



On Society
vol. 1: Philosophizing

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The Key Ingredient of a Healthy Society

Whatever our personal views might be, I think we can all agree on some basics of what makes a society healthy. A healthy society is one in which everyone is as happy and healthy as possible, where everyone feels fulfilled and able to meet their needs, and where people live in relative peace and harmony with each other and the natural world.

An unhealthy society, then, is one with astronomical disparities in health and happiness, where most people lack what they need to thrive, with regular social unrest, miserable, sick people, and rampant ecological destruction.

The United States is, of course, an unhealthy society. It's not alone in this; most societies around the world are wildly unhealthy. Whether it's an oligarchy or a republic, whether it relies on private ownership or state ownership of resources, nearly every society on the planet lacks the one key ingredient that produces the kind of healthy society we outlined above.

That ingredient is authenticity — but not in the way you might think.

We typically think of authenticity as a personal or relational issue alone. We worry about being authentic with friends and family, or practice being honest with ourselves about what we feel or want. When we think of inauthenticity, we think of Instagram influencers and high school popular kids.

Talk of authenticity might make its way into politics when judging the perceived character of a politician, but that's as far as it extends.

We don't think about authenticity at work. We don't think about authenticity in public policy. We don't think about authenticity in structuring our government or our economy.

When we go to work, we work for companies whose bottom-line is to perpetuate the company's financial interests, not to promote the authentic interests of their employees or their community. When governments run, they do so to preserve the power of their nation, which is often directly at odds with the authentic interests of their people and land. I don't know of a single nation-state that encourages regular collective conversation about what forms of governance and economy promote its people's authentic best interest.

Look around you. This whole world is built for institutions that don't prioritize anyone's actual wellbeing. Our world is run by and for "interests" that are utterly divorced from real needs. We've created a whole world built on concepts that only exist in our minds, and we prioritize these concepts above living, breathing people.

Take, for example, the British monarchy. The Crown is an institution, a set of ideas and expectations, and it's been imbued with an interest to preserve itself and its role in society. That interest is often at odds with the personal

needs of its even its own family members, including Elizabeth Windsor herself.

It's not just a monarchy of course. Any country in the world is just that: an idea, a set of expectations we've ascribed interests to. We say that a nation state has interest in expanding its power and maintaining its control, regardless of whether the actions taken in service of these goals have negative personal consequences for its citizens, land or leaders. A nation is just an idea. You cannot feed an idea. You cannot heal an idea. You cannot wage war on an idea. You can only wage war on people. Going to war with a nation means killing people and wrecking land. The idea remains unscathed.

A corporation is not a person, my friend, but it does have its own set of interests. Based on its charter and legal obligations, it has an interest to maximize profit for its shareholders, maintain and expand its market share, and out-compete other companies in its field. The interests of a corporation may tangentially correlate with the interests of the human beings employed at its highest levels, but this correspondence is indirect at best. Corporate interests are corporate interests; they aren't human interests.

Even the most powerful CEO is still a servant to the imaginary interests of "the corporation," as though an arbitrary legal determination could think or feel or bleed. We are all kept in servitude by our unquestioning allegiance to them. From corporations to nation-states,

from laws to institutions, we the people spend our lives enacting desires that truly belong to none of us.

To put it mildly: this has to stop. This institutionalization of interest, as though some abstract concept like a corporation or a country were a living, breathing creature in need of love or food, is quite literally killing us all. This is the logic of cancer, not of life.

If we want to end the cycles of exploitation, violence and depravity in our societies, we must create economic and political systems that allow people to represent their own interests, not confine them to act as representatives of some conceptual entity. We will continue to take actions that harm and exploit people and planet until we have political and economic structures that are built by and for what we actually need, not what some abstract concept requires according to the parameters by which we built it.

We made up corporations and countries. We made up property laws and law enforcement. We made up borders and criminality. So too can we unmake them.

Rather than act to play the role of the representative of a company or government, we must craft systems in which people sit at the negotiation table as themselves. We must act not as CEOs or employees, not as presidents or officers, not as judges or soldiers, but as people: individual humans with our own and shared needs, which are worthy of meeting simply because we have them.

We must craft economic and political systems that allow us to act according to the interests we authentically, personally have. We must stop wasting our energy preserving roles that are authentic to no one, to enact interests that are needed by no one.

Instead, we must lean into the vulnerable, empathetic process of making decisions together, simply as ourselves. Until we do, our needs and the needs of our planet will never be centered, because they can't be — not when our lives are enslaved to the fake “needs” of made-up concepts.

A healthy society meets the needs of the living beings within it. We must enshrine the ability to directly advocate for our authentic needs at every level of society. Anything else will continue to lead us deeper into collapse.

A Better Focus than “Freedom”

Any movement, be it personal or political, that is founded on freedom will invariably miss the mark. It will fall short of its goals because it fixates on the wrong ideal. Freedom is a means to an end, but not the end itself. It is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for creating actions that are consensual. The other necessary condition is authenticity.

To begin: Every action we take is a choice. This is not to say that everything that happens to us is a choice; it isn't. The actions we take, however, are choices, whether or not they feel like choices. When we act, we choose a particular option from a possible set of multiple options. Our choices are never infinite, in the absolute sense, but are infinite in the sense that there is an infinity of different numbers between 0 and 1.

For example, if your boss calls you into her office to fire you, this is not your choice. But where are you going to sit while you're fired? You can move your chair one inch to the left. Or are you going to stand on one foot? You probably chose not to interrupt your boss by reciting Shakespeare monologues or belting out a Disney love ballad. Are you thinking about your work performance, or the pimple on your boss's nose? You're breathing. Are you noticing your breath? You can breathe more slowly or quickly. Your inhale could take 5 seconds, or 2, or 10.

