



NAVIGATING DYSTOPIA

A healing journey manifesto v1.0

NOTE

This text came out of wondering what would happen if I just said what I really think. Its title conveys that I think we live in a dystopia. This work is about my experience of navigating dystopia and the perspectives this experience produced.

TRIGGER WARNING: Contains descriptions of sexual abuse and other potentially upsetting material.

Mark Bailey

<https://hive.blog/@mada>

Forward

This text describes some major personal challenges that I've experienced. There are parts of my story that some may find disturbing. But none of it should be shocking. Things like childhood sexual abuse and chronic illness are very common. While the particulars of these things as described here are my own, no one should be surprised by them in this cultural moment.

For a long time, I felt like my status as an abuse victim effectively silenced my voice. Living with chronic illness also silenced my voice, but in a different way. Presenting my challenges alongside the beliefs and opinions that ultimately came from these challenges was a deliberate choice. In part, it was a way to reclaim a voice that had been silenced by abuse and illness.

Although this text considers my difficult past, things were rarely all bad. I have positive memories from most periods of my personal history. And these days, my life is generally fine. I'm fairly content, living humbly as a writer. I'm also fortunate to have good relationships with family and friends. They're everything.

Even so, I maintain that we live in a dystopia.

Mr Larson

My parents traveled a lot when I was a young child. They played music and participated in evangelical Christianity. As I became school aged, my parents settled in the suburbs for a few years before moving my two younger brothers and I to a more rural setting. There, at my grandma's house on a wooded lot, I nurtured a passion for nature and learned traditional arts and crafts in my grandma's store.

When I was 13, my grandma's store closed and the property was sold. My parents moved us into a little house in town, away from the large forest that had come to represent both freedom and security to me. Suddenly, I couldn't do most of the outdoor activities that I loved anymore. There was no space for me to pursue my arts and crafts outside of a small bedroom. Nor was there a place for me to experience silence.

Our household was always full of life. But with younger siblings and cousins running around, and with televisions going in multiple rooms most of the time, I found it challenging to become absorbed in reading or even think. This affected me more than it would have if I were a normal kid. But I wasn't normal. I was hypersensitive to perceptual stimuli. I also had a high IQ and craved intellectual stimulation that wasn't accessible. Although they did their best, my parents didn't really know how to deal with someone like me.

School totally sucked. The bullying by classmates wasn't great. But the bullying by school officials was much worse. Administrators were always pulling me out of class, searching my person for contraband, and calling the cops on me for no good reason. Staying in that environment wasn't an option for me, so I quit school to teach myself at the end of grade 8.

Outside of school, the police began harassing me around then. One officer even intentionally hit me with her patrol car when I was 14. Unreasonable searches of my person became the norm whenever I was out in public. This was when I first came to understand that society wasn't as free as everyone claimed.

For money, I cleaned a coffee shop called Coffee Talk in Taylors Falls, MN. Sometimes I peddled handmade crafts. Sometimes I shoveled people's snow or washed windows. I was always running around, trying to stay productive.

In summer months, I worked at Merrill's Landing in Taylors Falls. Along with its quaint canoe rental, Merrill's Landing was a property with two residential buildings on it. There was XXXX's place, a house with a separate efficiency apartment at its lower level. And there was The Project, a sort of guest house with a Greek Orthodox chapel on its second floor. The presence of this chapel, complete with giant candles and unfamiliar ritual objects, always struck me as bizarre. The property was owned by a pedophile named Mr Larson, who began grooming me for sexual abuse when I was 14.

Mr Larson was a popular and respected member of the community. He'd lived in Germany for many years and maintained his international connections into retirement. His grooming process started with giving me small gifts and feeding me wine. Sometimes he'd invite his friend Wayne to The Project and we'd all get drunk while Mr Larson and Wayne talked at length about how normal and natural pedophilia was. They wouldn't use the term pedophilia, of course. They called it love.

XXXX, a gay man then in his late thirties, became my best friend. He had been Mr Larson's 'boyfriend' when he was a teenager, though their 'affair' was long over by the time I was around. Mr Larson and his wife talked about XXXX as an adopted son, which begins to illustrate how screwy that whole situation was.

I left home entirely at age 15. I told my parents I was going camping and just never came back. Loading an aluminum canoe with supplies, I paddled up the St Croix River to a wooded island that was maybe the size of a football field. There, I made a shelter by stringing a tarp up between trees.

I slept on this island until September, paddling into town most days to clean Coffee Talk and secure supplies. Most nights were spent drinking wine and eating crayfish I caught in the river. Usually, I was alone, but not always.

On several occasions, other kids from town would find a boat and join me on the island. Sometimes, they camped out and we all got drunk together. Other times, my island guests were local bullies who trashed the place and beat me up. And for three weeks, a mentally ill homeless man came and stayed on the island. He was super weird and probably dangerous, but he was always nice to me, even if he didn't know how to bury his poop like a civilized person.

There was also a gang of meth heads from the city that showed up and left garbage everywhere at the end of the summer. Small towns being what they are, I got blamed for this. To this day, there are probably townsfolk who incorrectly believe that I was responsible for the trash.

My most vivid memories of this era are of little things. The island was covered with tiny toads that liked to hop around after dark. There was a beaver who would get ornery whenever I got too close to its house. The river was often blanketed in thick fog. Oftentimes, I'd go out into the middle of the river in the middle of the night and just sit there, being brushed by passing bats. Once, during a severe thunderstorm, I sat, dry in my lean-to, watching a houseboat sink on the other side of the river.

When the weather turned that year, I moved into the efficiency apartment at Merrill's Landing instead of returning to my parents' house. In the mean time, Mr Larson's grooming had progressed to include fondling and inappropriate massages. I don't remember if it was that summer or the next one when the most egregious sexual abuse took place. What I do remember was the visiting troupe of Wanderfogel, or German boy scouts.

They were staying in the chapel, a man and four teenage boys, in the the upper floor of The Project. When they arrived, XXXX explained to me that the Wanderfogel group was a cover for pedophiles like Mr Larson and his friend, the visiting scoutmaster. On a well-lit night, with the moon near full, Mr Larson gave me five or more glasses of wine and then sexually abused me in a tent on the property. He then moved us to a picnic table in full view of The Project, instructed me to fetch something from the building, and sexually abused me on the picnic table. He may have done it this way to signal his scoutmaster friend so he could observe us.

As drunk as I was, I still clearly remember what was going through my head when Mr Larson started abusing me in that tent. I was thinking that I would lose my job at his canoe rental and my place to live on his property if I didn't go along with it and do what he wanted.

The next day, Mr Larson swore me to secrecy, leading me to believe that my life would be over if I ever told anyone. I told my friend XXXX about it and he acted sympathetic, but informed me that that was just the way it was. He also told me stories about his friends being sexually abused by Mr Larson's friend Wayne in the '70s or '80s. Apparently, when XXXX was young and had friends over to party, Wayne would hide behind a corner, waiting for one of XXXX's friends to pass. When they did, Wayne would jump out behind them and spray amyl nitrate up their noses to disorient them so he could sexually abuse them.

A year or two later, a man arrived from Germany and confronted Mr Larson about sexual abuse. When I was 21, I filed a complaint about Mr Larson's abuse with the Chisago County Attorney's office. Although Mr Larson didn't deny the abuse when

questioned by investigators, there was insufficient evidence to convict him of his crimes. XXXX stopped being my friend at this time and told others in the community that I was crazy and had made it all up. Mr Larson died in 2020.

Mere Piare Khalsa

Summit School for the Arts was a charter school in Chisago City, MN. I first heard about it when I was 15, peddling handmade goods at a craft fair at Coffee Talk. A man with a long white beard and a crocheted cap told me about the school and got me interested. His name was Mere Piare Khalsa. Officially, he was the school's 'Visionary.'

