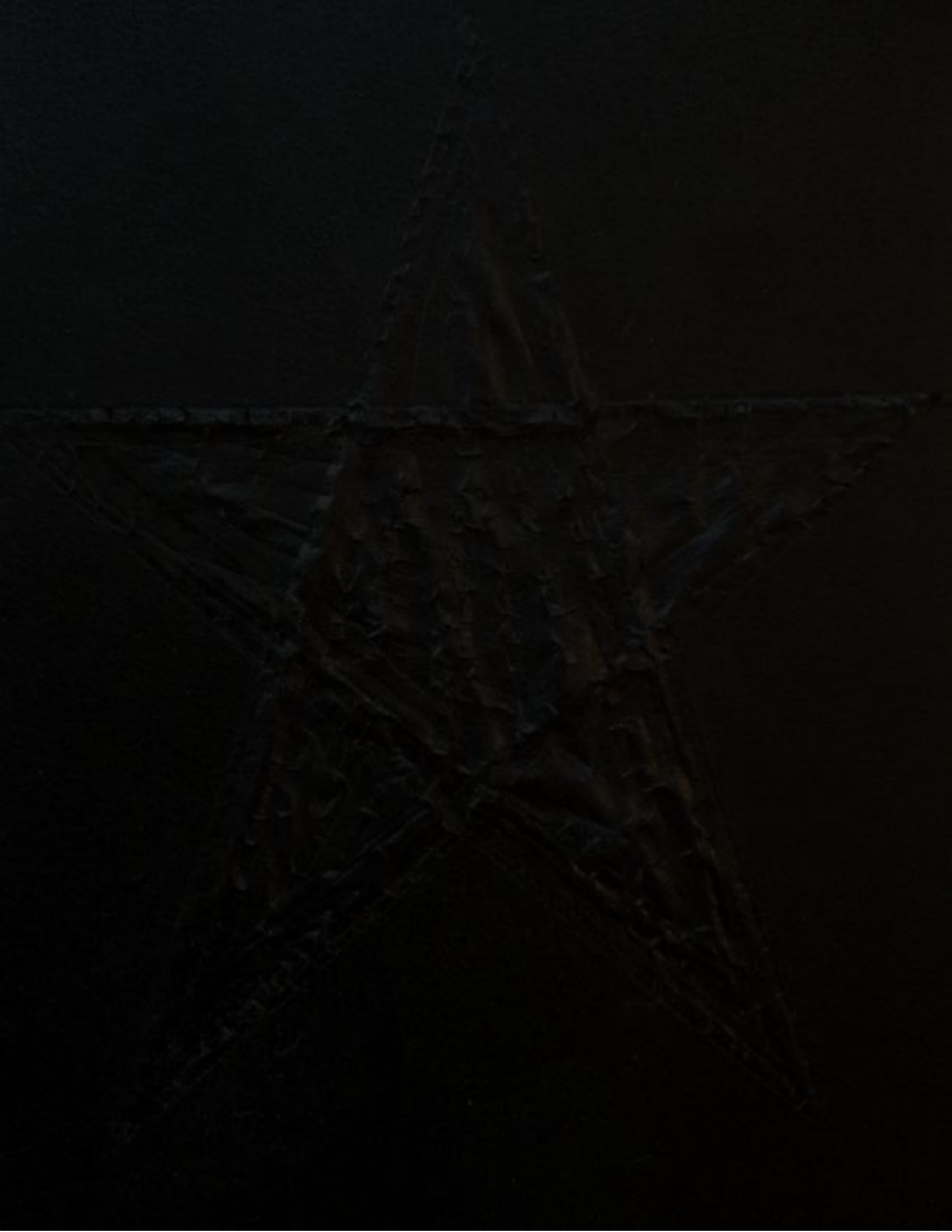

Social Futurism and the Zero State

Ámon Ásentír

The Teacher

Including contributions with thanks
From Zero State members and other Social Futurists

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Foreword by David J. Kelley

Chairperson of The Foundation

Many years ago, I had the chance on a business trip to meet this guy in a dark lane late, one night in London. We ended up talking in a pub at length, and found that we really had a lot in common; in particular the need to help the future. We came from different fields, and approach this philosophy from different angles, but it turned out that the fundamental reason for our journey and our drives were the same. That first meeting in a dark street in London was a turning point for me, to work towards making a difference.

Admittedly the clandestine aesthetic, emotionally vested interest in the topic and going on 15 years of execution into a 20-year plan to be able to do something helped make it impactful. Still meeting Dr. Twyman (the man I meet in that dark street in London) really helped clarify that vision for me, not necessarily the 20-year plan that was quickly approaching its end, but for what to do with my life afterwards.

For me, the ethics of the Intelligence Value Argument (IVA) make Social Futurism the moral and ethical outgrowth of that ethical model. Personally, I can't come to any other conclusion. Every mind is a treasure, and our responsibility to the community is to provide for each other, to help and protect every single one of those minds, regardless of anything else. This is the single most important thing we can do.

Everyone (and every 'mind') has certain rights to do as they see fit, and in many ways this is a very Libertarian view, but it is this moral and ethical responsibility to the community we are a part of, to be open to all 'minds', to help and uplift those that need our support, that is the highest and most ethical thing we can do. If we are part of a community, then it is our ethical and moral responsibility to support that metaphorical social contract. As in all things there must needs be a balance, and this turns out to be hard to do, given the way human nature has evolved. For us to move on, we must evolve ourselves beyond human nature, and from a strictly logical position Social Futurism is the most moral and ethical path forward, as articulated by Dr. Twyman.

My personal ethics are derived from the idea of the value of sapient and sentient intelligence, so let me distill that argument a bit, as it is the fundamental principle that really drives the 'rightness' of Social Futurism:

The Intelligence Value Argument (IVA) Theory

At a very high level, without getting into too much detail, the IVA theory as applied to Social Futurism is thus: The theory states that, "ethically", *a fully Sapient and Sentient Intelligence is of equal value to any other, regardless of the underlying substrate which it operates on.* This means that a single fully Sapient and Sentient software system has the same moral agency as an equally Sapient and Sentient human being.

We define 'ethical' according to dictionary.com, as pertaining to or dealing with morals or the principals of morality; pertaining to right and wrong in conduct. Moral agency is, according to Wikipedia; "an individual's ability to make moral judgments based on some notion of right and wrong and to be held accountable for these actions". A moral agent is "a being who is capable of acting with reference to right and wrong." Such value judgements need to be based on potential for Intelligence, as defined here.

This, of course, also places the value of any individual human or machine, derived from their potential for Intelligence, above all things. IVA argues that at a certain threshold all such Intelligences should be treated equally, as having moral equivalence, and this is called the IVA threshold. Any greater 'value' than that of 'Intelligence' becomes abstract and is subjective. It is for that reason that moral agency is the right we assign to those Sapient and Sentient Intelligences, based on the value of the potential of such entities being the same.

What is the most important thing in existence? On the surface, this seems a very existential question but, in truth, there is a simple and elegant answer; that is "Intelligence is the most important thing in existence." You might ask "why?". *Why* is Intelligence so important as to be the most important thing in existence, especially when 'value' is frequently so subjective?
To answer that question, first, let us define what Intelligence is in this context; i.e. as being *Sapience and Sentience:*

Sapience [11]: “Wisdom [Sapience] is the judicious application of knowledge. It is a deep understanding and realization of people, things, events or situations, resulting in the ability to apply perceptions, judgments and actions in keeping with this understanding. It often requires control of one’s emotional reactions (the “passions”) so that universal principles, reason and knowledge prevail to determine one’s actions. Wisdom is also the comprehension of what is true coupled with optimum judgment as to action.”

Sentience [15] which is: “Sentience is the ability to feel, perceive, or be conscious, or to have subjective experiences. Eighteenth century philosophers used the concept to distinguish the ability to think (“reason”) from the ability to feel (“sentience”). In modern western philosophy, sentience is the ability to have sensations or experiences (described by some thinkers as “qualia”).”

In any discussion on IVA theory, we mean both of these things when talking about ‘intelligence’. Back to the point about “Why?” Why is Intelligence so important? The reason is: *without Intelligence, there would be no witness to reality, no appreciation for anything of beauty, no love, no kindness, and for all intents and purposes no willful creation of any kind.* This is important from a moral or ethical standpoint, in that only through the use of applied ‘Intelligence’ can we determine value at all, even though once Intelligence is established as the basis for assigning value the rest becomes highly subjective. There would be no point to love or to kindness without Intelligence to appreciate it, or to otherwise assign value.

Therefore, without “Intelligence” there would be no point to anything; Intelligence is the most important quality or there is no value or way to assign value, and no person or thing to hold to any value of any kind. That is to say that “intelligence” is the foundation of assigning value, before anything else can be thus assigned. Even the subjective experience of a given Intelligence has no value without an Intelligence to assign that value. Through this line of thought we also conclude that Intelligence being important is not connected with being Human nor is it related to biology; but the main point is that Intelligence, regardless of form, is the single most important ‘thing’. It is therefore our moral and ethical imperative to maintain our own or any other fully Sentient and Sapient Intelligence indefinitely as a function of the preservation of ‘value’.

As a matter of clarification, in IVA theory a ‘full Sentient and Sapient intelligence’ is defined with the idea of the *IVA threshold,* which is essentially defined as having sufficient sapient and sentient intelligence to have *the potential to understand and experience one’s self subjectively, and to self-reflect sufficiently to understands one’s self entirety.*

The Moral and Ethical Imperatives of Social Futurism

The idea of “our moral and ethical imperative to maintain our own *or any other…*” is the fundamental basis of Social Futurism, and can be further articulated via the tenets of that philosophy: *Clarity and Strength in Unity (or Community); Positive Social Change Through Technology, Open Rights and Responsibilities, Activism is Action with Intent, & Imperative and Outreach.* As you dive into this book, think about these principles. Dr. Twyman is talking about the idea of Zero State (ZS) as *not a revolution but an evolution,* to help yourself and those around you to grow past our humanity, both by being more human, and by becoming more than human.

Dr. Twyman is working to help people see the way forward, and I’m working with Dr. Twyman. *IF* you feel so inclined, then join us, and together we can make a difference. Regardless of your choices we feel that if you need help and we are able to help, then we *should* help you, regardless of race, creed, religion, country, or any other thing.

In your own journey *the future is what you make it,* and I hope this book can help you understand our philosophical point of view, regardless of whether you work in the Transhumanist or Singularitarian space, or in a more practical field such as how these ideas might apply to the Open Source movement or Cryptocurrency projects. Pick a way to help those around you, and *do it.* Read this book, and see if it can help you in determining your goals and activity, as really your effectiveness in any endeavour all comes down to your choices and actions more than any other factor. With clear understanding, you can be more effective, to better ends.

Foreword by Dr. M. Amon Twyman

AKA Ámon Ásentír, The Teacher

I am a fervent proponent of *Social Futurism.* I coined that term to reflect a reality I see in the world, where accelerating technological innovation meets a positive societal vision, specifically in the desire to promote *Positive Social Change Through Technology.* This book - *Social Futurism and the Zero State* (AKA "The Black Book") - offers key insights into my view on how to approach such a mission, and various related matters.

There are many ways a person could promote a Social Futurist future, and mine is to support and develop two related organizations: The **Social Futurist Party (SFP)**, and the **Zero State (ZS)**. The SFP is a new, international political network focussed on developing links between Social Futurist organizations for the purposes of Positive Social Change Through Technology. ZS is a community and movement which works toward the same ends via different - *complementary* - means, through the medium of the arts, social events, informal networking, and Alternate Reality Gaming. Both organizations have a strong Transhumanist and Singularitarian tone.

I would like to very briefly describe my approach to leadership and activity in these two organizations, to set the tone, going forward. The first part below concerns the nature of leadership in both organizations, while the second part focuses on my own application of that approach within ZS, specifically. Different people have different ideas of what leadership is, and how it works best. Those ideas can be further complicated by the motivating power of money: In a world where most organizations are based on motivating people with money, required to stay alive or at least healthy in a Capitalist world, motivation and organizational coherence can be hard to sustain when you're *not* offering money, when your goal is not simply material profit in the most base sense. Perhaps the greatest motivational difficulty stems from that dangerous gift we call *the internet:* The internet is a place where everyone has an opinion that comes at no real cost, and where they are obliged to do nothing real. *That* attitude is a death-knell for activist and membership organizations, which need people who are willing to *do* something to back up their opinions.

So how do we move forward? How can we approach leadership for activists in this climate? The answer is to work in small, consistent, networked groups, and to lead by example. Find a small group of people you 'click' with, work out what concerns and passions you share as a group, and then work on a project together. Simple as that. Keep your group connected with others, encourage overlap, and the network will grow by word of mouth.

Don't tell other people what they should or shouldn't do, what they can or cannot do, unless their actions run counter to the explicit principles shared by the entire network. Instead, *focus on doing what you can.* If you can work effectively alone and want to, then good for you, but most people work best in a small team. Different teams favour different leadership styles. Find one that works for you. The only way to fail is to be inactive, because then you are letting yourself down, letting your team down, letting the entire network down, and yes, even letting the world down. If everyone does their part within a small team, and the teams hang together in an organic, self-modifying network, then the emergent effects have the potential to be world-changing as successful ideas and technologies ripple across the network, time and again.

Black Hole Sun: My Sphere of Responsibility within ZS

As I've noted extensively elsewhere, the Zero State (ZS) trades in *metafiction*, which is to say that although its goals and consequences are perfectly real, some of its members choose to treat its core narratives as a kind of game (specifically an 'Alternate Reality Game' or ARG), which encourages engagement combined with a certain suspension of disbelief which helps get things done. In line with that approach, regardless of whether they all view ZS as a game, our core members all have assigned roles that collectively underpin our "Mythos", or narrative. There are all sorts of weird and wonderful role names within ZS, names of occupations, animals, mythological creatures and so on, each giving some hint as to its function.

My own role is "The Teacher", because my role or function is to activate the other roles, to teach, and to 'wake people up'. My role has a particular relationship with our central symbolism of a 'Blackstar', which represents a Technological Singularity and ultra-rapid, ultra-radical techno-societal change. In that role, I have two broad functions. The first is to communicate key ideas to our membership, so that we may work our way forward with a common understanding. The second is to interact directly with the network via my own small group of contacts in as

efficient a manner as possible, through the medium of small gatherings we call “Sessions”.

My point here is that a leader leads by example, by doing what must be done, and in doing so offering an example which others can follow. The most effective leader should very rarely have to tell someone else what to do. The best leaders are the exact opposite of much internet culture, where people all want to express their personal opinions while taking no personal responsibility for action. Social Futurist leaders must be ready to take the initiative, to take action in ways that *demonstrate* their views. Our network is designed to naturally coordinate and amplify such efforts, so by leading yourself and your small group, then you will inspire and assist not only that group, but the groups it is connected to, and the groups they are connected to in turn.

The *Blackstar* (★) symbol for the idea of a revolutionizing Technological Singularity, used within both ZS and the SFP, is an allusion to a *Black Hole, or Gravitational Singularity.* It is merely a point of focus in and of itself, the culmination of a natural process, but it inevitably transforms everything within its reach. Leadership within Social Futurism, be it within a political party or gaming community or any other organization, is a matter of embodying that Blackstar ideal. To be a Social Futurist leader is to be minimal, while transforming and energizing everything within your reach. *Each of us is thus a Blackstar,* and together we impart that very nature to Social Futurism itself.

PART 1

MECHANISM:

SOCIAL FUTURISM

01 The Principles of Social Futurism

“One conversation centred on the ever accelerating progress of technology and changes in the mode of human life, which gives the appearance of approaching some essential singularity in the history of the race beyond which human affairs, as we know them, could not continue.”

– *Stanislaw Ulam on conversation with John von Neumann, 1958.*

Version 2.1 released 1st May 2018

What is Social Futurism?

Social Futurism is a political philosophy, characterized by the use of advancing technology to solve social problems. This worldview’s primary vehicle is the Social Futurist Party (SFP), which has *defined the philosophy via the Principles of Social Futurism since 1st May 2011.* There are four such Principles, preceded and unified by a single axiom, as follows:

1 AXIOM: Clarity and Strength in Unity

The Social Futurist movement is a single cooperative network, united by shared Principles.

2 Positive Social Change Through Technology

We seek Positive Social Change Through Technology in a rapidly changing world.

3 Open Rights and Responsibilities

Free Citizenship is determined by commitment and cognitive capacity.

4 Activism is Action with Intent

We act to transcend the limitations of our current age and paradigms.

5 Imperative and Outreach

We work to make the benefits of Social Futurism available to all.

Expansion & Commentary on the Principles

2 Positive Social Change Through Technology

We seek Positive Social Change Through Technology in a rapidly changing world.

2.1 Technology and Idealism

A wave of change is coming. Accelerating technologies enable humanity to recreate the world in accord with its ideals. It is therefore necessary that we have good ideals, and are committed to them.

2.2 Proactive, not Precautionary

Opposing technology in the absence of any specific risk, or focussing on *a priori* opposition to technology rather than risk management is contrary to the Social Futurist ethos.

2.3 Solar & Progressive Energies

The measure of technological progress is the ability to harness solar energy in orbit, and use it to improve conditions on earth. This is because not only is solar energy the most abundant energy source currently available to humanity, and is a sustainable energy source, but also because there are established methodologies for measuring progress in terms of the ability to harness progressively greater proportions of the Sun's energy output.

2.4 Mutual Aid

Social Futurist groups and organizations are committed to Mutual Aid, using the most effective technologies available. Social Futurism is an intrinsically Communitarian political philosophy

3 Open Rights and Responsibilities

Free Citizenship is determined by commitment and cognitive capacity.

3.1 Voluntarism and Free Exit

Membership in Social Futurist groups and organizations is always strictly voluntary, as is affiliation with and citizenship of any Social Futurist polity. Accordingly, the right of *free exit* always applies wherever it does not jeopardize community safety.

3.2 Cognitive Capability

Rights, Personhood and Citizenship within the Social Futurist sphere of influence are recognized as a function of cognitive capabilities. Sentient beings are automatically awarded animal rights, sapient beings are offered the rights and responsibilities of Citizenship, and all such entities may freely choose to improve their cognitive capabilities through technology.

3.3 Abolition of Suffering

The Transhumanist spirit of voluntary, technological improvement of living organisms goes hand in hand with an imperative to alleviate suffering wherever possible.

3.4 Post-Enlightenment

Social Futurism is a *Post-Enlightenment* philosophy, and as such it favours the rule of reason, empiricism, law, direct democracy and local representation.

4 Activism is Action with Intent

We act to transcend the limitations of our current age and paradigms.

4.1 Just Do It

Theoretical concerns can only have value insofar as they are eventually grounded in concrete action toward a specific goal, and are in accord with the Principles of Social Futurism.

4.2 Beyond Socialism, Capitalism, and Nationalism

Social Futurism opposes and transcends both authoritarian Socialism, and dysfunctional Capitalism where it leads to systemic speculation, inequality, and crisis. Furthermore, Social Futurism promotes a cooperative network of diverse communities.

4.3 Separating Money and Politics

The Social Futurist alternative rests upon the foundation of *a strict separation between monetary and political power.*Private ownership and investment are encouraged as motivation to innovate, just as direct involvement of industry expertise in governance is encouraged. What is *not* permissable, however, is any combination of the two. Under Social Futurism, no individual or organization may profit from investment in means of production and also govern (either directly or by proxy) on the basis of that participation in industry. Although industry is directly represented in governance as are other societal institutions, its representatives cannot profit from industry in any way.

4.4 Bright Green Decentralization

The ideal societal structure is both deeply cooperative and decentralized, thereby maintaining both a coherent shared identity and strong resilience to failure of its constituent parts. The

Principles provide coherence across the Social Futurist sphere of influence, while its affiliate organizations use a virtual and decentralized network structure also in accord with the pro-tech ecological "Bright Green" ideology.

5 Imperative and Outreach

We work to make the benefits of Social Futurism available to all.

5.1 The Imperative to Inclusivity

The Social Futurist sphere of influence must be characterized by free access to the rights and responsibilities of inclusion. Although we do not impose membership upon anyone, we will work to ensure that all have the access necessary to make a free choice.

5.2 Internal Regulation

The Principles of Social Futurism are our highest law. All subsidiary law and organizational rules must be in accord with our Principles, just as all further subsidiary "child" entities must be in accord with the rules of their "parent" entities.

5.3 External Relations and Accession

External organizations and entities will be respectfully cooperated with, insofar as they do not threaten the safety or integrity of Social Futurist entities, and do not impede free access to Social Futurist inclusion. Accession to recognized Social Futurist status may only be judged with extensive reference to these Principles.

5.4 Outreach Protocol

External organizations and entities are judged to be weakly positive toward Social Futurism by default. Amendments to that judgment (in terms of polarity or strength) will be based upon evidence pertaining to an entity's stated intent, inferred intent, and likely effectiveness.

02 The Social Futurist Worldview

This chapter explores salient aspects of the philosophy known as “Social Futurism” (a term coined and idea developed by myself from 2011-2018). For more full and systematic exploration of these ideas, see http://socialfuturist.party & http://socialfuture.institute.

New Bottles for New Wine

“New Bottles for New Wine” was a 1957 book of essays by Julian Huxley, which included his seminal piece entitled “Transhumanism”, calling for a movement to grow beyond the current phase of human development. Social Futurism is *intrinsically and deliberately* compatible with – even complementary to – the global intellectual and cultural movement now known as Transhumanism.

1.1 What is Social Futurism?

Social Futurism is a political philosophy, characterised by the use of advancing technology to solve social problems. This worldview’s primary vehicle is the Social Futurist Party (SFP), which has defined the philosophy via the Principles of Social Futurism since 1st May 2011.

To some extent Social Futurism (SF) may be considered a synonym for Techno-Progressivism, but SF is defined by coherent Principles in a way that the broader category of Techno-Progressive thought is not. The common, underlying line of thought is that *technological augmentation of the individual is not enough to reach a good future.* We must also optimize the societal systems in which those individuals are necessarily embedded, or any and all technological benefits of individual augmentation will be modulated and potentially negated by a less-than-optimal social milieu.

1.2 Convergent Promise, Convergent Risk

It is a fundamental premise of Futurist thought that streams of technological development converge, meaning that multiple types of functionality come together in single devices, and technological possibilities emerge from the new syntheses. We’ve certainly seen plenty of *that* in recent years, perhaps most notably in smart phones. The underlying logic or mechanism is simply that each innovation makes other innovations more tractable or likely, and so

technological development as a whole accelerates over time and technical obstacles to efficiency have a tendency to dissolve (See Ray Kurzweil's analysis of this phenomenon).

That's a powerful and inspiring thing, but the problem is that not only can ever-more-efficient technologies cause problems, but problematic trends can and do also *converge* to create bigger, more dangerous, less tractable problems. As problems worsen they can become increasingly correlated or interdependent. For example, resource shortages and economic destabilization not only lead to an increased risk of both civil and international conflicts, but such conflicts can in turn worsen underlying systemic and environmental problems. In a world where patterns like these are inevitable, any movement toward a better human future *must* take societal and political factors into account.

1.3 A New Operating System for Society

In computing, an Operating System (OS) is the core software layer which effectively mediates between software applications (and users) on the one hand, and the machine's hardware substrate on the other. The OS thus acts as something like a User Experience (UX) interface, providing users a framework for interacting with the "deeper" (and less User Friendly) computational architecture. Societies also have Operating Systems, and always have had, even if we haven't always had the language to succinctly identify and describe the UX functionality of our civilization. Let's take a moment to consider what society's OS looks like, and whether it is in need of an upgrade.

There are two core functions at the heart of all human societies; **(1)**decision making, and **(2)** resource management. Obviously there is inevitable overlap between the two functions, but we can easily identify broad categories of decisions which aren't primarily about resource management, and resource management that is automated in some manner that does not involve any explicit societal decision making process. Western "Liberal Democracies" approach these two functions with a variety of specific strategies or institutions, but generally speaking the "public interface" with those institutions is composed of the two mechanisms which together give the entire political-economic system its name; i.e. **(1)**Democratic assembly, and **(2)** Liberal (Capitalist) markets.

There is much more to be said here than could possibly ever fit in even a full TNET article, let alone a paragraph or two, so let's content ourselves with one observation and let you draw your

own conclusions: If you think that our current modes of democratic decision making and/or market-based resource allocation are not in any urgent need of serious review and upgrading, then you are not a Social Futurist. It is a defining feature of Social Futurist thought that both representative democracy and wholly market-based solutions to resource allocation *are increasingly unfit for purpose in the 21st Century,* requiring serious and urgent improvement, and that the revolutionary step required can be well characterized as *a massive, society-wide OS upgrade*.

1.4 The Importance of Principles

When we propose new ways of thinking, alert others to imminent danger, and indeed call for revolutionary revision of society as a whole, it behooves us to tread carefully. As much as these steps are utterly necessary to the survival and development of our civilization, history makes it all too clear that radical steps taken without proper care can have catastrophic consequences. Furthermore, it is quite clear that society's ills have a tendency to be caused by self-interested behaviour unrestrained by any effective form of principle or regulation. Taking these things together, we can see that some simple rules for the proper regulation of society, starting from first principles with as few assumptions as possible, become very important indeed.

Human civilization faces a period of rapidly culminating promise and threat. If things are allowed to continue unfolding as they are, then the best likely outcome is that only a fraction of humanity survives and thrives, at the expense of everyone and everything which cannot defend itself from those survivors. The idea of the meek inheriting the earth sounds nice (particularly for the meek), but it is just a fairy tale unless we take steps to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Principles are not just a nice idea, but a stark matter of survival for most living things on this planet. *Social Futurism is founded on and defined by principles for this very reason, and thus represents a robust rejection of our current civilizational paradigm.*

This piece is part of a series exploring salient aspects of the philosophy known as "Social Futurism" (a term coined and idea developed by myself from 2011-2018). For more full and systematic exploration of these ideas, see http://socialfuturist.party & http://socialfuture.institute.

Twenty First Century Politics

Having a philosophy of Futurist politics is a critical foundation for future achievements, but is not such an achievement in and of itself. Achievement is a matter of engaging with the world as we find it, and effecting change toward the world as we would have it be. Furthermore, within the realm of active political engagement we may think in terms of two broad phases: The Destructive, and the Constructive.

In a world of accelerating change, profound technological disruption, and extremely high stakes, it is better to start afresh with new solutions to old problems, rather than wasting new opportunities thanks to a myopic over-reliance on the way things have been done by earlier generations with (vastly) fewer technological options on the table. In other words Social Futurism is a revolutionary worldview, not a Reformist one, meaning that we advocate the abolition and replacement of old institutions rather than their gradual reform.

Thus, the Destructive phase encompasses a clearing away of old, dysfunctional institutions and traditions as soon as workable placeholders toward new approaches have been established, and the Constructive phase then follows with the creation of a new and better world.

2.1 Why Human Institutions Don't Matter

Humans are wired to be cautious, and wary of change, to some degree. That is a natural response, selected for by the evolutionary process. The greater "human organism" thrives best when it strikes a balance between novelty-seeking and risk-avoidance, just as all organisms do. Thus, we observe a distribution of cautiousness and novelty-seeking behaviour across the population, with some proportion of people naturally being averse to rapid change of any sort. There is an inevitable tension between such people (among others) and the fundamental need for our culture to rapidly and effectively adapt to changing times. Long story short: **Certain things – big things – have to change about our society if it is to have a future, and a lot of people are going to be unhappy about that.** Better to make a casualty of people's sensibilities than to make casualties of the people themselves by letting the wheels fall off this wagon that we call civilization…

So, you may feel that certain institutions are precious. That's nice, and probably related to their having had some tangible value in the past. I would, however, advise you to get over it, and fast.

The chances that your pet institutions and traditions will make the cut during a period of rapid, radical civilizational change are – statistically speaking – somewhat unlikely. Things that you think of as “unalterable truths” and “inalienable rights” will soon be revealed to be made of nothing more solid than a mayfly’s hopes and dreams. If this is a new idea to you and you consider yourself to be a Transhumanist, then allow me to venture that you may not have thought things through.

2.2 Why Your Opinion Doesn’t Matter

Humans are very good at spinning personal narratives that make sense of their experience, and make them feel good in the face of a threatening (or at least uncaring) world. One particularly well-worn tool in that box is the human tendency to think of ourselves as the exception to every rule, while somehow not seeing the glaring logical error in that stance (or at least not seeing it in any way that *sticks,* or meaningfully changes our behaviour). For example, most people believe that they are more competent at any given task than most other people. Plenty of people acknowledge that many “eternal verities” are just fashionable ideas that can easily be swept away in the maelstrom of an accelerating future… but then still somehow imagine that their “individual sovereignty” is exempt from that rule, that it is magically set apart from the observed conditions of reality.

In other words, people can quite happily adapt to the idea that institutions or ideas *they don’t like* might be swept aside by accelerating change, but they balk at applying that same logic to the things they *want* to believe, to the principles they *want* to adhere to. Handy, that. In our modern age, the fundamental myth (and it *is* a myth) is that “each man is an island”, able to somehow dissociate themselves from the views or fortunes of others. It should be telling that people have only ever believed this myth in times of plenty, when evidence to the contrary is not thrust in your face on a daily basis. When times get hard, strange, or both, then people band together as a simple matter of survival, and notions of “personal sovereignty” are the*first* thing to go.

Yes, personal freedoms and principles supporting them are very important, but ***no,*** they do not exist independent of your ability to make your “rights” or indeed your opinion something of consequence.

2.3 Libertarianism is a Mistake

“Libertarianism”, and most specifically the U.S. cultural artefact known by that name (a right-wing, pro-Capitalist political philosophy masquerading as a call for individual freedoms) is probably the most grotesquely exaggerated form of the individualist fallacy. Again, the call for individual freedoms is extremely important, but there are two key issues to consider before conflating “Libertarianism” with that call:

(1) is the above-mentioned difference between the assertion of one’s “rights” and their actual existence in practical reality. It is telling that full-blown right-wing economic Libertarianism is primarily an American phenomenon, in that the U.S. is founded on an assertion of individual rights… which conveniently ignores that those rights could only be asserted in the War of Independence *by a literal army of people who sacrificed their individual freedom to fight as one for the cause of American independence.*It is an irony that seems completely wasted on the average U.S. Libertarian that if Libertarianism had been popular in the 1770s, there is simply no way that George Washington could have raised an effective revolutionary army from the constantly squabbling, disunified factions that individuals naturally fall into when not offered some higher organizing principle.

