

Cutting Through Spiritual Colonialism

We are all pretty clear something is profoundly wrong with the world, and maybe with humanity itself.

But what is wrong, and what do we do about it?

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We live in an economy of fear

This is an essay about how problems wind around each-other in ways which seem insoluble, and how to pry these problems apart into soluble components. It is fundamentally an essay about decomplexifying our world models by making them more accurate.

An analogy is the use of vanishing points in art. If you want to draw in perspective without knowing about vanishing points, the task is almost impossible. But with vanishing points, even a child can do a pretty decent perspective rendering, because our mind is wired to see in perspective: it just needs a little encouragement.

Likewise, the structure of the world: we are wired to see power and the abuse of power, but we need three vanishing points put in place to draw the world in its true perspective.

I'm going to tell you what those vanishing points are right now: technological acceleration, limits to growth, and the invisible hierarchy of abuse. Each one of these stories is pretty simple in itself, allow me to summarize.

- **Technological acceleration** is simply that our underlying capacity to manipulate and control matter and energy has been on an exponential curve since the industrial revolution or a little before. 20 years ago a terabyte is an unthinkable amount of storage, packed into a raid array of 250 gig drives. Now you can have 250gb as a MicroSD card, and a single drive is 16 terabytes. Brain scanning. Genetic engineering, solar panels, self-driving cars, drones, you name it. Rocket ships and VR gear. Even retina displays. Every year that the machine keeps running, more innovation in these kinds of areas. Each generation of gore-tex is a little better, a little more nanotechnology, a little more amazing.

We have no capability to understand, much less manage, most of this change. Even if you try to keep up, it's too much innovation over too much front to really keep an eye on. Even if you watch self driving cars like a hawk, what's happening in immunotherapy? Have you seen the unthinkable transformation in cancer treatments?

- **Limits to growth** is as easy as pie: an average American puts out about 15 tons of CO2 per year. Best guess at a sustainable emissions level is 3 tons. If you emit more carbon than the sustainable level, the world gets warmer every year, and eventually that

starts to reduce your ability to do things like grow food. This story repeats for basically every natural resource. There are some high quality of life, ultra-low consumption enclaves in the world: Kerala in India is below one planet of consumption, and has demographics right in line with Europe. Cuba is another famous example: they were forced to decarbonise at the fall of the Soviet Union when their oil supply got cut off and built an extremely lean and efficient society as a result. We all know these examples exist, for hundreds of millions of people, but there's very little interest in scaling them. The world has not exactly beaten a path to Kerala's door saying "how did you do it?"

Why not?

- **The invisible hierarchy of abuse** is the answer to most of these questions, but it's a little harder to see: consider this question. "How much child abuse goes on in boarding schools?" That's your Etons and Harrows I'm asking about. Is the answer "none?" I don't think so. Once in a few years, an awful story will break: a sports coach, or a choir master, or a headmaster. And that's just the staff. Non-sexual student on student abuse is practically an institution in many of these places, and one does not assume those lines stay strictly drawn. Why is it invisible? Why don't we have some kind of measured dialogue on these issues?

Well, I'm typing this on a Mac that I know for-damn-sure involves actions that I would consider criminal in manufacturing in: no labour organization allowed in that supply chain, and the ever-present worry of conflict minerals down the chain there too. Never mind that my dinner will contain meat, and I know damn well where that came from.

This ability, to turn a blind eye "because we have to" is what makes the hierarchy of abuse invisible. It's what allows a game which is almost entire made of losers to continue to be played by everybody, as if they were winning.

Reducing the fear of worse loss is not the same thing as winning.

Practically nobody wins the game as it is currently constructed. Even those with near-infinite wealth and power (relative to us mere mortals) seem miserable and unfulfilled. Stare deeply into the moist robot eyes of Zuckerberg to see the Abyss staring back into you (don't do this too long.) Jobs railed, railed against the dying of the light, and got taken out by cancer with the job half done. Gates is the biggest imaginable philanthropist, and appears to be slowly turning into Gollum. Elon Musk looks like he's one triple espresso away from a nervous breakdown. On the other side of the fence, the most famous actresses and pop musicians in the world - all money, fame, popularity, beauty and intelligence combined - look like feral, beaten animals. Yes, the surface is perfect, but when somebody breaks - Kesha is a good example - and litigates over a lifetime of exploitation, the waves simply close over their heads and they are not much heard of again. Is Taylor Swift happy? Is that happy music? Maybe some of it, but most of it speaks to emotional instability and the difficulty of forming durable relationships. In objective terms there may be bigger female winners than the top tier actresses - female heads of state, for example - but at least in the arts it appears pretty apocalyptic, and that's the domain of much female ambition and adulation. Why aren't these people happy?

As the internet says: play stupid games, win stupid prizes.

The game that most of us are playing is about **avoiding loss**. As people climb the entrepreneurial ladder, they get hooked: make your first million, then step off there - and it will slowly dwindle over time - or put it back on the table in another company, another start up - and make the next big leap up to the ten or one hundred million level. At each step, either slow decline as money goes out but does not come back in, or more risk. The fear of losing what we have forces us to continue playing the game, and inevitable we will lose. Almost nobody gets out at the top with their pile, because of the fear of loss. Fear masquerades as greed.

Although the entire game appears to be about greed, about the lust for more, in actual fact the big motivation for most of these people is the desire to avoid eventual losses to inflation and their own lifestyle spends.

There are a few exceptions: the much-beloved (by investors) mission-driven entrepreneurs who will work like dogs for decades because they believe they are saving the world, and anomalies like Warren Buffett and Jeff Bezos.

The world's richest man is talking openly about building a trillion person space faring civilisation which occupies the entire solar system. This is not playing to avoid loss.

But most of us are, fundamentally, working because we are **afraid** and that fear is the driving force in our societies. It is fear of our fellow men, or at least it appears to be. Consider the fate of our more fortunate ancestors: say that by some accident of navigation we have an island to ourselves, just us and our little gang, with plenty of land. To win the fight against hunger, even in this idealised situation, requires **labour**. Even if the streams and shore are filled with fish, persuading them to get into our nets requires nets and harvesting activity. If it is to be the field and the plough that feeds us, these things must first exist.

How much labour is required to stay alive? How hard must I work each day to eat?

Society has locked this answer at 40 to 60 hours a week, *and increased our socially-enforced material wants to fill this available labour*. Our consumption has risen to meet our earning capacity, in a ratchet: social competition (bluntly: on average people prefer partners with lots of earning power, and we detect them by their demonstrated spending power). I've told the tale of finally locking in my "City of London" look when I took the black strap off my watch and replaced it with a spiffy stainless steel one. Suddenly, I'd passed through some invisible membrane, and my presence in the room seemed natural. It took me a year to find that little glitch: did the shoes, did the suit, would not sacrifice the hair (but I could get away with that, more or less, because I'm tech.)

No, it was that watch band.

Humans are sensitive to social cues. "Are you one of us or aren't you?" You can say it's about social norms, but at the end of the day, it's all proxies for future expected reproductive success out to the Nth generation: a combination of genes and social positioning resulting in an estimate of success. All these mechanisms are atavistic: for two million years beings almost biologically identical to us roamed on the plains and lived

in caves and forests and jungles, and had their first kids in their teens, and were certainly grandparents by 40, if they lived that long. We have very little of their culture with us today, but we have all of their biology.

Imagine the chaos if we introduced modern technology to such a tribe: you don't have to. We are that tribe, and that is our condition.

Delusional Optimism

At this specific moment in time, we are most deeply cursed by *delusional optimism*. The bedrock of this delusion is the 1960s Human Potential Movement, possibly just a franchise of the US government's MK ULTRA drugs and brainwashing program. The HPM's idea was that there were secret supermen, free of ego, fear, delusion, waiting inside of all of us. These evolved beings would be tapped into a single global consciousness, and this wider "us" would be incapable of hatred, greed, fear, and the rest of the *kleshas*. However, the main tools of transformation were not the traditional Asian religious tools of thousands of hours of meditation practice and severe renunciation, but drug-fuelled transformation.

