hearts of many. Nothing brings this badness out faster than shows of weakness, which is why complying with those who demand confessions and apologies oftentimes does little but make them angrier.

<sup>62</sup> See <https://www.worldwidelern.com/education-articles/history-of-distance-learning.html>

<sup>63</sup> Not only is this school in business, it offers some classes in English. See <http://en.ouchn.edu.cn/>

<sup>64</sup> See <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/03/12/colleges-confronting-coronavirus-tell-students-move-out-many-urge-attention-needs>

<sup>65</sup> See <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Are-Undergraduates-Actually/125979>

<sup>66</sup> Although many people can benefit from vocational training, a smaller number have the cognitive capacity to benefit from college. See <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Are-Too-Many-Students-Going-to/49039> and [https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/20/opinion/sunday/sorry-strivers-talent-matters.html?\\_r=2](https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/20/opinion/sunday/sorry-strivers-talent-matters.html?_r=2)

<sup>67</sup> (A) Hyperactivity (ADHD) is almost certainly overdiagnosed. See [https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/side-effects/201710/adhd-is-now-widely-overdiagnosed-and-multiple-reasons#comments\\_bottom](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/side-effects/201710/adhd-is-now-widely-overdiagnosed-and-multiple-reasons#comments_bottom)

(B) Autism is likely overdiagnosed as well. See <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/kids-health/study-suggests-autism->

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[being-overdiagnosed-n450671](#)

(C) Efforts to categorize bad behavior or beliefs go back years, to when *racism* started to be seen as both the result and the cause of a medical or mental problem, rather than simply being a belief or part of an unpleasant disposition. See <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1536504214558213>

(D) Finally there is the matter of student loans. How bad are they? See <https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/13/heres-how-much-student-debt-americans-with-phds-have-on-average.html>

<sup>68</sup> Love fades, but hate is eternal. Ellison knew this well. See <https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=bWlsZm9yZHNjaG9vbHMub3JnfG1yc21pdGhzY2lmaXxneDo3ODRkNDg0YjFjNzdkMDcx>

<sup>69</sup> For complete table see [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18\\_322.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_322.10.asp)

<sup>70</sup> For an explanation of *tacit knowledge* see <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/tacit-knowledge>

<sup>71</sup> The cost of sponsoring a worker under the H-1B visa program ranges from a few thousand dollars to much more. See <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2019/04/01/employers-have-paid-5-billion-in-h-1b-visa-fees-since-1999/#e45834168d10>

<sup>72</sup> See <https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/30/hbs-prof-says-half-of-us-colleges-will-be-bankrupt-in-10-to-15-years.html>

<sup>73</sup> A great deal of formal schooling does little more than serve as an economic signaling mechanism. See *The Case against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money* <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0691174652>

<sup>74</sup> How long colleges can afford to sponsor sports teams is uncertain. Stanford University—with some of the best athletic teams in the United States—is cutting 11 teams. Granted, neither basketball nor football were on the chopping block, but for a school of Stanford's size to cut so many teams is significant. See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2020/07/08/stanford-discontinue-eleven-sports-programs/#comments-wrapper>

<sup>75</sup> (A) University publishing houses have not fared well during COVID. They will need to either adapt or die. See <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2020/04/17/without-stronger-academic-governance-covid-19-will-concentrate-the-corporate-control-of-academic-publishing/>

(B) Academic research laboratories were largely closed as well. See <https://www.statnews.com/2020/03/14/coronavirus-pandemic-forces-research-labs-shut-down/>

<sup>76</sup> Employers began to rely more heavily on college education as a sorting tool for prospective workers after other assessment tools were largely banned under *Griggs v. Duke Power Company*. See <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/08/higher-education-has-become-increasingly-partisan/596407/>

<sup>77</sup> Regarding classic literature: Project Gutenberg provides thousands of texts at no cost (<https://www.gutenberg.org/>), and a great many lectures from esteemed professors can be found online as well. MIT's program is just one of many. See <https://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm>