Yes, technically, even within this extremely narrow event, you have an infinity of options, each and all of which alter and shape the experience for all involved. But that probably didn't make you feel anymore empowered to make choices, did it?

Because choice is not the same as consent. Consent is the act of making a choice that feels like a choice, that is experienced as a choice. Consent is experienced as a free choice. But freedom is never infinite — try as you might, you cannot teleport yourself to Rome right now. You cannot grow gills and breathe underwater this Thursday. You cannot just decide that your crush loves you back and make it true. You never have an absolute infinity of options, no matter how much “freedom” you have.

But at some point — freedom feels like freedom, and choices feel consensual. That point is determined by two things: 1) your ability to take possible options, and 2) your awareness of what options exist. When your ability is too constrained, always by some material or imagined power hierarchy, choices do not feel consensual. For examples of power hierarchy corrupting and negating the experience of consent, see the #MeToo movement. Likewise, when your awareness of possible options is too limited, your choices do not feel consensual either.

Political movements focus on creating consent through expanding the ability to take options (for example, by dissolving power hierarchies between profiteering landlords and tenants). Capitalism is intended to be

consensual (*vote with your dollars, kids!*) but its consensual Utopian goal is brutally broken by the fact that it tries to do so by creating power hierarchies, which is antithetical to consent. Dissolving those power hierarchies, and expanding ability, leads to less suffering. On the flip side, spiritual and self-help movements focus on creating consent through expanding the awareness of possible options (*free your mind!*), from observing one's emotions to dealing with unconscious resistance to finding simple acts of enjoyment to dissolving attachment. Expanded awareness, in this case, leads to less suffering.

Both of these kinds of movements have a tendency to talk about Freedom.

But a fixation on freedom invariably butts up against the reality that you can only ever make choices for yourself. Your freedom will never be absolute, nor should it be — absolute freedom for oneself necessitates a lack of freedom for others. Even “free association” is a myth; while it respects everyone's unique freedom, it misses the point that humans (like all of nature) are interdependent and completely reliant on one another for the meeting of our needs. Rather than buy into some fantasy of independence and “freedom” to act towards others however we choose, we could instead focus on getting our needs met in ways that are... authentic and consensual.

So why is fixating on freedom a problem? Because it either slips into a desire for absolute freedom, and therefore, tyranny, and because it completely misses the point of

what freedom is for: Freedom is for consent. If freedom is not aiding the act of choosing to feel consensual, it has no function. Freedom is a noble goal insofar as it dissolves power hierarchies and creates the opportunity for consensual action, and only that far.

Consent is a choice that feels like a choice, that is experienced as a choice. We feel our choices are free when we have enough freedom to choose an option that we *authentically* want. In this way, consent, too, is a means to an end: the end is authentic action: taking actions that we actually want to take. Doing things we actually want to do. Being what we actually want to be, saying what we actually want to say, acting and interacting in the ways that feel true.

Consent is still a means to an end, albeit a closer one than freedom and one that takes into consideration external realities, such as power hierarchies, that inhibit the practice of acting authentically. The end is actually authenticity.

Imagine a world where every conversation you have is authentic, every relationship you have is authentic, every thing you do is something you authentically want to do, even if it isn't your absolute first choice. Imagine interacting only with those you authentically want to interact with, because you authentically enjoy those people, not because you "have to" to survive. Imagine knowing yourself, so intimately, because you are completely open and authentic with yourself. Imagine knowing others, connecting so deeply, because you are

open and authentic with them, and engaging from a place where all interactions are consensual. It would feel so free, so freeing, so liberated. Why? Because freedom is a means to authentically consensual action.

So rather than build a free society, let's build a consensual society. Rather than free our minds, let's be completely honest with ourselves and behave authentically with others. Let's engage without hierarchy, but with respect for one another's freedom, allow our own to be limited by it, allow theirs to be limited by ours, but only so far as we need to in order to find interactions and solutions that are consensual, and authentically meet the needs of all involved.

I don't care for a free world, because what does that even mean? I care for an authentically consensual world. A world without hierarchy, and without lies and bullshit.

Authenticity is the goal. Consent is the manifestation of the goal in the world. Freedom is a complicated experience with blurry lines, and at this point, it's just a buzzword.

What the Fuck is Going On

There's a phrase you'll often hear in radical community organizing spaces: "You can't use the master's tools to tear down the master's house." It's a reminder to not commit the repetitive folly of thinking you can change unjust institutions from within them. The idea is that, in order to build something qualitatively different from the systems we currently have, you have to think and act and build in ways that are qualitatively different. If there is one thing this era is trying to teach us, it's how to think qualitatively differently than we have been.

I am not opposed to reform outright; I think strategic reform focused on steadily shifting the balance of power towards a truly democratic society is one of the best tools we have. What I believe is essential about learning not to "use the master's tools" is the call to prioritize thinking outside the box about the world we live in. We also need to think outside the box about the end of the world we live in.

It's the end of the world as we know it, and I feel fine. The systems we've built to enshrine hierarchies in society are collapsing. The lines between ruler and ruled are blurred. The line between creators and consumers, between personal and political, between comfort and ideal — it's all blurry. Identities are composite and unfixed, and who you seem to be within the system of codified identity no longer has as much power in determining what you

do. We are freer to choose, and with that freedom comes the breakdown of deterministic meaning. We are unequivocally in an age of collapse, but what's collapsing is, well... the master's house. When we give up on living in a mentality of masters and slaves, the collapse of our hierarchical institutions is no loss at all.

We are exiting a world of victims and villains, rulers and ruled, masters and servants, in-group and out, and emerging into a world of people with the power to shape their lives based on their will, not on some role they were obliged to play by the arbitrary circumstances of their birth. All around us, the roles are breaking down. As an extension, the institutions built on people playing roles are breaking down.