However, for whatever reason, drugs seem to have been very poor at producing the type of evolved spiritual consciousness which the Asian religions promise. It's not that the Asian traditions did not make use of drugs from time to time - I think it's reasonably clear that Hinduism and Taoist Alchemy both had their uses for such things at certain times and places - but there's never been a tradition in which chemistry was *the main event*. The transformation processes, particularly in repair of PTSD and depression, do appear to be real for some people in a clinical sense, but the spiritual transformative work which these approaches offer does not appear to develop anything like the same consciousness which is produced by years of seated meditation or other serious spiritual practice. In particular, the difficult work of disentangling oneself from the most morally compromising aspects of the material world - lying and lust for material resources of various kinds - result in an extreme imbalance. You just can't take a bunch of Ayahuasca and work for Google's advertising departments, and somehow balance the books morally as you spend all the money flying to exotic locations to go kite surfing as you step over homeless people on your way into Starbucks, and call this spirituality. The spirituality which counts is about acting correctly, not about feeling like a demigod.

In this respect, it's not difficult to see why the Asian spiritual masters have had their doubts about developments in America. Very few of the actual hallmarks of spiritual development are present in populations that actually consider themselves quite nearly evolved. Trungpa Rinpoche's *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* is the relevant ur-text on these topics, of course.

The theory of change associated with this model of the world is worth investigating. The basic HPM concept is that higher states of being are possible: this is undoubtedly true, and I myself have taught technologies which access those states for most of two decades. However, there is a bizarre hybridisation with Christian Millenarianism where, in the Californian model, if enough individuals transform their consciousness, a sudden non-linear transformation of the masses will kick in. The entire thing "flips" into a new state. Hunter S. Thompson describes this perspective in the immortal "Wave Speech"

from *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. The great and beautiful wave breaks, and rolls back, and we are (surprise surprise) left much where we were.

Where are we, then?

The answer, unfortunately, is 1948.

We have made essentially zero durable progress forwards, as a civilisation, since Gandhi was assassinated. Without the strict figurehead, spiritual evolution has become entirely diluted with various kinds of materialism, but this is not the worst of it. The worse of it is that spiritual evolution has become entirely detached from *personal morality*. Every ill that Gandhi discussed has become worse, and every remedy that he suggested has been ignored: Satyagraha and Swadeshi as concepts which liberated India should have been the bedrock of a new age of liberation for all peoples, but without Gandhi to lead the way, these ideals have been rapidly forgotten. And nothing substantial has taken their place: the mass awakening does not work, because the masses are not meditating at anything like the required level of intensity, and without mass meditation there appears to be little permanent catalytic transformation in consciousness from drugs alone. Even meditation is not enough: Swadeshi required a fundamental transformation in consumer behaviour: to not buy what oppressed other people, or yourself, as a point of political transformation. Because everybody did it, or at least enough of them, it generated enormous politically transformative force in India, enough to materially contribute to the end of the British occupation.

Now compare this to the values of the New Age model which came out of California in the 1960s, and the various adapted permutations of that model which have taken root in the generations since then, from Burning Man through to the Ayahuasca cults which are so much a part of the back room scene of the modern tech world. Does any of this stuff have the grounded awareness of other people's suffering which was so much a hallmark of the Gandhian perspective on the universe?

Of course not: its job is not to challenge colonialism, but to complete it: *spiritual colonialism* has supplanted spiritual materialism as the curse of our age.

Understanding Spiritual Colonialism

Spiritual colonialism is an attempt to ransack the treasure houses of spiritual wisdom found in colonised cultures, and put that wisdom to work for colonialist and capitalist ends.

It has exactly the same extractive logic as material colonialism, where the assets being stripped were physical.

Let's look at four instances.

- Tibetan Buddhism arrived in America in the 1960s like a pillar of fire, and was soon tamed and diluted to the point where Vajrayana gurus get kicked out of their Sanghas for being "not very nice." The formation first of "consensus buddhism" and then mindfulness as institutions separate from traditional Buddhist practice destroys the fundamental integrity of Buddhism.
- Tantra, pretty much the crown jewels of Tibetan Buddhism, Kashmiri Shaivism, and Taoism, gets diluted away from being a fundamental technology for transcending attachment to the material world, and into being a new form of enslavement to an

imagined perfected sexual experience, culminating in an explosion of destructive cults which you can read about in the news when they detonate.

- Ayahuasca is further outside of my remit: I cannot speak with fundamental insight on how happy or unhappy the traditional users are with the current popularity of their methodologies. But I do hear a lot of screaming on the internet from South America, as the locals are beginning to realise that easy-to-deal-with fantasy fulfilment gets a lot more PR than complex understandings of a multidimensional universe which does not have humanity at the centre. I don't want to speak for these guys, but I'm fairly clear at this point that at least some credible voices in that world report there to be A Problem with the way ayahuasca is being adopted. But they are far from my shop.
- Hatha Yoga, the fundamental physical practice of Hinduism, has been pried out of its religious setting like the Nassak Diamond. Whether it's a general health practice, or an approach to creating a body which will support industrious meditation, Hatha has always been part of a *system* of Yoga practices, starting with the indispensable Yamas and Niyamas - the fundamental moral rights and wrongs which must be mastered before Hatha Yoga is safe. After Hatha practice is established, Pranayama (the breathing exercises) must be cultivated to further transform the energy. It has always been this way: breaking Hatha Yoga away from Ni/Yamas and Pranayama is like cutting a power station out of the national grid, or cutting out a chunk of a pipeline and then wondering where the water went. It makes no sense. Except, inside of colonialism, where the dream of individual perfection is put above all other goals.

Spiritual colonialism is the act of using traditional spiritual methodologies from other cultures to advance the goals of capitalism. Once you can see it, you can see it everywhere.

It is not that the West does not have its own indigenous spiritual practices. There's plenty inside of Christianity. There's plenty inside of witchcraft in the many and various forms that it survives in across various cultures from Strega in Italy, English Cunning Folk of various kinds, and the surviving Latvian and Icelandic paganisms among others.

But what has taken root in America is of an entirely different character: the Californian self-transformation approach takes a few threads from tantra ("viras" or spiritual heroes) but then *attaches this identity to the triumphal Capitalist overlords*. Nothing is more Californian than a kid with a trust fund who hops ashram to retreat to ceremony, making Burning Man a regular stop on their calendar, without ever asking where the money comes from, or what is the difference between right and wrong.

The dharmic traditions developed these methodologies because *the spiritual transformation of the world is hard work* and it is better suited to empowered heroes than it is to regular folk. The ability to upgrade human consciousness and indeed the body itself is demonstrated: meditation and yoga work. Some of the more exotic practices in Tibetan Buddhism *really* work.

But not so much if you put them into the service of capitalism rather than into the service of the dharma. Certainly these techniques are accelerators: look at the claims made for mindfulness *apps*. You take material out of a 6000 year old (or older) guru-disciple tradition, and embody 5% of it in an application, sold to a wage slave, who will toil their entire life in spiritual darkness to the benefit of another being, their CEO. And, by the way, I say that *as a CEO*. I've done my shift inside of capitalism, enough to understand it - and we will see how my company fares through this covid pandemic. But I do get what that role is and how it is supposed to work: responsibility to investors,

responsibility to employees, responsibilities all round. Only in very rare cases does it turn into freedom, even if in theory it is a privilege.

Most of these people are trapped on the treadmill too.

Spiritual colonialism is the appropriation of the methods of indigenous spiritualities for the goals of capitalism.