After dragging my parents to a meeting at the unused summer camp where the school was located, I enrolled. Mere Piare became my mentor. At the school and at his nearby farmhouse, he slowly described his revolutionary vision for the future, with Summit School playing a small but crucial role in this revolution. This made me feel like I was a part of something important.

Summit School was small. There were never really more than 50 students, k-12, and most of the time the student body was only half that size. There was a teacher for the younger kids and a teacher for the older kids. One or two administrators. And parent volunteers usually present. A Board of Directors was technically responsible for everything. I sat on this Board as a student representative beginning at age 16.

Learning was mostly self-directed, with each student working an individualized plan. There were some structured classes, which were taught by parents or community members. Physical education was perhaps the most interesting. My favorite was fencing, with kinesiology a close second.

When I was 16, Mere Piare supplied me with a heroic dose of magic mushrooms at a reggae concert in St Paul. I left my body and had an amazing journey through an abstract space filled with shapes. Mere Piare later drove me and another student in his car while he was tripping on mushrooms himself. From that point on, drug use became a regular part of our interactions.

While I spent a few days a week commuting to college classes in the city, my days at the school were often unstructured. I just did whatever I felt like and so did everybody else. The permissive environment did produce some good learning outcomes. But the whole thing was basically a hippie fantasyland, which was problematic because it was a publicly funded school.

There were times when my schoolwork would consist of endless meetings. There'd be planning meetings and Board meetings and grant writing meetings. In between these

meetings, I'd meet with Mere Piare and he'd tell me what to say. We'd frequently game out the meetings to come up with the best way to advance his agenda. At the time, I loved the intrigue.

For the most part, Summit School's individualized learning plans were great. Its use of community experts to teach classes made perfect sense. The days I spent with another student in an unused basement room, listening to Jefferson Airplane records and making art, did more to prepare me for my real life than regurgitating the contents of some textbook ever could have. The school should have become a great example of effective alternative education. Instead, it became a cautionary tale.

At one point, Mere Piare got his daughter GuruNischan a job with the school and I started selling weed for her. A community member found out and reported her to the authorities. At the same time, Summit School was found to not be complying with the law. The state shut the school down and the cops started asking questions. My own police interrogation lasted maybe two hours.

At that time, I was told that Mere Piare and his family left town, fleeing the investigation. Later, I would learn that they were never even interviewed by police. Fortunately, the state allowed me and a few other students to complete our graduation projects and receive diplomas. But the scandal destroyed my plans for the future.

I'd been a poster child for the school's success and the school failed. I'd been counting on receiving help applying for scholarships, knowing my parents couldn't afford to put me through college. But I had no access to resources like this outside of the failed school. And suddenly, everyone was talking trash about my mentor, which suggested to me that maybe he wasn't such a great guy after all. Eventually, I came to understand that he wasn't just some nice old man. He was a radical ideologue systematically furthering his ideas.

Employing a combination of conversations, psychedelic drugs, and manipulations of both my physical and subtle energy bodies, Mere Piare indoctrinated me into a belief system that was neither ethical nor operative in society. In the moment, this indoctrination usually seemed playful and spontaneous. Yet it always advanced his agenda. And I always played along.

In Mere Piare's reality, there were regular people and special people. Regular people supported the evil System while special people were enlightened enough to see the System for what it was. In this belief structure, the rules of the System only applied to regular people. The enlightened pretended to follow the rules to appease the

unenlightened regular people, but they were really working in secret to bring about the System's downfall.

As a teenage outcast, I completely bought into this worldview. And Mere Piare also spent countless hours coaching me to con the regular people in all sorts of ways. Much of this focused on tuning my quality of manner, or 'vibe,' to produce specific reactions in those I was interacting with. In many instances, the instruction included things like breathing techniques, posture, and control of subtle energies. Sometimes, the purpose was to train me to impress education officials. Sometimes, it was to teach me how to smuggle contraband without getting caught.

The drug use that was a standard part of our interactions made me more receptive to these lessons. With or without Mere Piare, I would have been using drugs at that time. But with him, the drug use was always accompanied by philosophical indoctrination. Marijuana. Magic mushrooms. Meth. Other stuff. The use of these substances ensured that I wasn't thinking critically, even as Mere Piare swore that learning to think critically was foundational to the philosophy he espoused.

Mere Piare died in 2006. I've been in contact with GuruNischan and she's expressed remorse about her part in the school scandal.

Impact

One thing I find striking when looking back on my teenage years is that I wasn't really safe anywhere. So I drank and got high, which gave everyone in my small town an excuse to treat me as a non-person no matter what harms befell me. This shabby treatment wasn't unusual treatment for a troubled kid in that community. It was precisely in line with the status quo.

Mr Larson's sexual abuse and Mere Piare's psychological manipulations added layers of trauma to this unhappy basic condition. Both men had societal legitimacy. Mr Larson was a retired government employee who sometimes did business with my father. Mere Piare was a former prison chaplain working for a public school. Although Mere Piare's misdeeds were revealed in 1999 and I brought charges against Mr Larson in 2003, neither man ever faced legal consequences for their actions.

Nor did either one seem to face substantive social consequences. Though he was vilified by my parents and a handful of others, Mere Piare just lived out a retirement. Mr Larson continued to be regarded as an upstanding member of the community until he died in a rest home. The things both men did were utterly outlandish and unambiguously wrong. And yet, society supported them.

From my perspective, society supported them, not me. I languished in poverty, chronically ill, mistreated by the system that supported them. And I wondered why we lived in a world that supported abusers and not their victims. I still wonder why this is.

During the Mr Larson investigation, I was asked to fill out a victim impact form. I was horrified to find that the form was purely financial. At 21, I had no understanding of the long term financial impacts of childhood sexual abuse. What I felt was that these impacts were social and psychological. And there was no place on the form for that.

What these men did, each in their own way, was break my reality. The impact of that can't be quantified. Afterwards, I developed cluster headaches and bipolar disorder. It's impossible to know if there's a connection between my experiences and these diagnoses.

Mr Larson almost certainly knew that what he was doing was very wrong. He and his friends spent decades victimizing boys in the US and Germany, talking about their criminal proclivities as if they were a legitimate sexual orientation. But they'd only talk

this way with each other, in secret. Because grown men having sex with kids was never really okay with anyone.

The situation with Mere Piare was less clear cut. He may actually have been convinced of his own good intentions. Yet in a sense, Mere Piare's entire persona was a con. Presenting himself as a Sikh minister instead of as a former high-ranking member of the 3HO cult that had appropriated the Sikh religion, he fooled the rural community into believing that he had religious stature and discipline. He claimed to be in communion with Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, with all of the spiritual status this conferred. This ill-gotten status was then used as cover for his attempts to manipulate others into creating his version of utopia.

I started hanging around Merrill's Landing to escape an impossible situation at home. What I found was a predator hiding behind a quaint facade. When Mere Piare recruited me for Summit School, I believed the opportunity would provide me with a path to escape Mr Larson. But the school didn't provide me with the way out that I was looking for. It positioned me to be a guinea pig in Mere Piare's uncontrolled educational experiment.

Eventually, I learned to deal effectively with the alcoholism, mental illness, and physical illness that manifested in the wake of my unfortunate education. But even after years of therapy, with my issues effectively managed, there remained a problem in my thinking that no traditional or alternative healing modality could fix. The problem was that I considered society a dystopia run by power abusers and felt like my participation in it wasn't voluntary. This is basically how I still feel today.

A glance at history supports this notion. It's common knowledge that the US was built on genocide and slavery. George Washington had dentures made of slave teeth. American soldiers slaughtered Indigenous peoples while residential religious schools systematically stripped them of their cultures. And our government didn't magically become less atrocious over time. It merely modernized, perpetrating crimes against humanity again and again, covering these up as best it could when necessary.