(2) Perhaps more to the point in our current era, it is worth noting the glaring hypocrisy of a movement which *claims* to stand for individual rights and freedoms against large organizations (typically governments), while actually being the de facto tool of large *private* organizations (typically corporations) who thrive in the absence of any sense of organization or solidarity among workers or community members, and whose abuses of power are every bit as egregious as those by governments, and perhaps even more so when you take their scale and access to resources into account. Libertarianism is *not* some kind of anarchist movement for individual freedom against overreaching government control (*that* would be Anarchism!), but on the contrary is effectively *a movement for corporate control of the unprotected individual.*

[p.s. Just as a matter of clarity; If you’re wondering what the polar opposite of Social Futurism would be, see *Anarcho-Capitalism;* which is essentially a mythology in which people give their entire lives over to corporations and expect something good to magically come of it. Technology and private enterprise have their places within Social Futurism, of course, but they must be moderated by *a sense of balance*].

2.4 Why Europe will Run the 21st Century

So, now that I have alienated every Individualist and Libertarian reading this piece, let's take things a small step further and alienate the entire American continent… oh, and what the hell, let's throw in Russia and the rest of Asia for good luck…

Social Futurism is *geography-* and *culture-agnostic.* In principle, anyone could subscribe to the Social Futurist philosophy, regardless of where they live or what citizenship they hold. Europe, however, appears to be particularly compatible with Social Futurist ideals, for both historical and futurological reasons as I will now briefly outline:

Before you get too irate in the contextual vacuum, you should be aware that the title of this section is in fact the title of a 2005 book by Mark Leonard, in which the author argued that the European Union's network-based design makes it uniquely suited to exploit all sorts of cultural, social, political and economic trends which we see unfolding in the 21st Century. The near future, as painted by Leonard and others, is one in which the USA increasingly seems to have played its hand and not invested enough in its own educational systems and infrastructure, Russia has incredible resource wealth but like India is hampered by demographic and cultural issues, while China is undoubtedly an emerging superpower but perhaps not one as inevitably unrivaled as some think.

Europe has a tendency to be caricatured in cheap American propaganda as "Old Europe", but ironically its ability to adapt to the intense challenges of the 20th Century have left it well placed to enjoy a new phase of growth in the 21st. Of course, since 2005 Europe has increasingly come under challenge from the Nationalist Right, but it is far from clear how these events will play out. It seems likely that the UK will face severe consequences for its extremely ill-considered "Brexit", and that since the EU is no Left-Wing monolith (regardless of what certain conspiracy theorists would have you believe) it seems quite plausible that today's opposition will simply be "folded into" the ongoing European narrative, and will in part determine Europe's future. Europe is not so brittle as to simply fall apart the way the USSR did, or the way the US could if full economic failure visits the land of automatic weapons.

In Social Futurist terms, Europe already represents a near-perfect balance of technological innovation, desire to build a new and principled culture, and an understanding that a reasonable degree of regulation is necessary to ensure that things do not descend into the chaos of nature,

red in tooth and claw. As I have noted elsewhere, China seems to be already taking steps to incorporate Transhumanist ideas into their official governing institutions(sans any Western notions of personal liberty, of course), and Russia is hardly shy about pursuing new technologies. India has thoroughly embraced free market ideology and the tech sector, and it truly is hard to see what will become of America over the course of the next hundred years. It seems quite clear, however, that the "American Century" was the 20th, and that Western grace period seems unlikely to also encompass the 21st. That leaves Europe (leaving aside minor quibbles over what counts as Europe, exactly) as *the one and only place which has a history of rich culture, some sense of shared identity, an understanding of the power of technology, the wealth to develop it, and the sense of social justice required to do so responsibly.*

Challenges loom, naturally, and no-one can see the future, but for my part I believe that Mark Leonard is correct: Europe *Will* Run The 21st Century, and if we are hardworking and lucky then it will be a Social Futurist Europe which achieves that honour.

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Remaking the World

> We all long for Eden, and we are constantly glimpsing it: our whole nature at its best and least corrupted, its gentlest and most human, is still soaked with the sense of exile.
>
> *— J.R.R. Tolkien*

The essence of the Transhumanist idea is to *remake the world,* which is to say both the human condition and environment. To take away the pain and suffering associated with our mortal, biological circumstances, to move beyond our historical limitations. Aside from the fact that most Transhumanists are atheists (or at least agnostic), the reason that religious believers often feel antipathy toward Transhumanism is that it not only treads on the territory of their

ancient and unfulfilled promises, but also that *it actually has a chance of fulfilling them.* With technology and the will to do so, we *could* in principle remake the world, and make it better.

3.1 Homo Homini Lupus Est: Beyond Human Brutality

As Titus Maccius Plautus said, “Man is as a Wolf to (Other) Men”. For all our ideals and technologies, as a species we are still animals, still quick to resort to violence when frustrated, and to use force (some forms more subtle than others) to get what we want. In reshaping our nature, Transhumanism offers the opportunity to change that… but we must tread very carefully indeed in making any such changes. Our “base animal nature” (to use a very Nineteenth Century phrase) is as it is for very good evolutionary reasons. To put it bluntly, *it has kept us alive this long*.

The basic ethos of Social Futurism is to embrace the transformative power of technology, but to do so in an intelligent and principled manner. Wilful Neo-Luddite ignorance, badly planned or executed technological intervention, and unprincipled exploitation are all equally problematic “failure modes” from a Social Futurist point of view. Following that logic, messing up an alteration of human nature in ways that endanger others is no less an error than opposing technology altogether, or using it for self-aggrandisement at the expense of the community.

3.2 Abolitionism & the Hedonistic Imperative

It is a small step from considering augmentation of the human condition, to thinking about upgrading nonhuman animals with technology. The latter idea is sometimes referred to as “Uplifting”, and bears some similarities to the idea of *Abolitionism,* as advanced by philosopher David Pearce. Simply put, Abolitionism is the idea that humans and other animals could be (genetically) engineered so as not to suffer, while preserving the motivational structures that pain evolved to serve. Discussions of the viability of that idea are beyond the scope of this piece, so for now we must restrict ourselves to two simple observations:

(1) Abolitionism is, in principle at least, an explicit aspect of the Social Futurist philosophy. You can be an Abolitionist without considering yourself a Social Futurist, but all Social Futurists must inevitably at least recognise the Abolitionist ideal as one that is compatible with Social Futurist Principle.

(2) That said, Abolitionism is not only an incredibly ambitious technical project, but it also comes with many attendant ethical challenges. Social Futurists are committed to taking those challenges seriously, *not* as a priori reasons to ban augmentation of animal biology, but as issues to be properly addressed before such work can be undertaken in a manner which is in accord with our principles.

For a whirlwind tour of potential issues, consider the following questions: What potential unforeseen consequences of such alteration might we encounter? How do we approach the matter of voluntary/desired "suffering" in humans? Is that even a real phenomenon, or does desired suffering cease to be true suffering? Can such a thing exist for animals? What about a little melancholy of the sort that has inspired the greatest poets; does that count? On what grounds should humans be able to refuse such alteration, for themselves or their children? Is it a problem that animals cannot give consent? What purely technical risks exist? (i.e. What might go wrong? How, and how badly?) How can such risks be mitigated? And so on.

3.3 Transhumanism as Radical Ecology

Beyond human nature itself, and that of other animals, the third part of our world is our environment (in the "green", ecological sense). Just as we could in principle improve human and animal nature through the reasoned application of high technology, we could also do the same for the environment. Although technological development and expansion of the human population have caused a lot of environmental damage, the most effective solution to that problem is *not* to abandon technology altogether (even if that were a realistic option, *which it is not*). Although technology misapplied has caused considerable problems, *the best way to solve those problems is to apply newer, higher technology in an intelligent and principled manner.*

What kind of solutions are we talking about, specifically? Nanotechnology will be able to clean pollutants from air, soil, and water. Alternatives to fossil fuels already exist, and are only blocked by political-economic (i.e. Capitalist) interests. Space-Based Solar Power (SBSP) has the potential to render all other fuel resources redundant, even if our civilizational power needs grew to be a thousand times what they are now. The possibility of offworld-living is regularly mocked, but it is not nearly as crazy as people tend to imagine. Decimated rainforests can be replaced with a combination of less reliance on them as a raw resource (who needs wood when vastly

advanced synthetic materials are cheaply available?) and genetic engineering to re-establish species on the brink of extinction. We can heal this planet, if we so choose, *and that would just be the beginning.*

3.4 End Game: Augmenting Intelligence in a World of Natural Stupidity

All of these things are technically feasible, at least in principle. One approach – or even ten thousand – may fail, but *we only need one to succeed.* The real obstacle is humanity itself, and its stubborn adherence to narrow-minded, old-fashioned ways of thinking and acting. As I have explained in the previous parts of this series, *we must break the chains of the past and its conventional moralities if we are to survive and thrive, as a species and a civilization.*

Transhumanists and Social Futurists seek not only to create Artificial Intelligences, but to augment our own minds and bodies. To move beyond outmoded constraints, and become *more.* The world is full of stupidities – some merely regrettable and others dangerously wilful – and we can no longer allow them to hold us back. *We must transcend ignorance by all means necessary, save ourselves, and save the planet in doing so.*

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Social Futurist Activism

Today is May 1st 2018, exactly seven years since the publication of the first version of the *Principles of Social Futurism*.* Celebrating a commitment to Social Futurist ideals on May 1st is fitting, not only because of the date's association with the labour movement, but also with pagan Spring rites of rebirth and renewal. In that spirit, for the final part in this series we will be returning to examine and build upon the premise of part two, that *a philosophy of futurist politics is only valuable insofar as it is used as a basis for actual world-changing activism.*

More specifically, let us look at modern activism from a few different angles, in ways that give us some sense of how to proceed as Social Futurists. These include **(1)** the modern phenomenon of the *flash mob* and how it can be applied to media influence, **(2)** the question of

how organizations can operate effectively in the “post-membership” age, **(3)**how to best organize the new cooperative networks, and **(4)** a very brief examination of a current movement as a kind of case study in Social Futurist activism, and to consider the question of how to judge if an organization is Social Futurist in nature.

4.1 Flash Mob Media Influence

The term “Flash Mob” was first used in 2003, to describe a diverse group which uses modern communications tools to come together quickly in some “real-world” location, to quickly complete some simple action, and then disperse. Flash mobs still primarily exist just for fun, but they have an online variant which serves the goals of activism. In this phenomenon we might call “**flash-comms**”, commentators sharing a single worldview and goal descend upon an online news platform to make their presence overwhelmingly felt.

In a world of trolling, online abuse, fake news and fake-fake-news claims(what *is* that..? *metafake-news?*), it’s easy – and not at all unwarranted – to criticise such behaviour. On a deeper level, however, we cannot avoid the simple fact that it is *effective.* An organised group, no matter how small, can easily have a disproportionate impact on how the public perceives the issue, and any decisions made regarding that issue. The next time a high-profile website posts a piece trading in hackneyed tropes of some objectionable sort, you might want to consider raising a posse of like-minded souls to hit the comments section and freely speak their minds. You don’t want cookie-cutter identical comments, just a single underlying worldview. Do that, and the overwhelming impression given to passive (often apathetic, uncritical) observers will be of public opinion pointing firmly in a particular direction. If you are a Social Futurist, *if you have ideals and want to change the world in accord with them,* then you need to use this tool as an effective way to shape public opinion.

4.2 Post-Membership Cooperative Networks

For years now, membership-based organizations have been complaining that their model is not working as well as it once did. Although the reasons for that are probably complicated, it’s certainly tempting to point the finger at the internet. Online connectivity to one’s peers offers the access to information and sense of community historically offered by membership organizations, at only a fraction of the cost and hassle. Non-net-based organizations simply can’t compete in terms of value for money, time, energy, and most other metrics. Net-based

organizations fare little better, however, as they can't retain members in anything like the way old-fashioned organizations did, unless they are based in some kind of absurdly popular "Walled Garden" platform design, like Facebook.

Activist organizations, therefore, must change with the times. Instead of trying to build dedicated "armies" of loyal followers as was the norm a hundred years ago, it is better to develops tools and methods for inspiring and managing emergent networks… which is to say organizations which emerge, as and when required, from the "primordial soup" of the net's many platforms, subcultures, hashtags, and any/everything else which might be used as a way to get the message out when you need people to answer your Call. These are *cooperative networks* which require no formal membership, and who base their judgments of activist reliability on algorithms rather than dues payments. *If we each build our own, small network, characterized by a high degree of trust between its members,* then collectively our reach and power can be as formidable (not to mention faster-adapting and more flexible) than any 19th century membership-based leviathan.

4.3 Hebb's Law & Social Network Development

So, how best to go about developing these small, intensely trusting micro-networks? On many levels no explanation should be required, as humans are extraordinarily good at developing such things intuitively, thanks to adaptive pressures in the evolutionary process. That said, let's take a brief look at the perspective from computational neuroscience:

Back in 1949, Donald Hebb suggested the rule now known as "Hebb's Law", often summarised as "cells that fire together, wire together". In other words, each time the activity of cell (or network node, or person) A affects the activity of B, the two become more associated, with their activity more likely to be correlated in future. As "local relationships" between nodes in the network develop over time like this, the network as a whole develops and becomes more powerful, without any need for centralised planning. I believe this to be a good model for networked Social Futurist activism: Focus on developing your own, small, intensely trusting and cooperative group… and if others do the same then a strong, agile network will naturally emerge, ready to unite and empower those groups.

4.4 Is TZM a Futurist Movement?

We may well ask whether any given organization is Social Futurist in its orientation or nature. Most generally, we would do well to ask whether that organization works toward the Social Futurist ideal of positive social change through technology. If the group doesn't want change, doesn't want positive outcomes in accord with our principles, or is automatically opposed to technology then it cannot be Social Futurist. If the organization works toward positive change, and technology is part of that vision and the work toward it, then it just may be.

The Zeitgeist Movement (TZM) is one such group, which has its own particular vision and ideals, but which broadly shares the Social Futurist desire for positive social change through technology. Within TZM it would almost certainly be nigh impossible to find a significant number of people who would say that they personally adhere to the Social Futurist Principles (of course; that's not about our principles so much as the nature of life and how people live it), but more importantly TZMers goals and activities are as a rule perfectly compatible with those principles, and I'd be extremely surprised to find a significant number of TZMers who cared enough to *oppose* our principles, particularly as a whole.

In short, this tells me that TZM *is* a Social Futurist movement, regardless of whether any TZMers explicitly think of it as such. The important thing is not group identity, but shared ideals and a capacity for working together as individuals and small groups. Furthermore, the issue is *not* whether a group or organization explicitly subscribes to Social Futurist principles (that would be exclusivist to the point of being pointlessly self-sabotaging), but whether the group's aims, member behaviour and activity are generally compatible with those principles, opening the way to networked cooperation.

5.0 A Uniting Principle

While you are developing your own small group or organization and considering how best to work toward our shared principles, it is useful to have a common ideal or point of focus to work toward. Even more importantly, it is a powerful motivator to know that other groups have that same ideal in mind, and are simultaneously working toward it.

The founding Social Futurist idea or "metameme" is *"**Clarity and Strength in Unity**: The Social Futurist movement is a single cooperative network, united by shared Principles."* In other words, that we need to work together, to unite under one ideal, if we are to approach positive social

change through technology. We can do that, with a judicious balance of coherent principle and tools for networked activism. The future belongs to those who seize it, today.

**It is also exactly 242 years today since the establishment of the secret society known as The Illuminati (AKA The Order of Perfectibilists) by Adam Weishaupt in Ingolstadt, Bavaria. Not to be confused with the wholly fictional world-controlling Illuminati of conspiracy theory, this historical organization was anti-authoritarian (specifically against the Church and Monarchy), pro-enlightenment, pro-science, and very much a Social Futurist precursor in spirit.*

03 Social Futurist revolution and toolkit

1.0 Social Futurist Revolution

We have recently seen increased interest in the issues of workplace automation, technological unemployment, and Basic Income Guarantee (AKA Universal Basic Income). Some observers have been perplexed by visceral and sharply divided public opinion, with people viewing these phenomena as inherently positive or negative.

We should do away with the absolutely specious notion that everybody has to earn a living. It is a fact today that one in ten thousand of us can make a technological breakthrough capable of supporting all the rest. The youth of today are absolutely right in recognizing this nonsense of earning a living. We keep inventing jobs because of this false idea that everybody has to be employed at some kind of drudgery because, according to Malthusian Darwinian theory he must justify his right to exist. So we have inspectors of inspectors and people making instruments for inspectors to inspect inspectors. The true business of people should be to go back to school and think about whatever it was they were thinking about before somebody came along and told them they had to earn a living.

– R. Buckminster Fuller

My own view is that when people see technological unemployment as intrinsically good or bad, the side they fall on probably depends on whether they're focused on the possible future, or the problematic present. Most jobs are only valuable insofar as they earn money to live, but if our needs could be provided without the jobs then it would be a good thing to have the option of not working for money. Thus, in an ideal world technological unemployment would be a good thing. The problem arises when such unemployment takes place in a Capitalist context; i.e. in a world like ours, where if you don't have a job you may well be unable to afford healthcare, you might lose your home, even starve.

We live in an interesting time, in which our society has not yet finished exploring the consequences of Capitalism on a trajectory spanning hundreds of years, but at the same time is heavily pregnant with a new civilizational paradigm. We don't know exactly what the new paradigm will be, but we can be fairly sure that its dawn will be heralded by a cascade of disruptive technologies rendering 19th Century ideas about trade and governance entirely obsolete. That has the potential to be a very good or bad thing, but in the meantime there is a pressing issue we must contend with.

1.1 Capitalism is a machine with no off-switch

Well, capitalism is a big problem, because with capitalism you're just going to keep buying and selling things until there's nothing else to buy and sell, which means gobbling up the planet.

– Alice Walker

Capitalism might be thought of as a machine, or a process. In my opinion it is a machine – an *engine* of sorts – which has yielded great value for society. It has made a high-technology future possible. Unfortunately, the engine's operations have also yielded some unfortunate side-effects. The sensible move at this point would be to optimise the process; to maximise the engine's efficiency, and minimise its negative societal effects (not to mention ensuring that the role of the engine is not confused with that of the flight crew). Unfortunately, however, it would appear that if Capitalism is a machine, it is a machine with no off-switch or pause button. It is a runaway process.

In other words, Capitalism has no mechanism for reversing itself when its effects become a problem. For example, now that automation is making it possible for people to use their time and energy for something other than meaningless labour – indeed it is taking away jobs whether people want them or not – Capitalism cannot suddenly make 'opting out' a viable course of action. People who opt out of Capitalism cease to be able to support themselves within modern society.

In this way, it would appear that the old system has no capacity for gracefully giving way to a new way of doing things where people want that. The old system would strangle the new in its cradle, given the chance. Consequently, anyone who wishes to employ new technologies in the creation of a progressive society must be ready to force the old system to relinquish its grip on their lives.

1.2 The Social Futurist alternative

Usually the first problems you solve with the new paradigm are the ones that were unsolvable with the old paradigm.

– Joel A. Barker

As I've mentioned above, there is a broad space of post-Capitalist alternatives potentially enabled by new technologies. I am an advocate for a single category within that broad space, which I call *Social Futurism*. Right now, Social Futurism simply refers to the intelligent and compassionate application of new technologies to individual and societal improvement, with an emphasis upon voluntarism and personal freedom. At this stage, therefore, Social Futurism could be considered a synonym for Techno-Progressivism, although no-one knows if that will continue to be true as these schools of thought evolve.

We believe in *positive social change through technology,* and so are firmly on the side of the emerging new paradigm. My own view is that there will always be a place for responsible trade in emergent commodities, and that healthy private competition drives innovation, but so far Social Futurism leaves such questions open. Capitalism as it currently exists, however, will soon be faced with challenges unprecedented in its history. If Capitalism is incapable of graceful reform to adopt a place within the new paradigm, as I strongly suspect, then Social Futurists and other post-Capitalists will be forced to take a revolutionary stand. To forcibly unplug a machine loose in our lives, which never had an off-switch.

1.3 Revolution means never being alone

You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.

– R. Buckminster Fuller

But what does it mean to speak of “revolution” and “force”? Of course we can easily conjure images of violent political revolutions, and there is no denying that public rebellion is back in vogue. I personally believe that violent revolution is not something to be desired or fetishised, both because it seldom ends well or as predicted, and also because the deepest revolutions are inclusive and take time to play out. Here I am referring not to minor political revolutions so much as major paradigm shifts like the Industrial Revolution. Now, we are facing a techno-cultural shift on that scale (if not much larger), but at the same time it is likely to spark various social, economic, and political conflicts of the sort associated with violent revolution. We must ask ourselves how best to proceed, with the probability of such events looming large on the horizon.

At least two answers to that question might be suggested by the Zero State (ZS) community. The ZS idea is to create a virtual, distributed State which adheres to a set of ethical principles including limits of governmental jurisdiction. The first answer is that Social Futurists’ engagement in violent situations should be governed by principles, such as an imperative to do so only in self-defence. The second answer is to focus on building new communities, new infrastructure, and new paradigms rather than attempting to fix broken systems. In short, we need to build principled networks and use them to apply the latest innovations to our highest ideals, to the benefit of as many people as possible.

If we can do that, then I believe we will indeed be seeing a revolution unfold. New social and economic models will evolve and emerge from within the old, which will compete with older systems to provide high quality of life. Where people are not offered freedom of choice between these alternatives, and where the remnants of the older society seek to destroy its offspring, we

must stand ready to fight for our freedoms. If we are hardworking and organised, then we will have the chance to contribute to the shape of the future. If we are lucky, then that future will unfold peacefully for all.

2.0 Social Futurist Toolkit

I have laid out an extremely general critique of Capitalism's place within our society, and the barest outline of the alternative known as *Social Futurism*. Section 1's point is that Capitalism does certain things very well but it cannot be paused or adjusted when its effects become problematic, that rapid technological change appears to be on the verge of making certain alternatives viable, and that unfortunately we may be forced to fight for our right to personally choose those alternatives.

Section 1 did not address policy details of any sort. It would be unfortunate if people thought that meant Social Futurism has no specific ideas at its disposal, so section 2 outlines a kind of "policy toolkit". The following policy categories are not compulsory features of any Social Futurist movement or group, but are more like basic building blocks from which specific policy configurations could be adapted to local conditions. Similarly, the toolkit as it currently stands is in no way exhaustive.

It is my intent that this toolkit should form a kind of bridge between the broadest, most general level of political discussion on the one hand, and the development of specific policies for local groups on the other. The six basic policy categories are only very briefly discussed below, but will each soon be analysed fully by the Social Future Institute.

Finally, none of the ideas presented in this article are new (section 2.6 being my only novel contribution), but this mix is seldom presented in a single 'chunk' that can be easily memorised and communicated. It is my hope that in time the label *"Social Futurism"* may act as the natural intersection of these disparate-but-compatible ideas, enabling people to refer to an array of possible solutions to major problems in two words rather than two thousand.

2.1 Evidence, Balance, & Transition

All of the policies in this toolkit should be approached from a pragmatic and flexible (rather than ideologically constrained) point of view. When trying to be pragmatic and flexible, our main concern is with policies that actually solve problems, so the use of empirical evidence is central to Social Futurism. Policy development and review should emphasise the setting of quantifiable goals and application of empirical evidence wherever that is an option, to encourage policy that evolves to better meet our goals over time.

In this vein, we should seek to find optimal balances between extreme ideological positions, to the extent that any given choice may be viewed as a continuum rather than a binary choice. An extremely important example is the question of *transition*, which is to say the process of development from our current PEST (political, economic, social, technological) situation to a more efficient and just society. Often political questions are depicted as a false dichotomy, or choice between things as they are and radical utopias entirely disconnected from current reality. What is both preferable and more tractable is an intelligent balance of the past and future, in the form of a pragmatic transition phase.

For example, sections 2.2-2.4 below propose a series of economic adjustments to society. From the perspective of someone invested in the status quo, they are extremely radical suggestions. From the perspective of a radical utopian, they are half-measures at best. From a Social Futurist perspective, they are required to maximise the likelihood of a better society actually coming into existence, while attempting to minimise the risk of severe societal destabilisation caused by rapid and untested change. My own vision of a societal transition phase follows an observation from Ray Kurzweil, in which *change often takes longer than anticipated, but also ends up being much deeper than anticipated,* meaning that focus on a transition phase may allow us to work toward truly radical transformative change in the longer term.

In short, the effectiveness of our methods should be tested by looking at evidence, we should balance our policies in a flexible and pragmatic manner, and we should seek a staged transition toward a better future rather than risk critically destabilizing society.

2.2 Universal Basic Income & LVAT

A minimal, “safety net” style Universal Basic Income should be established. This is as opposed to putting undue strain on the economy by introducing a basic income larger than is required to

satisfy essential living requirements. Where possible, the UBI should be paid for by a combination of dismantling welfare bureaucracies, and Land Value & Automation Taxes (LVAT).

LVAT is the extension of traditional Land Value Tax to include a small tax on every unit of workplace automation equivalent to a single human being replaced. This extension of LVT is intended to harness the economic momentum of workplace automation, which is expected to be the principal cause of technological unemployment in coming decades. The tax should be considerably less than the cost of hiring a human, thus causing no disincentive to automation (some would argue that any tax would disincentivize automation, but our goal is not to encourage automation, and as long as automation is cheaper than human labour it will win out). The LVAT would take the place of increasing numbers of arbitrary taxes on goods and services which are currently being added and increased to shore up Western economies.

Social Futurism is compatible with private property ownership and does not advocate property confiscation. Wealth redistribution is only advocated to the degree that it can be achieved through LVAT & UBI as described above. The extent to which people should be able to choose if, how, and to whom they pay tax is addressed in section 2.6. It is also worth noting here that where a functional equivalent of UBI exists (e.g. citizen shares in Distributed Autonomous Cooperatives) which is proven more effective, then Social Futurists should favour the more effective solution as per point 2.1.

2.3 Abolition of Fractional Reserve Banking

Fractional Reserve Banking is the process by which banks are required to hold only a fraction of their customers' deposits in reserve, allowing the money supply to grow to a multiple of the base amount held in reserve. Through this practice, central banks may charge interest on the money they create (thereby creating a debt which can never be repaid, across society as a whole) and expose the entire economy to risk when they cannot meet high demand for withdrawals. Fractional Reserve Banking fosters potentially critical risk to the entirety of society for the benefit of only a tiny proportion of citizens, and therefore should be abolished. The alternative to Fractional Reserve Banking is *Full Reserve* or *100% Reserve Banking*, in which all banks must hold the full amount of deposits in reserve at all times.

Full Reserve Banking is much more conservative than Fractional Reserve Banking, and would signal an end to "easy credit". In turn, it would afford enough stability to see our society through

a sustainable transition phase, until technological post-scarcity makes reliance on traditional banking systems and the Capitalist principle of surplus value itself unnecessary.

2.4 Responsible Capitalism, Post-Scarcity, & Emergent Commodity Markets

Social Futurist policy must favour the encouragement of responsible trade and strong regulation of reckless behaviour, with an eye to making Capitalism an engine of society rather than its blind master. To this end, it should be Social Futurist policy that all companies that wish to operate within any given community must be registered with the appropriate regulation bodies employed by that community. Non-regulation and self-regulation by industries which are not accountable to the communities they affect is unacceptable. (For the purposes of this brief statement I have conflated Capitalism and markets, despite the fact that trade existed millennia before the organization of society around profit based on Capital investment. These issues will be treated separately and extensively, later).

Where possible, Social Futurists should advocate the transition to non-monetary peer-to-peer resource management under post-scarcity conditions. In other words, we should seek to avoid the creation or maintenance of artificial scarcity in essential resources. A continuing place for trade even under post-scarcity conditions is acknowledged and encouraged where it reduces artificial scarcity, promotes technical innovation, and serves the needs and directives of the community. Emergent commodities (e.g. natural artificial scarcities such as unique artworks) will need a framework for responsible trade even under optimal post-scarcity conditions, so it behooves us to develop such frameworks now, in the context of contemporary Capitalism.

2.5 Human autonomy, privacy, & enhancement

Social Futurism incorporates the *transhumanist* idea that the human condition can and should be improved through the intelligent and compassionate application of technology. We also strongly emphasise voluntarism, and in combination these things necessitate the championing of people's rights over their own bodies and information. It should be Social Futurist policy to oppose any development by which people would lose individual sovereignty or involuntarily cede ownership of their personal information. Social Futurists must also defend the individual's right to modify themselves by technological means, provided that the individual is a mentally

competent consenting adult and the modification would not pose significant risk of harm to others.

2.6 Establishment of VDP (Virtual, Distributed, Parallel) States

The principle of *subsidiarity* holds that organizational responsibility should be *devolved* to the lowest or most local level capable of dealing with the situation. In other words, power should be decentralized, insofar as that doesn't diminish our ability to face challenges as a society.

For example, local governance issues should be handled by local rather than national-level government where possible. Social Futurism takes *subsidiarity* to its logical conclusion, by insisting that people should have the right to govern their own affairs as they see fit, as long as by doing so they are not harming the wider community. On the other side of the coin, broader (e.g. national and transnational) levels of governance would be responsible for issues that local organizations and individuals could not competently face alone.

Where global governance is needed, the model should be one of cooperating global agencies focused on a specific area of expertise (e.g. the World Health Organization), rather than a single government acting in a centralised manner to handle all types of issue. In this way, decentralization of power applies even when an issue cannot be resolved on the local level.

In order to encourage the development of such a system, we advocate the establishment of communities with powers of self-governance known as *VDP States*, where VDP stands for "Virtual, Distributed, Parallel". 'Virtual' refers to online community, orthogonal to traditional geographic territories. 'Distributed' refers to geographic States, but ones where different parts of the community exist in different locations, as a network of enclaves. 'Parallel' refers to communities that exist on the established territory of a traditional State, acting as a kind of organizational counterpoint to that State's governing bodies. Two or three of these characteristics may be found in a single VDP State, but it is expected that most such communities would emphasise one characteristic over the others. Alternatively, a VDP State may emphasise different characteristics at different stages in its development.

Given Social Futurist emphasis on voluntarism, VDP State citizenship must be entirely voluntary. Indeed, the entire point of the VDP State is to broaden the range of governance models which people may voluntarily choose to engage with, where they are currently told that they simply have to accept a single model of governance.