I'm not telling people to stop doing yoga: you exist, you deserve to be health. But understand that *decontextualised* yoga is simply another part of the capitalist apparatus, with its rockstars and its schisms, its lawsuits and its feuds. It's just more of the same, at every level above the physical.

What is the goal of capitalism?

If we accept that the spiritual methods of various other cultures have become accelerants in capitalism, we must then ask *accelerants taking us where?*

Where is capitalism going? The mindfulness and the meditation and the hatha yoga and the meditation are being abused in the service of what, precisely?

Money.

But then what? If the goal was as simple as money, people who attain infinite money would immediately win capitalism, become <happy, liberated, free> or whatever the concept is, and that would be the end of that. Done.

So it is *not Money* which is the goal of capitalism, because money alone won't do it.

What is it then? What does capitalism want? Who is happy? Who has won capitalism?

The happiest people I can find in capitalism are mid-tier professionals in respected professions who are making a little more money every year than the year before: they exist at an apex of stability and continuous steady measured growth. They look forwards to comfortable retirements at predictable ages, and expect that their children will do a little better than they did, having access to better educations and more opportunities than their parents. For a moment, let us call this state *prosperity*. It is rooted in family life, and the reasonable expectation that your children will have better lives than you do.

Now let us juxtapose this position with *wealth*. There are some families who have been wealthy a very, very long time - they've figured out how to pass on wealth almost like a gene, a stable, enduring kind of wealth. Let us call these people *aristocrats*. Mostly, aristocrats are cheap, ruthless, and obsessed with maintaining social status. It's been hammered into them that you don't spend the money, because compound interest wins, and peasant revolts suck. They're the survivors of the French and Russian revolutions, and there are only a handful of them. The trust fund babies are generally in awe of these people.

Because mostly, the trajectory of the wealthy but not aristocratic is that their children will do far worse than they did. If you're an Elon Musk or a Bill Gates or a Warren Buffet, all you can pass on to your kids is genes and money. The lightning-like genius which met a ready environment and produced an enormous river of capital will not strike in the next generation: Prometheus, at his best, hands over only fire, not the will to go and steal from the gods. So the wealthy live with the knowledge that, in most cases, their children will have worse and less interesting lives than they had. They may inherit wealth, but there is a lot of inherited wealth around, and trust me on this: most of these people are miserable.

They're miserable because they know that eventually, down their genetic line, the money will run out, because they don't have the skills and talent of their forebears who actually made the money in the first place. They fear for themselves, and especially they fear for their children. Their children can only keep the wealth they can defend, they do not have the skills to make more as their ancestor did, and typically if they bet big, they will lose big. The money eventually runs out.

The entire wealth management industry runs on this fear: they are the mercenary retainers who will guarantee the money will grow and be passed down to another generation, in exchange for their 2% fee, come rain or come shine.

The rich are mostly **helpless** and the aristocratic are mostly in hiding.

This leaves the pirate kings, the so-called wealth creators, the makers of empires.

Churchill famously said "the empires of the future are the empires of the mind" referring to a new age of peace and prosperity that he believed could come from improvements in travel and international trade. This has turned out to be quite prophetic, as the battle lines in International relations are now as much to do with corporate fortunes as they are with tanks and guns and planes. Apple vs. Samsung is America vs. South Korea. Sony vs. LG is Japan vs. China.

Huge international sales mean money at home. Jobs from from money sent across borders, for the most part, because nearly all of the money in the world is somewhere else. The money sloshes around in an enormous bucket, and the countries it sticks to prosper, and those it flees, collapse.

In most industrialised nations, agriculture is 1% of Gross Domestic Product. Land is not value.

Real estate, although expensive, is not a substantial generator of value. A house produces no little houses, in the same way that a cow produces more cows. A house is not a machine tool, that produces parts for other machine tools. A house is a terminal point for wealth. As housing bubbles pull capital out of the manufacturing economies, and industrial capacity moves away, economies become hollowed out service economies as the people moving money and resources internationally spend their money down the pyramid. Real estate is not productive capacity, other than factories.

So if it's not agriculture and not housing, and it's not factories because all that stuff gets outsourced to countries with low costs of labour and safety standards as quickly as humanly possible in most nations. Germany being a notable exception - highly skilled small manufacturing companies make a lot of goods exported globally, and Japan has had a similar model at times. But for the most part, factories aren't really where the money comes from these days.

The money comes from trade. Many factors combine to make trade profitable: Ricardo's observation that if you do what you are good at, and I do what I am good at, and we trade, there is more for everybody has stood the test of time rather well. Specialisation, economies of scale, natural differences between nations, path dependence in previous industrial development and embedded knowledge capital which is hard to move internationally all combine to mean that what is easy for one is hard for another.

The disparities are so enormous that goods which are worth a dollar at the loading dock in China retail on Amazon in Europe for ten. By the time we introduce the economies of scale again and start to think in container loads everything changes again, and the difference between what manufacturers are paid and what consumers are charged can become a factor of a hundred. All of that gap is soaked up by tiers of middle men who “make trade efficient” by providing capital to enable large scale mass production of items which are otherwise too expensive when produced in small batches, and find markets for the enormous piles of goods that are being mass produced with this capital.

That’s basically the entire structure of the real economy right there: people who can marshal enormous demand for things can then pay somebody else to run incredibly efficient manufacturing operations, because when you’re making a million of something - or a billion of it - the manufacturing becomes almost free. There are exceptions, things which are genuinely hard to manufacture even at scale (microprocessors, cars etc. spring to mind) but for the most part the wealth comes from optimising industrial mass production. Even the huge commodities markets profit from stabilising prices for the feedstocks which are turned into all the material stuff that we use and consume: they can be parasitic up to a point, but the core logic of their existence is that they smooth prices over time and make manufacturing predictable.

And the internet? The internet makes its living as a vehicle for advertising. Some of that money is spent on information services - journalism - or art like music and video games, but the vast bulk of everything, when all is said and done, is material stuff.

So is the goal of capitalism to produce this stuff? You could very easily make that claim, but it’s not obviously true: if that was the case, why don’t we just *get on with it* and do the mass production inside of some kind of command economy context if the objective is just to produce masses and masses and masses of stuff?

If it doesn’t produce welfare for individuals even at the top of the pile, and the production of goods and services is not objectively the goal, *what is capitalism actually accomplishing?*

My answer is simple: capitalism is legitimised violence.

The goal of capitalism is to make it possible to practice violence without accountability. The same might also be said of socialism, but I have not lived under socialism, so I do not feel entitled to make such a bald statement.

But capitalism runs on violence, of three kinds.

The first is that *under capitalism, poor people can be beaten for doing the things necessary for their biological existence to continue*. The homeless can be moved on, regardless of their condition. The hungry are not automatically fed. Once you have *no money* you have essentially *no rights*. Money is therefore the right to act without violence: it is exchanged for consent of various kinds. “You make take one of my cakes for eleven dollars” or “you may stay in my hotel room for \$161.” No money means no consent means criminalisation, and the State legitimises violence of various kinds against criminals. This is the internal violence of capitalism. Once you fall into the designated victim class, you have few or no rights. Everything you need to do to survive becomes illegitimate: the homeless are homeless because we will not permit them to build homes of plywood and sheet metal on spare scraps of ground. They would all have homes quickly enough if we did not invest massive resources in *keeping them homeless* by

protecting the property rights and building codes and so on of polite society. Note this is not an argument for libertarian style deregulation, but let us observe that it is the law, not nature, which makes people homeless. They will build, if not stopped.