<sup>78</sup> If anything, instruction in the humanities should be *less* regulated than that in the martial arts: Flimflam academies of postmodern literature are far less dangerous to their students than are Frank Dux-style *Con Kwon Do* schools.<sup>78</sup> When was the last time anyone thought a working knowledge of Derrida would save him from an ass beating in a street fight? Although I suspect a great many of my readers have already seen his footage, YouTuber Joe Rogan has much fun tearing apart fake martial arts. For an example, see <https://youtu.be/NCDA6LBvyuM>

<sup>79</sup> Intelligence is a fragile trait, and without aggressive selection pressures, it is subject to rapid decay. See <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tig.2012.10.002>

<sup>80</sup> (A) Most Americans do not know their neighbors. See [https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/05/22/what-unites-and-divides-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities/psd\\_05-22-18\\_community-type-00-13/](https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/05/22/what-unites-and-divides-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities/psd_05-22-18_community-type-00-13/)

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(B) More generally, we have become increasingly isolated over the period of the last few decades, although such does not necessarily bother us. See <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/nurturing-self-compassion/201901/isolation-nation> and <https://theconversation.com/americans-are-becoming-more-socially-isolated-but-theyre-not-feeling-lonelier-96151>

<sup>81</sup> (A) The first welding robot was developed in the 1960s. See <https://www.robotics.org/blog-article.cfm/The-Evolution-of-Robotic-Welding/33>

(B) The first surgical robot was developed in the 1980s. See [https://www.brianday.ca/imagez/1051\\_28738.pdf](https://www.brianday.ca/imagez/1051_28738.pdf)

<sup>82</sup> (A) A brief history of the DARPA Grand Challenge. See <http://www.grandchallenge.org/>

(B) Tesla's recent advancements in self-driving technology. See <https://nypost.com/2020/07/09/tesla-very-close-to-next-step-in-self-driving-elon-musk-says/>

<sup>83</sup> Walmart relies more on robots now than it did even a few years ago, and it will deploy even more in the coming years. See <https://www.cnn.com/videos/business/2019/04/09/walmart-robots-retail-jobs-sd-orig.cnn/video/playlists/business-robots/>

<sup>84</sup> *Fight for 15* started in New York, and it has expanded to many other cities. See <https://fightfor15.org/about-us/>

<sup>85</sup> Viruses may come and go, but miserable summertime heat is predictable, particularly for those working at Amazon.com's warehouses. See <https://www.mcall.com/news/watchdog/mc-allentown-amazon-complaints-20110917-story.html>

<sup>86</sup> See <https://www.newsweek.com/54-percent-americans-want-work-remote-regularly-after-coronavirus-pandemic-ends-new-poll-shows-1501809>

<sup>87</sup> Working from home is here to stay. See <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zackfriedman/2020/05/06/covid-19-future-of-work-coronavirus/#493795773b2e> and <https://www.crn.com/news/running-your-business/some-may-work-from-home-permanently-after-covid-19-gartner> and <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/04/why-many-employees-are-hoping-to-work-from-home-even-after-the-pandemic-is-over.html>

<sup>88</sup> The Millennial preference for staying at home predates COVID. See <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/jomo-fomo-millennials-netflix-spotify-subscriptions-marie-kondo-a8752216.html>

<sup>89</sup> Staying at home is good for America. Hooray! See <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/24/opinion/coronavirus-us.html>

<sup>90</sup> There seems to be little research on how America has historically regarded those who prefer to be by themselves. Still, the benefits of being alone are gradually gaining recognition. See <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/hide-and-peek/201911/what-we-can-learn-loners>

<sup>91</sup> (A) Total gasoline consumption for 2019: <https://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.php?id=23&t=10>

(B) Number of miles driven per person (2018): <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/onh00/bar8.htm>

The numbers are not for the *same* year, but they are within one year of each. *Good enough is good enough!*

<sup>92</sup> (A) There were more than 30,000 vehicular deaths in 2019. See

<https://www.caranddriver.com/news/a32388179/us-vehicle-fatalities-down-2019/>

(B) Since the COVID pandemic, insurance claims for accidents have dropped 50%. See

<https://www.caranddriver.com/news/a32201608/auto-accidents-insurance-claims-down-coronavirus/>

Thus, few miles driven should lead to fewer accidents and lost lives.