Civil society did no better than government. The Catholic Church abetted pedophilia in its ranks for decades or longer. So did the Boy Scouts of America. Jeffrey Epstein's child sex ring likely involved people operating at the highest levels of power in business and government. These things describe a society where pedophilia is more of a norm than an aberration. Maybe that's starting to change. And maybe Jeffrey Epstein really did kill himself in a holding cell.

One of the strangest parts of being a survivor of childhood sexual abuse that I've encountered involves perceptions of the validity of my perspective. Many people have started treating me worse upon learning that I'm an abuse survivor. On one hand, they'll talk as if my experiences are inconsequential and not even worth bringing up. On the other hand, they'll completely discount my perspective on other matters, like politics, because they believe that an abuse survivor can't possibly hold valid opinions on important topics.

Justice

The word justice means very little to me. People use the word all the time and I have no idea what they're talking about. Other survivors of childhood sexual abuse always seem to be pushing for harsher legal penalties for offenders. Survivors of other traumas also push for harsher legal penalties for the offenses that harmed them. But everything I've seen suggests that the criminal justice system is an inhumane institution designed only to consolidate wealth and power in the incarceration industry. There's no such thing as justice in a system like that. There are only victims.

When I was 17, during a friend's high school graduation party in Lindstrom, MN, I got drunk and was hanging around a small crowd in the back yard. A couple of kids were fighting, and I was suddenly overcome with a bad feeling. Without thinking, I responded to this feeling by running away. As it turned out, local police had surrounded the property and were moving in to bust the party.

Officers tackled and handcuffed me. They dragged me into the front yard, where the other kids and the party's parental supervisors had been herded. Face down in the mud, cuffed, in front of everyone, I was kicked several times by police while I laid there, hard enough that I couldn't breathe correctly for the next several weeks. My ribs were probably cracked, but I refused medical attention, believing I'd be further assaulted by police if I did otherwise.

For my trouble, I was charged with underage consumption of alcohol, possession of marijuana due to the remnant of a smoked joint being in my pocket, and obstruction of the legal process. In court, I was lucky. The charges were dropped in exchange for attending chemical awareness classes with my dad. No one had cell phone cameras in those days, and the police faced zero consequences for assaulting a restrained drunk kid.

This experience gave me a window into the kinds of harmful things unaccountable officers do to members of the community as a matter of routine. Restraints and citations are legal procedures. Assaulting a handcuffed minor is extrajudicial corporal punishment, which is wrong. It's literally criminal. And yet, when I talked about my experience, most people responded by suggesting that it was my own fault that I was assaulted by police.

This episode was a relatively minor trauma in the context of much bigger problems. Still, for many years afterwards, just seeing a uniform would cause a physical panic response to rise up within me. My adrenaline would spike. I'd start shaking uncontrollably and become short of breath. Had I not been assaulted, this response would never have been programmed into my body.

At the same time, both with Mr Larson and with Mere Piare, the involvement of the legal system proved unhelpful. When Mr Larson was interviewed by an investigator in 2003, word of the interview spread throughout the small town of Taylors Falls, which may have indirectly limited Mr Larson's access to other victims. This was a good outcome, but it wasn't a legal outcome. It was social.

When Summit School was shuttered in 1999, students like me were interviewed extensively by police. Years later, a former member of the School's Board of Directors had property seized by the state in connection with the School's problematic financials. At no point did any representative of the legal system lift a finger to help any of the students whose lives were upended by the school's sudden closure.

Even if both Mr Larson and Mere Piare had both been jailed for their offenses, it wouldn't have undone the damage they did. Jailing an offender may limit their access to victims, but it doesn't heal sexual abuse. Nor does it heal years of cult-like indoctrination into a screwy belief system. What would have aided my healing process in both instances was some kind of community process that showed me that I was supported despite these men's harmful actions. Instead, what I got from the community was basically the opposite of that.

Because I was caught selling marijuana for Mere Piare's daughter in a societal moment when the disastrous War on Drugs was in full swing, I was regarded by the upstanding community as scumbag whose personal problems were irrelevant. This didn't make anything better. It would be years before I was able to begin healing from the harm I experienced around the school and its closure.

The community response was worse when I reported Mr Larson for his offenses a few years later. No one said anything to my face. But behind my back, people talked about me in an extremely negative way. The standard line was that I was crazy and had made it all up. This is what the owner of a popular local business suggested to my brother. It's what my former best friend XXXX said to anyone who would listen. In that moment, I was dealing with the messy aftermath of my first mental health hospitalization. Being gaslight by all of Taylors Falls just made everything worse.

It's possible that a Restorative Justice program could have created better outcomes in one or both of these situations. Such programs expose offenders to the impacts of their actions on communities and reduce recidivism for certain types of crimes. But Restorative Justice programs operate in conjunction with legal procedures like convictions or prosecutorial deferrals. The legal system didn't get that far in either of these cases.

In my opinion, a real justice system would involve transparency, accountability, and healing. There would be transparency about the harms an offender caused and the impact of these harms. There would be personal and community accountability for the offender. And there would be healing, which could include restitution or other means of restoring the victim and community to wholeness.

Also, in my opinion, drug prohibition made the Summit School fiasco worse, not better. It was obviously wrong of Mere Piare and GuruNischan to provide high school students with drugs. It was also wrong of her to have me peddling marijuana for her while she worked at the school. I don't believe my marijuana use as a teenager harmed me directly, though it did expose me to serious legal risk and make me more receptive to Mere Piare's wayward teachings.

In a sense, the drugs were the problem and the law was an additional problem. But the criminal status of the drugs muddied the waters about the underlying issue, which was that Mere Piare and GuruNischan were acting irresponsibly with schoolkids. This muddying of waters likely contributed to the community's failure to identify the problem in a more timely manner.

It's not clear where justice even fits into the Summit School situation. The school's abrupt closure disrupted the lives of dozens of families. My own life was turned upside down. Mere Piare and his daughter faced zero consequences. Given the school's community model, it would have made sense for there to have been a big meeting wherein they were compelled to account for their actions in front of a police officer and parents and students. It might have also made sense to restrict their professional access to kids. Ongoing counseling for students may also have been helpful. Instead, nothing happened. There was no transparency, no accountability, and no healing.

Cluster Headaches

I started getting cluster headaches between the ages of 18 and 25. During this period, I was also getting migraines. Learning to prevent the migraines isolated the cluster headaches, making it clear what was really going on. And what was going on was a living nightmare. Each headache attack lasts 30 minutes to 3 hours, they're indescribably painful, and they come in clusters. Sometimes the attacks happen at the same time each day. Sometimes they come again and again in a single day. Women who have given birth report that cluster headaches can be more painful.

From 25 to 27, I experienced headache attacks on a near daily basis. For the next decade, I averaged 8 months per year of attacks. More recently, I've found a management protocol that's reduced this to just 2 months in 2 years. A key missing ingredient turned out to be cannabis, which took me a long time to discover and come to terms with, in part because of the legal situation and how this plant was demonized in my youth. Another missing ingredient was high flow medical oxygen, which I've only recently acquired after years of trying.

Cluster headaches are uncommon and don't run in my family. Migraines do run in my family, but cluster headaches are different. They're faster and more ferocious. Medical science doesn't know what causes them. Part of me feels like there may be a connection between the presentation of cluster headaches and the childhood sexual abuse. I haven't found any data to support this feeling. Maybe someday I'll spearhead a survey to look for this data. For now, I just feel like there's a connection.

Each individual headache attack is uniquely traumatic, leaving raw exhaustion in its aftermath. Blood vessels on one side of the head dilate, crushing the trigeminal nerve, making it feel like your face is trying to explode. Tears run from one eye. Agitated sinuses over-produce phlegm, which drips from the nose and gets into the lungs, causing uncontrollable coughing. Involuntary muscle movements in response to the intense pain make remaining still impossible.