In an unconscious society, you do what is expected of you by the norms of that society. At the moment, our economic, social and political institutions are built on the notion that people will play certain roles within them. "Lawmaker" is a role that some people play and some don't. "Judge" is a role that some people play and some don't. "News anchor" is a role. "Parent" is a role. "Boss" is a role. Likewise, "worker," "tenant," "child," "consumer," "innocent" and "condemned" are all roles.

As more and more people challenge our economic, social and political norms, it becomes unclear what is expected of us. What becomes clear is that the roles are not determined and fixed. They're more like costumes we put on, depending on what play we find ourselves acting

in. What's happening right now is that a whole lot of people don't want to play dress up anymore, and the world doesn't know what to do about that. Which roles you accept without issue and which you wildly buck against will vary from person to person. These days, our collective awakening is a God damn rodeo.

We don't want to go back to the roles. It's that simple. We don't want to go back to having clear definitions for who is good and who is bad, who is in charge and who is obedient, who is obliged to do what and who is responsible if things go wrong. Instead, we want to uncover who we actually are beneath the roles. We want self-determination in choosing a life and a way of being that authentically fits us, rather than conforming to certain parameters because society thinks we're supposed to.

This yearning for authenticity and self-determination is nothing new. The thing is, rather than this being a fringe phenomenon hidden in the more Bohemian back alleys of society like it was in the 1910s, rather than this being a captivating counterculture movement sensationalized on the news like it was in the 1960s — this is just what's happening. Individuation and authenticity are mainstream now. The dominant culture to counter is dead. Punk's not dead; the mainstream is, and with it, rebellion feels performative.

We don't want to go back, but we're not yet sure how to go forward. There is no dominant culture, but there are still dominant institutions. The mentalities have shifted, but the

behaviors are still in progress. The behaviors are shifting, but the systemic mechanisms that condition behavior are slow to catch up. There are still laws, and a class of armed people who violently enforce them. There are still haves and have-nots, and a class of armed people who violently defend the property of the haves from the have-nots. There are still rulers and ruled.

Noam Chomsky famously lamented that radical protest movements get easily coopted and subsumed into the hegemonic machine of the dominant mainstream. What he didn't see then was that, once the hegemon has consumed everything, there's nothing left outside of it. When every identity is mainstream, no identity is fringe. When everyone is empowered, no one is oppressed. When everyone is in charge, no one is a servant. When everyone has, there are no have-nots to keep in a subservient place.

This kind of change is slow. You'd be forgiven mistaking what's currently happening for the end of all certainty and objectivity while actual social change stagnates. Don't be fooled. It's the quiet, tectonic rumblings before the eruption.

If you're wondering what the fuck is going on, it's this: the roles on which we've built our entire world are breaking down. Identity no longer predicts behavior. Position no longer predicts power. We are learning who we really are, and enshrining our determination over ourselves and our lives. We — humanity, all of us.

We are learning what is really good for us. We're learning what we really want. We're learning who we really are when the costumes come off, and how much freer and more whole we feel without them. We just don't know yet what to do with our newfound nakedness.

We are learning slowly. It's a rebirth of sorts, and birth is a painful and laborious process. But it's already underway, so we might as well embrace it.

Rather than try to stop the collapse, we can turn our attention to learning how to mourn and move on. Rather than cling to outdated ways of being, we can learn the difference between what is, and what we've been trained to believe that means. We can learn how to change our meanings. We can learn how to focus, and be relentless in pursuit of actualizing our authentic selves. Above all, we can give up control. When we give up control, we give up the fear of change. In its place, we can authentically create something new.

Control is the master's favorite tool. He used it to build his house, so he could keep the field and those who toiled in it all under his control. He enforced his obedience with violence and manipulation. He, they, all of us. We cannot tear down the master's house with the master's tools, and we cannot build the best of possible worlds by trying to decide for it what it is.

For now, the call is simply to give up everything you thought you were, and trust that the truth of you will be

revealed in time. As for the rest of it, it's collapsing, so you might want to climb down from the tallest tower if that's where you find yourself. Instead, start tending to the ground, and make it a softer place to land.

What the Fuck to Do Next

Western civilization, especially in the United States, is in an existential crisis that runs deeper than post-Covid economics or post-Trump politics. We've built our entire social order on people playing certain roles, and our identities have been defined by the roles we play. Who we are is what we are, by birth or by title, and that determines what we'll do. Now, the roles are blurrier, more mixed together, and less deterministic than they once were. We don't identify with them in the same ways. We see our social positions more as costumes than selves. We're in crisis because we don't want to go back to a world of defined social roles, and our social order can't accommodate the shift.

Well, our social order can't accommodate the shift *yet* — and that's where this essay begins.

I use a vague term like “social order” because what I'm talking about isn't any one industry or set of institutions. It's more, the combined effect of our economy, political structures, cultural touchstones and relationship norms that I'm discussing. Currently, all of these orders are built on people being defined by the roles they play, but that's changing rapidly in culture and relationships. Economics and politics will soon catch up, but there's more institutional inertia to erode there.

Gone are the good ol' days when the world made sense by oppressing everyone into rigid categories of identity. You know, when men were real men and women were real women, when the news came from Walter Cronkite, when the sky was blue and bright and the general continuation of the species into future generations was unquestionable. Those days are done. So long, and thanks for all the fish.

Welcome to 2021. Gender is cancelled. Everyone's a commentator (hello) but no one trusts the news. America's on general strike, and long-term job stability sounds like some charming relic of Shakespearean times. The sky is now regularly orange. We're maybe probably all gonna die.