The second kind of violence is against nature. This is completely obvious: trees are felled to make furniture, and have no rights as *trees*. They're just matter to be fed into the mill. The same is true for animals. If it doesn't have a bank account, it doesn't exist. Extractive on one end, polluting on the other: carbon dioxide, methane, CFCs etc. all go into the atmosphere and poison the future. The damage may not be severe one ton at a time, but a gigaton here and there, and pretty soon you're talking about acidifying oceans and the rapid collapse of agriculture. Inside of the capitalist system as it stands, there is no legal identity for Nature as a whole, and very, very little legal identity for biological entities like trees. The biblical "dominion over nature" is surprisingly literal over law, and while there are occasional protections about felling old trees they are not rooted in the idea that the living being has rights. Corporations, on the other hand, have rights which are in many ways equivalent to the rights of human beings, under legal doctrines like "corporate personhood." It's fairly clear that the system of laws cannot work to protect things which do not have *identities* in the law: there's no name to put on the litigation paperwork. This leaves governments legislating on behalf of nature, and needless to say, *Nature does not vote*. The people, also, do not vote much for Nature, and so nature is left largely voiceless and defenseless. Obviously the EPA does *something* and you'll certainly miss it *when it is gone* but there is nothing like a mandate to *unconditionally protect Nature from humans*. Americans are at something like five times the sustainable level of CO2 they can emit, an unthinkable gigantic crime against the future which has no scientific defense - the damage is intentionally continued year on year, because the alternatives are not funded or mandated at the scale necessary to achieve fundamental transformation. And this has been going on for decades.

The third kind of violence is **the violence of being embedded in a system** in which the poor and nature are being destroyed, theoretically in our name and for our benefit. This is violence against the soul. In my own life, I have to choose: I can live at the bottom of society, on as little money as possible, and own practically nothing, thereby minimising my impact. I did this for 12 years, largely because I'd come to the conclusion that all the money in the world was made from hellish abuses, if you averaged it all out. During that time I got a lot said and invented, and little *done* because *doing things requires financial power* in almost all cases. And inside of capitalism, as I started a company, I soon discovered that treating other human beings as if their humanity mattered was a fast road to nowhere. If I'd been willing to destroy people to get where I was going, or to enslave them to my will just because I was paying them, how much more effective would I have been? It is practically impossible to be both egalitarian and effective. I thought within high value knowledge work we could make an egalitarian enclave, but even there, it's simply not stable. I don't know what to do about this personally. I eat meat because my metabolism is damaged from previous altitude problems, but where's the ethical exception for "being a boss" which basically amounts to using fear and greed (mostly the desire to avoid future fear) to make people into slaves? The psychological configuration of effective capitalism involves use of people - even in the high value knowledge work domain - which is hard for me to square with my fundamental morality in practice. I was fangless, and collaboration is not a substitute for control inside of capitalism as *it is practiced*. Yes, the books say something different. No, those books certainly do not adapt to the start up world. The measure appears to be how effectively can the whip be cracked.

I knew it sucked to be an employee. I figured that out in the late 1990s when I made the decision to permanently fire my boss, and never work for anybody again. I became a contractor, and that was fine to a point. Then I tried capitalism from the other side and, in practice, no dice there either within existing frameworks. To build a moral relationship between employees and employers, which passes inspection at an absolute spiritual level appears to be almost impossible. Maybe there are options which involve a vastly expanded paternalism, or collaborative resource extraction much like the voyagers of old, but for the most part, these moral paradoxes are insoluble. The Elon Musk's of the world balance the books by saying "it's for the greater good" as they enslave people towards the goal of saving the climate or protecting the future of biology by moving people and plants to Mars, but without any doubt that's one hell of a compromise: to hammer down the individuals in the name of saving the species is a hard, hard path.

Once again we are in a position where all players lose this game. The middle classes who are making steady progress are being progressively sandbagged over time, and everybody else is basically miserable because all positions are basically dominated by the fear of loss. People harm each other trying to maintain stasis or make progress against unbounded evolutionary pressures, fractionalized and focussed by the logical machinery of capitalism.

There is no stability to be had anywhere, and it's hard for an honest man to make a living.

So, once again, what is the goal of capitalism?

Capitalism has no goal, and more than fire has a goal. Fire *is burning* in much the same way that capitalism *is violence*. Capitalism is simply mass predation, encompassed within systems of government that reduce the damage enough that people experience the people feeding on them as shepherds rather than wolves. But in this situation, just as fleas have smaller fleas to bite them, everybody is trapped at their level, constantly fighting against those who attempt to farm them or eat them whole.

Products are emitted as byproducts of the evolutionary arms race to effectively allocate their resources, much as brightly coloured bugs develop poisons, or perhaps more as fruit trees encourage people to take care of them by growing desirable fruit *from a certain perspective*.

The notion that capitalism is fundamentally purposelessness fundamentally matters, because humans are not fundamentally purposeless. This mismatch between the meaning-finding nature of human beings, and the meaning-vacuum of the system they have constructed around themselves explains why even the rich are miserable: the environment they are in has sucked away stability and meaning in a way which leaves them afraid for their kids and their souls. At the lower tiers of society we are encouraged to think that money is the answer to our problems, because *a lot of problems are caused by the lack of money*. But as I've found out on the few occasions when I was doing alright, past a pretty low level in the grand scheme of things, money does not solve the actual problems, because anything less than *enormous* amounts of money cannot buy stability, and *no amount of money* can create meaning or purpose.

I'm focussing very specifically on the angst of the rich for a specific reason: if even those who are perceived to be winning the game are, in fact, losing then we have every right to assert that the game itself is broken. If the rich were doing *just great thank you very much* then it would be easy to say that the problem was lack of money, and one day

everybody will be rich because capitalism is really effective at making money. And, to be sure, increasing material baselines in areas like healthcare really does solve fundamental human problems in a very direct way. I'm not saying that poverty does not create problems. What I am saying is that money does not solve the problems we think it solves problems, even in very large amounts. As soon as the immediate fear of homelessness recedes, for most people, a huge raft of existential questions immediately surface. If they have kids, they can generally ram that stuff down under the immediate crisis which is parenthood, and by the time the kids are safely through college, retirement looms and the chance for a shot at doing nothing for a while. And that's how society continues to function with these fundamental questions unasked and unanswered: people just get their heads down and plough forwards on behalf of their families, and push all the moral issues aside.

But for the rich, particularly those born rich, what you see is the existential questions slam into most of them like torpedos. Because if you have the time on your hands to ask *what is going on?* the answers are so disturbing as to be showstoppers. The aristocrats know how to keep it together, generation after generation, and all have sophisticated fictions to wish away these existential doubts: the most refined levels of hypocrisy known to man.

The ability to get those lies right is what separates the *nouveau riche* from the real aristocratic deal. The *true blue* have so internalised the lies that maintain their position that they cannot allow reality to penetrate without complete meltdown, enter the vast psychotherapy industry, to care for the psychological flesh wounds of the rich, without ever addressing the systemic infection.

What the hell are we doing here?

“God” is dead

Over time, Western society discarded religion. The paradoxes in mainstream Christianity simply ate away faith over time, and the combined horrors of WW1 and WW2 rapidly convinced an entire civilisation that they had it wrong: what kind of god would permit such a thing was, I think, the basic logic. In some jurisdictions it was the discovery of massive child abuse by the clergy, in others it was just that quality of life stabilised to the point where a vengeful god seemed obsolete. One way or another, the intellectual core of society *lost Faith* and with it much or all of the moral stabilisation apparatus which had permitted society to function. The feudal systems of Old Europe were highly productive at a cultural level at times, but the fundamental washing of hands for the obscenities that progress required was done by the Church. God has ordained that the King was the King, and the King made Laws pretty much on behalf of god, for at least with God's consent. If those laws required you to do Bad Stuff or the Sheriff would hear of it, like beat your peasants to get them to pay their taxes, well that was God for you. You could go and complain to the priest about it next week as you made Confession. The system washed hands at the spiritual level.