<sup>93</sup> Commute times have been getting worse for decades in the United States. This article refers to 9 *calendar days*, which is about the same amount of time as in 19 *workdays*. See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/10/07/nine-days-road-average-commute-time-reached-new-record-last-year/> and <https://nypost.com/2019/04/19/americans-spend-19-full-work-days-a-year-stuck-in-traffic-on-their->

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[commute/](#)

<sup>94</sup> Meetings waste time and money. See <https://www.inc.com/jeff-haden/why-99-percent-of-all-meetings-are-a-complete-wast.html>

<sup>95</sup> The average office worker spends 2.5 hours per day on emails. See <https://www.forbes.com/sites/annabelacton/2017/07/13/innovators-challenge-how-to-stop-wasting-time-on-emails/#6806a4389788>

A truly skilled time killer can spend far more!

<sup>96</sup> Telegrams were remarkably short by modern messaging standards, with the shortest known being sent by Oscar Wilde to his publisher. Living in France at the time, Wilde wanted to know how well one of his books was selling. The message he sent consisted of a single character—?—his publishers reply: ! See <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/6494297/Ten-famous-telegrams.html>

<sup>97</sup> Middle management is likely to take post-COVID beating. See <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/29/how-the-coronavirus-pandemic-will-impact-the-future-of-work.html> and this post about *flattening organizational structure* <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/ready-set-go-reinventing-the-organization-for-speed-in-the-post-covid-19-era#>

<sup>98</sup> The *low-hanging fruit* hypothesis has already been developed at tremendous length. See *The Great Stagnation: How America Ate All The Low-Hanging Fruit of Modern History, Got Sick, and Will (Eventually) Feel Better* <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B004H0M8QS>

<sup>99</sup> Psychology is just one domain in which old studies would never gain modern approval. See <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/52787/10-famous-psychological-experiments-could-never-happen-today>

<sup>100</sup> The first airplane death <https://www.nytimes.com/1908/09/18/archives/fatal-fall-of-wright-airship-lieut-selfridge-killed-and-orville.html>

<sup>101</sup> (A) Disastrously dangerous radiation experiments. See <https://www.discovermagazine.com/health/from-marie-curie-to-the-demon-core-when-radiation-kills>  
(B) The first dog in space was essentially cooked alive. See <https://www.space.com/17764-laika-first-animals-in-space.html>

<sup>102</sup> (A) Lightning-fast genome sequencing of COVID. See <https://phys.org/news/2020-03-sequencing-genome-virus-covid-.html>  
(B) And equally speedy vaccine development. See <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2005630>  
(C) Innovation in other domains is speeding up as well. See <https://www.forbes.com/sites/adigaskell/2020/06/04/how-the-coronavirus-is-transforming-innovation/#43c21578c73e>

<sup>103</sup> The law school I attended during the pandemic (and from which I recently graduated) moved from in-person classes to online classes in three days. Other schools did the same. See <https://www.law.com/2020/03/10/law-schools-shift-classes-online-amid-covid-19-but-can-they-do-it-right/?slreturn=20200607011842>

<sup>104</sup> Courts around the world are learning the benefits of Zoom. See <https://www.economist.com/international/2020/06/14/covid-19-forces-courts-to-hold-proceedings-online>

<sup>105</sup> For an extraordinarily biased interpretation of a significant study, see the *New York Times* article <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/04/opinion/trump-voters-chaos.html>  
The original paper can be found here <https://psyarxiv.com/6m4ts/>

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<sup>106</sup> (A) Free trade benefits the rich everywhere and the poor in the developing world. In the developed world, it leads to “polarization in local wages, employment, skill attainment, and individual welfare,” which is another way of saying that it has a tendency to make the rich richer and the poor poorer—not a great thing for the middle class. See <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022199615001543>