That sense of predictability and continuity we could build our lives upon before? Well, it's gone now. Whoops. An identity just doesn't mean what it used to mean. Who you were born, where you come from, what education you have, what city you live in, what job you do — none of that determines your life outcome quite the way it used to. The world is more fluid and less certain, from our identities to how we interface with society.

While non-binary gender might seem unrelated to the democratization of media content creation, they both spell the same thing: social roles are no longer defined. Gender roles broke down into a realization that gender was just a set of roles. Now, gender as we knew it begins to fall away. We might get nostalgic for that sense of media objectivity we had before, but the objectivity wasn't

real. Walter Cronkite had an agenda too, but when he was the only news we had, we were hard-pressed to see it. Now, we know the truth: no one's telling the whole truth. None of this means what we thought it did. How we fit into the world is anyone's game now.

Jobs have no security and the economy itself is insecure. America is practically eating itself, growing less stable by the day. There are gun fights in the streets of Portland and natural disasters that never seem to get healed. Europe is in decline, China is on the rise (except for its youth who have [built a movement on lying down](#)) and the only thing we know about the future of the world is that it won't look the way the past did.

There is no going back.

Within the void where a prescriptive social role used to be, we find ourselves floating. There's a kind of emptiness and aimlessness, like we're stuck in a civilizational bardo between the end of the one thing and the beginning of the next. Making long-term plans seems short-sighted. Starting a new job? I hope your paycheck will keep up with the astronomical rent. Buying a house in Arizona? I hope you brought your own water. I want to go back for my PhD, but I don't know if universities will still exist by the time I graduate.

Is it time to hunker down on a permaculture farm yet, or do we keep calm and carry on with the world we grew up in? How much toilet paper should we buy?

I don't know. None of us do.

So the best advice I can give is: don't try to know yet.

This is the time of crumbling. Before the next story of who we are can begin, this story must end. This is the time for questions, not the time for answers. We're asking the question because we don't yet know the answer.

Who are we beneath these roles that ring so false and hollow now? I don't know. I know that I am not who I thought I was, not defined by the aspects of my life I thought defined me before. What does it mean to live without the roles? I don't know that either.

What I can guess, though, is that any future progress for humanity will be defined by collective deliberation about this question. How do we build a society defined by authentic, fluid truth rather than by rigid, calcified role? That is not a question any one of us can answer — that's the whole point. We must ask it ourselves and answer it together, forging the future through reconfiguring our relationships to one another and moving forward from a shared understanding of what's actually best for us.

To me, this means participatory democracy, in politics and in the economy. There will be crises first, for certain, but when the worst of the storm is over, I foresee the dawn of real democracy. Government won't be about one side dominating the other. We won't be defined as Liberal or Conservative. Those are roles; they only have meaning in

contrast to each other. We won't be defined by government and governed. We will govern ourselves, together, debating and deciding courses of action, not just casting ballots for candidates.

In the economy, past the crises, I see a return to intrinsic value rather than exchange value. I see a return to place-based economies of food and local goods. I see participatory democracy in the workplace, as rigid hierarchies from CEO to janitor are refused and corporations crumble into cooperatives. I see work defined by how we engage with our communities, not by the title we hold. Like I said — we don't want to go back to the roles.

What I see, most of all, is a shift in our understanding of our place in the world. As we step out of social roles, we step into ourselves. As we step into ourselves, our place in the collective looks different. It's not about the defined role we play in a defined group, but the agency we each hold to enact change.

Responsibility becomes not about fault or duty, but returns to its essence: *response-ability*, ability to respond. There are no definitive *should's* to it. As the philosopher Captain Jack Sparrow teaches, the only rules that really matter are these: what we can do, and what we can't do. We shed the artificiality of the rest. We step into our ability to respond, and move in the world based on what arises authentically from there.

I wrote, in another essay, that we're ending the era of pursuing a better world on our own terms. We're entering the era of becoming authentic, stepping into our own power and our connection with each other, and pursuing a better world on the world's terms. What will be done will arise organically out of who we all are.

That is the world that awaits us beyond these roles. It will be a rocky road to get there, but if we make it, we'll give renaissance to what connection really means.

After that? I'm gunning for psychic communication and alien landings, but one step at a time, people.

On the Common Good

I find myself frustrated by how often socialists refer to “the capitalist class,” as though the group of people itself were somehow to blame for society’s ills. It reeks of division, of scapegoating, and of a fundamental Us-versus-Them mentality that I feel hinders any actual liberation.

I hate to break it to you, but capitalists are not evil. *Capitalism* is the problem. The people themselves, and the group they comprise, *are not the problem*. You can hate the actions of, say, Jeff Bezos all you want (and obviously, I do too), but if you had his biology, his upbringing, his exact set of experiences of the world, you would make exactly the same decisions. Why? Because you would literally *be* him. This is not to say that a different choice couldn’t have been conceivable anywhere along the line for Jeff Bezos to make, but simply that the fact that it did not happen was a product of circumstance.

We talk so much about free will without paying attention to the fact that our selves are not isolated, separate, or freely chosen things. Nothing that comprises you was your conscious choice. You did not choose your genetics, your family, the community you were brought up in, your early childhood experiences, or the experiences that followed them. Yes, you made choices, but the set of conditions in which your choices were framed were not chosen by you. I would go so far as to say that there is nothing that makes you *you*, except for... *everything*.

We are nothing but a uniquely concocted set of experiences and biology (and biology is, itself, a set of experiences) that is derived from entirely external factors. What is internal is not separate from what is external; we are *nothing but* the external.

So too, our very socialism was framed by the experiences and choices of the capitalist class, and of the working class, and our families, and our communities, and in some small way, the dog we might have had growing up.