I've experienced thousands of these attacks. They've consumed huge chunks of my life, replacing my time with trauma on an animal level. Low points include falling over in pain while stumbling down the sidewalk and having an emotional breakdown in a grocery store aisle due to hunger and poverty.

When I first began to suspect that I had cluster headaches, I was in denial about it. The condition was too awful. It was unthinkable. Even after I started to accept that this was what was going on, I hid my condition from others, trying to protect them from its horrors. This was reflexive and took years to unlearn.

Once I normalized talking about the condition in everyday life, the responses I got were a mixed bag. Most people were supportive and most people didn't understand. Some suggested that I drink more water. As if that had anything to do with it.

The worst was a neurologist who refused to fill out the paperwork I needed for food assistance. I was poor, experiencing daily cluster headaches, and she refused to confirm that I was unable to work for medical reasons. So I lost my food assistance. I went hungry and I'm sure she never gave me another thought.

Experiencing endless hours of physical torture gave me ample time to think. Unable to afford basic necessities, I thought a lot about being poor. Poverty isn't inevitable in a wealthy nation like the US. It's manufactured by corporate forces and government policy.

The economic reality of my chronic illness was hellish. While both of my brothers were getting married and buying houses, I was writhing in pain, barely scraping by on art sales and writing gigs, paying extra taxes to the government because I was self-employed. The social services accessible to me amounted to one year of food assistance. A few years ago, I was finally able to get medical assistance. At no point have I ever felt like society or the government in charge of it were allies in my struggle with this illness.

Obviously, as my life was being torn away from me by this condition, I didn't just passively let it happen. Every step was a struggle. So I tried to channel that struggle into creativity. I produced hundreds of decent works of art. I studied a wide range of subjects and taught myself Python at 35. After finally getting the headaches mostly under control at 37, I started publishing novels. As noteworthy as these accomplishments may be, they happened in the context of a brutal medical reality that robbed me of countless opportunities.

One thing that stands out about this experience is that it rendered my perspective unimportant in the eyes of others. When I was sick, no one listened to me or took me at all seriously. This was true of people I counted as friends. It was true of social service providers and healthcare practitioners. Having a chronic illness effectively silenced my voice. It was as if having special needs made me into a problem that everyone preferred to just keep quiet

The Fall

Once upon a time, there was a wooden staircase leading up the back of a friend's three-story house. When I was 24, I stood on this staircase, at the second floor, looking down to the street below. The friend I was waiting for called me. Answering my phone, I said hello and spotted my friend on the street. Planning to meet him there, I took a step, not considering that there was a stair missing.

I fell through the staircase at the second floor and plummeted down to a basement level entryway, where I landed on my back. Although I didn't lose consciousness or sustain any major fractures, the accident caused damage throughout my body. My muscles were torn. My spine was misaligned. My internal organs were displaced.

The fall shut me down. Suddenly, I couldn't do most of the things that I was used to doing. Work wasn't happening. The relationship I was in began crumbling. And I was in ungodly pain all of the time.

After several months spent trying to heal, my body was still messed up, but I tried to get on with my life anyway. Headache attacks and vomiting were a daily occurrence, but I got involved with opening an art gallery. Some friends and I spent half a year renovating a commercial building. The gallery's one and only show featured a collection of my paintings. Two days after opening, the business failed because it had no revenue.

When the gallery failed, my own failing health came into sharper focus. Something was very wrong and I became determined to get to the bottom of it. For the next few years, this became my full-time job. At the time, my dad was living in Brooklyn and was in a position to support me in this process. So I moved in with him and got to it.

The first year was mostly structural. Returning my organs to their rightful places. Correcting misalignments in my neck and hips. Maintaining sobriety. Then came the dietary stuff. Fasts. Cleanses. Food journals. None of that stopped the cluster headaches. So I dove into psychology, hoping to find a way to talk to my body and maybe convince it to stop going haywire.

Working AA's steps reorganized my thinking and unearthed serious moral failings that I hadn't been aware of. Working with energy healers got my subtle energies tuned up and balanced out. An intense meditation practice retrained my attention. These practices

had limited impact on the cluster headaches. But they did make me aware of important things.

One of these was simply that I could choose to be good no matter what was happening. Another was that the body stores information about our experiences, for better and worse. Although these things should have been obvious, they were mind blowing to me. Choosing to be good became a new way of life. And I was able to start identifying and resolving the traumas stored in my body.

These traumas are stored in constellations of psychological associations that are mapped to bodily locations. These trauma patterns can be installed in the system by abuse, but they aren't actually created by abusers. Rather, they're products of the body itself, responding to the harms it experiences. I started playing with ways to resolve them and had some success. For me, getting into a constant dialog with my unconscious self helped a lot. Initiating this dialog was mostly a matter of attention.

It turned out that my unconscious was always talking, whether by tiny physical sensations or by more disruptive means. In conversation, it asserted itself in all sorts of ways. The best trick I found for making sense of this involved paying attention to what I was paying attention to. Where my attention naturally went was a good indication of my unconscious priorities. So was the precise feeling of my body in relation to subjects being discussed in conversation.

Falling through that staircase totally changed the trajectory of my life. It screwed up my body, but it also put me on a better path. A path to healing some of my deepest wounds and facing my inner demons. This process eventually made me into an ethical person. And I wouldn't trade that for the world.

Bipolar Disorder

When I was 37, I stopped sleeping. Several days later, having not slept at all, it became apparent that I was interpreting important things incorrectly. I checked myself into a hospital where medication helped me start sleeping again. My diagnosis was bipolar disorder, which made perfect sense.

Looking back on my life, I found examples of what were likely manic episodes going back to when I was 18. A particularly intense one happened when I was 21. It ended a relationship I was in and generally destroyed my life. At that time, my parents mistakenly believed that my problem was marijuana and alcohol. My dad dropped me off at a treatment center where no one listened to a word I said. So I left. Then my parents went on vacation, leaving me at their house, telling me to take anything I needed. In that manic state, all I needed was get out into the forest, away from people. So I took my parents' expired credit cards and tried to buy a bunch of camping supplies at Wal Mart.

That didn't work, of course, but it gave local police a reason to pick me up and throw me in jail on suspicion of felony credit card theft and fraud. I sat in jail, manic and unable to sleep, for maybe a week. My mom eventually bailed me out and brought me to a hospital, where I was treated like trash and misdiagnosed. At the time, I was barely beginning to process major trauma that I'd experienced. But no one was even willing to listen to my experiences. In fact, everybody acted like my experiences were irrelevant to my mental illness.

After a friend in law enforcement helped to sort the legal mess out, the criminal charges were dropped and I underwent outpatient mental health and chemical dependency treatment. This wasn't an enlightening experience. Mostly, it was boring. But I did it, hoping the whole episode was just an isolated incident.

This is when I reported Mr Larson's abuse to the authorities. Other traumas I'd experienced, some while living on the streets, may have been more damaging, but I couldn't do anything about them. What I could do was tell people about Mr Larson. In so doing, I wanted to both limit his access to future victims and to calm some of my own inner turmoil.

For the next 16 years, I lived with no mental healthcare whatsoever. Most of that time, I attributed my mental health challenges to cluster headaches and poverty. And it is true that these things made everything harder. But there were times when I wouldn't sleep at all for days. There were whole months when I slept less than two hours a night.

Although I needed help, I was still holding onto the bizarre idea that I could think my way out of mental illness. I actually believed psych drugs were short term fixes that were more damaging to mental health in the long term than uncontrolled mental illness. This was a lesson left over from Mere Piare's programming. A lesson that made my life harder than it needed to be.