(B) Obviously, this harm was not exclusive to Black family, but a great many Black families did depend on the solid factory work and wages that allowed them to climb out of poverty, earning far more than they could have in the South. See <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/great-migration>

(C) As for those who would blame free trade on those evil Republicans, note that it was a decidedly bipartisan effort—the elites on both sides of the isle did all in their power to rob the American worker of opportunity. Consider the history of the (recently renegotiated) North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1868997,00.html>

(D) As for social welfare, how does it undermine the family? Let us count the many ways. See <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=njlsj> and <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/11/20/us/breakup-of-black-family-imperils-gains-of-decades.html> and <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/20/government-policies-racist-myths-dissolve-black-families> Establishing a perfect causal relationship between social welfare and Black family destruction is difficult, but that is a problem common to almost any matter investigated by the social sciences.

<sup>107</sup> (A) The effects of the gentrification of New York City area are well known. See <https://news.berkeley.edu/2019/04/10/new-york-city-gentrification-creating-urban-islands-of-exclusion-study-finds/>

(B) And violent crime has dropped a great deal in the City, which is not to say that there are not plenty of crooks. See <https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-york-citys-murder-rate-hit-new-low-in-2018-11546559793>

<sup>108</sup> (A) Solitude is one thing, extreme forced isolation is another, and its effects can be measurably severe. They include greatly increased aggression and fear. See <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/05/180517113856.htm>

(B) I explore this topic further in “The Dark Forest: Recognizing the Naturalness of Misandry and Misanthropy” of *The Rules* (page 219). See [http://vongoblerules.com/978-0-9820991-7-9\\_Complete.pdf](http://vongoblerules.com/978-0-9820991-7-9_Complete.pdf)

<sup>109</sup> I am using food and starvation as metaphor, but the metaphor is grounded in fact. See <https://www.healthline.com/health/refeeding-syndrome>

<sup>110</sup> See <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/1999/>

<sup>111</sup> The sexual revolution almost certainly undermined family and (by extension) community, which in turn led to the growth of identity politics. *Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics* addresses this hypothesis in considerable (and fascinating) detail. See <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1599474115> Unfortunately, extremist ideologies do not so much cure the problem of societal disconnect as they do weaponize it. And given time, a great many ideologies either collapse under their own weapon or become self-parodying.

<sup>112</sup> Academic life can be surprisingly stressful. See <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Stigma-StressFear-/237353> and <https://www.chronicle.com/article/A-Prominent-Economist-s/245932>

<sup>113</sup> See Note 105, *New York Times* link. The *NYT* article contains the phrase “should be burned to the ground” (without referring to atomic conflagration). How this should be taken is up for debate. I suspect that some survey respondents meant this literally. Others might have had destruction of a more metaphorical sort in mind. Either way, this does not bode well for many. If a fourth of the population sees little in America worth preserving, those with much to lose have much to fear.

<sup>114</sup> *Notes from Underground* was published in 1864, not long after the end of the Crimean War and during the middle of Alexander II’s economic and legal reforms. See <https://alphahistory.com/russianrevolution/russian-industrialisation/>

<sup>115</sup> Although I have briefly referenced the matter of isolation in academia previously (Note 112), here is more evidence of the isolation of academics and how it stands to harm them. See <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2006/03/24/isolated-academic> <https://theconversation.com/overworked-and->

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[isolated-the-rising-epidemic-of-loneliness-in-academia-110009](#)

<sup>116</sup> And herein lies the great contradiction in American society: On a theoretical level, we advocate a radical form of self-development that rises to the level of Nietzschean master morality—something that Nietzsche would almost certainly attack as impractical for the greater part of humanity to achieve. On a practical level, we promote an engineered, conformist culture created by teams of marketers (and increasingly, computers). The sentence associated with this endnote is a paraphrase of an Edward Bernays' quote. See [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/275170.Edward\\_L\\_Bernays](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/275170.Edward_L_Bernays)

<sup>117</sup> For source of quote, see <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/427317-remembering-that-i-ll-be-dead-soon-is-the-most-important>