The fault lies not with the unique capitalists, or The Capitalists as a class. The fault lies with power hierarchy in general. The very thing we are divided upon is division itself. Which brings me to something I've been thinking about a lot: the common interest, or the common good. What interests can be reasonably said to be universal? Can *any*? Given that our survival and thriving hinges, at the very least, on some things *not* surviving, what can possibly be said to be good for *everyone*?

There is an understandable logic in the division-based language of many socialists. *We*, the Working Class, have a common good that requires *them*, the Capitalist Class, to not have everything they want. The socialist vision of the common good makes a profound, logical sense: universal access to the resources that meet our needs, and distributed control over them. This vision of the common good is framed as a good of the "common" people — and yes, the detriment to the capitalist class would be negligible. Jeff Bezos could give up 99.99% of his wealth and still have

more than enough resources to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

But if something is not in the interests of one person, can it truly be said to be in the interest of *everyone*?

I would call the socialist vision of the common good not a common good per se, but a *greater good*. Its value is derived from a utilitarian perspective: the maximum good for the maximum number. But maximum is not necessarily the same as *all*. And the question still burns in my mind: what, truly is, the *universal common good*?

The answer, unsurprisingly for anyone who's read my writing, is *simple*, but not easy. Likewise, unsurprisingly, it all comes back to *feelings* and *needs*.

Everyone feels: pain, happiness, sadness, anger, heat, cold, hunger. It is the only access point this concoction we call the self has to interface with the rest of existence.

Emotions, sensations, they are the only tool we have to literally and figuratively touch the world outside of us. The world that made us. The world that *is* us, too.

Feelings arise because of needs, and needs because of feelings. They are an inseparable feedback loop. We feel cold, so we need warmth. We need warmth, so we feel cold.

Feelings are absolutely universal, and their purpose, to guide us towards our needs, is likewise universal.

So what we can say of any conception of a common good is this: it is rooted in feeling, and guides towards the meeting of needs.

The universal common “good” can then be said to be: the ability to respond to feelings in order to meet needs. There is nothing else I can say for a “common good” beyond this, but the application of the idea becomes more nuanced.

What does it mean to have the *ability to respond* to feelings? It first requires *awareness* of feelings. Awareness, consciousness of self and what it feels, is therefore a necessary component of the common good.

Second, it requires the ability to respond. It is in every individual’s interest to have the ability to respond to their feelings, to act upon them in the direction of their needs. Last, it is in every individual’s interest to have the ability to meet their needs.

What is interesting about any idea of universality, or the collective, or a common anything, is that it treats the universal as though it were anything other than the individual. The individual, our *self*, is inseparable from everything else in existence. It quite literally isn’t anything *other* than everything else in existence that gave rise to it. We are distinct, but inseparable.

To understand a true common good requires a reframing of understanding commonality. Rather than one thing that is universally for all, commonality can be reframed as that which arises out of all individuals.

Through this understanding, the collective good and the individual good are one: the ability to respond to feelings in order to meet needs. The common good is nothing more or less than the dynamic equilibrium of individuals working

towards their unique goods to the best of their ability, to respond to their feelings in order to meet their needs.

So, what does it mean to have a society in which everyone has the ability to respond to their feelings in order to meet their needs?

It means dissolving hierarchies of power by becoming aware of our feelings and seeking to meet our needs.

Allow me to explain:

Hierarchy is nothing more than the space between two things when one claims dominance over the other for the sake of its own desires. Dominance is nothing more than using one's force in the world to inhibit another from using their force in the world. Hierarchy is, therefore, the space that emerges from seeking to meet your desires by disallowing another from acting to meet their needs.

In seeking *not* to control, and instead seeking to meet our needs, we allow others to meet their needs, and natural harmonies between our unique needs can arise. When this happens, your needs are not separate from my needs; in each of us working towards our own, we work towards each other's. When it does not happen, we can freely disassociate.

The rigid division of blame for who is responsible for a corrupt world is utterly unhelpful in striving towards the actual common good. To lean on that division is an attempt to dominate the other: to use your force to keep it from using its force. So, shove your "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" back where it came from, Karl.

Rather than use our energy seeking dominance over another, the common good will arise from each of us seeking to *meet our needs*. Fostering a society that meets the common good is a question of practicing the common good. This means treating awareness of feelings as an absolute priority, encouraging authenticity about feelings, acting on feelings, having the ability to meet needs, having power to determine how to do so, and dissolving entrenched hierarchies of all kinds.

That is truly the universal common good, and intrinsic within it is the understanding that universal commonality *is good for it*. The greater our commonality, the more the natural harmonies of our unique needs will arise, and the less we will have to control one another to have our needs met.

So, I'm going to worry less about Jeff Bezos (*is your penis on the moon yet, Jeff?*), and more about doing other things. Things like, meeting my needs in harmony with my community. Empowering myself and others to do so more freely. Awareness of my feelings, authenticity in expressing them, and having the power to act upon them. Resisting by allowing. And, through doing this, seek to cultivate that same ability in others.

Effective Slacktivism

This is an essay for lazy people.

If you're so lazy that you don't want to read it, here's the point of it:

The most effective way to change the world is by investing your time, energy, and money in ways that divert power from oppressive, exploitative institutions and into institutions that empower your community and are accountable to your community. For example, stop buying produce at Whole Foods and start buying from a local cooperative farm.

Now, the essay:

Look, general assemblies are boring. Organizing meetings are tedious. Protests can be cathartic, but they always fall at the wrong time. Sit-ins, hunger strikes, blockades, Occupying wherever — it's just not for you. Maybe you'd love to be involved in political action more, but you just don't have time to commit to it. Maybe you just don't know how to start.

So, for whatever reason, you've become a Slacktivist — a slacker-activist: one who wants the world to change, but isn't going to do a whole lot of obvious work to change it.