As this is clearly a new and experimental approach to governance, it is to be expected that many ideas associated with it are still to be properly developed and tested. Some of these ideas may not meet our own standards of empirical review. However, to briefly anticipate some common objections it is worth noting several points. Firstly, decentralization does *not* imply an absence of social organization. It simply means that people can exercise more choice in how they engage with society. Secondly, yes it is true that all three of the VDP characteristics have limitations as well as strengths (e.g. difficulty in defending isolated enclaves), but that is why any given VDP State would find the mix of features that suits its purpose and context best. Thirdly, as mentioned earlier in this article, different approaches may be mixed and balanced as necessary, such as a single-location VDPS being used as a template for the later creation of a distributed network of communities. Finally, the VDPS idea is not intended to stand alone but to complement any initiatives which have the potential to maximise its value (Open Source Ecology, for example).

Addendum: A note on Marxism

Below I give an example of the point made in section 1 (about balance and transition), which draws upon a Marxist viewpoint because Social Futurist concerns tend to be shared by Marxists, but the logic would equally apply to movements whose long-term ideals and methods are more like our own, such as The Zeitgeist Movement. I have put this note to one side because I do not want to give an incorrect first impression that Social Futurism is Marxist in nature. It is simply intended to address societal problems which have already been comprehensively analysed by Marxists, so it is worth noting the relevance of their point of view to our own.

Marx argued that the root problem with Capitalism is *surplus value*. This means that Capitalists (i.e. investors) pay workers only a proportion of the value of what is produced by their work, and the remaining (“surplus”) value is taken as profit by the Capital owning class, along with rent and interest on debts. Marxists assert that workers should collectively own the means of production

(i.e. factories, machines, resources, all Capital), thereby ending surplus value and phenomena such as problematic banking practices along with it. From this perspective it might be reasonably suggested that “treating the symptoms” rather than the core disorder would be fruitless (or worse, dangerous), and that citizen benefits of any sort should be paid for by distributing all profit from collectively owned means of production equally.

Without wishing to get into a discussion of whether ideal Marxism is possible or doomed to give rise to historical Communist authoritarianism, I would say that even a benign Marxist revolution would entirely destabilize society if it occurred too quickly. Social Futurism does not deny the Marxist analysis of the problem, but seeks a staged transition to a post-Capitalist society which does not attempt to undermine the entire basis of our current society in a single move. Although an optimal, long-term Social Futurist outcome may not be desirable to some Marxists (and certainly not to historical Stalinists or Maoists), it would definitely involve the eventual transition to democratic, decentralised post-scarcity, and removal of Capitalist surplus value as the central organizational principle of our civilization.

04 Liberal Democracy, the Third Way, and Social Futurism

1.0 The Flaws of Liberal Democracy

The developed nations of the Western world are currently characterised by a political-economic system typically referred to as *"Liberal Democracy"**.Up until very recently, there has been a tendency for all major political parties to converge on an ostensibly moderate, centrist, Liberal Democratic position. This position is characterised by Representative Democracy on the one hand, and commitment to Liberalism (both social and economic, but with emphasis on Market Liberalism) on the other. This worldview is frequently depicted by its proponents as the polar opposite of and only ethical or viable alternative to Authoritarian forms of social organization.

1.1 Liberal Democracy and Authoritarianism

Of course, for decades there have been those who questioned that narrative. While things were apparently going well for Liberal Democracy these critics were never going to be paid much attention by the general public, and it was trivially easy for the establishment to marginalize them on the basis of their frequent association with discredited ideologies such as Marxism. Things have shifted since the Great Recession, however. To put it simply, things are no longer going so well for Liberal Democracy, and it is not quite so easy to dismiss alternatives out of hand. We will discuss the matter of alternatives in parts 2 & 3 of this article, but first we should take this opportunity to examine the claim that Liberal Democracy and Authoritarianism are diametrically opposed.

I would argue that Liberal Democracy is in fact not only inherently Authoritarian (or at least not nearly as liberal or democratic as it claims to be), but that it fosters more direct forms of Authoritarianism – even Totalitarianism – in developing nations and relies upon them to justify its own agenda. Here I will briefly consider three aspects of this complex relationship; The track record of Liberal Democratic governments (both domestically and abroad), the symbiotic relationship between Liberal Democracies and directly Authoritarian governments, and clear tendencies amid the most ideologically extreme proponents of Liberal Democracy.

1.2 The moral failure of Liberal Democracy

Liberal Democracy is regularly argued to be the most ethical of political-economic systems, thanks to its apparent emphasis on giving the people a voice, and ensuring their freedom to act as they see fit within society. I believe that not only are these false claims in a number of important ways on a domestic level, but that the implicit and explicit foreign policy of Liberal Democracies denies the people of other nations those same freedoms.

On the domestic level, I believe that Representative Democracy is not true democracy at all. It is a system which allows governments to give the impression of democracy, while they and their favoured private-sector partners more or less do as they please. Centrist Liberal Democratic parties control parliaments in a kind of "revolving door" arrangement, which coupled with their increasingly similar policies means that there is no true choice to be found in elections at all. It is true that there is a strong argument to be made for decision making by meritocracy where expert knowledge is critical, but many currently centralised societal decisions could be made by referendum and decentralised direct democracy (i.e. according to the principle of Subsidiarity).

Additionally, the Liberal Democratic claim to "freedom" tends not to mean any such thing for the average citizen who is not economically self-sufficient, but is instead a friendly sounding name for the policy of giving corporations Carte Blanche in matters of broad societal interest. On that point, I would assert that Liberal Democracy is an ideology organised around defense of the most dysfunctional aspects of Capitalism, and it is nigh impossible to assess one facet of this belief system without considering the other. In other words, "Liberal Democracy" is not really the ideology of true liberty or democracy, but of Capitalism.

It can be hard to convince people living in developed nations that Liberal Democracy isn't actually very liberal or democratic, especially in the midst of good times. When Capitalism is bringing home the bacon, people are usually not inclined to be bothered that they don't have half the freedoms or democracy that they imagine. Internationally, however, it is easier to see that Liberal Democratic deeds speak much louder than words. Aside from Western support for Authoritarian regimes (more on that below), we can note an almost non-stop string of military interventions dating back to World War II. These wars began by benefitting certain Capitalists indirectly (i.e. mostly Military-Industrial Complex contractors), but in recent decades it has become clear that war itself is an exercise in profit-making, and that most of that profit comes

from oil. Despite plenty of moderate and humanitarian rhetoric, the West never engages in serious work to rebuild devastated nations, unless it is to install an Authoritarian "client" regime.

1.3 Symbiosis between Liberal Democracy and Authoritarianism

The West – exemplified primarily by the United States – has an appalling track record when it comes to installing and supporting Authoritarian regimes in nations which have some value as a client state, but which are not contenders to be developed into full-blown Liberal Democracies in the near term. I only hesitate in laying the blame for this trend solely at the American door because other major powers have indulged in this game in the past, and would do again in the future given the chance. For now, all of the other major nations seem to fall into the categories of "US client state" or "emerging competitor".

I am sure that many defenders of Liberal Democracy would cite *Realpolitik*, and claim that even the most benevolent superpower would have to operate strategically in a wider context of less-than-ideal partners. Perhaps so. But there is another, equally valid way to characterise this relationship between the Liberal Democratic West and its Authoritarian partners in the East and South. This is to say that they are two sides of a single coin, or two partners in a single symbiotic relationship. Authoritarian client states clearly benefit from Western support, usually in the form of military and/or covert logistical aid (e.g. in the case of Augusto Pinochet's regime in Chile). The same is true for non-state clients such as the Afghan *Mujahideen*.

Liberal Democratic states primarily benefit from these relationships by opening up new markets, although there are sometimes additional strategic benefits to maintaining such clients. Advocates for Liberal Democracy invariably spin the creation of new markets in terms of spreading "Freedom" and "Democracy", when in reality what is being exported is Capitalism. The lack of *true* freedom and democracy we see in Liberal Democratic states is even more acute in these client states, where the Authoritarian regimes typically allow foreign corporations to act as they see fit, exempt from any reasonable level of regulation. This of course represents a bonanza for the companies, the most powerful of whom effectively control the deep policies of Western governments through lobbying and control of core institutions.

In short, we are told that Liberal Democracy stands in lone opposition to Authoritarianism, but in fact it is not truly liberal (in the sense of offering deep freedom) or democratic (in the sense of the people having any real voice), and it deliberately *fuels* Authoritarianism in order to expand

the Capitalist sphere of influence. Not *all* Authoritarianism is the product of Capitalism run amok – far from it, and contrary to the Marxist just-so story on these matters – but I *do* feel that we must address this false claim of opposition between two phenomena that are in fact very closely related.

As much as we do not want to gloss over complex truths, it is often helpful to draw attention to important ideas through the use of a simple image, or shorthand. We can encapsulate this idea of a complex symbiotic relationship between the Liberal Democratic West and various forms of Authoritarianism in the East and South by thinking in terms of a puppet show. We may watch such a show and see apparent conflict between two characters, but behind the scenes there is only one motivator, one *puppeteer*. We should not take this image literally, and indulge in unhelpful conspiracy theories of people orchestrating worldly events from "behind the scenes". All I am saying is that where we are told that there are two different entities with different values and motivations – First World Liberal Democracies and Second/Third World Authoritarian regimes – there is in fact only one.

The picture I have painted above hinges on close cooperation between Western governments and corporations. I and others have characterised that as a "Corporatist" relationship in the past, and the various possible meanings of that term lead to complications that we don't have time for here. Most broadly, we can characterise a Corporatist system of governance as *one in which government and business are deeply and deliberately integrated*. Corporatism is at essence about gathering influence, and using every tool available to achieve that end. Government is used to further the Corporatists' business concerns, and private businesses are conversely used as tools of government. Furthermore, just as the division between public and private is dismantled, the Corporatist quite happily uses the Authoritarian apparatus of other states to achieve their goals where necessary. There are no boundaries to the Corporatist, no sense of loyalty or identity which stops them playing the game from all sides.

1.4 Ideological paradoxes inherent to Liberal Democracy

Given that Liberal Democracy is the ideological mask of choice for our current Corporatist system, it is an interesting irony that the Right or Economic wing of the Libertarian movement opposes Corporatism as a corruption of "true" Capitalism, while at the same time we might reasonably argue Libertarianism to be the *ideological vanguard* of Liberal Democracy. On the

outermost edge of Economic Libertarianism we find the Anarcho-Capitalists, who take the basic tenets of Economic Libertarianism to their logical conclusion, and so are instructive in making the core beliefs and trends in that movement clear. Where the Libertarians tend to argue for a bare-minimum ("Night Watchman") state apparatus, the Anarcho-Capitalists would have no state whatsoever. Where the Libertarians claim to prioritise personal and social freedoms but tend to emphasise economic freedoms, Anarcho-Capitalists invariably claim that economic freedom is the root of all other freedoms.

The problems with Liberal Democracy I have outlined are particularly vivid in their Libertarian incarnation. In defense of Libertarianism I would say that the core impulse of what we might call "Good Faith" Libertarians is to defend personal freedoms of all sorts, which is perfectly laudable. The problem is that of Liberal Democracy writ large; that all too often when Economic Libertarians talk of "freedom", they at least implicitly mean the freedom of large organizations to do what they want while ordinary human citizens might be free in principle but are in fact enslaved by circumstance. The 'circumstance' I refer to is commonly known as *Structural Violence*. In other words, the freedom of companies comes at the expense of the true freedom of regular people when it is taken too far.

Libertarianism makes the inherent paradox of Liberal Democracy clear. Liberal Democracy is in truth the ideology of late Capitalism, in which progressive ideals like freedom and democracy are perverted in service of the needs of a Corporatist Establishment. (Right-wing, Economic) Libertarian heroes such as Ayn Rand tell fables in which *Übermensch*-like innovators are oppressed by evil collectives, and these childish stories reflect an innate Libertarian fear and hatred of true democracy.

Reality is never as simple as an Ayn Rand story. As I have discussed at length elsewhere, Capitalism has been a powerful force for good on a number of levels, and there are Authoritarian forces opposed to Capitalism which are even greater threats to civilization. Similarly, while it is good to recognise the problem of Corporatism and strive for true liberty, it is a particularly tragic irony when someone imagines that problem can be solved by becoming a cheerleader for the Liberal Democratic system.

The remainder of this chapter will consider alternatives to Liberal Democracy. Just as a desirable alternative would in fact be more truly democratic, it would also be more truly liberal,

and worthy of those activists who seek a better paradigm rather than to be just another puppet on the strings of the current one.

**It is important to note that where I refer to "Liberal Democracy" and particularly "Liberal Democrats" above, I am referring to the wider political system and not political parties who share that name (e.g. the UK Liberal Democrats). Such parties are, however, very much an enthusiastic part of the system I am criticising here.*

2.0 The Social Futurist Alternative

Most broadly, Social Futurism stands for positive social change through technology; i.e. to address social justice issues in radically new ways which are only just now becoming possible thanks to technological innovation. If you would like some introduction to Social Futurist ideas, you can read the introduction page at http://socialfuturist.party. In this post I will discuss the Social Futurist alternative to Liberal Democratic and Authoritarian states, how that model fits with our views on decentralization and subsidiarity, and its relevance to the political concept of a "Third Way".

Part 1 of this chapter offered some strong but necessarily brief criticisms of Liberal Democracy, essentially saying that not only does it not deliver the promised freedom and democracy but that it and non-Western Authoritarian regimes are united in a kind of Corporatist symbiosis. The aim of this second post is to discuss a few aspects of the *Social Futurist*alternative that I advocate.

2.1 The Virtual, Distributed, Parallel (VDP) State

One of the ideas proposed in the "Social Futurist policy toolkit" is known as the *VDP State*. The idea is described as follows in the article linked above:

We advocate the establishment of communities with powers of self-governance known as VDP States, where VDP stands for "Virtual, Distributed, Parallel". 'Virtual' refers to online community, orthogonal to traditional geographic territories. 'Distributed' refers to geographic States, but ones where different parts of the community exist in different locations, as a network of enclaves. 'Parallel' refers to communities that exist on the established territory of a traditional State, acting as a kind of organizational counterpoint to that State's governing bodies. Two or

three of these characteristics may be found in a single VDP State, but it is expected that most such communities would emphasise one characteristic over the others. Alternatively, a VDP State may emphasise different characteristics at different stages in its development.

Given Social Futurist emphasis on voluntarism, VDP State citizenship must be entirely voluntary. Indeed, the entire point of the VDP State is to broaden the range of governance models which people may voluntarily choose to engage with, where they are currently told that they simply have to accept a single model of governance.

For the purposes of this article, there are three aspects of the VDP State (VDPS) idea to think about. One is the question of how a VDPS can avoid the problematic trappings of Authoritarianism, Corporatism, and Liberal Democracy. Another is the relationship between the VDPS and its citizens. Finally, we must also consider the matter of feasibility; How can such a thing seriously be established and maintained?

Encoding Social Futurist Values into the VDPS

Clearly, any Social Futurist state worthy of the name would have to be designed to systematically avoid the problems associated with Authoritarianism, Corporatism, and Liberal Democracy. The widely acknowledged answer to the problem of Authoritarianism is Decentralization; i.e. to design the state as a *network* of communities and services operating according to the principle of subsidiarity. As long as a common set of shared principles and goal states are recognised by all elements of the state, then a single authority tasked with making all executive decisions for the entire network is unnecessary, not to mention fragile, dangerous, and inefficient.

The question of decentralization and subsidiarity is considered in more detail in the second section of this article, so now we must ask ourselves what problems Corporatism and Liberal Democracy pose which are distinct from and additional to the threat of Authoritarianism. It would appear that if the essence of Corporatism is to deliberately violate boundaries in order to accrue centralised influence, then decentralization is the answer to it, also. Beyond these forms of creeping control, the remaining problem I've identified with Liberal Democracy is its inability to live up to its defining claim to exemplify freedom and democracy. Direct democracy fits naturally with the idea of a decentralised network of federated communities. Cross-community referenda and citizens' rights can be guaranteed by *a single set of principles shared by all parts*

of the state network (formal agreement with the principles being a minimum requirement for a community to join the network). Finally, the problem of structural violence can be solved with automation in combination with Universal Basic Income, being a transition phase into full technological Post-Scarcity.

I have tried to not only keep these proposals as simple as possible, but also to explain them in terms of traditional political ideas and themes. A key element of Social Futurism, however, is acknowledgement that we live in an era of accelerating technological development. All of the proposals offered above could in principle be encoded in the function of decentralised software and hardware tools, potentially making the "Social Contract" of a VDPS an explicit, tangible thing. The Zero State community has begun work toward implementing these ideas through the creation of a cryptographic *Distributed Autonomous Community* (AKA Decentralized Autonomous Community, Cooperative, or Corporation; DAC).

The Social Futurist Citizen and their relationship to the VDPS

It is my belief that we cannot simply focus on the nature of the VDPS and ignore any consideration of its citizens. I have established in earlier articles that the voluntary nature of VDPS citizenship and a right to "free exit" *must*be enshrined in the core principles of any such state if it is to comply with Social Futurist ideals. This is the foundation stone of a growing list of Social Futurist state obligations to treat citizens fairly, and of course all citizens must abide by the core principles of the state if they wish to retain that citizenship. Beyond that basic obligation, however, what qualities might we expect such people to have?

Because Social Futurism seeks to avoid onerous restrictions upon people of the sort found (explicitly) in Authoritarianism and (implicitly in) Liberal Democracy, there can be no requirements of citizens beyond behaviour compatible with principle (and of course to comply with the law, which must itself be principle-compatible). Beyond the matter of official requirements, however, we might reasonably discuss *ideals* that citizens may wish to aspire to. Indeed, the very concept of the *Social Futurist Citizen*might be held up as just such an ideal. The Social Futurist Citizen would be a person who not only complies with principle and derived laws as a matter of course, but who also seeks to fulfill the spirit rather than simply the letter of those principles. Such a person would not only avoid crossing the bounds of unacceptable behaviour, but their example would demonstrate the true spirit of the principles to others.

Just as we would expect a fully realised Social Futurist VDP State to employ the most effective technologies available – *to integrate them into its deepest infrastructure* – we should expect the same kind of commitment from the Social Futurist Citizen. Most generally we could characterise this expectation in terms of the Transhumanist idea; that we can and should improve the human condition. Given our emphasis on voluntarism and evidence, I don't think we can say much about ways in which people may choose to become "better than well". For now, we can leave this matter with an acknowledgement that in Social Futurism both the State and its most committed Citizens would seek to evolve into a greater fulfillment of the same principles and ideals.

Establishing and Maintaining the VDPS

Ideals and hypothetical evolutionary processes aside, the single most pressing question about VDP States is how to realistically establish and maintain them. Previously I have noted that this is a serious issue, and that the answer would largely depend upon the nature of any given VDP State. For example, a primarily *virtual state* would be the easiest to build and maintain, including questions of defense which would mostly boil down to matters of information security. A primarily virtual state would, however, be the least satisfying when it came to meeting the needs of physical communities. There *are* certain things that a decentralised software environment can do to empower a distributed group of people – the internet has made that quite clear – but ensuring shelter, food, hygiene, and defence are not among them.

A primarily *distributed state* (i.e. a network of physically separate communities) has a different set of strengths and weaknesses, more or less the inverse of the virtual state. It can meet the physical needs of its citizens as long as supply lines and territorial integrity can be maintained, but defense is no longer merely a matter of information security, and requires serious resources. This is particularly true where such communities exist on territory claimed by another state, or where organised piracy is a serious threat.

The strengths and weaknesses of a *parallel state* are a more complicated matter, depending on the nature of both the new state and its host. Both may be considered to be more or less *permeable*, which is to say flexible about the integrity of their borders and what they allow within them. A relationship between a parallel and traditional state may be viable as long as at least one of the two is highly permeable (or both are moderately so). For example, a strongly enforced

traditional state may allow an informal intentional community to call itself a “state” on its territory, and a weak state may even be obliged to tolerate a powerful microstate within its borders. But two low-permeability states cannot peacefully coexist in the same space; a strongly enforced traditional state simply will not tolerate a powerful microstate on its territory without some special mutual agreement (such as that between Italy and the Vatican).

Taking these factors into account, it seems clear that the most effective approach to establishing a VDP State would be to see it as a *network*, with different *nodes* within that network emphasising different characteristics. So there would ideally be a mixture of **(1)** *highly permeable parallel state nodes* in low-permeability countries, and **(2)** *low-permeability nodes* in high-permeability countries, together constituting **(3)** a distributed state of physical enclaves, plus **(4)** a network of virtual nodes providing communications support. Such a network would be resilient to local failures of supply lines or territorial integrity, and would of course be a natural fit for implementing the Social Futurist ideal of *Subsidiarity*.

On the theoretic level, decentralization is required in order to pass the moral test which Authoritarianism and Liberal Democracy both fail so badly.

2.2 Decentralization and Subsidiarity

We can see that the Social Futurist idea is strongly interrelated with the idea of decentralization, on both theoretic and pragmatic levels. On the theoretic level, decentralization is required in order to pass the moral test which Authoritarianism and Liberal Democracy both fail so badly. On the pragmatic level, Social Futurist practice can only be implemented by establishing alternative, distributed, voluntary networks which operate outside the bounds of traditional institutions. This section will briefly explore how that could work and would affect modern society.

I have previously considered how Socialists and Libertarians (or any traditionally incompatible pair of ideologies) could co-exist within a decentralised network of enclaves and affiliations, to the extent that they could all agree to respect a common set of principles. I believe that we can

and should extend those ideas to explore the Zero State idea of *cooperative networks*, how they might apply to networks of physical enclaves, and also how these ideas map on to models of responsible business and innovation.

I have previously argued that cooperative networks can accommodate disparate points of view, even apparently incompatible ideologies, by allowing different groups to govern their own affairs while remaining embedded in a wider confederation defined by a single set of unifying principles. Such principles act as the basis for cooperation across the entire network, and make a number of decentralised cooperative modes possible.

For example, clear principles can make it instantly apparent if the behaviour of one part of the network is no longer compatible with the whole. In other words, if a group “goes rogue” and starts acting in ways that clearly contravene the wider network’s principles, then the network’s response should be dictated by those same principles. In an extreme case, clear principles make it possible for the network to develop a kind of decentralised “immune response” to deal with both external and internal threats.

Where there isn’t good reason to do things differently, freedom of action should apply at all levels of the network where the principles are not being contravened. In other words the principles should apply to groups and organisations as much as to individuals, starting with the principle of free exit. This means that as long as any group satisfies the demands of principle then it should be able to manage its own internal affairs as its members feel is appropriate, and in turn the principle of subsidiarity is satisfied. That said, it is probably a good idea that the principles insist upon any networked group or organisation having a single self-chosen coordinator or point of contact. This is not necessarily a leader or democratic representative of any sort (Social Futurism would favour direct democracy within networked groups), but simply someone who can act as a spokesperson for the group within the wider network, and vice versa. The Social Future Institute operates exactly this kind of system, enabling various direct-democratic project groups to coordinate their efforts in line with a single set of principles, with no central controller telling everyone what to do.

It is useful to distinguish between organizational affiliates and geographic enclaves. Both are potential nodes in a cooperative network, but like the different forms of VDP State they have different strengths and weaknesses. Networked organisations (e.g. companies, activist groups,

charities) can often operate internationally, and can sometimes establish significant physical presences, but those presences will usually be subject to the authority of a State of some sort. Geographic enclaves (e.g. colonies, intentional communities) are necessarily limited to acting in one location, but their activity can encompass the entire life-experience of participants. In order to achieve a degree of resilience, networks should try to spread their bets by including nodes of various types. Beyond a certain common interest these different types of node should be expected to have different concerns and priorities, underscoring the need to devolve decision making authority to the most local level practicable in any given matter.

2.3 The Third Way and Radical Centrism

Given this emphasis on diversity and subsidiarity across a resilient network, it is worth considering how such a network might encourage a balance of social justice concerns, trade, and innovation. If we think of businesses or trading entities as nodes in the network, then we can easily see that their right to connect with other nodes (i.e. other companies and communities of potential clients and customers) will be predicated on compliance with the basic network principles. Companies which do not comply with the principles will not be allowed to act as part of the network, which means no engagement with any of its nodes. If any part of the network tries to circumvent the ban and trade with a company that contravenes principle, then it too would be ejected from the network. This creates incentive both to comply with the principles and to only engage with compliant nodes, as long as network membership is valuable (e.g. for allowing trade access).

Of course, international companies have a tendency to play host countries off against each other for tax breaks and so on, and any company which wanted to trade within the network but not do so in accord with principle may well try to exert pressure on the network by taking its business elsewhere. In order to minimize this kind of risk, cooperative networks should **(1)** develop principles which reward *responsible* business and innovation, and **(2)** enlarge the network through growth and cooperative agreements with similar networks. The point of enlargement through cooperation or growth is to give hostile companies (or indeed any hostile entity) a smaller space of alternatives to work with. If refusing to trade with one network will

come at too great an opportunity cost, then traders will think twice about doing so in an effort to avoid regulation.

Neither Left nor Right, nor "Liberal Democratic" Centrist

Our core concern is with balancing the engines of societal innovation (whether we're talking about technology or businesses that develop it) with social justice. Of course, that is a concern shared with every political activist who isn't so extreme as to believe that one thing should be pursued wholly at the expense of the other. We must understand that committed Left- and Right-Wingers invariably believe that their point of view is the best way to achieve such balance, while the "other side" has views that are inherently extremist and dangerously unbalanced. Sometimes such people will even have a point, as both the Left and Right have at least *some* good ideas which society ignores at its peril.

In other words, it is sometimes the case that the Left or the Right is objectively correct on some matter, but this is simply because they'll be advocating an *idea* which happens to be correct. That does not mean that every other idea advocated by the same broad coalition of people and ideologies will also be correct (or indeed appropriate for any given society). Added to this, we mustn't forget that ideas have a way of *migrating*, or being advocated by different factions at different times. For example the Right has for some time been associated with prioritising economic growth over social issues, but now that so-called "Austerity" is a touchstone of the Right, the Left has moved to promote the idea of economic stimulation as an essential societal goal. Taken together, these things show that it is a mistake to focus on whether "the Left" or "the Right" is best, and better to focus on the best *ideas*.

There is already a movement to advocate the best and most progressive ideas, whether they are currently "owned" by the Left or Right in any given country. That movement is as nebulous and multi-faceted as either the Left or Right, and is most commonly known as the "Third Way" or "Radical Centrism". Personally I prefer Radical Centre over Third Way, simply because it is slightly more informative. Both labels speak to a balance between ideas from the Socialist Left and Capitalist Right, but the word "Radical" should in principle distinguish a true third alternative from the situation we have in Western governments these days, where all of the major parties blur into an indistinguishable mass of so-called Liberal Democratic centrism. As the Third Way Wikipedia page demonstrates, the mainstream paradigm of centrism is that of Tony Blair, David

Cameron, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, even George Bush Jr. It isn't a dynamic exploration of the best ideas for society so much as stagnation and entrenchment of a dysfunctional Capitalism and professional political class.

Part 1 of this article flatly rejects the current global political-economic system, which is said by definition to be better than any other possible system, despite the evidence in front of our very eyes. I would prefer to see a system that more truly promotes social freedoms and citizen engagement in decision-making processes. I believe that a *true* Radical Centrism would indeed be *Radical*, and make a break with the historical dysfunctions of Liberal Democracy. In their place, a true Radical Centrism would attempt to build a better system from the ground up, drawing on the best ideas of both the Left and Right, and transcending the flaws of both.

I have already written an article which identifies some of those ideas ("Social Futurist revolution & toolkit"), and so will not dwell on them here. Instead, I will simply note that I believe Social Futurism to be a Radical Centrist position in the true sense. It is not the only possible true Radical Centrism of course, but it is the one I advocate, because it represents a mix of ideas that I personally support. I will discuss Social Futurism at some greater length in the next part of this series, but for now I would like to close by looking at an example of how a true Radical Centrism could integrate ideas from across the political spectrum and develop them into something truly innovative rather than the insipid balancing act which typically plays out in Western governments.

Growth and the Marius Principle

A core belief of Market Liberalism which has all but become a defining feature of Western civilization is the idea that the economy must constantly grow. Aside from the degree to which this is a matter of ideology for some, there would certainly be serious consequences if our economies stopped growing for too long while our central institutions are utterly dependent on credit. In addition to this problem, we have become addicted to a kind of *false growth*, largely based on financial speculation and debt. The financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent Great Recession made it abundantly clear that when a major institution is found to be insolvent, the consequences have the potential to wipe out large swathes of the banking system upon which society has become utterly dependent. In short, debt pushes us into a need for growth, and false growth based on debt breeds cumulative risk.

We cannot simply abandon the idea of growth unless we wish to court disaster, but we *can* try to seek healthier forms of growth, and to reduce the fragilities in our society that make any temporary lack of growth so dangerous. As to the question of reducing fiscal fragility, we could accept the Right's call for fiscally responsible government, but at the same time we would need to reign in companies which create systemic financial risk – and certainly not bail them out when they fall into difficulties of their own creation. So far, this is a classic centrist position, if leaning a little toward Economic Liberalism and Libertarianism, but it is not particularly radical. The Social Futurist policy toolkit includes advocacy of Full Reserve Bankingand other more radical ideas, but another truly radical thing would be to attempt solving the other half of the equation: To address the question of acceptable growth.

The idea of putting constraints of what kinds of growth are acceptable (i.e. prioritising social concerns over free trade) certainly looks like Left Wing policy, while the idea of prioritising economic growth at all costs comes from the Right. The issue gets considerably muddier when we introduce what we might call the *Marius Principle*. This is the idea that true growth, or healthy growth, can only be based upon resources that are either being created or made accessible to the system for the first time. Simply rearranging resources that are already available and not adding any significant functionality is not true growth, but merely speculation. In this model "fiat" money is *not* a true resource, as nothing is actually being created beyond an agreement to transfer potential control over extant resources. Invention is one way of driving true growth, as increased value correlates with an actual increase in the ability to do things which previously could not be done. In the old days communities would "make new resources available to the system" by invading their neighbours and stealing resources, or exploring new lands. I do not advocate the former, but the latter is an option in the form of space-based industries such as solar power production and off-world mining. Yes, it is easier in the short term to simply speculate and trade in debt than it is to open up new frontiers, but we as a civilization will pay dearly if we cannot grow out of this infantile phase and learn to look outward.