<sup>118</sup> Not only does life go on, it continues with less change than one might think. See <http://longnow.org/seminars/02009/feb/13/social-collapse-best-practices/>

<sup>119</sup> The book in question is well worth reading. See *The World of Yesterday* <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0803226616/>

<sup>120</sup> Exactly when the Chinese fell behind the West is uncertain, but that it happened during the time of Manchu (Qing) governance is almost certainly beyond doubt. See <https://www.theglobalist.com/12-facts-on-chinas-economic-history/> and <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/china-2>

<sup>121</sup> The cost of our 21<sup>st</sup> century military adventures was astounding. See <https://www.cnn.com/2019/11/20/us-spent-6point4-trillion-on-middle-east-wars-since-2001-study.html>

<sup>122</sup> (A) American medical costs are the highest of any country. See

<https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/020915/what-country-spends-most-healthcare.asp>

(B) Among the many things that COVID did was drive home the fact that not everyone will be able to receive unlimited care when resources grow scarce, hence the ongoing debate over who gets a ventilator. See <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/03/24/coronavirus-among-patient-covid-19-who-gets-ventilator-column/2902014001/>

(C) This discussion should have started *years* earlier, with one writer, Sheri Fink, having considered this some depth in *Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm-Ravaged Hospital*, her book about a crisis at a New Orleans hospital during Hurricane Katrina. See <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0307718972/>  
As for this discussion in the current context, better late than never!

<sup>123</sup> *Sophie's Choice* is a 1980s film, so I realize that younger readers might not get the reference. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophie's\\_Choice\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophie's_Choice_(film))

<sup>124</sup> As much as I wish I could take credit for the observation that the Industrial Revolution/Long 19<sup>th</sup> Century was a singularity of its own sort, I cannot. See <http://bactra.org/weblog/699.html>

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *There is little more suspect than clamorous consensus, particularly if backed by evidence open to a multitude of valid and contradictory interpretations. Consensus alone does not warrant pricked up ears, nor does clamor. But the cacophony of them sounding atop each other should raise one's guard, if not his hackles.*

*The world is going to hell; America is spiraling the drain; and evil lurks behind every corner, ready to violate and annihilate all that we hold dear at a moment's notice: This is what we are told (and told with much vituperation).*

*The deafening drumbeats of fear and dread never cease. We are constant victims of petty acts of aural and psychological violence by our elites—be they in ordinary government, educational*

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*institutions, advocacy groups, the intelligence community, or the infotainment industry—and their specific partisan branding is of no real consequence. They injure us for the usual reason—for power, which derives from violence (with only the occasional exception). Fear overwhelms logic, and without logic, we cannot well determine how much the select few take from us and how little they offer in return.*

*I wrote this essay to attack bullshit and bullshitters alike, both of which annoy me. I wrote this essay so that anyone who reads it may launch a counterassault upon the lies and abuse he has suffered at the hands of arrogant fools who would have him believe they are his betters, when in fact, they are merely inheritors of an abundance of good fortune and a paucity of humility.*

*I claim no sympathy, no decency, and no compassion. Nonsense irritates me—that is all. And my desire to trounce the nonsense is reason enough to spend a few spare hours tormenting myself and my spellchecker. The problems we face are real. They are pressing. No one need be a bouncing, bubbly Pangloss. But there is hope, and there is opportunity in even greater measure.*

*I wrote this essay with a single wish in mind: That all the long-ignored and competent will rise to the level of their worth and their ingenuity.*

*Now is the time for new and good ideas.*

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** *Brant von Goble is a writer, editor, publisher, researcher, teacher, musician, motorcyclist, juggler, and amateur radio operator. Born in Kentucky, Brant has lived throughout the United States, and he spent more than three years in Hunan, China, where he won the Wuxi Friendship Award (2012) for his excellence in teaching. He received his Doctor of Education (EdD) from Western Kentucky University in 2017 and his Doctor of Law (JD) from Cooley Law School in 2020. One of his books, Foresight (and Other Stories), was favorably reviewed by Publishers Weekly.*