First of all — being a slacktivist is okay. There's nothing wrong with it. It's possible that your single Facebook post about child detentions may turn out to be the thing that keeps Great Aunt Betty from voting for Trump again. Maybe the one Black Lives Matter protest you attended with your roommate ended up inspiring her to read *The New Jim Crow* and become an advocate to end the prison-industrial complex. It's totally possible, and I mean that sincerely.

But the kinds of slacktivism we typically see, from Change.org petitions to supporting Elizabeth Warren for president, are not giving you the best bang for your buck. If you don't have a lot of time, energy, action or money to invest in activism, invest it as strategically and consciously as you can.

How to be an effective Slacktivist

As cathartic and grand as rising up against the oppressive system may sound, resistance and rising up will not create permanent changes to society. The lasting change to the fabric of how we deal with ourselves and each other involves much subtler and less glamorous work. Things like, changing the ways we meet our needs, cultivating new systems for meeting our needs, changing the way we relate to ourselves and each other, minute by minute, day by day.

One of the most appalling features of our current system is that it makes us complicit in our own oppression, exploitation and disempowerment. The options we have available seem to force us into giving our time, energy and money to places that exploit us, abuse us, degrade us, alienate us, and disempower us.

We're told all kinds of solutions to this pattern, from protesting in the hopes that someone hears us, to voting for a slightly better candidate who still won't give us the world we want. We tend to focus on particular issues, on political candidates, and on resisting the bad. We don't focus on building the good.

Politicians who take campaign donations from real estate lobbyists will never push through universal rent control or curtail harmful gentrification. Politicians who take campaign donations from fossil fuel lobbyists will never push through sweeping energy reforms. Politicians who can get elected without the support of you and your neighbors will never be accountable to you and your neighbors. The entire system is broken, and the world will not change until there is something for it to change into.

But you don't need politicians. You can vote for them or donate to them or campaign for them, but they aren't the best bang for your buck either.

The most effective way you can create a better world is by investing your time, energy, action and money in building or supporting alternatives to society's dominant

exploitative, oppressive institutions. Make regular, habitual changes to your day-to-day life that bring power back to you and your community.

Invest in alternatives.

How do you spend your time, your energy, and your money? What businesses do you buy from? What institutions do you rely on? What services do you use?

I know what you're thinking. Is this another one of those trite "Stop using plastic straws to save the whales" kind of pitches? In a way, yes. But bear with me.

Yes, I know the response. "71% of CO2 emissions come from only 100 companies. I can drive a Tesla all I want, it doesn't make a dent. My personal choices are moot, the system disempowers us, and that's the problem."

Exactly. That is the problem. But the solution is not to forego personal choice; that's just a recipe for inaction and further disempowerment. The solution is to destroy the system's power by building an alternative.

Invest in your own power.

How does the current system disempower you? What alternatives exist? What options exist that keep decision-making power in your community?

Whether or not you're explicitly anti-capitalist, our current capitalist system has become an oligopoly, and oligopolies benefit no one. The vast majority of news broadcasting is concentrated in just a few channels. The vast majority of financial transactions are handled by a few banks. The vast majority of online social interactions happen on just a few platforms. And you are not in charge of them.

Fortunately, in many places, there are alternatives. Local, independent media. Local credit unions. Local farms and grocery stores. Community solar farms are springing up all across the country as an alternative to utilities. Community land trusts that get land and housing out of the speculative market and put control over it back into communities.

Take stock of the where you invest your time, energy and money.

Spend your time and energy researching alternatives that put power back in the hands of you and your community.

Choose ones that make sense for you.

Invest your time, energy and money in those alternatives.

For instance, do you buy your produce at a chain grocery store? Could you switch to a CSA or cooperative local farm, or join a community garden, or plant a garden if you have the space and time to tend it? What options exist, and what makes sense for you?

Do you bank with Chase, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Citi? Could you switch to a local credit union? What options exist, and what makes sense for you?

Do you regularly tell other people what they should do? Could you switch to asking them what they need, telling them what you need, and offering to help? What options exist, and what makes sense for you?

Do you own a business that employs workers? Could you transition that business to a worker-owned cooperative?

Do you work for a business? Could you unionize your coworkers?

What do you need? What needs of yours could be met in a different way? What's possible for your situation?

This will take research, questioning, and creative thinking. Go slow, and be honest with yourself about what's possible for your situation. Just for the hell of it, I've turned it into a challenge:

Take The Challenge

Every week, for a full year, pick one thing in your life you could do in a different way.

This could be product you're buying, place you're shopping, service you're using, way you're interacting with people,

thought pattern you're stuck in, anything. If it helps, start with something that's been bugging you.

Write that thing down.

Write down what need you're meeting with this thing.

Research alternative ways to meet this need that put power back into the hands of you and your community.

Maybe there's another organization, company, product, place, strategy, tactic. Maybe the need can't be met through just one alternative, but requires a few working together.

Find an alternative that's possible for you, and actually make the switch.

One thing, every week, for a year.

The ways you spend your time, energy, action and money are how you put yourself into the world. What are you giving to the world? How can you give to the world in such a way that transforms it into the world you want it to be?

What matters is being conscious, deliberate and aware of your choices, and being honest with yourself about what you can change.

To change the world, change your world.

The best opportunities for world-changing action arise every day, in the regular moments of our regular lives. When we talk about changing the world, what we're really

talking about is changing the regular moments of our regular lives. That's what makes up the world, after all.

I hate Donald Trump too, but to be frank, Trump has far less impact on my day-to-day life than my landlord does.

Focusing our precious time, energy, action, money, and attention on the problems that aren't in our power to change just further disempowers us and perpetuates a system in which we don't have the power to change our lives.