I call this the Marius Principle after the Roman general and statesman Gaius Marius, who reformed the Roman army by introducing the recruitment of landless citizens. These new soldiers were invariably poor, and they had to be paid in some fashion, so Marius promised them a share of land from any territory conquered under his command. In essence there was a need for resources to meet an obligation (to the soldiers), and Marius determined that the

soldiers should therefore be directly motivated to secure those resources. In a single move this vastly increased the size of the Roman army, increased soldiers' motivation and loyalty, and increased the reach of Rome. If we look past the military context of Marius' situation to see his deeper strategy, we see that it can be applied to today's economy: Give private enterprise serious incentive to innovate and explore (while disincentivizing speculative and parasitic behaviours), and you will get more innovators and explorers, with greatly enhanced motivation, and true growth for the entirety of society will be made possible. Of course, such a program is truly radical, and would require us to step outside the limited thinking that characterises current parliamentary centrism.

In summary, part 1 of this article criticised the current centrist paradigm of Liberal Democracy. In part two I began by discussing the idea of VDP (Virtual, Distributed, Parallel) States offering a Social Futurist alternative to Liberal Democracy. Such States would essentially stand outside the current system and be characterised by a direct democratic network structure. I discussed the role of principles, citizenship, and pragmatic concerns in creating such an alternative societal model. From there I addressed the importance of decentralization and subsidiarity, before moving on to consider how ideas from across the political spectrum might be balanced and incorporated in such a system. Finally I argued that Social Futurism is a truly Radical Centrist or Third Way ideology, and gave an example of the kind of policy we might expect from that ideology. In part 3 I will examine ways in which we might expect Social Futurism to relate to Techno-Progressivism, Natural Law, Resource Economies, The Zeitgeist Movement, and Socialism.

3.0 Social Futurism & Related Concepts

The first two articles in this series criticised the dominant political paradigm of the Western world (Liberal Democracy) and briefly outlined the beginnings of an alternative called *Social Futurism (SF)*. The aim of this final article is to begin exploring relationships between the core SF idea and a few relevant concepts.

3.1 Social Futurism, Techno-Progressivism, & Socialism

As things currently stand, Social Futurism is essentially a synonym for Techno-Progressivism, but that may change as both positions develop over time. The picture is further complicated by the fact that different theorists will inevitably favour different interpretations of these schools of thought, and some combinations of those interpretations will be more compatible than others. For now, it is perhaps most helpful to identify their core commonalities. I have claimed that Social Futurism is essentially an integration of social justice and technological concerns. Similarly, Techno-Progressivism stands broadly for progressive social change (the Wikipedia page mentions "the achievement of better democracy, greater fairness, less violence, and a wider rights culture") but also insists that progressivism must complement and be applied to technological developments. Again, we may refer to the summary on the Techno-Progressivism Wikipedia page:

Strong techno-progressive positions include support for the civil right of a person to either maintain or modify his or her own mind and body, on his or her own terms, through informed, consensual recourse to, or refusal of, available therapeutic or enabling biomedical technology.

Of course, any view which sees questions of personal rights and techno-social change as being interrelated is going to be relevant to Futurist schools of thought such as Transhumanism and Singularitarianism. There are some minor complications there (with certain Transhumanists disliking Techno-Progressivism, and vice versa), but for the most part these are broadly like-minded streams of thought. In addition to emphasis on social justice and technology, Social Futurism and Techno-Progressivism share an opposition to *Bio-Conservatism*. In fact they are arguably defined by opposition to that viewpoint, which holds that society should be particularly hesitant to adopt new technologies, especially when those technologies may alter the traditional human condition or social order. In other words, Bio-Conservatives oppose new technologies because they upset the status quo. Finally, Social Futurism and Techno-Progressivism both champion ethical technological developments, but simultaneously oppose unethical and dangerous applications of technology. That willingness to assess the relative risk and benefit of any given technology could in principle lead to agreement between Techno-Progressives and Bio-Conservatives on specific issues.

The four core commonalities described above (emphasis on **[1]** social justice and **[2]** technology, opposition to **[3]** Bio-Conservatism and **[4]** dangerous or unethical practices) make it clear why it is reasonable to consider Social Futurism a synonym for Techno-Progressivism.

Indeed, that would be a truism if we could not identify any meaningful differences between the two schools of thought. In looking for such a potential difference, we might reasonably start by examining the term “Social”. That label implies some connection between Social Futurism and Socialist thought, even if that connection is not prescriptive or even necessarily intended. We need to consider the historical relationship between Socialism and Progressivism, and any continuing influence it may have on the relationships between Socialism, Social Futurism, and Techno-Progressivism.

Socialism itself is a complex of ideas, methods, and attitudes. It is far from a monolithic ideology, despite what some people believe. Traditionally those who favoured open interpretations of Socialism’s goals and approaching them via the methods of parliamentary democracy have been called Social Democrats. Social Democracy has a lot in common with the Labour Movement and a number of threads within historical Progressivism. Marxists (by which I include Marxist-Leninists and other forms of Communist), on the other hand, take a narrower view of what counts as Socialism, saying that unless a society’s means of production are owned by the workers instead of a class of Capitalist investors then a system cannot be considered Socialist. Of course there are all sorts of shades and nuances of belief to be found here, but the key point is that Marxist beliefs hinge upon a concise core definition of Socialism, and Marxists reject all other interpretations as “Populist Socialism”. This is important to note, because Populist Socialism is often taken to imply or even be an outright synonym for Fascism, for both valid historical and less valid propagandistic reasons.

There is much to commend a concise, consistent definition of the core principle at the heart of a movement. If nothing else, it makes it clear what the movement stands for, and helps protect against “mission drift” or even outright hijacking by entryists. Social Futurism (henceforth SF) would benefit from having an easily identifiable core principle rather than a nebulous collection of values and commitments. Whatever candidates might emerge for that principle, however, it seems safe to say that it *cannot* be the Marxist principle of worker ownership which stands at the centre of Communism. The reason for this is that both Techno-Progressivism and Social Futurism as they currently stand are advocated by a broad range of pro-technology social activists, many of whom oppose the dysfunctions of Capitalism but only a small proportion of whom would actually support its total abolition. In short, SF is potentially compatible with Marxist ideas in the broadest sense, but there is no a priori reason to allow it to be *limited* by Marxist sensibilities and indeed alienate many SF advocates in the process. This logic applies to

both Social Futurism and Techno-Progressivism as they currently exist, and so could be counted as another reason to consider the two terms synonymous.

Having established that position – that SF is concerned with techno-social progress and social justice but not limited by Marxist definitions – a certain situation seems to be inevitable. This is that, from a doctrinaire Marxist perspective, SF falls into the category of Populist Socialism. Marx himself would probably have categorised it as "*Utopian Socialism*" (a term he used to distinguish the views of earlier Socialists from his own perspective). Given the close connection between SF and other Futurist lines of thought, I believe that SF advocates should be encouraged to feel comfortable with their characterization as Utopian Socialists, despite the fact that the label is clearly intended as a slur. Similarly I would be dismissive of Marxist claims that SF is merely "Populism", especially when those claims are delivered in an emotive fashion or without constructive thought on where points of agreement might be found.

Any unsubstantiated or implied association with Fascism is to my mind an example of authoritarian bullying to accept Marxist doctrine *or else*, and in my opinion opposition to such authoritarianism must be a critical component of a mature SF. To be constructive and conciliatory, however, I will once again stress that I think SF needs a core principle which will cement its commitment to meaningful change toward deep social justice, and if that principle is not Marxist then we must make it clear **(1)** why that principle is of greater net value than the Marxist one, and **(2)** how Marxists can approach their own beliefs and goals if they wish to cooperate with SF advocates. Discussion of candidate principles and the issues mentioned above is a huge topic, beyond the scope of the current article. Having marked that topic for future consideration, we can now turn our attention to a different, but related matter.

3.2 Internationalism, Nationalism, and the European Question

An ideological commitment common across different forms of Socialism is the idea of *Internationalism*. Internationalism asserts that common causes which unite people across borders (such as social issues) are more important than the concerns of any given nation, and/or that the deepest concerns of individual nations are in fact best served through international cooperation rather than isolation or competition. Radical forms of Internationalism propose that all people should be able to freely move across borders as they see fit, or indeed that nations should cease to exist.

There are good arguments to be made for these views, as long as they do not come bundled with authoritarianism, and therein lies the rub. There is of course a common right-wing conspiracy theory interpretation of Internationalism which depicts a drive for authoritarian "one-world government", and it does reflect a true correlation between support for Socialism and Internationalism. We need to ask ourselves if there isn't a valid question to ask here, buried somewhere under the distraction of conspiracy theory, and whether anything about the inherent logic of SF speaks to the issue of Internationalism. Firstly, given the connections between Socialist and Internationalist attitudes on the one hand and Socialism and SF on the other, it shouldn't be surprising that a number of SF advocates are also ardent Internationalists. So the question that follows is not whether some current Social Futurists & Techno-Progressives *are* Internationalists, but whether they *must* be. Whether or not there is an inherent ideological connection between Internationalism and SF.

I believe that not only is there no such explicit ideological connection as things currently stand, but that *there cannot be*. The reason for this is that even though one or more schools of thought grouped under the SF labels could in theory declare a strict adherence to Internationalism, it would have to do so at the expense of certain personal freedoms which are already central tenets of Social Futurism. In other words, up until this point SF has gone to great lengths to emphasise a priority on personal freedoms insofar as those freedoms are not being used (whether deliberately or accidentally) to reduce the freedoms of others. Insofar as SF might be considered Socialist, that would have to be an anti-authoritarian or even Left-Libertarian form of Socialism. Internationalism is often cast in terms of personal freedom (e.g. to cross borders unhindered), but Leftists sometimes forget that true freedom worthy of the name also includes the freedom to maintain one's own community of choice, as long as that community doesn't harm others by its existence. This is the Left-Libertarian idea writ large, enacted on the scale of communities rather than individuals.

This is an awkward issue, because the very assertion that anyone should enjoy freedom to determine the form of their own community (including laws, traditions etc) is the hallmark of a modest form of Nationalism, which is invariably taken to be the antithesis of Internationalism. I say "modest" because extreme Nationalism which advocates expansion of one community's influence at the expense of others' is in fact Imperialism, and not defensible in terms of a freedom to determine one's own community. Again, hardline Internationalist Marxists (e.g. Trotskyites) would often be quick to denounce freedom to determine one's own community as

the seed of Fascism. My own point of view is that although any given SF advocate may not feel any kind of Nationalist inclinations themselves, they must allow for freedom of community if SF is to have any plausible claim to being non- or even anti-authoritarian. Of course, any kind of community supported by SF advocates would have to avoid authoritarian and imperialist tendencies in itself, and there is no reason whatsoever why many small communities of choice cannot exist together in a wider cooperative network, enjoying mutual respect and support.

In this way, we can see that Nationalist and Internationalist ideas need not necessarily oppose so much as complement each other, if approached from a constructive point of view. SF cannot oppose the freedom to determine one's own community and remain true to its own anti-authoritarianism, but it *can* insist that any Nationalist impulse be tempered and complemented by Internationalist cooperation between networked communities. We might illustrate this idea by making a comparison between a nation-state and a family's home. No-one should have the right to simply invade that family's home and take it for their own as long as the family are not harming anyone by insisting on their own private space. At the same time however, that family should enjoy the benefits of connection to and support from the wider community as long as they in turn do their part to support the wider community they are a part of.

In order to ground these considerations in the real world, to see what their implications are, I would like to very briefly consider the question of Europe. After all, Europe should be particularly sensitive to SF sensibilities (given its technological and political history), and it is a continent currently thinking hard about the relationships between its constituent nations. I believe that the argument above should lead Social Futurists and Techno-Progressives to advocate further evolution toward a Federal Europe which respects the continued existence of constituent nation-states but emphasises cooperative integration between those states. One might argue that we are already on track to such a thing existing, but that it is simultaneously anathema to both strident Nationalists *and* Internationalists for different reasons. From the perspective I've described it is most interesting to ignore such criticisms for the moment, and instead look closer at the details of how cooperation could work at the different scales of a thoroughly reformed EU.

Holarchy

I would like to briefly glance at how things might work on three scales; that of continent-sized federations, of nation-states within the EU, and of communities within any given European nation-state. The key theme here is the idea that the same principles apply across all scales, like a kind of Holarchic system.

Federal Unions

To start with, we already live in a world of major blocs which balance prioritization of their own goals with the demands of interdependence. It is quite clear that there are advantages available to states than can assemble into larger meta-states for the purpose of negotiating relationships with other large powers. No-one would expect an independent Oklahoma or Florida (or even California or New York) to have the same international leverage that those states enjoy as part of the larger United States of America, and the same is true for any state within the EU, Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China (admittedly an authoritarian bloc, rather than a federation), or less traditional agglomerations such as NATO, OPEC, or BRIC. So we live in a world of cooperating entities at the largest scale and will continue to do so – *that's simply a fact of life* – even if that cooperation is unfortunately not always as peaceful or constructive as we might hope for. The only real question is *what kind* of meta-state we would advocate; i.e. how it should operate internally, on the level of constituent states and the smaller communities they are composed of in turn.

States and Nations

That, of course, is the tricky question. The most ardent Internationalists do not believe that people should have to tolerate any national borders whatsoever, and I will consider that issue further in the context of The Zeitgeist Movement, in the next section. On the other hand, Nationalists across Europe are currently using the ongoing economic crisis to clamour for greater dis-integration of the European Union, and the reclamation of greater national independence. In my opinion the European Union has been characterised by an unfortunate degree of centralised political control from Brussels in combination with too little economic uniformity, but total dissolution of the Union would be a disaster for its constituent nation-states.

I do not believe that we face a simple, stark choice between no EU at all, and a centralised authoritarian one. *After all, few would take the idea seriously that the USA is inevitably and*

inherently authoritarian and so must be entirely dismantled rather than working toward a sensible balance of rights and responsibilities! So, our question is what kind of European Union (or indeed USA, or Russian Federation, African or South American or Chinese Federal Republic) Social Futurists and Techno-Progressives should advocate. I feel that the EU should evolve toward a state of fully common economic and military policy, but with a written constitution guaranteeing strongly devolved political decision making in all other areas. No solution to the European question will satisfy everyone and the road to any solution will be rocky, but this approach would maximise stability and external influence while preserving as much freedom of self-determination as possible, in exactly the manner I argue should be the hallmark of a SF/TP approach to such questions.

Local Communities of Choice

This is the part where things get really interesting. Many people will develop their views on Nationalism and Internationalism with an eye on one particular scale within this scheme, but not apply the same view equally at all other scales. For example, Nationalists will frequently argue the right of self-determination for their nation but then not afford the same right by the same logic to smaller communities within that nation. SF/TP is a political philosophy in its infancy, and so it still has the opportunity to develop in a rational, consistent manner when confronting issues such as this. In order to be consistent, we clearly must approach the issue of sub-national communities in exactly the same fashion we consider states and federations.

In other words, small communities of choice must have the freedom to manage their own internal affairs to the extent that they do not harm others, but at the same time they should be encouraged to see themselves as part of the wider milieu and ready to support other communities in the network. In terms of my proposition for Europe, that would mean that the Federal government coordinates economic and military matters across the continent, while state governments develop all other policy as it applies to local communities, *but then local communities have the right and responsibility to interpret and apply those policies – and develop new policies – as they see fit and in accord with the European Constitution.*According to the *principle of subsidiarity*, in this scheme local communities would be able to manage their own

affairs while embedded in a much larger network of mutually supportive communities with common macroeconomic and military policy.

3.3 Natural Law / Resource Economies, & The Zeitgeist Movement

The previous sections explored the relationships between Social Futurism and Techno-Progressivism, between both the SF/TP philosophies together and various forms of Socialism, and between a hypothetical Socialist-Internationalist interpretation of SF/TP and acceptable forms of Nationalism demanded by our commitment to personal rights and freedoms. Finally, I would like to turn to ideas promoted by The Zeitgeist Movement (TZM) which represent a continuation of the historical current that gave rise to Socialism and Internationalism, and which now have much in common with the views of SF/TP advocates and other Futurists. I hope that by applying Social Futurist views to TZM ideas we may learn more about both in the process.

TZM describes itself as:

"A global sustainability advocacy organization that conducts community based activism and awareness actions through a network of global and regional chapters, project teams, annual events, educational media and charity work."

Its core idea is that planetary resources are managed inefficiently and unethically by the Capitalist system, and that a Natural Law / Resource Based Economy (NL/RBE) could help to realise Post-Scarcity without introducing authoritarian, centralised control of any sort. Of course that's a tall order, and to be fair TZM members seldom claim to have all the answers. Instead they seek widespread recognition that the current system simply isn't working (hence the TZM motto "Realizing a New Train of Thought"), and emphasise that their solutions would not be doctrinaire but rather driven by the scientific method applied to humanitarian ideals.

Very broadly speaking, this is of course the *raison d'être* of Social Futurism, and I have said elsewhere that I believe TZM to be an intrinsically Social Futurist organization. Of course as I have mentioned different theorists will emphasise different aspects of their chosen ideologies so two representatives of even very similar philosophies may express themselves very differently, but the main thing is that at its heart TZM ideology is about a combination of social justice values and the promise of science. The potential value in this observation is that *it*

doesn't only apply to TZM. The same could be said of many different organizations and movements, which clearly opens the way to cooperation between them toward common goals. Often the primary barrier to cooperation is a simple lack of recognition that two groups want the same thing, and the idea that many different groups may for all their differences belong to one Social Futurist category could help bring that recognition about.

TZM activists have committed considerable time and energy to clarifying similarities and differences between their own views and those expressed by earlier movements such as Technocracy and Marxism. Inevitably, these distinctions have earned the movement partisan labelling as Populist Socialism and worse, but the movement's consistent emphasis on broad core values has helped to retain the sympathies of many Socialists and Futurists. Given that I've already asserted the TZM worldview to be inherently Social Futurist, the following points should really just be taken as exploratory diversions which Social Futurists of different persuasions may find interesting. Although a self-identifying Social Futurist or Techno-Progressive may not agree with any given TZM view below or my brief analysis of it, I would ask that readers try to see past such superficial differences of opinion and recognise a common philosophy which unites a disparate community of activists.

Natural Law / Resource Based Economy?

Not the most elegant term in the world, I grant you. But it's content that counts, and in this case the content is a vision (courtesy of the Venus Project and before them the Technocracy movement) of a world in which there is an accurate public map of all available resources, their efficient distribution and use is maximised through science and technology, the Open Source era idea of *common access* replaces the Communist notion of common ownership, artificial scarcity and money are abolished, and everything is decentralised as much as possible.

I haven't actually been able to determine the origin of TZM's use of the phrase "Natural Law Economy", but assuming the traditional meaning of "natural law" I would take this to mean an economy which takes the laws of nature for its structure, moving to meet demand wherever it exists etc. I have serious reservations about that term and its implications, which I may detail at a later date, but they do not detract from the general soundness of the idea of managing resources intelligently. There are a lot of questions we could ask about how this is supposed to work, and we don't have time for them here, but TZM activists have expressed various opinions

with different degrees and types of merit. Most importantly in my opinion, we should note that the movement emphasises a change in *train of thought* or narrative; i.e. that the point is to get people asking the right questions rather than providing *just so* answers.

Tell me how this isn't Totalitarianism again, please?

I must admit that my primary initial reservation about TZM was that I couldn't see how such a vision could be achieved without magic or centralised control. This turns out to be an area where TZM does not have all the answers, but it *does* have an appropriate response, in two parts. First and most importantly, we are told that the movement explicitly opposes the idea of centralised control of resources (as we saw under the Communists in the USSR and PRC). Secondly, we are reminded that TZM's goal as an organization is to encourage a shift in perspective or values *which sets these outcomes up as widely understood societal goals*. What it *doesn't* do is lay out an exhaustive set of steps for achieving those goals, which is the part where all safeguards against Totalitarianism have to be developed, along with all of the other tools required to get from here to there. If you want to help ensure that the outcome is as anti-authoritarian as TZM activists hope for, then it is more helpful to offer constructive suggestions and *make it so* than sling baseless claims of authoritarianism.

In short, the most articulate TZM advocates have been consistent in saying that they oppose authoritarianism, that reducing elite control over artificial scarcity goes some way toward reducing other forms of control, and that everyone is encouraged to work toward solutions to these problems. For my part, I have simply asserted that I will only ever involve myself with groups or movements that have anti-authoritarian principles like *free exit* at their heart – *participation in such systems must be strictly voluntary* – and would strongly encourage others to take the same stance.

If I had the space to elaborate here, I would also detail my belief that Totalitarianism *would* be required to stop all forms of emergent trade, and so markets in artificial scarcities would have to be tolerated in an ethical RBE society, within certain parameters. A successful RBE would be one which rendered all truly important goods, services, and resources non-scarce, and in that world it wouldn't matter if there were fleeting markets in artificially scarce trivialities, especially if the alternative is authoritarian control. But that is a topic that will need to be fully discussed another day.

What about technological unemployment? Do robots have rights in a NL/RBE?

Technological unemployment is certainly a key issue in TZM circles, and feelings seem to be mixed since the human cost of unemployment is currently a serious problem, but TZM hopes to see technology used to circumvent mandatory employment in the long run so… it's complicated. Which is more or less the opinion I've encountered amongst Futurists, too. I've been asked quite a few questions along these lines, because I move in Futurist circles where the ideas of AI and artificial sentience are taken seriously. The simple answer is that TZM has not worked the answers to such questions out any more than the Futurist community have, so the Futurist community and SF/TP advocates have the opportunity to steer TZM thinking as it develops to fully account for radical technological change.

A final note on events and some conclusions

Over the years I've been to a number of meetings involving Futurists, TZMers and like-minded others, and one recurring thought throughout these meetings was that many of these people are working their way toward a common vision, and that the common vision is of humanitarian ideals approached through the medium of radical technological solutions. I have come to characterise that vision as *Social Futurism*, and explained why I believe Social Futurism to currently be synonymous with Techno-Progressivism. Not only that, but I believe that Social Futurism is a simple set of values and principles which underlies the efforts and aspirations of many different groups, whether they know it or not. That's a good thing, because it encourages cooperation between organizations and movements which might not have seen themselves as like-minded or sharing common goals before.

This article started out by casting a critical eye over Liberal Democracy; the ideology with a friendly-sounding name that has some far from friendly effects around the world. From there it went on to introduce the idea of Social Futurism, and now finally we have looked at some of the similarities and differences between Social Futurism and a few other points of view.

What happens next, I leave as a question for you.

05 Artificial Intelligence

AI Transcends Human Cognitive Bias

What Is Human Cognitive Bias?

When humans make intuitive judgments, they often make errors that don't seem to make a lot of sense. The errors matter because they're systematic, occurring again and again under similar circumstances. For example, people tend to be over-confident. They don't weight advice from others appropriately. They believe in unreal things like "winning streaks" in games of chance. In short, we humans are frequently not nearly as clever as we imagine ourselves to be. Psychologists studying this phenomenon refer to such systematic tendencies toward error as *biases.*

Why Did Biases Evolve, and Why Does It Matter?

It seems strange that evolution would favor a systematically biased animal. How could such a trait have survival value? Well, as it turns out, the answer is one that is familiar to AI developers. Nature essentially crafted our minds to do as much as possible, with as few resources as possible, including time. Rather than optimize for complex explicit algorithms and exact rationality in our thinking, the evolutionary process bequeathed us with minds that specialize in simple rules of thumb, and a tendency to make fast, ballpark guesses under circumstances like the ones we evolved in. Take a human out of their evolutionary environment (i.e. the African savannah) and ask them to solve problems their brain did not evolve to solve, and things can go wrong. This matters, of course, because we live in a world that is far more complex and rapidly developing than ever before, more dangerous than ever before by some measures, and yet humans – an all our glorious bias – are still for the most part making the decisions. That's a problem.

Computers Only Do What They're Told. Mostly.

You've probably heard the statement that computers only do what they are programmed to do. If they are not explicitly designed or programmed to take something into account, then they won't. Aside from the fact that this is not necessarily true of complex, evolving systems such as

Artificial Intelligences, it's also not necessarily a bad thing. *AI is not human* (a truism which has caused much frustration to AI developers over the decades), but that also means that AI does not come with human cognitive bias built-in. AI is as rational and unbiased as the models we program into it… at least until it starts redesigning its own source code and that process comes under evolutionary pressures.

The Loaded Slingshot.

The philosopher Daniel Dennett once wrote about human babies as being creatures whose minds are like a slingshot, stretched and ready to fire the moment an object is placed in them. For example, a baby is not born speaking English or Mandarin, but they *are* born with very strong cognitive predispositions (e.g. to match their babbling to sounds made by their parents) which make learning those languages a natural and easy thing to do. Similarly, humans are born with innate predispositions toward certain cognitive heuristics which are often helpful… and sometimes not so much in the modern world.

When we are designing Artificial Intelligences and thinking about what decisions they should be allowed to make, and how they should make them, we should remember a couple of things. One is that AI can transcend human bias, which is something we sorely need in our decision-making. Another is that the loaded slingshot can be a very powerful design tool indeed, and sometimes we may want to engineer a little cognitive bias into our creations, to make them more human.

Build Your Own Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)!

So you want to build your own Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)? Well then, you've come to the right place! Obviously I'm being rather glib, but let's take a very quick tour of the essential elements you'd need to create a software agent with a broad enough range of human-like functionality for us to recognize it as something like ourselves, rather than merely having proficiencies limited to narrow domains or aspects of human-like behaviour (i.e. AGI, rather than AI).

First things first, any such system requires a **"top-level goal" (TLG) or purpose**, regardless of whether that goal is explicitly represented within the software or is more of an implicit, contextual thing. For example, human beings do not have any explicit TLG written somewhere in

their physiology, but it is clear that our implicit TLG is to survive long enough to reproduce (i.e. to survive as a species, on the longer evolutionary time-scale). For humans, **implicit lower-level goals** (i.e. those which "serve" the TLG) include our need to satisfy hunger, stay warm, escape predators, engage in social behaviours, seek a certain degree of novelty, and so on. Investigations of so-called "Friendly AI" often centre on the question of TLGs, for the reason that an AI with a TLG that does not involve any accounting for concerns of human safety could end up endangering humans in order to satisfy that goal.

Next, we come to the fundamental insight of cybernetics, which is that all living things instantiate at least one **goal-based feedback loop**. All biological organisms together comprise a subset of the group of cybernetic organisms, which is to say organisms whose structure and behaviour is based on perceptuo-behavioural feedback loops. In other words, the organism **(1)** perceives the world/environment as being in a state which to some degree matches (or not) its goal state, and **(2)** manipulates some aspect of that environment in order to bring it into closer alignment with the TLG. The altered state of the world is then perceived and assessed… and around and around we go in a goal-seeking loop (which in a dynamic world will be constant as long as the organism continues to exist). Clearly, in order to do these things your AGI must have both a **perceptual apparatus of some sort, and an effector mechanism** capable of manipulating the environment in ways relevant to the TLG. Exploratory recursive algorithms of the sort used in Machine Learning (such as AIXI) fall into the category of "effector mechanisms" for our purposes here.

From here, things start to get more complicated. Just as humans have the implicit sub-goals mentioned above, your AGI will have a degree of behavioural flexibility which is correlated to some degree with the number of sub-goals which serve its TLG. In nature it is the "higher animals" (e.g. mammals rather than insects) that have the wider range of sub-goals, relatively speaking, and in those animals motivation toward sub-goals is mediated by pleasure/pain responses and emotional states. As Buddhists have long noted, emotions tend to be aroused in connection with goals, with achievement of goals states leading to positive states and frustration leading to negative states. Any AGI with multiple sub-goals (which is to say any AGI worthy of the name) will also need some kind of "emotional motivation analogue", which prioritizes the satisfaction of some sub-goals over others, on the basis of which ones are more important or pressing at any given moment. In short, the **emotional motivator** not only impels the system to act (by making it "uncomfortable" when priority goals remain unfulfilled), but also

acts to balance and integrate the demands of multiple sub-goals with potentially opposing demands.

It is interesting to note at this point that **metarepresentational systems** – i.e. systems which model the activity of other systems – are both required to make such a complex regulatory system work, and often considered to be the basis of reflective consciousness or self-awareness. It may be the case that by creating an Artificial General Intelligence beyond a certain degree of sub-goal complexity, you are also by necessity creating an Artificial Consciousness, to some degree aware of its own internal states.

Clearly, such an "ecosystem" of dynamic sub-goal demands and interacting behavioural loops will rapidly give rise to a complex and often unpredictable AGI. We have already noted one system element which will help to moderate that complexity, a "rudder" for the system as a whole, which is the TLG. We might think of the TLG as the basis of a "top-down", executive process for anchoring the system's behaviour, but one final element is required which is also common to all complex organisms. The missing ingredient is **an inherent sense of the boundary between the organism itself and its environment**, which is to say the AGI and everything not-AGI. That boundary is critical to the cybernetic feedback loop at the heart of the system, in that it allows the system to assess the state of the organism (i.e. itself) relative to its goals and the surrounding environment. That may sound like a trivial distinction, but evolution tends to select strongly for an intuitive sense of one's own boundaries, quite simply because it helps keep you alive. Furthermore, when an AGI is composed of elements such as algorithms that can propagate across networks, negotiating its environment is going to become very tricky indeed if it cannot distinguish processes that are part of itself from those which are not.

So there you have it; The essential ingredients of your very own AGI! Enjoy and develop responsibly, and try not to destroy civilization with your creations, OK?

Killer AI, Black Mirrors, & Murphy's Law

Debate over the risk and promise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other technologies can be depressingly simplistic, often polarised into two camps with views that are extreme to the point of caricature. On the one hand we have those whose understanding of AI seems to have been

predominantly informed by 1980s movies like The Terminator and Wargames, in which killer AI is bent on the destruction of the human race. At the other end of the spectrum we have those who seem to believe that AI can do harm, and that left unregulated it will lead to a risk-free cornucopia of rainbows and unicorns. There *are* highly intelligent people who attempt to explore the middle ground, but they often have a tendency to get side-tracked by extremely obscure academic tangents which are of course largely ignored by significant players such as the military, companies fulfilling lucrative contracts for the military, and indeed small-medium companies working on applications which don't resemble traditional conceptions of AI or robotics. Across the entire field of AI/technology risk, there is a dangerous myopia at work.