All of that changed when I started receiving real mental healthcare a few years ago. It mostly changed for the better. With a name to give my symptoms, previously inexplicable things started making sense. With my mood chemically stabilized, I slept every night. And with a therapist to talk to, my issues could be dealt with systematically, instead of haphazardly, at inconvenient moments.

These things greatly reduced the number of crazy actions I took without thinking. They also helped my working productivity improve. The new perspective this cultivated brought with it sharper focus. This, in turn, brought with it a valuable insight.

When I considered my manic episode and previous probable episodes, one thing they all had in common was a feeling that I was tripping on psychedelic drugs. In fact, a common feature of my manic episodes was believing that I'd been dosed with a psychedelic drug without my knowledge. Essentially, I went through life feeling like I was tripping often enough that it seemed normal. I did that for 16 years.

It's possible that extensive use of psychedelic drugs as a teenager, some under Mere Piare's supervision, contributed to the onset of my bipolar disorder. I feel like this may be the case. I also feel like experiencing certain harms may have permanently broken my mind in some nontrivial way. Even with the good, supervised mental health I enjoy today, I can't shake this thought.

Societal perceptions of mental illness have improved dramatically in the last 20 years. My friends and family have been nothing but helpful and understanding when it comes to my bipolar disorder. Healthcare has gotten better, such that my doctors usually treat me like a person. But I still feel like serious mental illness is stigmatized in society. Sometimes I even stigmatize it in my own thinking.

Status Quo

My life has been filled with serious challenges. Mr Larson's sexual abuse. Mere Piare's psychological predation. Catastrophic physical illness. Mental illness that wasn't even properly diagnosed until I was on the doorstep of middle age. What all these things had in common was that they taught me how sick the world was. Oftentimes, I was a mess. But the societal context for my life was equally problematic.

I've always felt like society was totally screwed up. It abetted predators and didn't care for the needy. It wrecked ecosystems and waged wars. Early on, I went looking for alternatives to the mainstream in activism and the intentional community movement. What I found was the rainbow family.

The rainbow family is an anarchic network of counterculture camping enthusiasts. Rainbow gatherings are camp outs on public lands wherein participants establish temporary autonomous zones. In these zones, no money is used, though barter sometimes is. People work and eat and sing together, holding ad hoc councils whenever decisions need to be made. The most important event is a big prayer for peace at the gathering's main meadow. When it's all over, participants dismantle the temporary autonomous zone and remove all trace of it, going so far as to break up packed earth trails and reseed plants in trampled areas.

The first big rainbow gathering I went to was in California. Between ten and twenty thousand people attended. There, in a primitive encampment deep in the wilderness, I caught a glimpse of something I'd never seen before. I saw a makeshift city full of people, all peacefully working together, motivated only by their desire to make things great for everyone.

One memory of that gathering stands out in my mind. It was a sunny day. I was sitting by a camp that served coffee. A dozen people lounged around a communal fire pit, playing music. There were fifty or a hundred people milling around. Some sat, some walked by, some were giving away little gifts. Many danced, either deliberately to the music or unconsciously to more subtle rhythms.

In this moment, it dawned on me that everyone at this gathering was a real and legitimate person choosing to be outside of societal norms. This insight was incredible for me at the time, because it revealed that these norms were ultimately insubstantial

and perhaps even arbitrary. And I thought, if the status quo is just a program that people can choose not to run, then maybe the world was a little bit more hopeful than I previously believed.

Of course, the rainbow family has a dark side just like normal society does. Thieves and abusers take advantage of the permissive counterculture. When they're discovered, the discovery is broadcast on social media. At gatherings, there are councils about these predators, the harms they've done, and how to keep the community safe from them in the future.

One thing that's completely absent from rainbow gatherings is the structural reinforcement of harmful societal norms. In the US, interpersonal disconnection and socioeconomic stratification are programmed into us by the physical environment. The economy, at the most basic level, programs people to see scarcity in a world filled with abundance. The media programs people to live in fear. This list could go on and on.

The patterns of thinking and behavior these programs encode into us aren't inevitable consequences of 'progress' or natural products of increasing societal complexity. They're the result of choices made by our control regime to force us to surrender more and more of our power. What I witnessed at that rainbow gathering in California was people experiencing freedom from these choices. If freedom from the control regime's harmful choices could exist for thousands of people in a forest, perhaps similar freedom could also be reclaimed on a larger scale, in more conventional circumstances.

How to actually begin such a reclamation of freedom is an open question. I doubt it could begin with traditional forms of protest. Identifying and shedding wrong assumptions might be a better place to start.

When I was growing up, the large stone heads on Easter Island were considered a great mystery. More recently, it was discovered that these giant heads sat atop giant stone bodies, which had been buried. This discovery was big news. It upended society's assumption that the heads were disembodied. In hindsight, this assumption seems baseless. Foolish, even. And yet, the assumption was widespread in the recent past.

Protests against the Iraq war in 2003 were unprecedented in human history. Up to 10 million people in sixty countries participated in these protests. Did they make a difference? They did not. There was an invasion, an occupation, and a legacy of death, all for no good reason.

Civil rights demonstrations following the murder of George Floyd by police in 2020 were on another level. Up to 26 million people in hundreds of US cities participated in those

demonstrations. In my hometown of Minneapolis, where they started, those demonstrations didn't result in a dismantling of systemic racism. They resulted in a crime wave and a divided populace.

Both of these unprecedented demonstrations were products of galvanizing events. A war started under false pretenses. The callous murder of a man by police caught on camera. Both situations proved that society isn't a person you can talk to with a protest. Instead, it's the machinery buried under the talking heads.

This machinery is inaccessible by design. How we vote is irrelevant to its operations, yet we're told that voting is the only way we can change things. So we vote for the big stone heads. And we ignore the machinery supporting the big stone heads, hidden from view.

Political protest and the act of voting are useful only in a symbolic sense. And media portrayals of current issues are designed to keep the conversation centered on symbolic actions like voting and protest. Society's myriad problems consequently remain unaddressed until they reach the level of crises. These crises then become new galvanizing events used by the machinery to advance an agenda of further power consolidation.

Society is currently poised at the intersection of several such crises. The machinery's agenda of power consolidation is evident everywhere. The government keeps awarding itself new powers. The corporate world has begun exercising more and more control over our lives. Meaningful dissent has all but disappeared.

I don't believe the problems we face can be solved by adhering to the status quo. Neither are solutions likely to be found in opposing the status quo. Both paths are variations of the same path. A path that has already led us to dystopia.

Media

In 2014, I was hired by a nonprofit information service founded by a former high level State Department translator turned whistleblower. My job was to summarize news reports about corruption and cover-ups for wanttoknow.info, an organization website. Every week, I summarized 8-12 articles about terrible power abuses and 3-4 stories that were more inspiring. These summaries were posted to the website and a popular newsletter. After reading and summarizing thousands of these news reports, a big picture began to emerge, challenging me to see the world in new light.

This big picture was disturbing, but it was also hopeful. Major events were being manipulated by known entities and hidden forces. The media was also being manipulated, though sometimes just by the forces of capitalism. The government wasn't even in control of itself. And there were always people working tirelessly to make things better.

Covering news about proven conspiracies made me less inclined to consider major events to be the products of conspiracies. It improved my confidence in some areas of government while decreasing my trust in government as a whole. As the years passed, the job trained me to take shocking news in stride. And yet, even taken in stride, some of the stories I ran across were unsettling.

One of the most unsettling things I witnessed at this job involved Corizon, a company that provides healthcare to correctional facilities. According to a news report I received, this company's pattern of providing substandard medical care had resulted in inmate deaths at several facilities. I summarized the story and later went back to it to verify details. Only a few days had passed, but when I went back to the article, it was different. The piece had been totally rewritten to eliminate any mention of the company's systematic malpractice. The replacement article described issues at only one facility and implied that these issues were the result of individual bad apples, who had been disciplined.