Once god is dead, the rationalist classes have a problem: there's nothing to wash their hands for the evil that they do just to get by, and there's no Divine Order to make what is happening either necessary or acceptable. Things are broken, but **now we are the ones holding the bag**. This is a new situation and presents a new moral problem: this stuff is all wrong, but I still have to do it to feed my kids, and it was not ordained by God that things be this way.

I want to drill down on this at a “chain of command” level. In the old world, there was a celestial hierarchy: God, God-as-Christ, Apostolic Succession of the Pope in Rome, Divine Right of Kings, then the Feudal Order of Barons and so forth, right down to the luckless sinners pulling stones out from before ploughs wondering how come it was their turn to grow the turnips. The whole thing was anchored by the perception that it was divinely ordained, so its shitness was simply the way of the world, and you read your bible, worked hard so your aristocrats wouldn't cut off your ears, and confessed your sins on the basis that it was basically impossible to function in this world without sin, so you better have some place to put the moral load of being an asshole in a world filled with assholes.

As this system breaks down, the moral load has to land somewhere: if this mess is not god's fault, who's fault is it? Man's? Who's actually holding the bag here.

The Marxists, of course, try and reengineer society so there is no bag: everybody works reasonably hard, everybody eats, and the fear-based model of existence goes away over time, liberating people into a new blah blah commissars mass murder genocide gulags and so on. Apparently that didn't work so well, having been tried repeatedly. The systems required enormous violence to manage and maintain these illusions of utopia, and the damage is bad enough that the “never again Marxism” rational is not irrational, any more than “no more Nazis, ever” is a very reasonable stance.

So we are in a position where there is a moral bag to be held, because our lives still imply doing violence to nature and to other human beings. God will not wash our hands. Marxism attempted a universal hand-washing by building a society in which the violence in the system was justified by the care that the system provided, and then blew the entire thing in an orgy of mass murder, over and over again, across half a dozen societies.

Where do we go now?

Path dependence

The system that we have erected could not have been constructed without the illusion of god to absorb the moral burden of the violence inherent in our creation, society.

We built the system up with the illusion of God, and particularly with the institution of Confession as a place to dump the guilt and shame of operating such a horrendous machine as feudalism. When the Protestants came along and decided that the hot thing was *predestination* they simply decided that it was God's will that the poor starved and the rich beat them, and no confession was necessary: god had *ordained* all of this, just as he had ordained whether or not a given soul was saved or damned. The Dutch very effectively demonstrated the power of this guilt bypass in places like South Africa. It was arguably better than the Henry the VIII model in which the English Throne became extremely explicitly a position ordained by god, and all the things done in its name were fully justified and authorised by The Powers That Be right up to the Heavenly Throne far above us, on which the creator of the universe ruled.

If we had never build these guilt bypasses, could society have ever come to look like this?

Most of the tribal societies appear to have had vastly less sophisticated guilt bypass mechanisms. Concepts like reincarnation are common, often going as far as the idea that

the hunters may occasionally reincarnate as the lions, and vice versa, and sometimes even out to the prey animals. The treating of animals like family members, right up to the point of slaughter, is more or less a universal practice. Local gods, or religious customs backed by roughly equivalent force, certainly washed the hands for plenty of brutal local customs, but I have yet to come across an example of a guilt bypass mechanism with the unbelievable power of the Divine Right of Kings coupled with Confession, or Protestant Predestination. The doctrine that everything is god's will, in European culture, seemed to turn into a *carte blanche* for butchery in a way that in (for example) India it largely turned into pacifism and acceptance of life's difficulties without much violence - or effective attempts to resolve the root causes of suffering. A "that's just life, try not to make it worse" attitude on one hand, versus the Western approach of (if anything) **maximising** suffering, and then making a general cultural goal of curing diseases, housing the masses, growing food out of stones, and generally removing all the causes of material pain by the application of science.

I was in my 40s before I could afford to go and see a dentist who was genuinely and completely painless, and incredibly competent. Compared to the standards of rural Scottish dental work in the 1970s, it was a different lifetime. I am all for the reduction of incidental pain by the application of science, and if anything is a sacred mission, this is.

But why do we seem to be trashing the world and slaughtering the poor to get there?

What the hell is wrong with us?

Cutting through Spiritual Colonialism

What is the answer to Western guilt about destroying the world?

It's clearly eating people alive. The declining standards of rationality in the West's most powerful cultures - incidentally the ones still profiting the most from colonialism - are in response to the overwhelming knowledge that their lifestyles are maintained by the rape of nature and the torture of millions or billions. The slow trickle of news about the CIA trained death squads in South America, the occasional pictures or, even worse, videos from the inside of slaughterhouses, and the increasing need to step over homeless people on the way into Starbucks have made it increasingly clear that *something is very wrong*. And I say this sitting on a chair that would have cost a thousand dollars retail: even if I picked it up in a flea market for a hundred bucks, somebody had to actually pay a thousand dollars for these things *in bulk* or they would not exist. I am not immune to the desire for the finer things: but am I willing to kill to maintain that lifestyle? Am I willing to crush people structurally to maintain it?

I don't know. The guilt sink of "well, I'm saving the world" has worn thin: I've piled up quite a bit of possibly world-saving innovation over the years, most notably the hexayurt refugee shelter and the simple critical infrastructure maps planning tools, but the adoption is so slow that it appears I've done little more than keep a book in print which nobody chooses to read. Updating and expanding the work of Buckminster Fuller was a big job, but even done quite well, very little change has resulted.

Can I justify my consumption if what I'm doing is, I don't know, building digital identities for physical stuff? Is the link between my existence, and some kind of overwhelmingly good and useful deliverable too fragile to actually make the necessary sacrifices to maintain a high productivity lifestyle?

Am I doing this for you, in the abstract, or for me?

I eat meat, for chirssakes. Can I really justify that?

Why am I in this position? Here, we have a cultural mismatch: Asian spirituality, in my case the householder tradition of the Nath Sampradaya of India, meeting the lifestyle of a modern tech executive. The western half of that has a *path dependency* - it was built up during the hellish Medieval and Colonial periods in which Europe washed its hands of the rivers of blood by liberal application of the Blood of Christ, sometimes boiled down into concepts like King and Country, for the English. The Western system simply externalised all the damage it did using the fiction of divine preordination and a god that forgave all sins for the price of a wafer and a sip of wine once a week. Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition, but if you think about it, give human beings that kind of moral “get out of jail” free card in an environment where killing to survive is a lot more certain than farming lentils and you begin to see how we got here: there is an overwhelming bundle of guilt at the heart of western society because our lifestyle practices were established at a time when *there was no guilt, because this was all god’s fault*. As we have established a more mature moral position it has become necessary to start to examine how we act, but the entire situation is so morally filthy that it’s almost impossible to imagine our way out of it.

We built the entire system on a credit card that we *thought* was being paid for by the Blood of Christ, as outrageous indignities were committed by all parties to build this civilisation, and now we discover that those credit card bills are actually being delivered to our house, and *we ourselves are responsible for our actions, not the absent god*.

Western civilisation has few or none of the necessary mechanisms required to handle the moral weight of people being responsible for their own actions, and the resulting split between reason and our history is the major driving force behind syndromes like global warming denial and praising HIV as “the wrath of god.”

It’s not that people have simply lost their mind: Faith built this hell, and the loss of Faith leaves us responsible for fixing it. We have a civilisation-level moral hangover.