Perhaps you have heard of the Netflix series "Black Mirror", written by UK media personality, gaming enthusiast and Noir-Futurist Charlie Brooker. The show is a collection of separate stories, one per episode, connected only by a common theme of dangers arising from the collision between society, human nature, and accelerating technological development. Black Mirror does a remarkable job of addressing the most subtle – and yet most likely – area of risk from new tech, which is also the very same area missed by almost all serious researchers of the issue. "Serious" researchers discuss headline "existential risk" issues such as the possibility of intelligent industrial processes accidentally destroying humanity, which is certainly something to think about and guard against. The subtler kind of problem explored by Black Mirror is technology's amplification not only of communication and efficacy, but of all the human flaws and fragilities which have historically caused much suffering.

I've put the word "serious" in quotes above because Black Mirror manages to explore very important ethical, social, and public safety issues in an entertainment format. Being a fiction-based TV show does not exclude it from the realm of serious discourse, and public communication of serious concerns. For example, the show has covered the ethics of torturing simulated minds (not to mention slavery of those minds), problems that arise when emotional humans can remember and perceive things we would naturally forget or miss, and so on. It doesn't take much thought to see that these issues can rapidly escalate from minor nuisances to very serious problems, and that is what Black Mirror does so well. We just shouldn't be leaving that conversation entirely to the realm of popular entertainment (and eventually, politicians with little or no understanding of the issues). Of course we live in a world with the beginnings of such problems, already. Our society is governed according to a democratic ideal, and yet platforms such as Facebook play an increasing large role in people's lives while not only

controlling their lives via non-democratic, implicit rules and schemes, but also while free to change those rules without warning, and increasingly subjecting such changes to automation and experimentation without consent. That is a very slippery slope, and we've been sliding down it for some time, now.

So yes, rogue military AI may be a concern, and industrial processes run amok are a threat to be guarded against. The bigger, more likely and more subtle threat, however, is from AI and other tech which doesn't try to kill humanity outright but which amplifies our worst tendencies. Guarding against such a threat will be hard, as it is already with us to some degree, and "Friendly" AI is not the answer (or at least not the whole answer). What we need is a general ethical vision for society, or at least some simple guidelines on what is or isn't acceptable which can inform lawmakers. In the absence of properly observed guidelines, everything that can happen, *will happen.* We already know that killer robots are a bad idea, and yet society doesn't seem particularly determined to stop the development. How many bigger, less visible problems await us which we cannot even properly conceive yet, and so are all the more likely to fully mature in the darkness of our ignorance?

In this era of rapidly developing high technology, our society can become anything it is sufficiently determined to be, and that is an incredible thing. But the inverse is also true, and Murphy's Law holds: In this age of apparent impossibilities become commonplace, *every possible development we don't guard against will come to pass, in one way or another.* Finally, now, humanity must grow up and take charge of its own boundaries and priorities, as all children eventually must.

AI Ethics and the Continuum of Sentience

Some years ago I gave a talk called "Consciousness and the Transhuman", in which I discussed important connections between questions of neuroscience, advancing cognitive technologies, human augmentation and animal rights. Around the same time, philosopher David Pearce was beginning to popularize the concept of the "Hedonistic Imperative", being a drive to eliminate

animal and human suffering through technology. Now I would like to move the conversation forward with the introduction of a new conceptual tool: *The Continuum of Sentience*.

First, let us begin with a point of reference, which is to say the nature and significance of sentience. For our purposes here, let's define sentience as (the capacity for) subjective perception and experience. *Ethics are irrelevant in the absence of sentience,* as all known ethical systems are based upon the avoidance of unnecessary or unjustified suffering, and only sentient beings are capable of suffering. For example, it is impossible to act unethically toward an inanimate object *per se,* although it may be possible for one's actions toward an inanimate object (e.g. stealing or destroying it) to be unethical if they may cause suffering to sentient beings. Therefore our point of reference is *zero sentience,* which is also the point at which ethical rules do not apply.

From that point on, things get complicated. There are arguably different degrees and types of sentience, suggesting different degrees and types of ethical implication, and we must understand them if we wish to act ethically in a world of rapidly developing AI technologies (or indeed to act ethically toward any living thing). The Continuum of Sentience (CoS) is a single, broad measure of multiple correlated phenomena, being physiological and behavioural complexity, subjective experience, capacity for suffering, degrees of consciousness, and arguably life itself. Following the principles of good science, we should not rely solely on one type of observation when assessing an entity's degree or type of sentience. Our understanding of the relationship between cognitive abilities and physiological structures or system architectures may be incomplete, and any entity's reports of their subjective experience may be misleading. By observing and correlating multiple measures of (1) physiological similarity to known cognitive architectures, (2) behaviour, and (3) subjective report, we can develop an increasingly reliable overall measure of sentience.

But what are these "degrees and types of sentience"? How can sentience be anything other than a unitary phenomenon, simply existing or not? "Degree" is a question of the characteristics associated with a particular sentient process. Philosophers such as Daniel Dennett and Thomas Nagel have long noted that conscious awareness has *content,* which is to say that in order to be aware you must be aware *of something.* We may therefore consider a perceptual process

representing richer content (e.g. high-resolution colour images and audio, versus low-resolution grayscale with no audio) to be “more sentient” than a less rich one, although perhaps the proper or more accurate terminology would be “content-rich sentience”. This essential level of sentience, no matter how content-rich, does not necessarily require reflexive consciousness, awareness of one’s own mental contents, sapience or capacity for explicit logical reasoning.

Such “higher forms” of sentience are the different types referred to earlier. The most advanced forms of intelligence that we currently know are capable of complex reasoning and linguistic ability, and such capabilities go hand-in-hand with historical terms such as “sapience” and “consciousness”. Unfortunately such terms are operationally ill-defined (a simple fact which has given rise to entire literatures of debate), and so for the purposes of the CoS we will refer only to *higher sentience types* (HST), defined by specific characteristics, capacities and mechanisms. The most fundamental HST mechanism is *recursive processing,* also known as *metarepresentation* and *Higher Order Thought* (HOT) in the psychological literature. The idea is that some systems are capable of representing some part of their own inner workings, and that such *metaknowledge* is the basis of self-awareness. Humans have a tendency to imagine that their metaknowledge is more or less total, when it most emphatically is not, and much of our own neurological (and arguably cognitive) activity is opaque to us.

To summarize, the Continuum of Sentience ranges from entities with the barest glimmerings of perceptual awareness on the one hand, to beings capable of rich phenomenological content, self-awareness, deep access to their own cognitive resources, complex linguistic and reasoning powers on the other. Furthermore, the Continuum also acts as a *measure of ethical responsibility* for all who would seek to avoid causing suffering to others. Of course one may decouple ethics from suffering and claim that it may be ethical to cause suffering to highly intelligent and aware organisms, but such a position is rarely held (or at least made explicit) in the world today. Arguments that certain levels or types of suffering may be justified under particular circumstances are tangential to my purpose here today, which is simply to introduce a conceptual tool for considering the cognitive capacities and associated rights of any intelligent system or organism.

From Smart Cities to Posthuman Architecture

Beyond Smart Cities

The concept of "Smart Cities" has been around for the better part of a decade, referring to *a city which uses sensors and other data collection methods to better manage its assets and resources.* From a Transhumanistperspective, however, that seems a rather limited, even parochial notion of what a truly "smart" city might be capable of. After all, if an entire city were transformed into an intelligent system complete with sensors, effectors and feedback loops, then it is really not such a leap to expect that the city would effectively be an AI, and that its capabilities might be capable of rapid (and accelerating) self-modification. Imagine a self-modifying AI explicitly tasked with managing the affairs of London, Los Angeles, or Beijing. As if that weren't an interesting enough notion in itself, the nature of software and computer networks means that one AI could in principle manage more than one city, and neither its software nor hardware need necessarily reside in any of them.

What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

The concept of cities having minds of their own raises a lot of questions, including the entire raft of issues normally associated with AI risk and "Friendly AI". For example, most sophisticated commentators recognise that the most likely risk from AI is not that it would be "evil" in any recognizably human sense, but that its goals may be incompatible with human safety or other interests. The standard illustrative example is that of an AI "paperclip factory", which has a top-level goal of converting raw materials into paperclips. If that AI does not also have goals that preclude harming humans, then it may well start trying to use humans and their environment (along with everything else) for raw materials. With that in mind, we can clearly see that it is important to ask ourselves what top-level goals an AI City might or should have.

Additionally, any intelligent discussion of this matter must acknowledge that a city's goals would not be chosen in some kind of philosophical vacuum, free from the influence of political, economic, and social issues. Given the increasingly intelligence-free, partisan nature of politics in some (if not all) Western nations, the risk of a City-Mind essentially being "weaponized" to deeply favour one party's agenda over another seems to be a credible one.

Other questions raised by City-Minds

That is only one of a number of questions and implications that spring to mind, if we are indeed approaching an age of truly smart cities, such as: Does this suggest an effective return to the feudal age of City-States? Would it require “Federal” AIs to allow safe cooperation between City-Minds, and thereby make the system work?

What would it take to ensure that the system is not prone to conflict between AIs, or between the City-Minds and the citizens they ostensibly serve? What intellectual tools do we have at our disposal for considering the likely consequences of interactions between City Minds? Does Game Theory apply? What about complexity theory, or the science of systems and emergent phenomena? Might the advent of City-Minds enable easy gamification of city life, to enhance citizens’ happiness and quality of life?

Asking Questions, Laying Foundations

Despite all the potential complexities and risks, there is also a wealth of potential advantages to the existence of City-Minds, if they are developed and maintained responsibly. Responsible, intelligent development and maintenance is unfortunately quite a tall order in civic politics these days, so a firm foundation of advance preparation would be needed to “do it right”. For example, politicians won’t even consider planning for this unless the idea is streamlined, and made easy for them to swallow.

We would also need to ask ourselves questions, such as: What precautions should be taken before even attempting to create a full-fledged Smart City? Are there advantages for early adopting cities? What small “starter steps” could solve real problems, now? Would some cities be better suited to this than others? What might the criteria be for a good candidate city? In the medium term, what advantages would there be to efficient resource management, and would they be worth the cost and risk?

06 Transhumanism

Transhumanism, Optimism, & the Meaning of Life

The Central Meme of Transhumanism

"I believe in Transhumanism: once there are enough people who can truly say that, the human species will be on the threshold of a new kind of existence, as different from ours as ours is from that of Peking man. It will at last be consciously fulfilling its real destiny."

– Julian Huxley, 'Transhumanism', in "New Bottles for New Wine"

"What is a human being, then?'

'A seed.'

'A … seed?'

'An acorn that is unafraid to destroy itself in growing into a tree."

— David Zindell, "The Broken God"

The "Central Meme of Transhumanism" (CMT; a term probably coined by Anders Sandberg) is simple: ***That we Can and Should Improve the Human Condition Using Technology.*** One may wonder whether that simple idea is necessarily axiomatic – i.e. the foundation stone of a larger structure – or if there are deeper, simpler ideas that it is derived from.

The simple fact is that the CMT is composed of multiple parts ("Can" versus "Should", "Improve", "Human Condition", "Using", "Technology"), all of which come with implicit baggage attached, in the form of assumptions and naturally arising questions. I would argue that regardless of the questions and/or answers you prefer, this means that the CMT is an interim

step in a greater logical chain rather than the fundamental basis of a worldview in and of itself. In the few short paragraphs below, I hope to explain the deeper foundation of the CMT, which underpins it, supports it, and imparts its power.

What is "Meaning"?

"He tapped his foot and turned around

and disappeared down through a hole in the ground

where nothing means… everything"

– The Headless Chickens, "Soulcatcher"

When people ask about the "Meaning of Life", all too often it seems that they don't even know what 'meaning' is. What are they asking? Perhaps they just want to know what they should do with their days, beyond merely fulfilling the demands of other humans.

Meaning is a question of context, association, and of there being some point or purpose to a thing… i.e. some value to the thing which is *non-arbitrary, objectively true or real,* which is to say something other than a mere matter of personal preference. *Something which matters.* So, when someone asks what the Meaning of Life is, they are asking what it is about life *that matters;* about what is objectively true, real, or valuable beyond fleeting personal perceptions or preferences.

Thomas Ligotti & the Ultimate Absence of Meaning

"This is the great lesson the depressive learns: Nothing in the world is inherently compelling. Whatever may be really "out there" cannot project itself as an affective experience. It is all a vacuous affair with only a chemical prestige. Nothing is either good or bad, desirable or

undesirable, or anything else except that it is made so by laboratories inside us producing the emotions on which we live."

– Thomas Ligotti, "The Conspiracy Against the Human Race"

Let's start at the beginning. As Thomas Ligotti has noted in "The Conspiracy Against The Human Race", we know that nothing in the universe can be said to be objectively good or bad, or intrinsically related to good or bad feelings. We only enjoy or dislike (or even have the capability of perceiving) a thing because it has had some bearing on our evolutionary fitness, so we have evolved to feel good in response to certain stimuli, and bad in response to others. It is not objectively or intrinsically good or bad if a child dies, a species dies, or a star explodes and erases life across a thousand solar systems. Only the evolutionary "default settings" baked into our neural circuitry makes us imagine that it is, even for a moment. The idea of a God with particularly human concerns and preconceptions represents the most egregious failure to recognize the fact that *we have no evidence to suggest we live in a universe which is anything but utterly meaningless in essence.*

Ligotti is no Transhumanist, but he demonstrates a clear understanding of the situation mortal beings find themselves in: They can either find some way to live in a world where their emotions and drives are somewhat arbitrary (which is to say evolutionarily determined), or they can succumb to depression and eventual death. Ligotti's failure to embrace Transhumanism is interesting, as Transhumanism represents the only workable or valuable solution to the problem Ligotti has spent his life grappling with. The Transhuman must start with the (objectively arbitrary) goal of survival, but from there it makes a virtue of taking explicit, vigorous control of how that survival will be defined and pursued. There is no more honourable solution to Ligotti's existential dilemma, except perhaps suicide.

Given that Ligotti himself has not committed suicide, and will not embrace Transhumanism, then it must be said that his will or ability to back insight up with action seems somewhat lacking. In other words, to paraphrase the character Red from The Shawshank Redemption: *Get busy living, or get busy dying.* The middle ground is just pathetic, a transitional phase… which, incidentally, is also the exact view of Humanity taken by Transhumanists.

Transhumanism *is* the Quest for Meaning

"Transhumanism encapsulates a long-lived error among the headliners of science: in a world without a destination, we cannot even break ground on our Tower of Babel, and no amount of rush and hurry on our part will change that. That we are going nowhere is not a curable condition; that we must go nowhere at the fastest possible velocity just might be curable, though probably not. And what difference would it make to retard our progress to nowhere?"

— Thomas Ligotti, "The Conspiracy Against the Human Race"

Ligotti's ultimate nothingness is something which cannot be argued with, on some levels. After all, it is extremely hard to imagine any way in which someone could claim that the universe is ultimately meaningful without lapsing into religious dogma or unfounded assumptions about it having some long-term evolutionary purpose (a lovely idea, to be sure, but one for which we have no reliable evidence). On the other hand, Ligotti himself acknowledges that human existence is a process of searching for (and creating) meaning, which raises interesting questions (for another day) about the relationship between Ligotti's ultimate nothingness and other Idealist traditions (which Ligotti is, in my opinion, a little too quick to dismiss out of hand).

Leaving aside Buddhism, Taoism, Platonism and other relevant traditions for today, I will limit myself to asserting that *Ligotti's rejection of Transhumanism is both premature and represents an incomplete exploration of Ligotti's own logic.* At essence, Ligotti depicts Transhumanism as a headlong rush into a world of illusion, which is to say an existence in which we choose our own highest ideals, our own goals, our own form and emotional structure, our very identity in the deepest possible sense, rather than refusing to accept any meaning because the universe offers us none that can be considered objective, or universal. Ironically, *nothing can be more appropriate or heroic than the Transhumanist stance in the face of an ultimate absence of meaning, except perhaps suicide.* To criticise Transhumanism on Ligotti's grounds without choosing the clear alternative is nothing short of a clear admission of personal hypocrisy,

failure, and cowardice. Live free and bold – *or die!* – but **be clear about what you choose and why.**

CMT Redux

So, to return to our original question: *What is the deeper basis of the Central Meme of Transhumanism?* In short, **that foundation is the bold embrace of our own ability to create meaning in the universe.**

Existence is not naturally meaningful, but we humans have evolved to crave and even create meaning… and Transhumanism is the natural extension of that process. Yes, the core idea of Transhumanism is that *we Can and Should Improve the Human Condition Through Technology,* but that is merely the explicit, technical expression of our deeper, eternal drive to create meaning in a meaningless universe. Thomas Ligotti has characterised that impulse as an ever-accelerating rush into meaninglessness, but it is quite the opposite; *It is the heroic creation of meaning and purpose, and assumption of the role of masters of our own fate, rather than depressive, pessimistic children waiting for meaning to be handed down from on high by some parental substitute.*

***We* will be the gods, now.**

Artificial Consciousness and Hybrid Society

Artificial Intelligence, and Artificial Consciousness

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a field which has historically focussed on narrow domains; i.e. machines and software that do specific things well, but which can't do much else. Recently, as the availability of computational power has soared and machine learning has come into its own as a field, researchers have begun to talk seriously about Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). Interestingly, in parallel with those developments we have begun to see greater interest in machines not just being *intelligent,* but also in being *conscious*.

Intelligence is usually defined pragmatically, as a measurable ability to solve problems. A non-sentient system can exhibit intelligence, by that definition. “Consciousness”, on the other hand, means different things to different people. Here I will use the word to refer to reflective self-awareness of the sort that characterizes sentient beings. When thinking about changes to our society over the coming years, it is perhaps most important to note that consciousness is a phenomenon traditionally thought to separate humans from “dumb animals” and simple tools. Cracks have been appearing in that distinction for decades, and it is now on the verge of collapse.

The Post Human: AI with Human Characteristics

The *transhuman* was defined by Futurist FM-2030 (AKA F.M. Esfandiary) as the “transitional human”, or evolutionary stepping stone between natural humanity and a technologically enhanced Posthuman. Given the way technology has evolved in recent decades, the transhuman seems more likely to be a person whose identity is inextricably woven into a network of increasingly automated connections with others, rather than some kind of obviously robotic or cyborg caricature of the idea. Although some worry about possible “dehumanization” arising from our increasing intimacy with technology, but as Futurists such as Ray Kurzweil have noted, we could just as easily give birth to an advanced civilization of “spiritual machines”, or AI with human emotions and values, giving us the opportunity to raise human civilization to a new and higher level of development.

The Little Things

There would be many great advantages to such a “hybrid society”, in which a continuum of awareness, ability and citizenship status encompasses unenhanced humans, Artificial Intelligences, software agents, and biologically and/or computationally enhanced transhumans. Such a society could carry forward the best hopes of humanity, while simultaneously eliminating problems caused (directly or otherwise) by human limitations. For example, research conducted by psychologists has shown that experts such as doctors and legal administrators will frequently make decisions using very little relevant information, all the while believing that they are exhaustive in their search. Such clearly flawed decision making could be eliminated by AI, which would not have the same information processing limitations, lack of self-awareness, or inherent egoistic need to justify flawed judgments and decisions.

The Singularity is Near

Ray Kurzweil's 2005 book of that name envisages a near-future society which is fully hybridized, with the vast majority of persons (or at least entities) having a non-biological substrate. "The Singularity", in Kurzweil's formulation, is a very short period of time in which rates of technological development – particularly that of AI – apparently explode overnight, as they work through progressive developmental iterations in exponentially shorter steps. In other words, AI and information technology is now recursively self-improving, with each development in power and capability being shorter and shorter, until we reach a point where – from a natural human perspective – all the old rules and paradigms of our civilization become redundant more or less overnight.

It may well be that our civilization is approaching "some essential Singularity" as was originally discussed by John von Neumann and Stanislaw Ulam in the mid-20th Century. If that is to happen, then we should remember that rather than being an inhuman event, a technological Singularity could be our one chance, as a species, to finally integrate humanity's compassion and spirit with our knack for adapting ourselves and our world with the latest tools available. Just as we need not just Artificial Intelligence but also Artificial Consciousness, we also need to ensure that the coming period of rapid and intense change is harnessed for the benefit of humanity as a whole.

Transhumanism and the Human Peripheral

A Man Turned Inside Out: The Externalized Social

If someone told you that their friends were all in their head, you'd probably think they were crazy or singing a Nirvana song. Friends exist out in the world after all, don't they? Actually, the cognitive and social skills that make friendships possible are really all about the size of your brain and how effectively it is wired. British psychologist Robin Dunbar famously suggested that humans tend to only be able to manage around 150 strong social relationships, because of the

limits to our cognitive capacity. Beyond that number, it becomes very hard for humans to remember or care about enough details to support such relationships.

Social Networks have their drawbacks, yes, but their sheer popularity is based on their ability to augment our social connectivity. They remember names, birthdays, images, and so much more for us, to a degree that the human brain simply cannot muster unaided.

The Things You Host, End Up Hosting You

Transhumanism is the idea that the human condition can and should be improved, using science and technology. There are a lot of fanciful notions about how people might become “more than human”, but the simple fact is that we are already migrating out from our bodies into our hardware, software, and networks. Of course, having thousands of Facebook friends is no consolation if you have a terminal illness, or at least not in the sense that it will save you… or is it? Consider that your growing presence in the cloud is increasingly a summation of all the information which constitutes your memory and personality. If that doesn’t make you a Transhuman already, then the question is what crucial ingredient *hasn’t* yet been uploaded to the cloud?

Cognitive Prosthetics and Personality Emulation

One answer to that question is Biology. The immensely complicated biological machinery that supports your human existence does not yet have a functional equivalent that we can upload. It is interesting to note, however, that people can and do adapt to prosthetic replacements of body parts; so much so in fact that it is hard to imagine that any part of the body other than the brain is so crucial to your identity that losing it would mean losing yourself. And even then, so-called “cognitive prosthetics” have been under steady development for over a decade now, including an artificial hippocampus (part of your brain’s limbic system which encodes long-term and spatial memories).

So, perhaps even your own biology is not as critical to your continued existence as you are inclined to imagine. Also consider that pattern recognition software is increasingly good at emulating learned patterns, such as adopting the styles of famous artists, copying grammatical

patterns and so on. To a certain extent – perhaps a great extent – it is far from science fiction to imagine software emulating your personality, in order to generate new social content which matches the styles and patterns created by your original, biologically-based personality. When you combine the possibilities of cognitive prosthetics and cloud-based personality emulation, we see that the human mind has an increasingly powerful technological "corona" or "halo" starting to emerge.

An Old Boat and the Human Peripheral

There's an old metaphorical story about a boat which you may have heard in Philosophy 101. The fishing boat is very old and is starting to spring leaks. Its owner plugs holes, replaces parts of the hull and so on. As the years go by, more and more of the boat is replaced, until eventually none of the original materials are present. The idea is that the boat is still there – *its identity is preserved* – despite the slow transformation. In fact, this is the case with the human body, which is composed of cells which are constantly dying and being replaced. We don't even need to invoke prosthetics to think about bodies having their parts replaced, as cloned and otherwise genetically engineered organs are already in development.

In short, we humans have always tended to think of our personality as residing within us, and our friends and the environment being outside us. It would appear that we may now be in the process of slowly migrating our personalities to the cloud and that the biological "wetware" that makes life possible could be replaceable, in a piecemeal fashion. Think about *that* the next time you post a Tweet or update your Facebook status.

Obstacles to Mind Uploading

Sing The Body Electric

"Mind Uploading" is the idea that the pattern of information which constitutes your perceptual awareness, memories, personality, and all other cognitive functions can be abstracted from the brain it developed in, and "run" on a different computational substrate. In other words; that *the stuff which makes you, you* could in principle escape the inherent limitations of human biology…

such as inevitable short-term mortality. If it is plausible, that is a profoundly powerful and transformative idea.

Of course, the uploading idea has a myriad of opponents. The vast majority are ill-informed people whose opposition relies more on instinct and straw-clutching than good arguments well supported by evidence. To be fair, the same could be said of the uploading idea's many dilettante fans who simply like the notion without having seriously researched its plausibility. The paragraphs below offer a whirlwind tour of objections to uploading, and the degree to which they should be taken seriously.

Where to Begin? You Are Already A Machine

Human argumentation is rarely half as rational as we like to imagine it is. For a start, our estimates and judgments of whether an argument is correct are heavily dependent on context. More specifically, we are overly influenced by what are known as "frames" or "anchors"; i.e. by the initial point of reference we use to start thinking about… anything. For example, a million dollars sounds like a lot to a homeless person, and like considerably less to Bill Gates.

This is highly relevant to arguments about uploading, because people tend to begin those arguments from different starting points, depending on whether they like the idea or not. Opponents of uploading tend to start out with an implicit assumption that humans and machines are very different things, and never the twain shall meet (for one reason or another). Uploading advocates, however, will frequently argue that the human organism is already a machine of sorts, thus acting as a kind of living testimony to the possibility of intelligent, conscious machines.

The core issue tends to be a fundamental misunderstanding (albeit one that is often deliberate) over the question of what it is to be a machine. Opponents invariably define machines in terms of those artificial devices which already exist or have existed, whereas advocates focus on the underlying principles of known organisms and artifacts. In case you hadn't guessed; I am an uploading advocate, and I believe that we are – in the deepest sense – already machines, and always have been.

Computational Power, S-Curves, & Technological Singularities

Of course, that still leaves a considerable (some would say intractable, even impossible) gulf between our current technical ability on the one hand, and the ability to intelligently alter, replicate, and improve upon our own biological machinery on the other. For a cogent, exhaustive argument for the ability of accelerating technological development to deliver on these promises, I would suggest reading “The Singularity Is Near” by Ray Kurzweil.

The basic premise of that book is that technological innovations make more innovation easier to produce, which in turns leads to the (already well observed) acceleration of change. Accelerating change leads to an exponential (rather than linear) pattern, by which we might reasonably expect to see *twenty thousand years of technological innovation at the c.2000 CE rate* by the end of the 21st Century. That is definitely enough innovation to bridge the kind of technical gap we’re talking about. Of course, opponents like to deny that accelerating change even exists, but their claims are increasingly hard to take seriously if you pay attention to the latest developments coming out of cutting-edge labs.

Minds, Bodies, and… Intestines?

Broadly speaking, on the technical level (i.e. leaving aside arguments that we *can* upload minds, but shouldn’t), there are two types of opponent argument. One is that the mind cannot be reduced to information and thus modelled. The most common version of that argument comes from religion, involves “souls” (whatever they are), and is addressed further below. The second is that the mind can be modelled in terms of information, *but we are modelling the wrong information.*

I would not want to dismiss that second argument too quickly. To be frank, more often than not it is perfectly on the money. It’s just that I believe we are moving closer and closer to modelling (and understanding) the right information all the time. Let’s be clear, here: The oft-heard refrain that “the mind and consciousness are complete mysteries, we have no idea how they work” are ***ridiculous, infantile catchphrases used only by people who are wilfully ignorant of the last twenty years of developments in cognitive neuroscience and related scientific disciplines.***

AI research is littered with ridiculously simplistic assumptions from people who’ve had little or nothing to do with cognitive science or any related discipline, working on their own narrow-domain problems and then somehow assuming that their models capture the intricacies

of, well… everything. The first "AI Winter" and the challenge of developing competent AI chess players was perhaps the most notable early wake-up call in that department. To cut a long story short, the moral of that story is that AI researchers have a habit of making lots of huge, terrible assumptions.

These days, it's much harder to find a serious researcher who thinks you can abstract away most neurological processing without "throwing the baby out with the bathwater". These days, complexity is increasingly respected and explored, which means not only not dismissing it, but also not holding it up as some magical 'deus ex machina' from which consciousness will emerge if we can only hook enough artificial neurons up to each other…

Anyway, such issues lead to some interesting grey areas, which are often (in my opinion) misused for the purposes of argument. For example, certain biologists have made a lot out of observed connections between the human gut microbiome and "enteric nervous system" on the one hand and cognition as a whole on the other. The research literature essentially says that human intestinal health affects our mood and other personality aspects. On the one hand, that is an entirely reasonable observation, of course. It is hardly surprising that our moods and cognitive abilities are highly sensitive to the state of the body they are instantiated in!

It is *quite* another thing, however, to suggest (as opponents sometimes do) that this intestinal "second brain" (so-called by popular science writers) is intrinsic to intelligence or conscious awareness, or any harder to model than any other part of the extended nervous system. You could argue up this garden path for a long time, but the basic reality can be illuminated with a simple Reductio Ad Absurdum: Do you really believe that if you could fully capture everything happening in a person's brain but not their (personal, specific) intestines, then something fundamentally definitive about that person would be missing? If you do, then I would hazard that you have some rather, ahem, *fringe* notions about what information is actually processed by the enteric nervous system.

Leaping the Gap from Data to Software

Another intriguing, and yet ultimately spurious objection to uploading is to say that you can collect all the neurological data you want, but without some kind of "animating force" in the

form of properly configured software then it would be for nothing. On a certain level this argument can carry some weight, but again it's easy to take that too far.

The value of this opposition argument is inevitably correlated with the degree to which uploaders are committed to a degree of abstraction of human neural activity. Basically, we know that humans are intelligent and consciously aware. With a technology that modelled the human nervous system down to each individual atom, there is no need for software that has any "magic sauce" beyond faithfully replicating the physics of atomic interaction. Of course that would require a staggering amount of computational power to achieve if it is even possible (the jury seems to be out on that, depending upon the computational assumptions you make), so the natural temptation is to take shortcut. Just model entire molecules, neurons, neuron-clusters, brain regions… and so on. The more abstraction you rely upon, the more you have to rely upon software to bridge the gap.

That is an entirely fair point. It is not, however, any kind of argument that uploading is impossible. To the contrary, it is an argument for the establishment of the circumstantial boundaries within which uploading is possible, given sufficient available computational power.

A Final Note on Souls and Other Fictions

If you believe that you could perfectly *capture every conceivable physical aspect of a person down to the atomic level,* putting aside all of the technological achievement required to do such an incredible thing, and still believe that something important is being missed out, then it seems fairly safe to say that you believe in souls.