The reason this was so unsettling was that it illustrated major media complicity in a realtime cover-up of systemic problems with a major government contractor. If such a cover-up happened in this instance, how many other similar cover-ups were happening unnoticed? Maybe a few. Maybe a large number.

In early 2016, something weird happened with mainstream media that I still can't quite put my finger on. I first saw it in coverage of the Democratic Primary, when Hilary Clinton was competing with Bernie Sanders for the party nomination. Major news coverage was heavily slanted in favor of Clinton. Google search results and social media feeds began behaving in unexpected ways. It turns out that part of what was happening was that the Democratic National Committee, the Clinton campaign, and major news outlets were all colluding to prevent Sanders from winning.

This was a systemic problem in the party system. And, as with the Corizon episode, the story of this systemic problem was covered-up by mainstream media. The whole system was visibly broken, but audiences were urged to blame Russia for releasing damaging information about the DNC, and to blame Debbie Wasserman Schultz for all of the improprieties at the DNC.

In my opinion, the media never really returned to normal after that. It became more fear driven than ever and hyper-partisan about everything. Then Donald Trump's presidency drove many news outlets into a prolonged frenzy. But that wasn't the weird part. The weird part was that I began to notice that corruption in business and government only seemed to receive substantial coverage when it aligned with a news outlet's nakedly partisan agenda.

By the time covid struck, the media landscape was covered in blank spots. There were topics, whole industries, and even geographical regions that media at the national level ignored. And when the pandemic began, news sources somehow avoided reporting on systemic problems in healthcare. They instead praised the heroism of workers while presenting the virus in a more negative light than was warranted by the science.

This is not to suggest that the media is all bad. During the civil unrest in Minneapolis and elsewhere in 2020, journalists put themselves in harm's way to report on the modern Civil Rights Movement while they were attacked and detained by police. Most reporters are comparably committed to telling the public the truth. This makes major news reliable, even if it is heavily skewed. And now some journalists are going independent, avoiding corporate censors, selling their stories directly to crowds on a variety of platforms.

As of this writing, I'm still working this news job with no plans to quit. The work informs me of mainstream perspectives. It also keeps me updated on UFO disclosure and other fringe topics that I find interesting. Beyond this, wanttoknow.info covers sexual abuse scandals and human experimentation comprehensively. Contributing to this coverage helps me feel like I'm helping to raise awareness around these important topics.

Value

Society has become obsessed with party politics in recent years. My writing caters to neither party. Technically, I'm probably an anarchist, if only because my views aren't represented anywhere else on the political map. My political perspective is uncomplicated.

I believe that every person has a natural right to perfect freedom, which is necessary to meet all personal and social obligations. I think government is legitimate to the extent that it protects this freedom, and illegitimate to the extent that it impinges upon it. By this measure, I consider the US government to be more legitimate than not. By a similar measure, I oppose street-level anarchy to the extent that it impinges upon people's freedom. So I'm an anarchist who generally supports the government and opposes anarchy.

One of the biggest threats to our natural freedom is economic coercion, operating at a level as deep as the language we use to describe economic fundamentals. Human labor has been viewed as a simple commodity, directly interchangeable for other commodities in the marketplace, since Adam Smith's publication of *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776. Decades after Smith, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon began an anarchist tradition of viewing personal possessions as a distinctly different entity from private property, which was regarded as offensive. Predictably, Proudhon favored labor in considering labor relations with capital. I disagree with his construction of this contest.

My philosophy formulates life as perfect natural freedom to meet obligations. Freedom, of course, implies freedom in time. Labor is reducible to time. Capital is also reducible to time, namely the time of the preferred segment of society, which has already converted some of its time into property. I therefore don't favor labor over capital in a contest between the two, because there is no contest there. All that is contested is the value of one group's labor against the value of another group's labor.

By stripping away the obfuscating facade of popular economic theories, this basis for determining economic relations leaves no place for inequality to hide. Labor value is equal to earnings, no matter how these earnings are achieved or deployed. All wealth is considered earnings and earnings are property. Capital investment is a labor investment accompanied by a property investment. If the labor of the investor class is regarded to

be of much higher value than the labor of the working class, the problem isn't capitalism per se. The problem is our societal priorities.

In a practical sense, our society has been lowering the value of average laborers for decades. Wages have stagnated as productivity has gone up and up. This devaluation of labor has an intergenerational component. When my parents' generation reached a median age of 35 in 1990, they had 21% of the country's wealth. When my generation reaches an average age of 35 in 2023, it will own about 3% of the country's wealth. At the same time, about half of workers over the age of 55 will be poor or near-poor when they reach 65.

I could go on and on about how the rich are getting richer at everybody else's expense. And there are issues of taxation and public policy that can be blamed for contributing to the starkly unequal distribution of wealth in society. But two of the matter's underlying issues are discussed so infrequently that I suspect them to be taboo. The first is that society simply values the labor of the wealthy more than it values the labor of average people. The second is that our monetary system structurally supports this disparity, in part by making national currency artificially scarce in parts of the economy that are accessible to the lower classes.

These issues aren't new. On the monetary front, Proudhon, in his day, tried and tried to get average workers affordable access to credit markets with little success. Others have since attempted to address the issue with various credit schemes, community currencies, and, more recently, with cryptocurrencies. The latter actually shows some promise, as it allows non-banks to create new money where money is needed.

Proposed remedies for the social problem of many people's labor being regarded as near-worthless are harder to find. Is the labor of my generation truly worth 1/7 of the labor of my parents' generation? Is the labor of an industrialist worth a hundred million times that of a cook? The value we do or do not place on people as a society is a choice that is made every time money changes hands. Talk of 'market preferences' for capital or labor masks this fact, but the fact remains.

Until recently, globalization has meant the globalization of capital across captive labor markets. But with the advent of remote work, more labor is beginning to globalize. And distributed ledger technology is paving the way for alternative capitalization methods to emerge. These may be hopeful trends. Regardless, I fear our ongoing dependence on loaded economic jargon is a hindrance. If we could start talking about people and property, rather than about capital and labor, then maybe we could begin to address inequality in a more meaningful way.

This brings me to an important point. Economic inequality is problematic from the standpoint of fairness. But formulating the problem as inequality, or worse, as income inequality, neatly hides the underlying problem of poverty. I wouldn't care how wealthy the wealthiest members of society were if the poorest members of society had sufficient resources to live happy and healthy lives.

Emerging technology has placed solutions to the problem of poverty within reach. And yet, the role of technological advancement in our dystopia is nuanced. Power abusers use tech to make war. They use it to surveil and censor and influence populations. And they use it in a way that's environmentally devastating. Alongside this, technological advancement as a whole is broadly beneficial. It produces tools that make incredible things possible.

Our dystopia does have a distinctly technological dimension. It may be tempting to misidentify the tech as the dystopia. Some might even try to reject technology on this basis. Personally, I enjoy being able to exchange little notes with anyone in the world, instantly. And I imagine that any path out of dystopia would have to include computer networks.

The money problem is a defining feature of our dystopia. The legacy economy is unfair to most of the population. National currencies are artificially scarce for the lower classes. The credit system, ruled by private companies, is a rigged game that excludes many working class people from creditworthiness. In a structural sense, the monetary system and credit system work together to further the control regime's agenda of power consolidation.

Although some imagine that the current system can be reformed, the machinery of the legacy economy is fundamentally unfair. With the advent of crypto, this fundamentally unfair machinery no longer has a monopoly on the creation and distribution of money. Cryptocurrencies and emerging token economies make an alternative to the legacy system technically feasible. They make it possible for transparently administered and self-governing decentralized networks to replace centralized power structures in many areas.