Focus on your own life. Even the most resounding defeat of our exploitative systems will prove a waste of time if we have nothing but the same old exploitative systems to fill the void up again. Fortunately, countless alternatives exist and more are springing up every day. They may take time, research and effort to uncover, and further investment of energy, time and money to make fully viable, but the seeds have already been planted.

Start watering them.

What is Healthy Masculinity?

The fragile masculine: you've seen him or you've been him. The cat-caller who turns to threats when ignored. The boss who turns to domineering when questioned. The nice friend who turns to rage when rejected. The man whose "masculinity" spirals into vitriol and violence when it feels threatened in any way.

If you haven't heard, this phenomenon is called *fragile masculinity*.

In an age of rising feminism, of #MeToo, and of the Internet allowing us to share our previously private stories and experiences widely, many men are left wondering what it means to be healthily masculine. There's a lot they know they're not supposed to do anymore, but not enough they seem to know *to start* doing.

Those of us who are *not* men are often left confused and disgusted by the men who are so fragile. In truth, I often am too. I find compassion hard to muster when on the receiving end of someone's shattered Ego trying to stab me with their own brokenness. I don't believe this pattern of behavior is excusable, even if it's understandable, and I do kind of understand it. It's conditioning, it's pressure, it's lack of awareness, all rolled up into one.

This essay is for anyone struggling to understand masculinity, but especially for men. I don't claim to know

what life is like when you're brought up or identify as a man in our culture. I wasn't and I don't. I also know, in my personal life, you guys don't always listen to what I have to say about feelings, but *maybe if I wrote it out?* Well, here goes:

To answer *What is the opposite of fragile masculinity?* requires understanding two things: masculinity, and the opposite of fragile.

What is masculinity?

Masculinity, like femininity, has been made a complicated phenomenon. I reject definitions too caught up with adjectives like *strong* or... *strong* or... is there anything other than *strong*? These may be correlations, but specific ideas or identities are still not the thing itself. Amidst all kinds of ideas about what it means to be masculine, I can only raise my hand and offer my own perspective:

- Masculinity and femininity are just energies: ways of engaging with the world.
- "Masculine" energy just means directed, forward-moving energy.
- "Feminine" energy just means open, receptive energy.

Both energies exist across all genders, but our *ideas* of manhood and masculinity live entirely in masculine energy. The “unhealthy masculine” kind of strength is about *only* resisting obstacles and pushing ahead, and resisting yourself when you experience feelings of pain or vulnerability.

Do you resist in order to change, or embrace in order to understand? Do you listen and receive, or advocate and defend? Do you allow things to be, or seek to change them? Both energies can be helpful and harmful. We all balance them, and both always come out in our responses to everything. For everything you change, you’re accepting something too.

Though I am a woman, I have a great deal of what I’d call masculine energy. My main way of dealing with life is primarily forward-moving. I wish to change things — push them ahead — myself and the world included. I advocate and improve. My fragile masculinity is impatient, angry and domineering.

At its weakest, this is how this energy reacts to threats. It bites. At its strongest, it builds and catalyzes.

A man I once loved had a great deal of what I’d call feminine energy. His way of dealing with life was primarily in openness and allowing. He wished to be seen and embraced, and he saw and embraced others in turn. He listened and accepted. His fragile femininity came in deflection, indecisiveness and inertia.

At its weakest, this is how this energy reacts to threats. It wilts. At its strongest, it nurtures and empathizes.

I used to shame myself for operating in the world like I do, and especially not like this man did. My mother had the embracing and nurturing thing down pat. *Why couldn't I?* I thought it was a bad thing — immature or egotistical — to push instead of to embrace. But I've learned that it's not; it's just a different thing. Both energies are vital to all life. In realizing it was okay that I liked to change and improve more than embrace and allow, I embraced and allowed myself.

In leaning into my masculine energy, I've expanded my feminine energy. In sticking to what I know I like, I've grown my comfort zone. In advocating for myself, I've become more accepting of others. In supporting myself and those around me, I've come to embrace and understand them. I feel so much healthier in myself, growing in a new way, expanding out the more I hone in. By leaning into the side of myself that is more traditionally *masculine*, I've become more authentically *feminine*.

By leaning into the side I've long avoided or shamed, I've stepped into the side of myself I wanted to be from a place of authenticity.

What is the opposite of fragile?

Well... *Antifragile*. While I am not certain that it was [Nassim Nicholas Taleb](#) who first coined the term, it is from him that I first learned it.

Antifragility is the opposite of fragility. A thing is fragile if it breaks or weakens from being subjected to challenge, stress, threat or shock. A thing is robust if it remains unchanged from being subjected these forces. A thing is antifragile if it *gains* or *grows stronger* from these forces.

If masculinity is caught up with being “strong,” what could possibly be stronger than antifragile? A strength entirely built on resistance may not always be futile, but it is *fragile*. A strength built entirely on allowing and accepting is *robust*, but only a balance of the two can be *antifragile*. In my view, being antifragile is the both strongest and the healthiest one can be.

This traditional notion of “masculine strength” is far too one-sided to be healthy for anyone, and so it is fragile. It’s forced to be a kind of “strong” no one can always be. Of course it will break when threatened. But rather than channel that into a more traditionally “feminine strength,” a strength that embraces and understands, shutting down one’s own feminine energy causes the masculine strength to spiral out into vitriol and violence.

No one has infinite armor, and continuously trying to build armor can quickly turn to building weapons. We defend ourselves until we feel too threatened, and then we attack. Everything is defensive until it’s not anymore. So maybe...

open your throat for a change. Get vulnerable, to get stronger.

What is antifragile masculinity?

What I've learned is that antifragility is not a quality unto itself. It is the quality that emerges from a space of authentic balance between robustness and fragility. The way ecosystems weaken in small ways to grow healthier as a whole, but obliteration is obliteration. The way some hardship in our lives can make us stronger people, but too much hardship can fracture us. The way some exposure to harmful bacteria can make us immune, but too much can make us sick.