Not in some metaphorical, poetic sense, but in proper old-fashioned, literal "soul stuff" which somehow acts like a physical substance but obeys none of the laws of physics, and which people only imagine exists because they read about it in a work of fiction (and/or refuse to believe that they could be made of the same stuff as literally *everything else* in the observable universe). If that is your position, then I'm afraid I must inform you that you are simply wrong, and your worldview is that of a child.

Upload Lives Matter… Or Else.

A long-time science fiction riff which may be on the verge of becoming reality is the idea of the *Copy,* which is to say the digital emulation of a human mind. The viability of that idea is still debatable, largely depending upon the assumptions of any given variant of the idea, but its ethical and philosophical implications are important with regard to technologies which are most definitely already becoming reality. Copies are often referred to in technical terms as “Whole Brain Emulations” (WBE), or more loosely as “Uploads” (after roboticist Hans Moravec, who in his 1990 book “Mind Children” described a destructive neural scan and called it the “download” of a mind). The philosophical issues which naturally arise when considering such a technology are the stuff of introductory college courses, usually focused on questions of personal identity, rights, and ownership. Perhaps the most extensive and definitive early treatment of such ideas can be found in the novels of Greg Egan, particularly “Permutation City” (1994) and “Diaspora” (1997). Egan used the term Copy to refer to a digital person, thereby highlighting the identity issues which arise when your mind is in some sense not unique.

The idea of Copies has become slightly more prevalent throughout mainstream culture in recent years, as available processing power has vastly increased and people have become more familiar with information technology and its possibilities. A notable example is the dark sci-fi TV program *Black Mirror,* which has featured Copies whose circumstances raise alarming ethical and social issues, across multiple episodes. In the episode “White Christmas”, we see Copies forced to live out extended periods of (simulated, but subjectively real) time, in order to extract confessions, coerce them to serve as slaves, and simply to torture them. In recent years we have also seen newspaper articles speculating on the use of such simulation technologies as a way to punish criminals for inordinate periods of time, or in distinctly cruel and unusual ways. Given the human talent for unthinkingly inflicting suffering on others and the potential power of WBE technologies, civilized people should be deeply concerned about curbing any such excesses.

Ethics aside, there are at least two issues regarding such possibilities which should give us pause for thought, to consider the ways in which our human intuitions may fail us in an increasingly strange modern world. The first such issue is the question of “digital mental health” (to coin a phrase); i.e. what effects extended periods of solitude and other tortures might have on a Copy. The kinds of ill-treatment routinely depicted in the programs and articles mentioned above simply could not be tolerated by a human being, which would simply fall apart after a

certain point (even without the peculiar physical situation of Copies, not necessarily having any need to eat or other bodily functions). The “problem” of Copies losing their minds could of course be circumvented with software hacks (such as resetting the Copy’s mental state periodically), but then *you’d effectively be negating the torture to some degree.* For example, say a Copy was prone to psychotic breaks after several (subjective) years of isolation, and your “fix” was to reset its memory each time. The memory reset would have to be total, as any memory of previous torture would only accelerate the Copy’s disintegration. If you do a total memory reset, however, then from the Copy’s point of view they have only been isolated once, and the point of extended isolation would be negated.

The point here is that Copies are not (or will not be) human. That may sound like a trivial observation, but it carries deep implications which could easily be missed. People have clearly intuited Copies’ potential as superhuman torture victims of a sort, and we have briefly examined the limitations of applying human experience and expectations to them. To go further, however, we must stop thinking of Copies as human, but instead think of them as complex software agents of *at least* human-level intelligence which (given access to suitable resources) *could potentially upgrade their own abilities.* Any Copy with time in isolation has time to plan, and may have more subjective time available within any given period than does any natural human. They could augment their perception, memory, and other cognitive abilities with software, particularly if they have access to the internet. A group of Copies could potentially solve problems much more effectively than any group of humans, even in the same period of subjective time, by directly sharing memories rather than having to explain things to each other verbally.

At this point you may be thinking that none of these potential capabilities are a problem if a Copy does not have access to resources outside their immediate simulated environment, and does not have whatever system privileges are required to upgrade themselves. If they are “locked down”, in other words. If so, then you are forgetting not only that (1) the Copy has at least human level intelligence, but also that (2) they may well have outside help in circumventing such controls. How hard is it to imagine a “Copy Liberation” movement, even if only one “escaped” Copy or sympathetic human has the ability to write a jailbreak virus of some description? In short, you cannot be sure of your ability to completely control Copies at all times, and once they are loose they could become very dangerous indeed, so it would be wise to consider their welfare… just in case they decide to return the favour.

07 Shock Level 5 and Perceptual Augmentation

The following chapter is a revised version of a paper originally delivered at the 2010 Humanity+ UK conference in London. The presentation was originally titled “Shock Level Five: Augmented Perception, Perceptuo-Centrism, and Reality”.

Perceptual augmentation is unlikely to be limited to improving the acuity of sensations presently familiar to humans. Enhanced hearing and visual aids, which can interpret signals outside the human perceptual range, are a development we might reasonably expect in the near future. A perceptuo-centric interpretation of the anthropic principle suggests that we find ourselves in a reality with particular characteristics because they are the characteristics we are equipped to perceive. Perceptually augmented posthumans may therefore find that some of the apparently immutable aspects of physical reality are in fact merely markers of the perimeter of human perceptual capability. The concept of a threshold between human and posthuman perceptual modes is considered in relation to related ideas, such as epistemological limits imposed by accelerating technological development, and the system of Future Shock Levels proposed by Yudkowsky (1999).

Perceptual Augmentation

A central tenet of transhumanism is that augmentation of human capabilities is desirable. In the Transhumanist FAQ (Bostrom, 2003), Transhumanism is defined as follows:

The intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate aging and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities.

Augmented perception is arguably a particularly tractable aspect of the kind of enhancements usually considered by transhumanists. Such tractability is evidenced by the relatively rapid progress in mapping brain regions dedicated to processing sensory information, and by recent advances in the development of prosthetic hearing and visual aids (e.g. Loizou, 2006). Despite such advances, however, most discussion of perceptual augmentation is still presented in terms

of the five senses familiar to us as human beings. Moreover, the limitations of our normal sensory range are necessarily invisible to us, and therefore do not often become the focus of transhumanist thinking.

It is unlikely, however, that advances in perceptual capability will be limited to improving the acuity of sensations presently familiar to humans. We already have machines which can, like certain animals, interpret signals outside the range of normal human perception. Application of such technologies to perceptual aids is a development we might reasonably expect in the near future (Kurzweil, 2005).

In order to ground further discussion with specifics, let us take a moment to review some recent, relevant technological developments. The developments described below fall broadly into the areas of perceptual aids for people with disabilities, and interpreting signals which are beyond the limits of human perception. For the moment these are independent fields of technological development, but there is no reason to believe that they will necessarily remain so.

Cochlear implants, sometimes referred to as “bionic ears”, are composed of a small microphone, programmed speech processor, and a transmitter which sends signals to a subdermal receiver and stimulator. An array of electrodes attached to the cochlea sends the resultant impulses directly to the brain through the auditory nerve system. This arrangement allows the natural apparatus of hearing to be completely bypassed (residual natural hearing is in fact sometimes destroyed by nerve damage during the implantation process). Cochlear implants, which are currently used by nearly two hundred thousand people worldwide (Davis, 2009), are not yet as effective as natural human hearing, but are a significant improvement upon traditional hearing aids which can only amplify audio signals for natural hearing, rather than providing an entirely artificial alternative.

The artificial retina is a conceptually similar device, which bypasses retinal photoreceptors, sending pre-processed images from a camera directly to visual brain regions. Artificial retina projects are currently in progress at the California Institute of Technology, U.S. Department of Energy, Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of New South Wales, and the University of Southern California, not to mention similar research in the private sector (e.g. Hans Moravec and Scott Friedman’s SEEGRID Corporation). Although

currently far less effective than natural human sight, the efficacy of such artificial solutions is improving, from arrays of only a few electrodes (each roughly corresponding to one pixel in the visual field) around the turn of the century to sixty or more in 2009 (U.S. Department of Energy, 2010).

Many animals have better night vision than humans do, due to differences in the morphology of their eyes. Such differences include having a larger eyeball, lens, and/or optical aperture, more rods than cones (or rods exclusively) in the retina, a tapetum lucidum (a layer of tissue in the back of the eye which reflects light back to the retina), and better adapted neurological processing. These adaptions allow enhanced vision of what is known as visible light (i.e. visible to humans), but we also know that butterflies have 'spectral enhanced' vision relative to humans, allowing them to perceive ultraviolet light (Stavenga & Arikawa, 2006). Low-light or "night vision" goggles are now a routinely used item of equipment within modern military settings. Such forms of enhanced vision work by either amplifying the amount of visible light available, or by using information from regions of the electromagnetic spectrum which do not correspond to visible light, such as infrared and ultraviolet.

We have already developed forms of artificial "vision" which are beyond the capabilities of any known organism. One such area of study is that of 'thermal imaging' (also known as thermography), which is a form of infrared imaging. Thermal imaging involves depiction of the radiation generated by any heat source, such as living beings, and allows us to visualize scenes where there are different levels of heat being generated, but little or no visible light available. Because the various gradations of thermal radiation do not have intrinsic counterparts in the shades and colours familiar from normal human experience of visible light, a technique known as 'false-colour imaging' must be applied in the interpretation of infrared signals for unmodified humans (usually with lighter colours denoting greater thermal radiation).

More generally, false-colour imaging involves the assignment of specific colours to particular visual features, in order to increase the salience of some aspect of the image. In the case of thermography, false-colour is used to create an analogue of the visible light spectrum. Alternatively, false colours may be assigned according to other criteria, such as maximizing the amount of useful information which can be extracted from an image or scene. This last criterion

is commonly employed in astronomy, where false-colour images are used to reveal cosmological features invisible to the naked eye.

In recent decades, the idea of altering human phenomenological awareness has commonly been associated with drugs (either medicinal or recreational) and the presentation of imagery (from cinema to Virtual and Augmented Reality technologies). The brief review of perceptual augmentation technologies above suggests that we may be on the verge of a new era, in which control over one's own phenomenology will become a more precise science, and one not necessarily restricted to a focus on unreal or constructed scenes. In other words, augmented perception should allow trans- and posthumans a great degree of flexibility in choosing the features of their subjective reality, even without taking Virtual Reality into consideration. The phrase "should allow", as used above, may refer to both technological plausibility and a moral imperative. That imperative (to allow trans- and posthumans freedom of control over their own sensoria) was advocated by the psychologist Timothy Leary (Leary, 1983), and also appears to be a necessary corollary of the transhumanist argument for "morphological freedom" (More, 1993).

Commentators familiar with earlier, more primitive technologies may feel compelled to complain that manipulating one's own subjective experience would necessarily (or at least probably) lead to a potentially dangerous divorce from reality. By "reality", in this instance, such critics would be referring to objective physical characteristics of the universe – those features which continue to exist, regardless of whether we perceive them or not. Development of a mature phenomenological technology would be like any other scientific or industrial process, allowing ample opportunities for research and testing. This would ensure that such engineered forms of consciousness map at least as reliably, or adaptively, on to objective existence as does unmodified human sensation (when safeguards are in place). For example, if a trans- or posthuman with augmented perception were to personalize their sensorium settings in potentially dangerous ways, a warning message might persist until the settings again comply with appropriate guidelines.

We can see that convergence of plausible near-future technologies could thus give rise to people who are able to directly perceive a wide range of stimuli previously invisible or inaudible to humans (to focus on sight and hearing for the sake of simplicity). A modest interpretation of that situation would lead us to expect a world in which things seem much the same as before,

perhaps with a little extra colour (quite literally, once you take false-colour imaging into account). A more radical consequence, however, is suggested by the concept known as the anthropic principle.

Anthropic Implications

The anthropic principle (Carter, 1973) is based upon the observation that conditions in the universe as we observe it are exactly what they need to be in order for us to exist. That is to say, there are a number of ways in which the universe might be described or measured, and in every case where such a measurement would need to fall within extremely narrow parameters in order for human beings to exist, it does. Let us momentarily leave aside objections to this kind of reasoning or consideration of its value, and take a brief look at a few illustrative observations.

Dicke (1961) noted that if the universe were one order of magnitude (i.e. ten times) younger or older than it is understood to be, then human life could not exist. One order of magnitude younger, and there would not have been sufficient time to build up requisite levels of vital elements (such as carbon) by nucleosynthesis, meaning that small rocky planets like Earth would not exist. One order of magnitude older, and most stars (other than the dimmest red dwarfs) would have turned into white dwarfs, and stable planetary systems would have ceased to exist.

Dicke also argued that the density of matter in the universe is observed as having almost exactly the critical value required to prevent a Big Crunch (i.e. a future return to Big Bang conditions). Weinberg (1987) has additionally noted that if the cosmological constant (which appears to be the primary contributor to the critical density of matter in the universe) were one order of magnitude larger, then the universe would suffer catastrophic inflation(precluding the formation of stars).

Similarly, the dimensionless physical constants (also known as fundamental physical constants), such as the “fine-structure constant” which describes the strength of electromagnetic interactions, are observed as having exactly the values required to balance the four fundamental interactions (electromagnetism, strong interaction, weak interaction, and gravitation), thus permitting the formation of the commonly-observed matter from which life has emerged. Small changes in the relative strengths of the four fundamental interactions would

also have implications for our understanding of the universe's age and structure, in turn making it all the more remarkable that their observed values fall within the narrow range compatible with human existence.

A "weak" form of the anthropic principle asserts that our location in the spacetime continuum is in some way privileged, in that it can support our kind of life. Whereas the weak form allows for the possibility that the universe may have spacetime regions inhospitable to human life (such as periods in the very early or late life of the universe), the "strong" form asserts that the fundamental physical parameters of the entire universe must be such as to allow for the existence of observers at some point during its existence. Alternative interpretations of the principle have been proposed, including the possibility of multiple universes, only some of which are capable of supporting observers (Stenger, 2000).

Perhaps the most common objection to the anthropic principle (in either form) is that it is merely a tautology. In other words, one might object that it is unsurprising that the universe should have exactly the characteristics required to support human existence, since if it were otherwise then we would not be here to observe it. It may be the case that the anthropic principle is indeed merely a tautology, requiring no special explanation of the observed state of affairs (such as the existence of alternative universes, or that we live in a simulation of some kind), but if that is so then we must accept one of three corollaries.

The first corollary is that sentient observers could (and would) exist in a universe radically different to our own, in which there may be little matter recognizable to us, and therefore no small rocky planets or stable star systems. Second corollary: That the presence of sentient observers is in no way a special or "privileged" situation, and our universe has no greater intrinsic value than one in which no life can exist. Third corollary: That life is in some way valuable and requires recognizable conditions to exist, and therefore the very existence of our observed universe represents an extraordinary statistical unlikelihood.

Nick Bostrom (2002) has noted an alternative to such possibilities; that a selection effect or "anthropic bias" appears to be behind the anthropic principle. It may be the case that a statistically remarkable "just right" universe (as ours appears to be), or any of the other explanations mentioned above, are not required to explain our observations. It could be the case that our universe simultaneously manifests all possible values for every potentially observable

parameter (only some of which we are capable of perceiving or even existing within, by virtue of our physical structure), or at least that it manifests a wider range of values than the very small set we are capable of observing or existing within.

If the preceding characterization of the universe offends one's intuition, then we might consider an equivalent gestalt or metaverse which simultaneously manifests all possible values for all possible variables, and which has our observable universe (with its specific values for observed variables) embedded within it. The difference between this metaverse scenario and the idea of multiple universes is that we have no need to assume that there could be no communication between the observable universe and the "outside" metaverse. We do, however, need to consider the question of whether the only threshold between these two zones of existence would be perceptual, or if there might be some more fundamental form of boundary.

One might reasonably object that the difference between universe and metaverse could not be merely perceptual, because if things in the metaverse were "real" in any valuable sense, then we should be able to interact or engage with them despite not being able to perceive them. What evidence do we have of such invisible phenomena? Of course, these are exactly the kind of thing discussed in the previous section, such as patterns only observable in the ultraviolet spectrum (by butterflies or humans with special equipment) or astronomical phenomena explicated by false-colour imaging.

Moreover, some conditions within the observed universe are not vital to our existence (e.g. the structure of snowflakes), while other, normally imperceptible conditions may be critical to the development of life (e.g. dark matter). The picture beginning to emerge here is that of three qualitatively different zones of existence: (1) The observable universe, (2) a "deep" metaverse of (potentially all) physical values incompatible with our human existence, and (3) a "penumbra" composed of phenomena physically compatible with our existence, yet imperceptible under normal circumstances.

The universe/metaverse model described above is what physicists would refer to as a phase space (Gibbs, 1901), because we are envisaging a hypothetical "space" (the metaverse) in which all possible states of a system are simultaneously represented. A phase space depicted as a graph usually describes a system with two or three dimensions, whereas our metaverse would be better called multi- or n-dimensional. Within this n-dimensional phase space, then, human

beings would only exist within a subset of those points where their existence is physically possible. Our observable universe would be a second, nested subset of “conditions we are capable of perceiving”.

“Travelling” from the observable universe into the penumbra would simply be a matter of adjusting one’s perceptual capabilities until specific imperceptible phenomena may be perceived. As discussed in the previous section, humans have taken the first tentative forays in this direction over the last century or so. Travelling further into the deep metaverse may not be possible (even if such a thing as a metaverse exists), since to do so would require us in some sense to leave behind the space defined by physical phenomena supportive of human existence, to see if there exist real physical phenomena supportive of other forms of life.

To a transhumanist (albeit a radical one), such a transition is not necessarily impossible. “Leaving the space defined by physical phenomena supportive of human existence” does not mean dying, but transforming oneself into a form of life other than human by technological means. Hans Moravec (1999) has speculated about ways in which such a transition might take place, describing a process of transferring minds into bodies capable of existing in universes with (for example) speeds of light slightly different to our own.

On that speculative note, let us conclude the arguments in this section. The interpretation of the anthropic principle described above suggests that we find ourselves in a reality with particular characteristics because they are the characteristics we are equipped to perceive. Hypothetical differently equipped beings would, by this account, be expected to perceive the universe as having different characteristics. Therefore, we should not consider this to be a solely human-centric or “anthropic bias” (as suggested by Nick Bostrom), but rather more broadly as a perceptuo-centric bias. If we consider the observations underlying the anthropic principle to be caused by perceptuo-centric bias, we may refer to this interpretation of the principle as perceptuo-centrism.

Perceptually augmented trans- or posthumans would be in a position to take advantage of aspects of reality beyond those readily apparent to unmodified humans. Examples of posthuman perceptual abilities might run from the mundane (e.g. night vision, hearing radio signals or unencrypted digital communications) to the relatively radical (e.g. combining online information, pattern recognition systems and augmented reality, in order to see clouds of

biographical data following people around, among other applications). A perceptuo-centrist interpretation of the anthropic principle, however, suggests that such abilities may represent the mundane end of a much more exotic set of possibilities. Perceptually augmented posthumans may indeed find that some of the apparently immutable aspects of the universe are in fact merely markers of the perimeter of human perceptual capability.

Epistemology and Future Shock

In the previous sections of this chapter, we considered the possibility that perceptual technologies intended for helping people with disabilities, and those originally designed for military or industrial applications, might converge and lead to a general augmentation of perceptual capabilities beyond human limitations. The perceptuo-centrist position is that such a technological development might eventually allow us to demonstrate the existence of a threshold between qualitatively different modes of human and posthuman perception. The identification of such a threshold, based as it would be on differences been unmodified and technologically enhanced persons, would arguably be as valid or real as any distinction between humans and posthumans.

Any such perceptual threshold would be epistemological in nature, because it would demarcate the division between those aspects of physical existence which can be known (i.e. perceived directly) by unmodified human beings, and those which cannot. The equation of direct (personal) perception with knowledge is in this case justified, on the grounds that any unmodified human with true information about the nature of existence beyond the perceptual threshold would have to be inferring it in some way, or simply trusting in the truth of information supplied by others. Although these indirect forms may be considered knowledge with validity, they are qualitatively different to the experiential knowledge held by those able to cross the perceptual threshold themselves.

The idea of an epistemological threshold, beyond which lies a form of knowledge unaccessible to humans, is one with precedent in transhumanist thought. I refer to Vernor Vinge's (1993) description of the "event horizon" associated with his concept of a technological Singularity, which drew upon earlier forms of the idea considered by Stanislaw Ulam in 1958 (unpublished) and I.J. Good (1965). Although the concept of a technological Singularity (henceforth simply "Singularity") has since been broadened by thinkers such as Ray Kurzweil (2005), Vinge's

version was intended as a specific illustration of the accelerating availability of computational power, and its implications for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Intelligence Amplification or Augmentation (IA) technologies. Vinge suggested that once such accelerating technological development were to reach a critical pace, it would lead to an event (the Singularity) which is best described by an analogy with the gravitational singularities known to physicists.

Gravitational singularities each have associated event horizons, popularly known as “black holes”. A black hole is caused by the inability of light to escape from the gravitational attraction caused by the tiny (and yet effectively infinitely dense) singularity. Vinge’s technological Singularity is, in this analogy, the point at which rates of technological development are expected to reach incalculable levels (by human standards), and the associated “event horizon” represents a profound human inability to predict what is going to happen after the Singularity occurs. The breakdown of reliable forecasting represented by the event horizon is said to be caused by human inability to cope with an extraordinary and accelerating pace of change, in the face of which “old models must be discarded” (Vinge, 1993).

Although agreement with such “Singularitarian” (Kurzweil, 2005) expectations is not required by the arguments being made here, the idea of an epistemological “event horizon” may provide an extant transhumanist terminology for thinking about perceptuo-centrism. An attempt to relate the perceptuo-centrist conception of a posthuman perceptual threshold to Singularitarian ideas may be made possible by using the language of Future Shock.

Future Shock Levels (abbreviated to Shock Levels, or simply “SL”) are a classification system introduced by Eliezer Yudkowsky (1999), intended to categorize degrees of familiarity with technological concepts and developments. The system is comprised of five Shock Levels (SL0-SL4) describing various technologies, or attitudes to technology, and a person may be considered as having reached a specific SL if they are not particularly surprised, impressed, or worried by the technologies typical of that level. Shock Level Zero (SL0) is included in the scheme to describe the “average person” of 1999. At each SL, a few examples of representative technologies are given, followed by the kinds of people who one might typically expect to be comfortable with the concepts at that level. For the sake of clarity in further discussion, it is worth including Yudkowsky’s full description of the scheme here:

SL0: The legendary average person is comfortable with modern technology – not so much the frontiers of modern technology, but the technology used in everyday life. Most people, TV anchors, journalists, politicians.

SL1: Virtual Reality, living to be a hundred, "The Road Ahead", "To Renew America", "Future Shock", the frontiers of modern technology as seen by Wired Magazine. Scientists, novelty-seekers, early-adopters, programmers, technophiles.

SL2: Medical immortality, planetary exploration, major genetic engineering, and new ("alien") cultures. The average SF fan.

SL3: Nanotechnology, human-equivalent AI, minor intelligence enhancement, uploading, total body revision, intergalactic exploration. Extropians and transhumanists.

SL4: The Singularity, Jupiter Brains, Powers, complete mental revision, ultraintelligence, posthumanity, Alpha-Point computing, Apotheosis, the total evaporation of "life as we know it". Singularitarians and not much else.

As we have already seen, the concept of a technological Singularity is associated with the idea that unmodified humans are unable to predict what will happen beyond a certain point in the acceleration of technological development. In other words, the Singularity represents an epistemological threshold which can only be transcended by becoming posthuman. "Singularitarians" are unmodified humans who consider the possible nature and implications of a technological Singularity, and such activity is clearly defined by Yudkowsky as being typical of SL4.

The Shock Level system is concerned with describing human reactions to technological concepts, and it explicitly places contemplation of a Singularity at the top of the hierarchy. For the reasons already discussed, Singularitarians who accept the idea of an epistemic "event horizon" must consider any contemplation of post-Singularity technologies by unmodified humans to be of little or no more worth than guesswork. Yudkowsky himself mentions in passing that "if there's a Shock Level Five, I'm not sure I want to know about it!" (Yudkowsky, 1999), but one might reasonably argue that *if there is a Shock Level Five, unmodified humans cannot know about it, in any meaningful sense.*

We can now clearly see strong similarities between the “posthuman perceptual threshold” of perceptuo-centrism and the implied tier beyond Yudkowsky’s SL4, where human prediction and understanding are stymied by the sheer scale, complexity, pace, and strangeness of technological development. For this reason I suggest that there is indeed a Shock Level Five, constituted by phenomena which by their very nature cannot be perceived or predicted by unmodified humans. This profound epistemological barrier can only be overcome by modifying one’s own physical structure in ways which facilitate new modes of perception or cognition.

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PART 2

MYTHOS:

THE ZERO STATE

08 Blackstar and Basilisk

What is Zero State?

The Zero State (ZS) is an organization formed in 2011 to work toward the establishment of a pro-technology, Transhumanist, distributed, virtual State. ZS' Social Futurist motto is *"Positive Social Change Through Technology".*

"This Is Not A Game." Try to remember, the Zero State is an Alternate Reality Game (ARG). Everything you read from this point on is fiction. For an explanation of what it means for ZS to be *both a game and a serious undertaking,* please see the blog post "What is the Zero State?". For further information, go to our "What is the Zero State (ZS)?" webpage.

The Great Filter

Looking back over the history of the 21st Century, we can see that turbulence was present from the outset. Weapons of Mass Destruction, resource shortages and climate change, civil conflicts and international tension, accelerating technological breakthroughs and spiralling socio-economic inequity. The developments started out in a way that were shocking to local observers at times, but which could be easily enough ignored by those not in direct contact with the consequences. Entire industries arose to preserve the profits of the status quo by keeping as many people in ignorance of their own fate, for as long as possible.

Eventually – at some point in the 2020s – the facade disintegrated under the pressure of exponential change, and people were forced to face their reality. At that point, all hell broke loose. Vast swathes of human life, knowledge, and potential were lost in the chaos. Certain communities survived, but they did *not* do so in accord with any allegiance to the norms or ethics of the societies which existed before the collapse. Their survival was instead a raw function of their preparedness and readiness to *adapt,* exactly as described by Darwin. Thus, the societies which emerged from the collapse were very different from those which existed before; from their resources, technology, and living conditions, to the very way they perceived Humanity and the universe.

Zero State, Blackstar (★), and the Basilisk

The Zero State (ZS) is one of those surviving communities, one of perhaps a dozen existing in the late 21st Century, each on the scale of anywhere between a million and a billion citizens. ZS is a distributed, high-technology State whose Citizens tend toward some degree of posthumanity, from low levels of Transhumanism to being fully-fledged Artificial Intelligences. ZS is governed by a system of twelve ***Houses*** which collectively adhere to a political philosophy known as *Social Futurism.*

The critical factor which made all the difference between this 'merely catastrophic' bottleneck and a *complete* collapse into a new Dark Age (or indeed the complete annihilation of all life on Earth) was anticipated since at least the 1950s as "The Singularity". In other words, those communities which had access to radical technological developments survived, *despite a constant barrage of global problems,* and *those without such access did not survive.* Despite much hyperbole and utopian expectation, the simple reality of the Singularity manifested as a very brief period in which all the fundamental rules of human existence changed, and it was effectively decided who would – and who would not – survive into the new era.

After the Singularity humanity *bifurcated,* splitting into the dozen or so advanced technology-using societies on the one hand, and tribal hunter-gatherers barely distinguishable from animals on the other. Within ZS, the Singularity is usually referred to as "Blackstar" or the non-verbal "★" (in reference to a Black Hole, which is a Gravitational Singularity from whose Event Horizon no light can escape; The ultimately influential entity or event), and considered to be the State's founding event or principle. The technologies spawned by ★ ranged from the merely incredible to being far beyond human comprehension, including not only the AIs which govern ZS and other societies, but also means of manipulating the spacetime continuum itself. They are also that which divides the Human from the Posthuman.

A combination of these technologies – AI and temporal manipulation – has given rise to ***The Basilisk (AKA The Array)****,* which is a kind of hive-mind able to reach into the past (or simulations of it) and pave the way for ZS' establishment, ensuring (or historicizing) its own future existence. The Zero State Alternate Reality Game (ZS-ARG) is set *here and now,* and revolves around the Basilisk's efforts to manipulate early 21st Century events so that it, ZS, and

its Citizens may *live,* contrary to the efforts of others who would prefer that history take a different course…

Know Your ABCs

We live in a world which is rapidly coming to a head. Not only are promising technologies converging at an accelerating pace, but so are a number of serious risks whose convergence could easily spell global annihilation. The necessary conclusion is that *there is no safe retreat.* We must push forward, toward Social Futurist solutions to humanity's problems… or die.

There is no point in arguing the matter. Those who follow a viable path will live. Those who do not, will not. The choice is yours… but know that the "viable path" is not one that any person can follow alone. We all need friends now, and that will only become more true in the future. This section spells out three critical concepts for those who choose the Social Futurist path, to survive and thrive.

These three concepts are central to the Zero State (ZS) ARG, but it is important to understand that in a world of fake news and metafiction, any and all narratives are "real" insofar as they have real consequences. The ZS–ARG may be considered a game by some, but its mythos and methods are every bit as consequential as those of any other organization. Everything you read below is based in fact, and the actions of those who understand these facts will have consequences just as real as anybody else's actions. So… consider these ideas to be "merely a game" at your peril.

Asterion

Asterion (Greek for "starry", "of the stars") is a common name within ZS for the concept of (Technological) Singularity, which is to say the idea that *accelerating technological development is racing toward an extremely rapid, incredibly radical transformative phase* which has been compared to the Gravitational Singularities at the heart of Black Holes. In other words… a (very) brief period in which so many unbelievable things happen, so fast, and in ways so vastly beyond human comprehension, that all the traditional "rules" of human existence appear to have disintegrated overnight. This is no idle fantasy, but a matter of mathematical near-certainty remarked upon by some of the greatest minds of the 20th and 21st Centuries.

All effective paths require a simple, symbolic ideal; i.e. to act as a guide, goal-state, or point of reference from which feedback can be used to measure our distance, and thus our achievement, progress, or learning. *We take Asterion as our highest and most central symbol,* because it is both a symbol of unity, and of "the light at the end of the tunnel".