Within this context, the apocalyptic nature of Marxism becomes much clearer. The attempt was to build a world which would not generate this enormous weight of guilt, because the general social weal would be so overwhelmingly obvious that whatever ills had to be committed to maintain the society would be seen as an acceptable price to pay for a country (or, indeed, a world) in which nobody went without education or health care. But without time to adapt, entire nations went straight from the “God washes all hands” Christian era, straight into Godless Communism *and continued to act as if god was picking up the bills for their misdeeds*. The Marxist tendency to genocide amounts to internal “convert or die” Faith-based crusades *against internal populations who were seen as showing inadequate zeal in the New Faith* and the resulting mass murders look all too familiar from previous rounds of massive religious frenzy. The destruction was epic and total, and so many of the essential concepts of Marxism are now soaked in blood that they have to be rederived from other sources, rather than simply being quoted from Capital.

Spiritual Colonialism is the futile attempt to steal methodologies from, for example, the Dharmic civilisations of Asia and apply those methods for *individual spiritual absolution* for members of Western society who are unwilling to give up their lavish lifestyles just because they require bloodshed on an epic scale to maintain.

The desire is to find a framework which *allows colonialism to run wild* by convincing people that they are not personally responsible for their own personal participation in and gain from the evils of society as a whole. In short, they're looking for an equivalent of the Nuremberg Defense, in which Nazi officials claimed to have been "just following orders." If one can say "I was just playing out my role in the great wholeness of life" as one slaughters in the mall with a credit card, unconcerned by the child labour making the clothes, and the piled bodies of generations of union activists who were shot in the back of the head by guys trained by guys trained by guys who were trained by the CIA back in the '70s, then there is no fundamental responsibility: once again, all is as god wills it.

Of course, this is not how the Dharmic civilisations work at all. The way "Divine Law" works in such societies is built on a different set of foundations to the Divine Right of Kings, including concepts like caste dharma - the set of things required of you by each station of life. And these traditions are, needless to say, completely contaminated by medieval bullshit on a scale which makes even the more backwards corners of Christianity look ultraprogressive. The fabulous problems of dragging Hinduism into a form which is even broadly compatible with egalitarian democracy and universal human rights could take centuries to work out at the current rate of progress. But that issue, bad as it is, is not the world-threatening issue. The world-threatening issue is using concepts from Asian and other religious traditions *specifically as an escape route for the moral responsibility for what is being done to the planet and its peoples by the West, every single day.*

Those caste dharmas and the general framework of Hindu morality are entirely rooted in concepts like reincarnation. If you screw this place up, you are coming back here. I have never once, in 25 years of mixing with New Age types at various levels of exposure, ever heard a person express anxiety about reincarnating on a planet their civilisation has entirely trashed. Ethnic Hindus, on the other hand, often discuss their concerns about global warming in the context of "my god what is going to be left of this place by the time we come back?" It's a completely different felt sense of the role of the Dharma, the divine ordering of things, because the "god has willed" parts are embedded inside of a model of *karma* as a massive long-term huge scale responsibility framework for human actions. This is why Gandhi had so much leverage: the Hindus really did believe that they were talking on the *karma* of the people they were harming by their habits in the marketplace. As a result it was possible to motivate them to act en masse to push back *against the incursion of a system which required them to act in unethical ways to survive economically.* It was a fight back against the Market as an absolute law, backed by colonial power. The English model of the economy was going to bankrupt India, destroy its productive capacity, and siphon all the wealth to England. Gandhi fought it at a moral level, and cut the desire of the Indians for English-made machine-loom cloth by making hand spun cloth made in India by traditional weavers the only acceptable patriotic dress, as part of the Swadeshi movement *which recovered India from the English with hardly a shot fired.*

This stuff works.

There is no escape from personal responsibility for your participation in capitalism in the religions of Asia. In all of those traditions, you are *massively more* responsible for the consequences of your actions than in any Western conception of reality.

We would never, ever have built this hellhole because there was simply no way to externalise the spiritual costs of constructing it. There was simply no ritual of confession to wipe away the sin of living this way, and taking all the past steps which led to us living this way today.

Building a civilisation where “god” picks up the tab for all the evil done is morally unsustainable in the worst possible way, and the system created on that “get out of jail free” card is equally morally unsustainable today.

The abuse of Asian religious concepts to wash our hands for participation in capitalism is spiritual colonialism. It is not what our traditions say, and believing that it is perpetuates the system of violence which runs this world.

There is no escape for what you have done in yoga.

Gandhi was not messing around: what we buy is inherently part of our moral development, and this basic level of morality cannot be neglected in the practice of yoga. I do a lot of things I know are wrong. I struggle with this too. But let me tell you: things are as they are, and not as we would like them to be, and we must all struggle with this load.

And now, let's do the new age.

Mass awakening is another destructive delusion

One of the byproducts of the CIA soaking California in LSD in the 1960s was the formation of the Great Awakening Myth. The GAM was well established by the Victorians and earlier occult writers: the Age of Aquarius was long in the tooth long before the musical Hair made it into a catchphrase. But the combination of LSD, cultural unrest (fuelled by people being drafted and sent to Vietnam, plus desegregation), and a huge influx of teachers of Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and more, fused into a sticky, tarry mess in the form of the Great Awakening Myth. This is a beast that will not die. It dies in the 1960s as reality crashes in and a wave of heroin and Altamont-style disasters contaminates the entire perception that the Age of Aquarius is nigh upon us. But it's reborn in the 1990s all over again, now wrapped around That Thing In The Desert (hip speak for Burning Man, not Coachella.) The “Burner Exceptionalism” collides with the SF tech boom, and the Iraq war. The result is a near-reproduction of the conditions of the 1960s, but now the hippies have money, and communes can support themselves by computer programming. AIDS has cramped the Free Love stuff substantially, but polyamory is at least affordable love, and the whole shambolic mess restarts.

Then the Ayahuasca arrives.

Now, I'm on thin ice here. I've got no grounding *at all* in the South American indigenous traditions. I don't think I've ever had more than passing contact with trained shamans, certainly not indigenous adepts. Maybe they're just delighted with the way that Ayahuasca has been integrated into American leading edge culture, but *from the things I have seen online* it sure looks like many of the South American leadership think this entire Californian Ayahuasca cult scene is becoming a destructive shit show. This should surprise no one: just look at the utter disaster they made of Tantra. Certainly, from somebody sitting in the cultural crater that Ayahuasca abuse has carved in spiritual culture in the West, I think there are very severe problems, and I think those problems

replicate the same patterns in the Californian abuse of concepts and practices from Tantra (my own tradition.)

I should note here that I have never done Ayahuasca. I do not like what it does to people, and I have no wish to spend 8 hours throwing my guts up, telling a vine that it does not understand the 21st century, and needs to stop hamfistedly interfering in human affairs before it does the world an injury.

What I have seen is an endless parade of people who've been brainwashed by the same spiritual vision: a world of spiritual oneness in which some kind of advanced techno-tribal civilisation runs without ecological offence, in a paradise of peace and plenty. And, while I have no doubt that such a world is possible, it is my severe duty to tell you **drugs will not get you there.**

The Asian traditions were not short of access to drugs. Soma is legendary in Yoga, indeed one old name for the Yogis is apparently "those who have drunk the soma and know." But.

Carved out of the traditional Asian context, particularly the guru-disciple tradition, what the drugs do for most people is cause massive psychological distortions. The Ayahuasca download *makes no sense at all* and, in this world, if you can't represent it on a *spreadsheet it is not happening*. There's simply no way forwards towards that goal for people who aren't sitting on trust funds, and *coincidentally* most of the people who are most profoundly sold on the Californian Ayahuasca vision of the future are sitting on top of trust funds.

What they're looking for is a vision of the future in which they can live a life of luxury and pleasure, flying round the world taking drugs with their friends, and feel this is directly contributing to saving the world by ushering in The Great Awakening.