This has already had a positive impact on free speech and international remittances. When Wikileaks published documentation of the US military killing journalists, the US government attempted to silence the news organization using its influence over the legacy financial system. Banks and credit card companies stopped servicing Wikileaks. The organization responded by starting to accept donations in Bitcoin, which the US government couldn't stop. This allowed Wikileaks to survive for several additional years.

International remittances, where money is sent from one person to another person in a different country, cost an average of 7% in the legacy system. This high cost is typically paid by people with low incomes in the developing world. By utilizing crypto networks instead of the legacy system, this cost can be brought down to a much more reasonable figure. Transferring funds on some crypto networks costs nothing at all.

The legacy economy isn't going anywhere. Neither is the emerging crypto economy likely to slow its growth. I don't see this resulting in any meaningful conflict between the two sectors. Instead, I predict that the interaction of these two economies will produce countless changes in the fine structure of the total system. It may be years before federal taxes can be paid in Bitcoin, but it's already trivial to swap Bitcoin for dollars.

The crypto economy provides the lower classes with access to financial services. But it can't solve the problem of structurally manufactured poverty. A Universal Basic Income (UBI) and universal healthcare could solve this problem.

The version of this that I support would include universal healthcare and a UBI equal to a realistic minimum cost of living, paid for by a wealth tax in the neighborhood of 5%. This would be accompanied by the elimination of a vast number of bloated social service programs and a drastic reduction in healthcare costs, in part due to the elimination of the parasitic health insurance industry.

The wealth tax I favor would replace the capital gains tax, and would apply to all quantifiable wealth held by all taxpayers, including corporate entities. This means stocks and bonds, real estate holdings, baseball card collections, money in the bank, crypto, all of it. Importantly, the wealth tax I envision wouldn't need to be paid in cash. It could instead be paid as a financial instrument entitling Uncle Sam to a percentage of an asset's future sale.

I've never heard anyone else seriously consider an arrangement like this, and I wonder why that is. 5% is less than the annual return on good investments. So the managerial class could remain intact with slightly reduced profits while poverty was eliminated. And the scheme would be universal, so everybody would be taxed the same and would receive the same benefits.

Some people might take issue with the idea of giving the government effective partial ownership of property. But the government already seizes private property whenever it wants to. And the mechanisms by which this wealth tax was implemented could be purely digital, with the taxpayer retaining full material control over assets regardless of government claim status. Presumably, the home would be off limits. That doesn't seem worse than the current system.

The vast majority of people would be able to simply pay their wealth tax with the UBI. Personally, I'd gladly pay 5% if it meant that everyone could sleep in a bed and go to the doctor. An arrangement like this wouldn't merely end poverty. It would stop all of the entities that exploit poverty from continuing to do so.

Had there been a UBI when I was poor and starving due to chronic illness, I wouldn't have been starving. I would've been sick, but okay. Had there been universal healthcare, my illnesses would have likely been diagnosed and effectively treated sooner, perhaps saving me years of extra difficulty.

Deep Context

Modernity has introduced many changes into our human ecology's biological scaffolding. Even the best of these changes produce unpredictable outcomes. Consider statins. These drugs lower cholesterol. They can also cause undesirable behavioral changes in some people. And statins aren't the only common drugs that do that. Acetaminophen, antihistamines, asthma medications and antidepressants can all negatively impact behavior or the personality under the right circumstances. This list of drugs is far from comprehensive. It's just some of the ones that start with A.

According to Google, two thirds of Americans use prescription drugs. I'm in this category. My life is better with the right drugs. The primary impact of mass medication may be an improvement in the quality of many lives. But the unintended effects of this are both significant and unpredictable.

Society's experiment with mass medication coincides with the addition of myriad subtle poisons to our human ecology. At the same time, ecological disasters such as the decline of insect populations are also underway. Light pollution has hidden the night sky from many places. Pavement makes the very ground on which we walk into an alien thing. Evolution designed our bodies for a certain kind of world. A world that doesn't exist anymore.

This mismatch between the world we were made for and the world we inhabit is inseparably part of the context for our lives. In a sense, our baseline is a fundamental disconnect, coupled with environmental and pharmacological factors that alter thinking and behavior in ways we're barely beginning to understand.

One result of this is widespread biological confusion that provokes different responses from different sectors. In healthcare, it is typically ignored. When a person feels this confusion and finds it disturbing, the standard medical response is to suppress the feeling with drugs. Pop culture has produced a spectrum of social responses to this confusion, ranging from various back-to-the-land movements to transhumanism. Individual responses to it are even more varied.

A population that is alienated at such a basic level is easily manipulated. At any point, our control regime may advance its agenda merely by misidentifying this biological confusion and prescribing solutions to this misidentified problem that serve its aims.

It seems like our regime wants people to be healthy enough to work but sick enough to frequently require costly healthcare services. With two chronic illnesses, I'll require regular healthcare for the rest of my life. And even with healthcare, modern society is a minefield of headache triggers. Most food in grocery stores is off limits to me. Smelling the wrong cleaning product or perfume can sometimes trigger an attack. And I can't be the only one with such sensitivities.

In our culture, it's okay to add slow acting poisons to food, water, soil, and air. Toxic chemical fragrances and off-gassing modern construction materials are normal. Much of this disrupts hormones or brain function. That's probably significant.

Our toxic and biologically confusing human ecology is largely inescapable. Some people tolerate this better than others. Personally, I find our environmental context unfortunate. There's a mass extinction event underway. To me, mass extinction events are a clear signal that something is wrong with the total environment.

Part of what helps me deal with unpleasant awareness of environmental issues is lithium. I also create pollinator habitat in my yard and sign online petitions. To support people and groups serving the public good, I created a crypto token for virtual philanthropy. Beyond this, I generally support environmental causes. Specifically, I favor many courses of action that most people seem opposed to.

For example, I'm in favor of eliminating most car travel and replacing this with efficient mass transit. I'm for eliminating sod grass in favor of plants that support life. These aren't popular views in Minnesota, where I live. Most people here want cars and sod.

One thing that settles my biological confusion is getting out into an undeveloped forest for a few days. I've found that it takes me a day just to unwind and release unconscious tension. After that, I'm relaxed in a way that isn't possible in a city. In my urban neighborhood, there's a huge old oak tree that I sometimes visit. This isn't the same as being immersed in a forest. Beyond immersion in nature, my confusion is also sometimes settled by my spiritual beliefs.

The materialistic perspective explains the physical world, but it can't make sense of consciousness. There are things that happen with consciousness that defy conventional scientific explanation. Near-death experiences are rare. Synchronicity is commonplace. Both involve phenomena that materialism cannot adequately explain. And this isn't the limit of what materialism can't explain.

A religion, operating in its cultural context, traditionally explained such matters to everybody's satisfaction. In our secular and multicultural society, participation in

religions has dropped precipitously. The abandonment of organized religion makes sense in the wake of revelations about Indigenous genocide and the institutional facilitation of pedophilia. But it also leaves a void in society. One that it would be wise to take seriously.

The absence of meaningful ritual in society is noteworthy. The absence of stories that explain life and its purpose seems like cause for concern. Not everyone is built to see life as merely the product of a random cosmic accident. Many people have experiences that directly conflict with this view.

Some believe in a higher power. Some believe that we have souls and purpose. Personally, I don't believe we have souls. I believe we are souls, temporarily embodied as people. The story of souls is part of a larger story that I find compelling. This is the story of the infinite world.

The infinite world is a place outside of time. It's made out of all the important aspects of all places and times. This is where souls go when they're not embodied. They live there between lifetimes, at their ideal ages, interacting with each other and with stuff reproduced from across time and space.

As embodied souls here on Earth, anything we say or do could end up incorporated into the infinite world. The only criteria for inclusion in the infinite world is importance to the infinite world. And souls in the infinite world determine whether or not a thing is important enough to be included.