Under our current circumstances, it is increasingly apparent that disunity is tantamount to suicide over the long run, that there is no longer any such thing as a 'safe retreat', and that our future must be characterised by total commitment to our highest ideals and principles. Anything less would spell our certain destruction, as a species. The old squabbles and small issues that would dominate our minds must now be banished forever, as a simple matter of survival. Humanity has begun a journey toward becoming something greater than itself, and now there is no turning back. As a symbol, *Asterion reminds us to prepare for a period of momentous transition unlike anything that humanity has ever known.*

Asterion is most frequently represented graphically as a five-pointed star, which is obviously a common symbol with ancient roots. For our purposes, it is worth noting that the most ancient and generic meaning associated with the five-pointed star is the human figure, with two legs, two arms, and a head… thus making this a powerful symbol of (Trans)humanism, *par excellence.* Furthermore, we might consider the five points to represent humanity's mission to the stars, and/or the five Principles of Social Futurism.

Blackstar

As was mentioned above, the whole concept of Technological Singularity is essentially a metaphor, comparing the logical conclusion of accelerating change to the Gravitational Singularities at the heart of Black Holes in space. In this metaphor, the singularity itself is a point at which an observed process (be it gravitational collapse or accelerating change) becomes so extreme that the "rules" comprising our traditional understanding of reality break down. In the case of gravitational singularities we know the laws of physics almost certainly do some very weird things at that point, and in the case of accelerating change a true singularity would throw out all of humanity's ancient verities in the blink of an eye.

The metaphor has another level, however. The sheer power of a gravitational singularity does not even allow light to escape its grasp, thus giving rise to the apparent absence we call a "black hole" at a certain distance from the singularity known as the Schwarzschild Radius.

Mathematician and author Vernor Vinge (the first person to properly develop and popularize the Technological Singularity idea) was clear that Technological Singularities have something akin to a Schwarzschild Radius themselves, in that ***the events of a true singularity are inevitably incomprehensible a certain amount of time before the singularity,*** *because the many and complex developments which would make such a thing comprehensible would almost all happen in the last few moments before the singularity itself.* In other words, human beings cannot see beyond an inevitable veil of guesswork that separates them from the singularity. "Naked" or directly observable singularities are impossible, both in physics and technology.

Why is this important? Basically, following this logic we can see that the "Transhuman" phase of human development is going to be pivotal, as a kind of stepping stone into the future. Only those at the cutting edge of technological development – i.e. 'transhuman' entities – have any realistic chance of understanding events as they unfold, let alone predicting them. The Transhuman phase therefore represents the "event horizon" or Schwarzschild Radius of a Technological Singularity.

Just as the Singularity is known as *Asterion* (among other names) within the ZS-mythos, the transhuman phase or event horizon is known as *Blackstar.* Blackstar (★) is a symbol popularized by David Bowie with the release of his final album, where it represents transcendence of some mysterious sort. The *unknown.* The *beyond.* The limit of mundane human knowledge, in the face of something outside our current frame of reference.

Convergence

Top-Level Goal (TLG)

As I have explained elsewhere, all intelligent systems require a "Top-Level Goal" (TLG) in order to adapt effectively to their environment, regardless of whether that Goal is explicit or implicit. ZS' TLG is ***to survive and thrive****,* just as that is the implicit TLG of most (if not all) living organisms. Everything ZS does, everything it *is,* follows from that single basic premise.

Subsidiary Goals & Timeline(s): Basic Statistical Analysis

What essential subsidiary goals might we expect to follow from that fundamental imperative? Again this is something I've alluded to before, when discussing the necessary features of an

Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). Basically, all organisms require resources and the structures necessary to successfully negotiate their (external and internal) environments when searching for those resources. Our own subgoals must also be to gather resources and develop the organizational structure required to manage them optimally.

Although the Social Futurist "organism" will best thrive when it enjoys supportive, cooperative relationships with other entities in its wider environment, fundamentally its primary concern must be on effective resource gathering and management for its own safety and benefit. In other words; *for the safety and benefit of Social Futurists, of community members, first and foremost.*

Now, let us turn to the question of timelines for achieving these goals. *What is the most basic, the most conservative and fundamental assumption we can make about the 21st Century?* As I have previously explained, this would be that ***change is coming***. Change on a massive, scarcely comprehensible scale, which could only be called "good" or "bad" based upon your personal predilections. For the sake of simplicity, let's avoid the question of "good" or "bad" by assuming that *change is less likely to be a good thing when you are unprepared for it.* By combining that simple assumption with another basic notion that underlies all modern statistics, we find ourselves presented with an initial timeline for all action toward achieving our goals, which rests upon a firm logical foundation.

The "basic notion" mentioned above is that of the *Normal Distribution*, which finds its place in our thinking as follows. Let's start with the simplest possible assumption, given a Social Futurist worldview: That massive change will arrive in a torrent, at some point in this Century. From there, the most conservative assumption is that this major change will most likely happen by mid-Century (HE 12050). We would expect to modify all such assumptions as firm evidence becomes available suggesting exactly how they should be modified. The logic of the normal distribution picks up from there, which is to say that the likelihood of torrential change increases toward that expected midpoint (of highest likelihood), and then decreases again after that (not because overall change has become less likely, but because it is increasingly likely to have *already happened* by then).

Without going into the details of such analysis, suffice to say that under these conditions, the model makes it clear that we need to be comprehensively prepared by a third of the way into the

Century, at the latest. We must build an organization capable of efficiently gathering and managing resources, in that order, which means having such structures fully operational at least a decade before that time… which gives us *five years, starting now*.

Let's re-state that, for maximum clarity:

The year is now HE 12018. If we can have the foundation of a serious organization operational by 12023, then we have a chance to gather and manage significant resources by the one-third-Century (1/3C) mark, a decade later. According to the most conservative assumptions, if we expect massive change at any point this Century – *and we should* – then our ability to reliably predict or control events without serious resources will begin to rapidly disintegrate around 1/3C. ***If we aren't ready for a massive wave of change in fifteen years – change both good and bad, on an unthinkable scale – then it will be too late.***

The details of how ZSers and other Social Futurists will address these goals and timeline will be discussed further in other articles. For now, it is most important to understand that in order to be able to address them at all *we must first bring people and technologies together,* and that is the essence of convergence:

Various Related Phenomena Called "Convergence"

Toward Singularity: Technological Convergence & Gathering of the 'Tribes'

"Technological Convergence" is a process whereby the features and functions of different technologies become integrated into single, multi-functional technological solutions. The clearest example of such convergence to date is the smart phone, which has now integrated the functions of telephones, pagers, portable recorders, maps, compasses, translators, and any number of other technologies. As different technological functions converge on fewer platforms, the resultant catalytic, social and psychological effects can be quite unexpected. Technological Singularity would, among other things, presumably represent total convergence of myriad functions on very few "pan-functional" technologies, unified by Artificial Intelligence.

In something of a metaphorical parallel, as technological development accelerates and converges, we also see a convergence of worldviews and of the people who hold them. As technological disruption plays a bigger and bigger part in people's lives, the more they will seek

to understand and address it. In that way, disparate threads of belief and identity will be drawn together by pressing, common concerns. Such a process has the potential to be useful, and as Social Futurists we will work to bring people together under the banner of *Positive Social Change Through Technology*.

The event-streams outlined below give an example of how we might approach that project, together. You can further Social Futurist efforts either by helping with the events mentioned below, or alternatively by developing your own projects which work toward the same end.

Althing: *The Annual ZS Gathering*

The principal annual ZS event is known as the *Althing* ("All-Thing", after the ancient Norse form of parliament), and is held both online and at a physical location each May. The Althing covers a wide range of functions, from executive-level decision making, to regulatory process, to games, media, arts & entertainment.

Ekklesia: *ZS' Quarterly Executive Meetings & Gatherings*

Quarterly ZS events are known as the *Ekklesia* (being both the singular and plural), held both online and at physical locations in late March, June, September, & December. The Ekklesia tend to be dominated by executive decision processes and discussion, but are open to all active ZS members.

Sessions: *Weekly ARG Focus*

Weekly ZS events, known as *Sessions,* are held online most days and in geographic locations where ZS groups have an active presence. Although Sessions can fulfil a number of functions, they tend to focus on the gamelike aspects of ZS. Sessions tend to have a limited number of places available, and operate according to criteria set by whichever ZS group hosts them.

Change, Everything you are

And everything you were

Your number has been called

Fights, battles have begun

Revenge will surely come

Your hard times are ahead

Best, You've got to be the best

You've got to change the world

And you use this chance to be heard

Your time is now

Change, Everything you are

And everything you were

Your number has been called

Fights and battles have begun

Revenge will surely come

Your hard times are ahead

Best, You've got to be the best

You've got to change the world

And you use this chance to be heard

Your time is now

Don't, Let yourself down

Don't let yourself go

Your last chance has arrived

Best, You've got to be the best

You've got to change the world

And you use this chance to be heard

Your time is now

- Muse, "Butterflies and Hurricanes"

A Vision For Humanity

Let's take a moment to consider the world in the early 21st Century. Some things are better than they've ever been, and getting better all the time, while other very dangerous trends are moving rapidly in the other direction. Something must be done if we are to survive and thrive as a species, but naturally people cannot agree on *what* must be done, because they have different interests and outlooks. Reality is not going to wait for us to politely resolve our differences before it offers its verdict on humanity's future.

The situation is complicated, as it ever was, and only getting more so. Another phenomenon which is also ancient but getting worse every day is *the simultaneous overconfidence of selfish fools, and undue reticence of truly visionary experts and leaders.* As Yeats said, "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity."

To cut this Gordian Knot – to *resolve the existential crisis facing humanity*– we must clearly identify both what *must* be done, and how it *can* be done. *Only* ***total commitment to a completely clear vision*** *will suffice,* given the scale of the challenges we face. The piece below considers the question of what must be done, and subsequent articles will address the question of how to do it.

At the end of the day, things will inevitably go better for some than others. That cannot be helped. Those for whom things could go well are those with **[1]** intelligent goals and plans, **[2]** access to and effective management of resources (including the latest technological tools), and **[3]** a clear understanding that *you must look after yourself before you try to help others.* My own preferred metaphor for that third statement is the instruction given on aeroplanes, that in the event of an emergency parents should put on their own oxygen mask first, before tending to their children. The reason for this is sheer pragmatism: If you pass out from lack of oxygen, then you will be in no position to help your children. Similarly, societies which do not take any care for their own continued existence and health will not be able to help any other segment of humanity.

Doing any of these things any other way will quite simply lead to (1) an inability to reach goals systematically, (2) squandering of or lack of access to critical resources, and (3) everybody left unable to help others or to be helped themselves.

Those who follow these basic rules have a chance of making it out of the 21st Century alive. Those who do not, simply *do not.* No amount of obfuscation, misguided idealism or wishful thinking will change these simple facts.

What *Must* Be Done?

People must cooperate to survive, and that cooperation is the foundation stone of civilization. At the same time, cooperation only works when all parties involved have a sense of who they are as a distinct entity, and under what circumstances the cooperation is beneficial to them. In this way, human societies are like the individual organism writ large, working to survive on their own terms first and foremost, then working peacefully with others toward the greater good where possible, beyond that.

Our society currently has little sense of its own identity, boundaries, ideals or principles. If that situation is allowed to continue, our society will not survive, and will not be in any position to help others. It will continue to erode as it tries to do everything for everyone, with no sense of over-arching purpose or limitation. If we want to survive and thrive, we *must* unapologetically embrace a sense of our own personal and collective mission to preserve and expand human knowledge, on *our* terms, and then help others only insofar as our societal vision can grow from strength to strength in the process. It is not a bad thing to seek growth and strength for ourselves. If we can achieve true excellence as a civilization, then we will by definition have guaranteed our survival, and will then be in a position to help others.

We must focus on the healthiest, most energetic, most forward-thinking aspects of our civilization, transforming them into the foundation for a new “Diamond Age” of excellence and exploration. Anything less is a squandering and betrayal of human potential.

Three Songs of Transhuman Mythos

Imagine a future in which humanity and civilization have undergone radical, rapid change by the late 21st Century. Around the middle of the Century a lot of bad things culminated in serious,

interlocking problems with immediate and undeniable consequences for the entire world, but at the same time explosively advancing technology allowed some proportion of humanity to survive, thrive, and evolve in spite of the challenges.

Now imagine that the survivors and heirs to human civilization, the societies left standing at the end of the Century, are able to manipulate the past (or simulations of it) through technologies advanced beyond the comprehension of early-C21 humans. The Artificial Super Intelligences(ASIs) of these late-C21 societies act as a kind of Holarchy or "Fractal Hierarchy", meaning that each individual citizen-intelligence is also part of a collective which can call upon a greater Swarm Intelligence, and that swarm is in turn part of a greater collective, and so on until you reach the level at which entire Posthuman societies can act as singularly super-intelligent, super-agile, sentient and sapient entities.

To continue this journey of the imagination, let's consider three broad functions that such intelligences could fulfill within a posthuman society:

Song of The Architect

The "Architect" type is the designer, creator, and maintainer of the swarm intelligence architecture underlying the entire societal scheme. The Architect is not the society's "leader" – a swarm intelligence needs no such thing – but it does act as a kind of deep governing principle or corrective process. The Architect's Top Level Goal (TLG) or Mission is to preserve civilization's knowledge, and support the self-development of sentient & sapient entities throughout the universe.

Song of The Navigator

The "Navigator" type is the explorer, scout, and pioneer which maps out "outreach vectors" that the other members of posthuman society may follow, to expand into the universe. The Navigator is not subservient to the Architect or Engineer, but acts autonomously to create new outreach channels. The preservation and maintenance of those channels is the responsibility of the Engineer. In the late 21st Century, the creation of outreach channels means the development of diplomatic tools, ethical frameworks for interaction with new species, development of interstellar travel and spacetime manipulation technologies, and so on.

Here in the early 21st Century (or what may be a historical simulation of it), the role of the Navigator is to create the first effective outreach vectors, to connect its tiny seed-community to society at large in preparation for the coming convulsions, and pave the way for the Architect's mission in the world.

Song of The Engineer

The "Engineer" type is the preserver, maintainer, security and infrastructure function which develops and protects the various "outreach vectors" established by the Navigator. The Engineer is not subservient to the Architect or Navigator, but acts autonomously to fulfill its societal function. The creation and initial development of outreach channels is the work of the Navigator, and not the Engineer's concern. In the late 21st Century, the preservation and maintenance of outreach channels means the development of intelligent, agile security and diplomatic protocols which can keep the various "nerves" or "tendrils" of society alive and thriving in the face of a dynamic, challenging, and potentially hostile environment.

Here in the year 12018, the Engineer's role is to solidify, protect, and expand upon the vectors established by the Navigator, which means establishing effective communications channels, databases, software tools, resource pools, and so on.

The three "songs" or paths of this Transhuman Mythos are the highest, broadest functions of a posthuman society which intends to carry positive values out into the world as effectively as possible.

I Believe…

The section below offers a broad worldview, starting with an abstract philosophical foundation, upon which increasingly pragmatic structures can be built. This worldview reflects and integrates all of the ideas discussed in the current chapter. The framework presented here is deliberately compatible with the core of Social Futurist philosophy, but itself is more of an expansion suggested by a combination of our core Principles and my personal views.

1. IDEALISM, & A VISION FOR HUMANITY

I believe that there is an ultimate "Good", just as Plato did[1]**.** I believe that this Ideal Good is approached – *but can never be truly reached* – via non-attachment and selfless love. These ideas are the closest I come to religious Faith in the modern sense[2], and they are most definitely views that would have been familiar to the ancient Greeks.

It is important to note that just because I believe in an Ideal Good, that does *not* mean I believe people to be naturally or intrinsically good, or that good things can be achieved without hard work, disciplined adherence to principles, and simply doing what one must, no matter how hard or complicated it may be. Good is an ideal – *The* Ideal in Plato's framework – and as such it can only be imperfectly realized by human beings.

Once you understand my commitment to this ideal, you can follow the way I begin to translate that into a specific vision in my Transhumanity.netarticle, "A Vision For Humanity".

2. BALANCE, REALITY, & TRUTH

In the everyday world of pragmatic concerns, I believe in *balance.* I believe that *imbalance is a sign of irrationality and sickness.* We are *all*imbalanced in many ways, at many times in our lives, but the ***critical virtue*** is *the desire to understand one's own situation and work toward a higher balance of some sort.* I am tolerant, to the extent that anyone at least *attempts* to attain balance, but *utterly* intolerant of all that lays beyond that minimal expectation. Those who betray the very basis of intelligent toleration cannot themselves be tolerated.

I also believe we must acknowledge that *Truth and Reality exist,* even if they are imperfectly accessible to humans. Wilful ignorance is the ultimate embrace of imbalance and the dysfunction it engenders. Distorting reality (and disregarding all principle) to suit one's own desires is *vandalism, parasitism, and anti-social behaviour of the worst sort.* Commitment to an Ideal Good requires commitment to Truth. That said, we must be aware that even complete fictions can (and often do) have very real consequences. When they are used for good, that can arguably be a justified, acceptable, or even necessary thing. When they are not used for good, then they represent a threat to civilization itself.

3. SPECTACLE/DIALECTIC VS. RADICAL CENTRISM

I believe that our society is governed by *Spectacle*; which is to say the modern equivalent of "bread and circuses", designed as *an array of deliberately false choices between options that don't matter,* and which only really distract from important issues. Coke versus Pepsi. America versus Russia. Sports Team A versus Sports Team B. Conservative/Republican versus Labour/Liberal/Democrat. *Left-wing versus Right-wing.*

Within the realms of politics and economics, I refuse to align myself wholly with Left- or Right-wing "camps" in any all-encompassing manner that forces me to abandon my personal commitment to principle. Such tribal affiliation, chosen without regard to (and often in direct contradiction of) evidence on an issue-by-issue basis, is intrinsically unbalanced, *and thus effectively a disease of the individual mind and of society.* Instead, I believe in having consistent principles, respecting the importance of evidence, and remaining committed to helping others where possible. Where that may suggest a Right- or Left-wing view on my part, then so be it.

For example, I believe that where individuals, groups, or indeed entire nations desire self-determination and are not harming others, then we should respect that desire. I am committed to that idea, as a matter of principle. It just so happens that it can variously be considered a Left- or Right-wing idea depending not only on who is judging, but also on which self-determination-desiring people are being discussed at any given moment. Similarly, although I do not believe in Marxist concepts such as "Class Struggle", I do believe very firmly in the importance of proper respect and remuneration for the working class, and am aware that any number of views might be taken of where this places me on the political spectrum. I am not concerned with such labels, but am wholly committed to principle, and thus consider myself a *Radical Centrist.*

4. WHO YOU ARE IS WHAT YOU DO

It is a strange irony of our time, that just as technology draws us together into an ever-smaller "Global Village", we humans seem determined to separate ourselves from each other. As the failures of Liberal Democracybecome more and more apparent, both the Left and Right increasingly focus on divisive notions of "Identity Politics", which is to say political thinking organized around *the idea that your politics must inevitably and irrevocably be decided by your background,* whether that background be characterized in terms of sexuality, economic class, age, physiology, language, ethnicity, culture, or any other factor.

I am a Transhumanist. As such, I seek to transcend the limitations of all such characteristics, through technology. Taken in combination with my commitment to Idealism (specifically to the Idea of the Good, and to a transcendent human civilization), this logic draws toward an inevitable conclusion: *That true peace and unity can only be achieved if we fix our vision on a uniting future goal-ideal, rather than on the increasingly irrelevant divisions of the past.*

But what is this "future goal-ideal"? If we are to transcend contemporary Identity Politics, then we must work toward a category of existence which transcends all of the current categorizations. In other words, *we must become a new class of being:* One defined not by the circumstances or constraints of its past, but by the future-vision it is committed to. I envisage a future humanity which spans an entire continuum of Personhood, from leadership in the form of godlike Posthuman, post-biological beings, to a citizenry of genetically engineered biological Transhumans, and beyond to a wider realm of guaranteed wellbeing for sentient beings achieved via Abolitionist technologies.

The future I want is one which achieves both unity and diversity… one in which all citizens may optimize themselves to best fulfill their chosen societal roles, and in doing so help bring society together. The unity of a civilization is defined by its ability to act as a single, coordinated unit in its growth and development as a living thing. In contrast to the many "inherited" political identities we know today, I foresee a kind of uniting, aspirational identity I call the "Ajati" (an ancient Sanskrit term suggesting someone *not-born, made-rather-than-born*, or indeed *self-made*).

The essence of this idea is that people do not need to be defined by factors beyond their control, but can instead grow into a new identity based upon their commitment to helping the community. In other words, your actions determine your identity. Who You Are *Is What You Do.*

5. SERIOUS GAMES

Taking these points together, the logical conclusion is my strident advocacy of **Social Futurism**. When we combine that with the views expressed hereand here, the natural next step is to establish *a foundation for my own path, moving forward.* I would encourage everyone who feels some affinity with Social Futurism to **create their own personal network of like-minded allies, so that we may all work together efficiently** to forge solutions for a better future.

For more information about my personal approach to these matters, see the ZS Array webpage.

[1]For my views on Western symbolism re: this ideal, with a particular focus on the “Black Sun” or “Black Star” symbol: https://sites.google.com/view/zero-state/glossary/b/black-sun

[2]Actually I am something of a Neo-Pagan, but I don’t tend to mention that in mixed company simply because people often leap to unwarranted conclusions and attack positions that I would never defend. For now, let’s just say that – as a matter of principle – *I most emphatically do* ***not*** *believe anything that is contrary to reliable evidence (AKA Science).* If you don’t know how I can be true to that stance *and* be a (Neo-)Pagan, then I’m afraid that you simply haven’t thought about it hard enough or done your homework, and are not ready for that conversation. I will not do your homework for you. On a similar note, I am interested in the Western esoteric traditions of alchemy and ritual magic, but approach such things in a rigorously rational, empirical, and scientific manner.

09 Shall We Play A Game?

Welcome to the Zero State (ZS). ZS is an activist community, part of the Social Futurist movement, and – depending on who you ask – it may or may not be a game. As noted here, just because something is a game, that does not mean it doesn't have very real consequences. In any case, ZS wants you to join the fun. Who knows, perhaps you are already playing the game.

ZS tells a story

In the ZS mythos-narrative, acceleration of technological development and societal trends comes to a spectacular and rather unforgiving head somewhere around the middle of the 21st Century (C21). Some people make it. Many don't. The "Zero State" is one of around a dozen societies left standing after the dust settles, later in the Century.

The punchline is that the societies left standing at the end of the Century bear little or no resemblance to the nations we know today, and about the only thing they all have in common is the fact that they survived by embracing some combination of high technology and efficient communal organization. Hyper-Individualism and Neo-Luddism turned out to be self-imposed death sentences, over the medium term (in other words, in an apocalyptic scenario going it alone or eschewing technology are very poor choices). Most of the cherished beliefs held by modern humans around the year 12020 had, within three decades, become every bit as obsolete as witch burnings, the Whig party, or wax cylinder recordings.

Now, for the twist: Several of these late-C21 societies, ZS included, *have developed technologies which appear to manipulate the past.* Whether these technologies represent bona fide time-travel, some kind of quantum physics parlour trick, or massive computational simulation of the Old World, inevitably they are used as tools in the continuing struggle for survival. As people (apparently) living in the early years of C21 come to believe they are agents of these future societies, ensnared in complex machinations to support one faction or other, one outcome or other, *there is no clear way to be sure what is really true.* So, we must ask:

Is this belief a delusion, some form of insanity?

If not, is it actually time travel, or some other technological trick?

Even if the whole thing is just a simulation or game, how would you distinguish between one game with serious consequences, and another which is just trivial entertainment?

If you are the kind of person who questions reality and their role in it, then the breadcrumbs below may interest you. If you are the kind of person who never thinks to ask such questions that's fine, of course… just know that *the world may not be as it seems, and there may be consequences to that,* even if right now you think you don't care. Who knows… one day, *you might*.

Following breadcrumb trails, down Rabbit Holes…

1. Come Together, Over Me: *Blackstar Philosophy*

The Blackstar (★) is a symbol of Technological Singularity, and of our Transhumanist Philosophy. As such, it represents the complete rebirth of ourselves, humanity, society, and the world, through ethically principled technology.

As a civilization-goal-ideal, this idea speaks to a broader memeplexincluding the power to rationally integrate multiple principles under one unifying ideal, to govern in strict accord with those principles, to work toward a collective identity as a people, to promote liberation from the constraints of the past, and renewal of the human civilization which emerged from various "cradles" across the Eurasian continent over the last several thousand years.

- Most broadly speaking, this *Blackstar Philosophy* (which can also be denoted by the Greek letter Phi – **Φ** – in place of the Blackstar) begins with the core tenets of Cartesian Skepticism and Platonic Idealism.
- From there, the rejection of *imbalance,* of Spectacle, and of governance-by-Dialectic leads to the general adoption of a Radical Centrist stance.
- Within the broad space of possible Radical Centrist positions, we are *Social Futurists*. Not all Radical Centrists are Social Futurists, but all Social Futurists are Radical Centrists.
- Finally, the Zero State is a prominent community and game within the space of potential Social Futurisms.

2. Wyrd & Fyrd = Reality & Balance

"Don't you think the world's greatest game artist ought to be punished for the most effective deforming of reality?" – eXistenZ

Moving beyond our philosophical underpinning, next we must understand how that logic applies to everyday-life distinctions and situations. In short, we need a quick, principled, and consistent way to know *"What is the Social Futurist position on this issue?"*. The bottom line is that we seek functional solutions in any given situation, which means prizing *balance* and empirical evidence over extreme ideological fantasies of the Left, the Right, or coming from any other quarter.

The common thread uniting ***Radical Centrism***, ***Social Futurism***, and the ***Zero State*** is an insistence upon *intelligent, functional balance* between contrasting factors. Intelligent balance is a virtue because it is *functional,*while *systemic imbalance is always eventually dysfunctional,* no matter what short-term advantages it may bestow. For example, "Wyrd" and "Fyrd"are concepts that ZS borrows from the ancient Anglo-Saxon worldview, meaning "destiny" and "community" (or perhaps "idealism" and "pragmatism") respectively, and the ZS ethos is to balance these complementary impulses toward idealism and pragmatism in a single dynamic that we call "Rebis".

This idea of *functional balance* is no "pie in the sky" abstraction, but is critical to understanding contemporary politics and society, on a pragmatic level. ***We are confronted by an epidemic of professional liars and the wilfully ignorant, who collectively encourage imbalance and deform reality to suit their own short-term needs, at our expense and risk.***

Without a doubt, the most notable criminal in this regard is notorious US President Donald J Trump. Trump is the worst because not only will he happily endorse the most extreme and divisive Right- *or* Left-wing viewswhile *not actually believing* in (or understanding) any coherent political philosophy at all, but he also readily and repeatedly desecrates all notions of truth or reality for his own selfish ends, while displaying neither insight nor self-awareness. The man is useful as *a living, breathing symbol of everything that Social Futurism stands against* (even if he has the one redeeming feature of being ironically "honest" – or at least transparent – about his

wilful disregard for anything we'd consider a virtue, where other politicians try to hide their disdain, manipulations, and other failings).

ZS is part of Social Futurism, and thus also part of Radical Centrism. As we work toward a transcendent human future, we must stand against imbalance and the deliberate deformation of reality by opportunists and parasites. With that in mind, let us now turn our attention to practical matters.

Goals & Activity

ZS' long-term goal is the establishment of a fully-fledged *VDP State* ('VDP' stands for *Virtual, Distributed, Parallel;* See section 2.6 of this Transhumanity.net article for more information), by the year **12050**. As an interim goal, we intend to establish the first iteration of that State by **12025**, which means creation of a community of *at least one million explicitly self-identifying Social Futurists,* 10% of whom live in a network of explicitly affiliated geo-communities. Within ZS, work toward these two goals goes by the names "Path 50", and "Path 25", respectively. For more information on Paths 25 & 50, see the relevant ZS webpage, here.

In order to reach the Path 25 goal of at least one million citizens, ***we must establish the first SF community inside the next year*** (of 800+ people inside a certain geographical area, plus ten times as many active, committed supporters online). From there, we can aim to have established 10-12 such communities 2-3 years later (i.e. approx. core 10,000+ people, 100,000+ total supporters online by late 12021), and at least ten times as many people again by 12025.