This is the fine line between fragility and antifragility. Antifragility requires a certain amount of robustness and a certain amount of fragility. There is no "one-size-fits-all" balance, no map to tell you what your unique balance looks like and how to get there.

There is a compass, and that compass is found from accepting your feelings (embracing) and meeting your needs (moving forward).

For many men who have for too long ignored the more feminine energy actions of allowing vulnerability, becoming aware of feelings, embracing and accepting, and listening to and receiving others, leaning into this side may help you

reach a harmonious balance. In leaning into something that doesn't come naturally to you, you are both pushing yourself out of your comfort zone and embracing a new option. Both energies are still at work.

The compass that points you towards your natural state of antifragile balance — that dynamic equilibrium of being able to roll with punches, grow from hardship and improve from difficulty — requires a deep connection to your own feelings, an acceptance of difficulty and weaknesses, and usually, an embrace of help.

Antifragility comes from a healthy *embrace* and acceptance of oneself and a healthy movement to *change* and improve oneself. If you're entirely focused on improving yourself without ever embracing yourself for who you are and what you feel, you are leaning too far to one side of a healthy equilibrium. From there, the next step is to tack with the wind and lean the opposite direction: to embrace more. To trust more. To open more.

To be healthy is to be whole, full, in your unique state of authentic equilibrium. But that state is always dynamic. How you choose to react to its changes can spiral you into what is unhealthy and what is fragile. It is a counter-intuitive process: when you feel threatened, to react by becoming vulnerable and trusting others.

All I know is, for me — embracing the aspects of myself that feel masculine have made me feel so much more

authentically and healthily feminine. I would hazard a guess that it works the same in reverse.

What I can say for certain, as a straight woman, is this: I care *far* more about you feeling healthy in yourself, and therefore able to treat yourself and others around you in a healthy way, than I do about your biceps or your paycheck.

If you're unsure how to embrace feminine energy, the energy of openness and acceptance, you can always ask for help, especially from, you know... the kind of people who've been taught to embrace feminine energy all their lives.

We've Been Looking at Meritocracy Sideways

We keep trying to build a meritocratic economy wrong, because we're looking at meritocracy sideways. Our usual understanding of a meritocracy is a system in which economic and political power go to those who deserve it, determined on the basis of their merit. We're losing ourselves trying to assess the merit of the wrong variables.

Defenders of free market capitalism champion that system as a meritocracy: the free market is a space of open competition for money, and the invisible hand allocates money to the ideas, products and people who deserve it most.

Those seeking to regulate capitalism might posit that, without regulation, this system limits meritocracy by creating insular circles of power and investment and boxing good ideas out. Creating greater equality of opportunity would allow for more good options to be viable, and bad ones to more naturally fade out.

Socialists might chime in, "Excuse me, but doesn't human life have intrinsic value on its own? So everyone has merit, and deserves at least some allocation of money and power."

The debate itself gets us closer to meritocracy. Whether or not we think capitalism or socialism creates more

meritocratic outcomes, both are trying to answer the questions of which people have merit, what that merit should entitle them to, and who decides. In truly striving for meritocracy, this isn't the most important question. The meaning of meritocracy itself needs to be on the table, right in the center. "What makes a system meritocratic?" is a much more useful question than "Which people have merit?"

I'd like to propose a heuristic: once any system (or, pattern of decision-making) has grown so entrenched and unwieldy that it has more power over people than people have over it, that system is no longer a reliable allocator of merit. We are the first and final arbiters of the society we have to live in. When that stops really feeling like the case, because our structures have grown more powerful and immutable than we are, then we know we are badly off-course.

Rather than determining who has merit so the system can allocate resources, we need to be determining which systems have merit so the people can allocate their allegiance to it. Instead of viewing meritocracy as a market that determines the merit of people, people must decide the merit of markets.

Imagine we have a group of 10 people and \$1000. Under a traditional understanding of meritocracy, the question would be, "Which one of us is the most deserving of the \$1000?" We've immediately created competing interests. One of us must win, or one of us must win out with the idea that we all deserve money in some share or another.

Six of us could band together to soak the other four, we could start killing each other, or any other number of outcomes from the savory to the unsavory.

No matter what the outcome, the interests of all ten people cannot be met perfectly, because the parameters around the decision create interests that are inherently in conflict. Either everyone compromises, some people compromise, or one person takes all while the rest take none.

Now imagine this: we have a group of ten people and \$1000, and we must answer the question “What is the best allocation of this \$1000?” Rather than pure competition, we’ve created conditions for both cooperation and competition. Our goal and our paradigm have qualitatively shifted.

We don’t have the same competing interest or zero-sum mentality. I’m not in competition with you to prove I deserve \$1000 more than you do. I might be in competition with you to prove that I have a better idea of how to allocate that \$1000 between the ten of us, but you and I are united in our shared interest in ensuring the \$1000 is allocated the best way it can be. In this model, money isn’t the reward, but the fundamental condition, and we are awarding to it the best situation it can have. We may compete over what that situation is, but we have a shared interest in figuring it out, and cooperating with one another to get there.

Now — you may be asking yourself, would this actually get anyone to stop competing to take home the \$1000 on their own? Surprisingly, it would. In a group of people allocating money according to where it can be used best, the goal of the people is to create the best market they can. The shared goal of all individuals in the market is to improve the quality of the market. The market is not about awarding money and power, but about fitting money and power where they can be used best to meet the needs of the individuals.

That's a much deeper meritocracy: rather than individuals competing through merit for shares of the market, allocations of market share compete through merit for the trust and compliance of individuals.

Of course, to do anything like this, we'd have to deeply democratize our decision-making structures at every level...