I know some of these people. I'd consider them my friends (at least until they read this.) But the bottom line is that awakening individually takes 20 years of diligent effort for most people, and I don't think it's much different in South America. They might be able to whack people a couple of times with the Big Shiny Rainbow Mallet a couple of times to get them to understand that there is work to be done, but if it was instant enlightenment, South America would have been a utopia decades ago, if not centuries. And I'm sure the Amazonian Indians and the Peruvians and so on were doing great, at times, but the odds that entitled white people are going to absorb that culture and tradition *by doing the same drugs* is as absurd as people thinking that taking cocaine will let them dance like John Travolta in Saturday Night Fever.

Now, this is not to say that it's impossible for Californians etc. to study with the South Americans and learn their ways over time. I'm sure there are good teachers and good students doing diligent work over decades to achieve an intercultural spiritual understanding of depth, integrity and deep mutual respect. But these brave few people are lost in this vast swamp of corrupted idiots trying to wash their hands in a river of nonsense just because they saw a vision of a better world on a bunch of drugs. If the drugs can ship that kind of change, they would have already. Clinical use to treat PTSD and depression is a paradigm with clinical data to support it. But mass awakening? Progress towards that goal should be visible by now if it worked, *and it just isn't*. The test of spirituality is what people do: not what they see, not what they say, not what they tell you is coming. California has been steeped in hippie values and every drug, drug cult, and drug culture known to man for 60 years, two full generations, *and there is absolutely*

no sign of mass awakening, as you can see from the treatment of San Francisco's homeless population.

If there is no human solidarity, then no awakening has occurred.

It's a simple and utterly reliable test. Whatever San Francisco got from 60 years of the Great Awakening Myth, it was not awakening.

If you would like evidence of what Awakening looks like, I direct your gaze to Kerala, one of the poorest populations in the world (60 million people) with a near-100% literacy rate, and life expectancy and birth rates right in line with Europe. They manage this by actually taking care of each other. One of India's most respected spiritual leaders, Ammachi, has enormous cultural influence there, and one could suggest that her values are part of why Kerala has such good sustainable development results. I will defer to experts on Kerala on that issue, but from a distance, it sure looks like there may be some impact there. Amma has a very large follower base in the State.

Where do we go from here?

Gandhi was right.

We are morally responsible for what we buy, and for the living conditions of the people who made it, transported it, sold it to us, and will dispose of it when we are done. There is simply no escape from this conclusion, and any spirituality which does not acknowledge *that we are responsible for what we do* is simply a false path which will lead us deeper into hell as the environmental and resource crises deepen. No more Spiritual Colonialism. It's time for that show to end, permanently.

If there is to be real spirituality, it must come in the form of what we do, not simply the stories we tell ourselves about our lives.

How, then, are spiritual beings to live in this world?

Let's go back to basics. Here is Gandhi's list of the fundamental problems.

1. Wealth without work.
2. Pleasure without conscience.
3. Knowledge without character.
4. Commerce without morality.
5. Science without humanity.
6. Religion without sacrifice.
7. Politics without principle.

Now, let me ask a naive question: is he *wrong*?

He's a smart, Get Things Done kind of a man. He shipped great, revolutionary (bloodless!) results, and shone an incredibly bright light into the world, until some idiot shot him. We all live in the enormous crater left by Gandhiji's death. The tragedy of the world is that we have made essentially no moral progress since he was murdered by a person who wanted to hang on to privileges which Gandhi wished to fade into history.

Are we strong enough to pick up where Gandhi left off, and actually build a spiritual culture which transforms how we live and how we work, into a pattern of life which we can square against the fundamental truths of our age on poverty and environment?

Or are we going to tell ourselves that going to Burning Man is our spiritual development for the year? I mean, don't get me wrong, I *love* Burning Man, but it needs to be part of a balanced diet of *intensive meditation* and *hard moral effort* if it is going to turn us into better people. If we are doing the work as hard as we can, the occasional spiritual festival cannot help but uplift us, but the core, bedrock spiritual work is not being done at anything like the levels of intensity, by anything like enough people, to stabilise and ground the psychedelic wonderland of Burning Man into a broader cultural transformation which is relevant to the culture of exploitation and destruction in which we are still embedded. You just need to look at the garbage problems on the road to Reno to understand how little fundamental spiritual transformation has been achieved by Burning Man: it's about what people do, and far too many do whatever they damn well please, and mistake this heedlessness for Freedom.

We must go further, and we must do more.

The unconscionable concentration of wealth is not simply about the billionaires. It is not simply about the 1%, or the 10%. It is about the cultures who looted the world to build systems which could create computers, the internet, vaccines and rocket ships, but also squandered endless resources in destructive foreign wars, and the creations of nuclear and biological weapons stockpiles which threaten the world more than any other single factor, global warming included. All the members of these cultures benefit from what was stolen from the rest of the world, either directly or indirectly. That's why they have electricity, running water and paved roads everywhere, while most of the human race scrabbles in the dirt for resources, and hopes to stop their kids dying of diarrhoea.

Our need, our spiritual evolution and purpose, has to be to awaken from the myths that tell us that our lifestyles can *literally* cost the world, and that in some way we are both *entitled* to live this way, and *morally free to do so*. The Great Awakening Myth is the go-to hand washing solution for the vast majority of the semi-self aware people in Western culture. It's how the Californians justify most of what they do, both individually and collectively. The Silicon Valley technocrats have a slightly different approach, which I will detail shortly. But the bedrock spirituality of the progressive edge of Western culture is rooted in the Great Awakening Myth, and it is utterly paralysing our ability to get anything done about the real integrated moral spirituality which the world so desperately lacks.

We must pick up Gandhi's tools if we are to straighten out this mess. The focus has to be directly on the moral level to generate the necessary moral force to change the way we live and create an economy which will give Nature enough breathing space to support us all, and our descendants, long into the future.

In the yoga tradition, before Hatha Yoga, the physical positions, there are the Yamas and the Niyamas, the things one should and should not do morally before doing Hatha Yoga. We need Yamas and Niyamas for the modern age, and I believe Gandhi is our single best hope at acquiring those necessary spiritual and moral values to guide the rest of our development as human beings.

We must ground our spirituality into the marketplace through our purchasing decisions: buy nothing containing poison, torture, murder, or slavery. Right now, being

100% on top of that would mean dropping out of society, so there has to be a long term concerted push to establish ethical brands *and make this work*.

There has already been substantial success making vegetarian and vegan food mainstream. Building that awareness and those supply chains took decades. How fast could we do the same thing for carbon-neutral and slavery-free certifications?

Are we willing to be poorer to be better people? Do our spiritual values have any reality at all?

It is the same question. But you can only see that if you pierce the veil on the big lie of the Great Awakening. Otherwise, the Great Awakening simply becomes another form of absolutism, and all the evil that we do is in some way justified by this future potential collective transformation. Nothing can wash our hands of what we do.

The Space Elite

Now let us examine the other Silicon Valley strategy: building spaceships.

Here, the moral hand washing is pretty simple: we are going to sacrifice quality of life for a lot of people, and use the resources we take in this process by safeguarding all life by loading it into spaceships and sending it to Mars, and then on to the astroid belt. In the process we are going to bring a pile of new resources to earth, and hugely derisk the continuation of life on earth.

They're not wrong. They may be assholes, but they're not wrong. These actions are grounded in an intelligent view of life on earth and its predicament: the nuclear weapons really are in the silos, and the political class which commands them is beyond respect or trust. The prospect of nuclear annihilation is very real over the half century timescale, and the onrush of biotechnology destabilises the world ever-faster. There are catastrophic consequences for even small errors in this environment, and we need acute awareness of our options, one of which is "make a backup in space."

So they're not wrong.

There are open questions about whether this strategy makes it more or less likely that the earth itself will become uninhabitable. My guess, and it is only a guess, is that conditions on Mars will be so difficult and unappealing that the global elite will not simply relocate operations there and try and run Earth by remote control: Mars is not going to be Switzerland for a century, and in all probability its governance will not make it suitable as a haven for escaping elites. They are going to have to Get Stuff Done to survive up there, and that leaves little room for pampered, useless elites to embed themselves.