I didn't just invent this story from nothing to relieve my discomfort with the unknown. The story, instead, came to me in a series of dreams. I saw the dead living happily in the infinite world. Some played out fantasies that would be impossible in corporeal life. Some conspired to produce specific situations when they returned to finite reality. Some collected art.

This story might be little more than a product of my unconscious. Even if that's the case, it explains big mysteries well enough for me. If nothing else, the story of the infinite world provides context for the parts of life that are timeless. Until a better story comes along, this is the one that I'm sticking with.

Transformation

When I was younger, I had major problems. There was always a part of me that imagined I would see the world in a better light if these problems went away. But when I finally got my personal issues under control, it didn't improve my low opinion of society. It did however bring matters into sharper focus.

While my experiences taught me to appreciate the little things and to live in the moment, they also forced me to accept that I existed in the context of a culture that was largely unacceptable. People abused and manipulated each other. They harmed the web of life. They used individuals as scapegoats for their collective failings. Acknowledging these failings, I came to understand that society was deeply unethical. It was spiritually sick.

In my own story, there was a moment, after my accidental fall, when I changed into someone ethical. Before that time, I did my best, but I didn't really have principles. I consider this a spiritual transformation. Today, my spiritual practice isn't complicated. I try to do no harm, fulfill obligations, keep my word, and use my time to make the world better.

This personal transformation didn't come about because everything was great. It came about after disaster prompted me to reexamine my life. A key component of my transformation was noticing that obligations were the glue that held everything together. This was a strange realization alongside the awareness that our culture barely acknowledged the importance of obligations in our social fabric.

Consider the question of the inattentive customer:

You're in a busy checkout line at a store and you notice someone accidentally drop a twenty dollar bill. No one else sees this happen. Do you point out their error or pocket the money?

Before my transformation, I would have pocketed the money, rationalizing that it didn't belong to anyone once it left the inattentive customer's possession. Afterwards, I saw a social obligation to notify a community member of their error. I wish more people looked at each other and saw social obligations. Too often, in our culture, they see only competitors and enemies.

It would be great if people could set aside their differences and work together to exit dystopia. Sadly, almost no one seems interested in doing this. Even if they were, giant corporate and governmental systems operate according to their own rules, regardless of what their human operators do. Some of these systems are part of the problem, and no one has the power to stop them.

The war machine might be the most egregious example of this. War has been a racket since long before Smedley Butler published *War is a Racket* in 1935. The US military could successfully defend the country with a tiny fraction of what it presently spends. Outside the US, our military makes us enemy after enemy by overthrowing governments and killing civilians with impunity. And yet, nearly everyone I've met who's served in the military or worked in intelligence impressed me.

These are smart people. I respect them and the specific work they do. Despite this, the military's wasteful spending and abuses of power keep happening. I can only conclude that the system has a mind of its own. There's ample evidence that the nature of this mind is inhuman. After 9/11, the US set up a secret international network of torture prisons. There was clearly no humanity in that.

Throughout society, the equally antisocial minds of other big systems are just as out of control. Good people are everywhere, but they're powerless against these systems. I think most people are aware of this and have no idea what to do about it. Having to rely on these harmful systems for survival is like being stuck in a household run by an abuser. Saying that shouldn't be taboo, but it is. After hearing my story, some people have pointed out to me that some of the systems I interacted with only harmed me a little at times, when they could have done me much greater harm. That's exactly the kind of thing people say when they're defending an abuser.

Recent years have brought our society disaster after disaster. The Holocene extinction. The political response to the pandemic. The mass production of poverty. Civil unrest. Any one of these things should have triggered a critical reexamination of our ethical foundations. Instead, so far, they've only produced more political tribalism.

And yet, if a person like me could transform for the better in the wake of disaster, perhaps something similar is possible on the level of our culture. Many of the ingredients for such a transformation may already be present. What isn't present is space.

By this, I mean the physical, psychological, emotional, social, and financial space necessary to fully consider our shared circumstance and respond to it in meaningful

ways. Most people simply don't have this space in their lives. Nor is there sufficient accessible public space for such consideration and response to occur.

One area where I see the possibility of such space being created is in the arts. Never before has there been as much artistic freedom as there is now. Arts and entertainment allow us to envision new ways of thinking and alternative realities. Emerging technologies make creative expression censorship resistant and make new art forms possible.

Even in dystopia, at the mercy of terrible systems, I can do whatever I want artistically. This freedom has seen me through some of my darkest moments. It helped me process the abuse and psychological manipulation I experienced as a kid. It also motivated me to keep going during years of hellish chronic illness.

Putting this text together the way that I did was an artistic choice. Having just published my seventh science fiction novel, I wanted to try something different. Combining the story of my healing journey with a manifesto of sorts was an idea I found compelling. While the result probably isn't a marketable product, if it ends up helping even one person to deal with their own challenges, I'll consider it a success.

Although my story is mine alone, many people have supported me over the years in various ways. There were periods when my parents helped me immensely. Other family members and close friends also carried me through many moments that would have been impossible otherwise. And a kindly stranger has helped me along my path more than once. Society as a whole may be a total mess, filled with confusion and misuses of power, but people are mostly good.

Imagine if all the good people got together and fixed the world. Consider what that might consist of. What kind of conversations should we be having today if the plan is to leave dystopia behind tomorrow? Who wants to talk about that?

Donate

If you found this text useful, consider donating. Funds will be used to free up time for creative pursuits. I accept several major cryptocurrencies. Please contact me by email to make a donation denominated in national currency.

Bitcoin - 3EUHvDJR5MapoBB2MjRQEjcF3wJtxc7SY6

Ethereum - 0xd852EB3Dcd80fC42EC69b505CD9C4058b1bfD4BD

EOS - fixingrobots

WAX - kagaw.wam

Hive - mada

Network

Blog - <https://hive.blog/@mada>

Twitter - <https://twitter.com/MaDaBailey>

Telegram - <https://t.me/fixingbrokenrobots>

Email - accessiblefuture@gmail.com

Science Fiction Novels

The Paradise Anomaly

Print - <https://www.blurb.com/b/10994168-the-paradise-anomaly>

Kindle - <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B09NLB95NZ>

Psychic Avalanche

Print - <https://www.blurb.com/b/10891426-psychic-avalanche>

Kindle - <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B09JS6CV9X>

Blue Dragon Mississippi

Print - <https://blurb.com/b/10192086-blue-dragon-mississippi>

Kindle - <https://amazon.com/Blue-Dragon-Mississippi-Mark-Bailey-ebook/dp/B08C54F99R>

Flying Saucer Shenanigans

Print - <https://blurb.com/b/10002213-flying-saucer-shenanigans>

Kindle - <https://amazon.com/Flying-Saucer-Shenanigans-Mark-Bailey-ebook/dp/B0863FRJN2>

One Man Embassy

Print - <https://blurb.com/b/9876573-one-man-embassy>

Kindle - <https://amazon.com/One-Man-Embassy-Mark-Bailey-ebook/dp/B0836SRC8K>

The Ostermann Method

Print - <https://blurb.com/b/9660167-the-ostermann-method>

Kindle - <https://amazon.com/Ostermann-Method-Mark-Bailey-ebook/dp/B07Y6RDTJF>

Rainbow Lullaby

Print - <https://blurb.com/b/9330918-rainbow-lullaby>

Kindle - <https://amazon.com/Rainbow-Lullaby-Mark-Bailey-ebook/dp/B07P4MYTGT>

Rstory

Rstory is a crypto token I created for virtual philanthropy. Rstory tokens are called tudes, short for gratitudes. Tudes are given to people and groups working to make the world better in my estimation. Each gift of tokens is accompanied by an article showcasing the good work. Learn more about this project at <https://rstory.io> or <https://hive.blog/@rstory>