It's a frontier, and that's not typically where elites choose to relocate.

However, we should be warned that these massively educated, informed and effective human beings have such a grim view of the world and its governance that they are working extremely hard on getting us off-planet. This obsession is prevalent among some of the best minds on earth not as a distraction or a game, but because they have essentially given up on fixing the governance of this world in time to make any difference to the survival of our species.

Now, the tricky moral question: are these people morally justified in the things they do inside of capitalism, just because they use their money on space flight (or, in the case of

Gates and Buffet, on massive modernist philanthropies which may or may not be effective in the long run).

There is no simple answer to this question. Was Bill Gates the same man at 35 when Embrace and Extend crippled digital interoperability as he was at 55 when he decided to save the world with his money, and got Buffet on board too? I would say that, within parameters, these men are in the role of Great Kings: they've done terrible things (but a lot less terrible than armed bloodshed) to amass great fortunes, and are now turning their wealth to moral ends. Perhaps their trajectory is effective and efficient, perhaps it is needlessly destructive. Either way, it is what we have got to work with, and a lot of money is being spent. A lot of work is being done.

I believe that any of these people could give you a well-reasoned argument, from clearly defined moral first principles, for the vast majority of what they have done. We could either agree or disagree with it, point by point, but I simply do not believe them to be acting *now* from a lack of integrity.

This is a zone of nothing but compromises and grey areas, but remember this: far, far more wealth is locked in enormous fortunes that create nothing other than real-estate deals and boardroom takeovers. I'll take the Gates philanthropies and the Musk-Bezos rocket ships over luxury condos any day of the millennia. They may share the guilt of the rich, but their chosen mode of atonement ***genuinely does benefit everybody, and possibly protects life itself in the process.***

If we are stuck with great concentrations of wealth - and that is a political question - let us hope that more and more of it is spent in such intelligent, creative, and humane ways.

The end of the beginning

The corona virus pandemic represents the end of a great phase of planetary affairs. It is the end of the post-WW2 settlement, far more so than the victory of the democratic model in 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed.

We have been reminded, relatively gently, of the power of Nature. The virus could very easily have been 20% fatal for everybody, as it was for the very old, and it is a matter of some luck that the first bad pandemic in a century was not more severe. It could very easily have knocked us back into the medieval period had it shown the full ferocity of which disease is capable. I will not say we got lucky, because it could be followed by a mutation or a second pandemic very easily. We are still in the first phase of dealing with this thing.

We have seen corona virus tear through the fictions we told ourselves about governance and the global economy, particularly in America and perhaps China too. The UK has made a global laughing stock of itself after the hamfisted Brexit process was followed by a pandemic response so bad it made America look good. We have seen smart, sane, largely female-led nations move rapidly towards effective infection control as the "leaders of the free world" revealed themselves to be absolute clown shows.

The old model of power will have a hard time justifying itself again, and I would expect voting patterns and political concerns to sharply reflect this in future. Silicon Valley, too, has failed to perform in some quite radical ways: three months in, and still no widespread automatic contact tracing platform, although there is cooperation to this end. Did it take

the Chinese and the Koreans this long? Even Hong Kong, where the response was largely bottom-up, managed these tasks quickly and effectively.

By any standards, the incumbent powers are not doing well.

We don't know how far the economic collapse is going to go either. There is a real possibility that markets will fail, and we will be thrust into interdependence whether we like it or not: our farmers may once-again be at the centre of society, and critical infrastructure workers may struggle to keep the lights on this winter, if the global economy caves in as many think it threatens to. Likewise, America's democracy is at serious risk: I have never seen serious newspapers debate whether or not a sitting president will accept the results of an election in America. It chills me to the bone. In short, the decks are stacked for a few years of global change which will still be written about centuries in the future.

I want to kill some pernicious weeds which have grown up in my patch. I am an enlightened householder yogi of the Nath Sampradaya tradition. I've made a complex and difficult pass through the West, from my birth in Scotland, through to my current life today as CEO of <http://mattereum.com>, a company which seeks to track the carbon and slavery footprints of manufactured goods, as well as authenticating art work and collectibles. We have a long manifesto (about as long as this document) on precisely how these mechanisms of accountability can result in less inefficient and morally cleaner global trade <https://medium.com/humanizing-the-singularity/how-post-industrial-capitalism-and-a-new-type-of-big-data-will-save-the-planet-6574b1d75bf6>.

This is my attempt to square my spiritual values with my desire to get enough resources to go and fix the problems I started to work on when I designed the <http://hexayurt.com> refugee shelter.

I've watched for years as wave after wave of phony, disconnected spirituality has washed through western society, deceiving and deluding people in their search for truth. It's made it extremely difficult to get things done, as people confuse a certain shiny, distracted quality (mostly coupled with some bullshit story about mass awakening) for real spirituality.

The real thing is hard work. And we need more people doing the real thing, doing the hard work of personal transformation, so that they can be upstanding moral forces to help set this planet to rights in the current unpleasantness, and can bravely face the challenges to come.

Facing the climate crisis is going to require an entirely new kind of global civic engagement. The solar panel technology is rushing towards us, but getting them deployed cannot happen fast enough to sustain our current lifestyles. There is going to have to be compromise, between the rising global middle class and the incumbent comfortably-off citizens of the Western powers for sure, but also between the Western powers and China and India. If democracy is a good principle for governing individual countries, why not the world? The old cultures represent about 40% of the world's total population, but have very little say (even today) in the fundamental direction of the world. Perhaps votes at the UN should be weighted by the population of the country casting the votes. I don't know.

But I do know this.

The specialised knowledge of the Asian world in consciousness is being horrifically abused, perverted and distorted by Americans and Europeans to provide moral absolution where none is warranted or deserved. It's providing a moral escape hatch for just exactly the culturally progressive people that should be buckling down to implement Gandhi's vision of voluntary simplicity and service to the poor, and today, to the earth itself. We need a grounded, worthy, dense, durable, and above all *responsible* spirituality for the global conditions which now pertain.

The bubble has burst. Covid has tested the Great Awakening Myth and found it hollow: months into the crisis, that entire landscape is still entirely a shambles as people try and explain how mass death from disease is "part of the planetary awaking process." Well, sure, but you could say the same thing about Hiroshima, Nagasaki and AIDS, and would be equally true and equally false. The absence of credible response and leadership from that sector should tell us all everything we need to know about their ability to show credible spiritual leadership in the times to come. There is no Great Mass Awakening, and all action taken and justified on that basis is just more investment in delusion and folly.

The hard path is open to all of us: morally justify your actions with service to your fellow beings, and especially service to the earth. We need mass collaboration, perhaps in the Free Software / Open Source model, to design lifestyles of voluntary simplicity which allow us to live well and take no more than our fair share of the earth's resources in the process. There is no need for the conspicuous display of wealth on a planet with a billion starving people, particularly from those who believe themselves to be spiritual beings ushering in a Great Awakening. This is simply corruption of the worst kind, and should not be tolerated by anybody.

I've tried to convey here a sense of the outrage that I feel, on behalf of my lineage, at the corruption of yoga by a culture that simply takes, twists, and wastes nearly everything which nature or God gives it. There is no legitimate spirituality in the west, because everything was built under the illusion that God washes your hands when you die, or similar abrogations of personal responsibility. This is not so: we are as God made us, but we are also imbued with free will, and responsible for what we do with it. There is no short cut or escape hatch which separates us from the responsibility for our actions.

Freedom comes from having multiple paths forwards, each of which represents spiritually, morally, ethically and creatively correct behaviour. If the choice is between one evil and another evil, you have no freedom: you are enslaved.

By this metric, who among us is truly free?

We must work together to build a moral base for human freedom.