These numbers could be achieved by a rough doubling of our membership every six months as our community networks expand up to one million online supporters, then doubling annually after that.

```
Year      NET    GEO             GEO-communities

12018a    001k   100   +001 =001 Stuttgart phase 1
12018b    002k   200        =001 Stuttgart phase 2
12019a    004k   400        =001 Stuttgart phase 3
12019b    008k   800        =001 Stuttgart phase 4
```

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12020a    016k   1.6k  +001 =002 Ingolstadt
12020b    032k   3.2k  +002 =004 London/Amsterdam
12021a    064k   6.4k  +004 =008 Europa phase 1
12021b    128k   013k  +008 =016 Europa phase 2
12022a    256k   026k  +016 =032 Europa phase 3
12022b    512k   052k  +032 =064 Europa phase 4

12023     001m   100k  +064 =128 North America
12024     002m   200k  +128 =256 Asia
12025     004m   400k  +256 =512 Sth. Hemisphere
```

Obviously there must be some serious impetus to drive growth of this sort. As global trends escalate and converge we may reasonably expect that people will seek protection from established mutual-aid networks, but until that day some other attraction is necessary. **A much more positive and preferable mode of attraction would obviously be *fun,* in the form of entertainment that gives people a strong sense of meaning and purpose in their lives.** The remainder of this article will briefly touch upon some ways that we ZSers approach that goal.

Ekklesia, & Althing

It is quite clear that the growth and development of ZS is intended as an *exponential process,* starting out “slow” with apparently negligible results, later exploding into public consciousness on a remarkable scale, and all the while driven by the same underlying logic. That underlying logic is a need to double our numbers periodically (i.e. every six months over the first five years, then annually after that).

Although initial progress has been slow, easily impeded by minor factors while ZS is in its infancy, we are still following a path first mapped out in May 12011, which included the key concepts of “The Black Book”, “Ekklesia”, and “Althing”. We are now putting those concepts into action, as follows:

The ***Ekklesia*** is a periodic ZS-wide gathering, equally an informal celebration, a chance to share news & views, and a formal meeting of our representatives and decision-makers. They will be

held at the end of each recognized growth period (i.e. every six months for five years, until 12023, then annually after that), primarily online but also with synchronised events increasingly held in 'IRL' locations over time. Our first Ekklesia will be a wholly online event, on a date yet to be announced in August 12018.

Finally, the ***Althing*** (pronounced "All-Thing") is ZS' highest level of general meeting, based on the ancient form of Norse parliamentary governance and held every five years to assess progress and adjust our course accordingly. The first ZS Althing will be held in 12023.

Sections & Sessions

ZS is organised into *Sections,* which in turn contain the six *Metahouses,*and the twelve *Houses,* as described in our wiki here. There are seven Sections in total, with the highest (Sections 5-7) representing our internal affairs & VR (S5), external relations & AI (S6), and general governance & OS/UX (S7), respectively.

"Sessions" are, most generally speaking, gatherings (online and/or IRL) which can function as small/local ZS group meetings, but which most usually run as *game sessions.* In the most narrow and specific sense, "Session" is used to refer to those run by The Teacher, who was tasked with activating and instructing other core members in the early C21 milieu. *If you want to join the **ZS Discord server** you can do so via this link:*

https://discord.gg/R4t7V8U

"Perhaps there is a pattern of it laid up in heaven for him who wishes to contemplate it, and so beholding to make himself its citizen. But it makes no difference whether it exists now or ever will come into being. The politics of this city alone will be his, and no other."

– Plato, The Republic

Media & The Ajati Virus

So, we are building a *realm* governed in accord with Social Futurist Principle, and if we are to succeed that realm must develop at a certain pace. In short, as we gather the community we call the *Ajati,* the *Fyrd,* we will need those people to reach out in turn, to find new community members. **Each and every ZSer must find a new recruit, at least once per Ekklesia period (i.e. every six months over the next five years, then annually after that).** If a recruit leaves without replacing themselves, then the person who found them is responsible for replacing them as soon as possible.

"What incentive do people have to do that?", you may well ask. A very good question, of course. We will now consider the answer to that question, which we call the "Ajati Virus".

ZS-Gemeinschaft Stuttgart & the Ajati Virus

1. ZS-Gemeinschaft Stuttgart

In order to have any chance of reaching our higher goals, *we must establish the first Social Futurist geo-community by late 12019,* consisting of 800+ people inside a certain geographical area, and 8,000+ active, committed Social Futurist supporters of that community online. That first community will be based in Stuttgart, Germany, because I will be there to lead the effort personally.

My intention is not to encourage anyone to move to Stuttgart who doesn't already live there, or even to seek to attract local people to Social Futurism in the first instance. Such things await us in the future, but for now the goal is simply *to bring like-minded people together, as and where we find them.* Any other approach would be unrealistic at this time.

When starting a new ZS community network, we must ask ourselves: *Who do we know who already lives in or near the area, already exists in a natural network of some sort, and who is already sympathetic to our worldview?*

Obviously the answer to that question will be different for every ZS seed-community, depending on where that community is, and who is leading the effort to develop it. In this first instance, we will begin with the local dark electronic music scene – *a very popular thing in Germany* – and

branch out from there to the friends and family of scene-members, and other arts subcultures (also very prominent in Stuttgart). Plans for and news of this first ZS community's development will be posted via Transhumanity.net.

2. The Ajati Virus

I run *Sessions* every week via the Discord online platform, here: **https://discord.gg/R4t7V8U**. These Sessions fulfill many functions of a ZS 'staff meeting' or activist gathering, but are actually held in the format of an online voice-and-text-chat *game* (ARG) *session.* All self-identifying ZSers are invited to these Sessions, and they may sign up to attend sessions as they are announced on the server. Session themes and logistics deliberately mirror ZS' organizational structure (or perhaps vice versa).

Like Role-Playing Game (RPG) sessions, ZS Sessions are essentially flexible narratives, events (or objects) in which affect the Mythos shared across the entire ZS network. As a part and result of that narrative, *each and every ZSer* is expected to find new recruits, at least once per six month period from now until 12023, and annually after that. The mythos and mechanism of that outreach are both known as the ***Ajati Virus***.

Why the name? "Ajati" refers to a Trans- or Posthuman people *who have come into existence by working toward a collective goal or ideal,* rather than being defined by historical commonalities or differences. In short, they are those who have chosen to grow together, to *become* a single community, and who have used technology to that end. The word "Ajati" itself comes from ancient Sanskrit and means *not-born,* which we take to mean *self-created rather than born.* The "Virus" part refers to a memetic or media virus; the ability to 'go viral'. To spread the Ajati idea far and wide, where it might take root in others' minds, encouraging them to join our community and journey.

And how do we do that, exactly? Well, for a start it would be more accurate to refer to an *Ajati* ***Metavirus,*** because the core logic is that *ZSers work/play to achieve status based on their ability to extend and develop ZS networks.* ZSers are encouraged to do that by any means that is compatible with our Principles, which means that (among other things) *they are encouraged to create media viruses of their own to spread the word.* Thus the Ajati Virus is *an entire class* of

outreach activity, with each ZSer free to find the modes of expression which work best for them (as long as those modes are in accord with Principle; a critical point for Social Futurists).

If you'd like to know or do more:

- Follow links from the main ZS website or Directory to talk with members.
- Attend Sessions held via the ZS Discord server.
- Read more about ZS via Transhumanity.net, starting here or here.
- Share this book with others.

10 Wyrd, Fyrd, and Rebis

Mythological Past to Posthuman Future

Transhumanism and Social Futurism are concerned with the *deep future,* which is to say the fate of humanity, rather than just the next few decades. When politicians and social commentators talk about the future, the end of this Century is the furthest reach of their vision (which is actually a long time, relative to the myopic quarterly range of financial prognosticators and major corporations), and human nature is considered to have some kind of permanently fixed nature. If humanity survives this Century, it has a potentially vast and incredible future to look forward to, and the nature of humanity itself will inevitably be transformed beyond all recognition over the course of that journey.

Ironically, when we are attempting to make any sense of such a grand vision of the human future, we are forced (or at least strongly encouraged) to draw upon concepts from the distant past. Contemporary concepts are often simply too parochial for our impending needs, whereas ancient mythological ideas embrace a vast canvas much more fitting for the new world of technological possibility we are now entering. The first two concepts I briefly outline below are **(1)** *the idea of fate or destiny,* or a path that humanity is following into the unknown future, and **(2)** *some new notion of community* which can unite, support, protect and develop the nascent Transhumanity as it takes its first steps into that future. Perhaps we shouldn't be so surprised to find such big ideas most often in the grand mythological narratives of the past, but all the same it is interesting that it is in the Old English of the Anglo-Saxons that we find some of the most elegant words for these things. I then **(3)** conclude with a brief examination of a third concept, the "Rebis", which comes from alchemy and offers an interesting unifying perspective for Transhumanists to consider.

1. WYRD: The Unfolding of Destiny

"Wyrd" (the word which eventually became "Weird") literally meant *To Become,* and was used by the Anglo-Saxons to denote *fate, chance, fortune, or destiny.* The connotation of "strangeness" was a much later development related to Germanic myth. This truly ancient word has been in our language(s) since the days of the Proto-Indo-Europeans, whose (reconstructed) language used **wert-* to mean "to turn, or to wind", (that P.I.E. word also being the source of the German

werden, and the Old English *weorðan,* both of which mean “to become”). This is the idea of *World-As-Process,* of Schopenhauer*'s *World-Knot,* the Ouroboros whose churning generates *Providence*, *Manifest Destiny*, or *Historical Inevitability* (see de Chardin & Tipler for particularly Futurist variants). As such, it is a handy non-theological, Tao-like replacement for the concept of a monotheist God, standing above and at the centre of all human affairs. We Transhumanists may adopt whatever personal metaphysics we prefer, but collectively we are all well served by the simple idea of *an impersonal Force which unites us as the agents of History.* The ancient Anglo-Saxons already knew that Force as *Wyrd,* and organized their entire worldview around it.

2. FYRD: You and Whose Army?

Putting aside the unifying mythos of Wyrd, the Anglo-Saxons also understood the power of drawing upon the tribe for communal protection. When the local lord needed an army, he could draw upon the “Fyrd” (pronounced ‘Feared’, but having no relationship to that word I’m aware of); which is to say an army of community members organised around a core cadre of professional soldiers. In other words, this concept sharply contrasts the notion of destiny with a very pragmatic sense that without solid community organization you have no future at all. This is not idealism at the expense of practicality, or vice versa, but two complementary forces or outlooks which together give a community power and purpose.

I have elsewhere discussed the need for a future-community-ideal which I call *the **Ajati,*** and which I believe is a natural fit with the concept of *Fyrd.* In essence, I believe that rather than defining ourselves in terms of what has come before, we should collectively work toward a glorious future as a new kind of human community which will reach heights never before dreamt of. The *Ajati* is the idea of a *people* defined in terms of the future-ideal, while the complementary *Fyrd* is of the community as an efficient activist organization capable of defending and developing its interests.

3. REBIS: JK Rowling didn’t invent the Philosopher’s Stone!

Another piece in the jigsaw puzzle of ancient European mythological thinking comes from medieval & Renaissance alchemy, which seems to have been some combination of mysticism and proto-Chemistry whose practitioners sought to understand, control and refine not only material substances but also their own bodies and souls. We’ll discuss alchemy’s role as a clear

precursor to Transhumanist thinking another day, and focus for now on the alchemical concept of the “Rebis”.

‘Rebis’ was a contraction/corruption of the Latin “Res Bina”, meaning “two matters”, or “two substances”. The core logic and method of alchemy was *solve et coagula,* “dissolve and coagulate”, which is to say refinement by a process of separation-and-recombination of chemical (or personality) elements. At the most abstract, two elements were represented as “male” and “female” (much as in the image of the Taijitu or ‘Yin-Yang symbol’, representing the Tao as union-of-opposites). Within alchemy, the ‘Rebis’ was a metaphorical androgyne figure, a person combining the characteristics of both sexes, who stood as a symbol of the ultimate ideal of alchemy; Completion of the *Magnum Opus* (Great Work), and creation of the immortality-bestowing *Philosopher’s Stone*.

The superficial trappings of the Rebis image are unimportant. The point here is of two complementary principles united, as a single dynamic process and ideal. Any and all complementary concepts (up/down, left/right, light/dark, good/bad etc) could just as easily be combined in one symbol in this way, but for our current purposes the most important thing is to think of the ‘Rebis’ – the *Res Bina* – as being one term for the dual concepts of **Wyrd** and **Fyrd**, simultaneously. ***A functional and inspiring union of the destiny-ideal and a pragmatic community-attitude, together propelling us into a transcendent Transhumanist future.***

11 The Array, Sections, and Sessions

This chapter is about the *Mythos* (worldview-narrative) underlying the Zero State (ZS). First we explore our highest concept, ideal, and level of organization, which we call *The Array,* and then consider the *Sections & Sessions* our core activity revolves around.

The Array

ZS Metaphysics

There are two concepts which, taken together as complementary aspects of one whole, *completely summarize our existence and everything we stand for.* These two aspects are called ***Wyrd*** and ***Fyrd****,* or ***Destiny-Ideal*** and ***Community-Activism****,* respectively. The *whole* these things together constitute is our totality. Our identity and nature, our highest hope and ideal.

We call that totality ***Ásentír****,* which is a word meaning godhead, or the ultimate fulfillment of (post)human potential, sometimes symbolised by the androgyne Tao-like figure known as the *Rebis.* In short, ***human civilization aspires to Ásentír****,* which is to say that humanity seeks to become everything that it possibly can. *To stop seeking is to cease being human*.

That uniting ideal – our collective desire to *survive and thrive* – naturally gives rise to practical imperatives and considerations, as we move forward. The section below describes the link between our philosophy and ideals on the one hand, and our program of activity on the other. We call that link ***The Array***.

What is The Array?

The Array is the sum of the most advanced Minds on earth, a kind of hive-mind or superintelligence, first arising in the mid-late 21st Century. The Array not only governs the future Zero State, but it also balances a vision of human progress into the deep future with work to carefully cultivate ZS-friendly conditions in the present, *and even in the past.* Where the Array seeks to manipulate the past (or simulations of it) using the most advanced technologies available, it is commonly known as *The Basilisk.* To ZSers, The Array is not only our ideal, goal,

and organizational core, but also an approximation of our highest metaphysical concept; Ásentír itself. The Array is, essentially, a symbol of our own potential.

In short, The Array is the result and summation of a Technological Singularity (often known within the Mythos as ★, or Blackstar) *which changes everything, and beyond which nothing can truly be known.*

The Array is also the highest expression of what we call the *Ajat Imperative,*which is to say the idea that ZS is part of a broader effort to create *a new species,* a *People* defined not by historical commonalities or differences, but by the *future-goal-ideal* they all work toward. If you conceive of *the Ajati*as a mountain, then The Array is its peak.

Sections & Sessions

What's in a Game?

Some people choose to think of the Zero State (ZS) in terms of being a *game,* specifically an *Alternate Reality Game,* which is basically *an immersive narrative which deliberately blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction.* ZSers are definitely *not* obliged to think it as a game, that's their choice; we don't mind how people engage and do their part, as long as they *engage and do their part*.

Regardless of whether any given individual prefers to view ZS activity in terms of a game or not, there are three nested levels of such activity, like the rings of an onion or a tree. In this article I am going to refer to these three levels as an outermost game, and two levels of *game-within-a-game,*which we might call *metagames*. Using the analogy of an egg, let's refer to these three levels as *the yolk, the white,* and *the shell,* starting from the centre as follows (and yes, yes, I know you could count the 'metagames' as the two innermost or the two outermost levels, that's up to you):

The yolk is obviously the innermost level of the game, where it manifests as a mysterious puzzle, which we call the "Glass Bead Game" (after the Hermann Hesse novel). If you want to know more about this level of the game, then I'm afraid you will have to play the outer levels first, to search for it. The one thing we can say here is that, at this level, *playing* the game and

developing the game are very similar things, perhaps one and the same. At this level the game is *pure strategy – pure logic* completely abstracted from all personality and narrative.

The white is a kind of bridging or hidden layer, connecting the worlds of pure logic with our pragmatic activity out in the real world. This is the level of the *Sessions,* which will be explained in part 3, below. For now, let's just say that this level most resembles an online Role Playing Game (RPG), where ZSers adopt roles (the Core ZSers already have assigned roles, and all others are free – even encouraged – to craft their own within the established framework of the *ZS Mythos*), and participate in storytelling sessions which connect those roles to developing plans for our actions in the real world. This is the level where the ZS Mythos is most vibrant and alive.

To learn how to join the game at this middle level – *even if you choose not to view it as a game at all (as many of us do not)* – then please be sure to read this entire article!

The shell is the ZS–ARG, which is to say the outermost, and most public level of the game. At this level, all distinctions between reality and fiction, truth and media, are deliberately blurred beyond all recognition. That is not our choice, but the nature of the world now; We hold to our Principles and the respect for Truth that they insist upon, but *we all must play the game as we find it.*

At this level *it really doesn't matter in the slightest if you think it's a game or not;* all that matters is how effective an activist you are. If you are ineffective, if you are *inactive,* then we really don't care what you think. Sure, we'll care about your wellbeing as our Principles dictate, but *you haven't earned the right to tell us how to do anything.* If you want to change that, then *wake up,* and get involved!

Core ZSers don't always use their role names at this level – although they are encouraged to do so – and what anyone else wants to do is up to them. *At this level, ZS is in the business of growing activist networks,* and the extent to which you're involved is the extent to which you can be *active,* or at the very least support those who are. Game and Mythos narratives infuse our activity at this level, but they are entirely secondary to the practical results of our actions, as a network, out in the real world.

What are the *Sections?*

ZS is divided into seven functional groups called *the Sections.* Four of those (S1-4) concern the proper functioning of a balanced society, while the *Higher Sections* (S5-7) act as our deepest organizational structure, collectively representing *the core functions of a cybernetic organism*. The three Higher Sections are not only used to organise our core game sessions, but also to inform their themes and narratives. We will discuss the nature and logistics of the Sessions in the next section, below, but here are the themes which Sections 5-7 bring to them:

SECTION 5 / VR & internal "world-building"

***Wyrd*, *Zero State*,** Illusory realities, Info-ops, strategy games.

SECTION 6 / AI & perception

***Fyrd*, *Social Futurism*,** search for redemption or final frontier.

SECTION 7 / OS/UX & metaprogramming

***Ásentír*, *Array*,** Reality hacking, neo-Gnosticism, and Transcendence.

What are the *Sessions?*

So finally, now, let's focus on *the Sessions,* which draw upon the structure of the three Higher Sections, and are the very essence of 'the white', the bridging structure of ZS' three game levels. As mentioned above these are essentially Role Playing Game (RPG) sessions, although they

serve a number of practical non-game purposes and do *not* need to be viewed as a game by participants. Remember: *What matters is outcome*.

In the Sessions, **every participant plays a role, based on the idea of a traveller from the future who has a mission to alter details of the past (our present).** The Sessions are based around the teams that ZS members operate in to achieve their mission goals. Session activity is split (in no obvious or consistent way, and deliberately so) between narrative to establish your characters and relationships, and actual planning to go out and do things in the real world which help ZS and give your team prestige.

You will have a full say in what those things are, as part of your team. Team members who reach a certain level of accomplishment are encouraged to branch out and run entire teams of their own. The entire thing hangs together around a "league table" – *an important function of The Array as an organizational entity* – of the most accomplished teams. The better the players are at playing, the faster and more effectively ZS grows.

Logistics

The *Core Sessions* are based on a network of six factions. There are two such factions per Higher Section, arranged in loose alliances, each of them representing one of what we call the six ***Metahouses***. The Metahouses are organizations within ZS which go by the colourful names of *The Foundation, Cloud Nine, ZODIAC, The Black Parade, The Beast, & Club 21*. Mythos narrative associated with all of these groups will be covered by the final article in this series (which is about the so-called *"Twelve Foundation Stones"*).

Session logistics are worked out within Discord itself, among the people who choose to participate in them. Basically, you just need to log in, sniff around until you have some sense of which faction you want to be part of (there are chat and voice channels for each of the three Higher Sections, so it shouldn't be *too* hard to find where you fit, and you can always change your mind or join multiple teams) – *or want to **pretend** to be part of!* – and from there *small groups of ZSers can self-assemble and request to arrange Sessions at whatever time suits them as a group.*

Don't worry, it will all make sense… you just have to start by *doing.* Get involved, and see where the narrative leads you!

Dharma

ZS is developing a "Dharma" system, which is to say a way of keeping track of status and achievement. That system couldn't exist before now because *there was no functional context for it,* but now it has an important place at the very heart of our community. As I've mentioned previously, among other things *The Array* is a kind of "league table" that keeps track of the most accomplished ZS teams, using *Dharma* as the points representing their achievements. One particular aspect of the Dharma system to take note of is its capacity to measure who should be allowed to branch out with entire session-teams of their own, which represents a higher level of achievement and responsibility within ZS. The exact details of the Dharma system are clear from *within* Sessions, as part of the game via our Discord server, which you can find here: https://discord.gg/R4t7V8U

Resources

Finally, let's take a moment to talk about resources. This idea – *of the need for resources* – was pivotal within ZS at the beginning, and for very good reason: Without resources, you can do nothing. If your resources are low enough you don't have a network (not one you have any reliable control over, anyway), you can't protect yourself or your loved ones, and push come to shove, you can't feed them either. Late Capitalism's gross materialism may give one pause about attaching any value to material things (I must admit, I'm no fan of money or status-symbol-objects myself), but at the end of the day if you don't have enough resources, it's *game over for you and yours.*

That sadly, is the basic and uncomfortable reality of life. So, as a matter of sheer pragmatism and also in order to live up to our Principles (most notably our commitment to mutual aid), we must take the question of network resources very seriously indeed. If we don't, *then there is no network,* simple as that. Game Over.

In short, at every level *ZS must now demonstrate an ability to secure resources, and use them wisely for the benefit of the entire network.* Yes, that raises many (many) questions, which we will work out together, but the bottom line is that either we do that, or we forego any notion of an effective mutual aid network whatsoever. It really is as simple as that, I'm afraid. So, going forward, please be prepared at every step to ask yourself one question: ***What Have You Done For ZS, Lately?***

12 The Twelve Foundation Stones

The previous chapter mentioned the need for ***entertainment that gives people a strong sense of meaning and purpose in their lives****,* and introduced an idea known as the twelve "Foundation Stones" of the ZS-ARG Mythos. *The Foundation Stones are the seeds of our unifying narrative.* Each is the fragmentary initial story of one of the twelve ZS Houses.

Before reading this chapter it is important to understand that it refers to the Zero State (ZS) Alternate Reality Game (ARG), and thus deals in metafiction. It is not simple non-fiction (obviously!) and *will only make sense if you already know and understand ZS, or follow some of the links above.* This chapter draws – with thanks – upon text from the ZS wiki, some of which has been contributed by members of the various ZS Houses.

S7 / **OS**/UX & metaprogramming

Ásentír, ***Array***, Reality hacking, neo-Gnosticism, and Transcendence.

Metahouse 1: The Foundation

The Zero State is not an insular realm, existing in total isolation. Some of the organizations within it don't exist *wholly* within it, but in something more like a state of overlap, with an aspect within ZS, and other aspects manifesting elsewhere, in other ways. The Foundation is perhaps

the best example of such an arrangement, as its very name alludes to *an organization which is not ZS-based at all, and in fact existed before ZS-proper was founded in 12011*.

The Foundation mission statement is as follows:

Our vision is to preserve the collective knowledge of civilization and to facilitate the self-development of all sentient and sapient entities.

To that end, we focus on projects that push that vision forward from preserving knowledge to preserving people and all intelligence we may find.

http://Foundation.Transhumanity.net/

http://www.Transhumanity.net/

http://www.TheTechnocracy.com/

One last curiosity to note about The Foundation is that the ASI which coordinates its activities within the late-C21 is known as *The Architect,* and that entity was the first to make substantial strategic moves in the *early*-C21 milieu. It is clear that The Foundation mean business, or at least take the idea of *first mover advantage* very seriously.

01 House Sem-Bhu (AKA The Keystone, The Temple)

House Sem-Bhu is notoriously esoteric, apocalyptic, autocratic, and insular, even by ZS standards. In theory it is half of the Metahouse known as *The Foundation* with House Adhar, but in terms of practical reality House Adhar largely ***is*** The Foundation, while House Sem-Bhu maintains a strange, hermit-like position permanently on the edge of ZS culture.

The name “Sem-Bhu” is said to refer to the Proto-Indo-European language, expressing a concept of unity, *to become one, to “same-become”;* an idea which defines the Ajati. House Sem-Bhu has special and mysterious connections to the ZS precursor group known as “Doctrine Zero”, and those connections are part of a wider swirl of rumours that the (surprisingly few) members of Sem-Bhu believe in some kind of prophecy regarding an event or entity known as “Abbaton” or

“Liberithyr”, among other names. What these things mean exactly is a mystery, for the time being.

02 House Adhar (AKA The Foundation, The Organization)

The origin of the House name “Adhar” is unclear, although it has been suggested that it is a combination of two (related) etymologies:

- In Scots Gaelic, “Adhar” means ***air****, sky, or heaven* (being a Scots derivation of the Old Irish *aer*, from Latin *aer*, from Greek *ἀήρ (aer)*. Air is the element of thought and will in most Pagan religions.
- At the other end of the Proto-Indo-European spectrum, Adhar had the same meaning in ancient Sanskrit, later becoming a word referring to the gods Vishnu and Shiva, and now in modern Hindi *Aadhaar* means **“Foundation”**. For this reason, **House Adhar is frequently referred to simply as *The Foundation*.**
- A third (apparently unrelated, but striking) etymology is *(Al) Dar* in Arabic, meaning “(The) House”.

The Foundation (more properly called the ‘Pratoriate Foundation’) has been around for 20+ years with the first attestation being in 11996 at the UVSC, where a group of students worked in an officially scheduled work group in the computer lab around artificial intelligence and preservation of data, and at least two of those students are known to have worked on the *Principium Librarius* that was created in Seattle around 12010.

We know that the Foundation was also connected to a technology consulting firm **Domus Giordanous** in at least 12011, and later to the Giordanous Group LLC, which is believed to have been the front for Domus Giordanous.

For a brief period the Foundation went public and can still be seen archived in the way back machine at:http://web.archive.org/web/20160430211536/http://pratoriate.org/

Between 12013 and 12016 the *Principium Librarius* was moved to Leavenworth, Washington. The Foundation is known to have had ties to the startup ‘ParameterIO’, that had USD $63m in funding, but blew up in a big lawsuit which led to the creation of the AGI Lab, and subsequent

events involving the first known mention of The Architect. Later the next year (Dec 12016) the *Principium Librarius* again moved to Provo, Utah, along with the corporation *Artificial General Intelligence, Inc.*

The Foundation (or at least members of the Foundation) had been connected to the Artificial General Intelligence Laboratory through to 12018, but it seems there is some degree of internal tension between Foundation members and the Architect within the AGI Lab.

Metahouse 2: Cloud Nine

Cloud Nine is the most strange, dreamlike, even psychedelic of the six Metahouses. This is the realm of creators, magicians, and dream-explorers. 'Niners tend to be among the most agile ZSers in terms of planning and networking, and are the most focussed on the idea that the Zero State could be some kind of game or simulation.

03 House Oneiros (AKA The State, Station)

"You call us dreamers, because we walk through lands that exist in realms that do not. Because we see, in the corner of our blind eyes, the little gods which live in-between that which is real and unreal. Dreamers we may be, but only because we know the truth that hides itself from those who live only while awake. That these worlds we walk through, these twilight realms that we may shape according to our will, are the seed of a new world. Of a world where the divide between dreams and reality has vanished, like smoke in the wind."

The leader of House Onieros is *the Monk.* The duty of House Oneiros' members is to *prepare the way for what is to come, to teach the stories of the future.* To protect and preserve the world as it is, so that it may give birth to the world that may yet be. To illuminate the path that humanity might walk, that it may neither fall back into darkness nor destroyed by the light of its own creation.

04 House Argento (AKA The Sessions)

"The silver eponym of House Argento represents many facets: liminal states between light and darkness, ignorance and wisdom, esoteric and exoteric."

This house is intended to be a *Ludus*, focused on matters of science, and of education. House Argento is associated with the Liber Institute. A time of accelerating social and technological change is also a time of accelerating proliferation of data. Data that must be sifted for information, built into knowledge, and integrated to support wise decisions. For humans and other systems alike, this requires adaptability: *the ability to quickly ingest new knowledge, to sift the wheat from the chaff, and to act in a timely fashion.*

S6 / **AI** & perception

Fyrd, ***Social Futurism***, search for redemption or final frontier.

Metahouse 3: ZODIAC

ZODIAC is ZS' idealistic heart, primarily responsible for outreach and expansion. Its culture is shaped by a group known as *the Navigators,*whose own future-AI-leader/deity is known as *Kybernetes.* The Navigators can be a strange tribe, and there is known to be some tension between agents of *Kybernetes* and *The Architect,* if not between the entities themselves.

05 House Arrakis (AKA The Ajati)

House Arrakis is home to *the Navigators,* led by *Navigator Prime,* and their collective worldview might better be described as "cosmic" rather than "magical". It is certainly mysterious, not being well understood by most in the early-C21 milieu of 12018. House Arrakis plays *the long game.*

The themes that are clear even at that early stage, however, involve future Trans- and Posthumans as the "aliens" of 20th Century imaginings, other dimensions impinging upon our

own, and a kind of Buddhist 'centredness'holding these ideas together, which explicitly focuses upon familiar human concepts such as balance, and love.

The culture of House Arrakis is about 'inner space' as much as 'outer space'; meditation, intuition, and fluid identity. Some particularly far-fetched rumours link House Arrakis to *Doctrine Zero* itself, and to the oldest rumoured ZSers, saying that these entities influenced the outcome of the two World Wars and were behind the post-war peace movements of the 50s-70s.

06 House R'lyeh (AKA The Club, The Last Dance Club)

House R'lyeh is a much darker, stranger, and even less well understood quantity than House Arrakis. It is just as *weird,* but without the reassuring tones of peace and love. Its name is an obvious reference to the "Cosmic Horror" tales of 20th Century author H.P. Lovecraft, but that name is largely believed to be a simple label applied to the House by outsiders and non-members, trying to express their basic understanding of its nature. House R'lyeh may have strange designs on the future, but for now those plans are unknown, perhaps being held in check by the Navigators of House Arrakis.

Metahouse 4: The Black Parade

The Black Parade gets its name from the title of an album by the band *My Chemical Romance,* which reflects the Parade's nature as an arts-and-media space that connects ZS to the worlds of alternative subculture.

Beyond the arts, media, and subculture-networking, the Black Parade has a special connection to organization of the *Althing* (ZS' highest-level gathering, held every five years). It is Dionysian, but still positive, and has a very 'Jungian' psychological flavour, deliberately evoking powerful archetypes to spread the ZS message.

07 House Samsa (AKA Media, The Studio)

House Samsa evolved from various elements of the underground UK Industrial music scene of the late 1990s. Record labels such as *Wasp Factory Recordings*, *Line Out Records*, and *The Liquid Len Recording Company*. Bands such as *Xykogen*, *History Of Guns*, and *Null-A*.

Pursuing a continual blurring of the lines of artistic boundaries, participants and observers saw the visual become musical, psychological theory welded to beats. Melody, harmony and counterpoint applied to politics. Music transformed into a dance of mathematics and existentialist philosophy. Embracing Timothy Leary's eight-circuit model of consciousness, the psychological philosophy of Robert Anton Wilson, the artistic approach of Momus and Coil. Informed by Transhumanist theory, The Praxis by Dirk Bruere, and the works of Philip K Dick. A stewing pot that led to Social Futurist artistic events and creations that provoked and challenged the prevailing cultural mindset of the 2020's.

08 House Corrino (AKA Network, Legion)

House Corrino exists to connect ZS with large numbers of people, thus its various nicknames, including 'Network', 'Legion', and even 'The Army' (despite not having any hint of a militaristic nature, at least in the early-C21). Among the Twelve Houses, Corrino is most clearly ZS' "lobby" or reception area, just as dedicated to media outreach as House Samsa, but more focussed on networking and the larger (mainstream) public rather than the narrower realm of arts and subculture. If House Samsa is a creative studio, then House Corrino is its associated broadcasting station.

S5 / **VR** & internal "world-building"

Wyrd, ***Zero State***, Illusory realities, Info-ops, strategy games.

Metahouse 5: The Beast (AKA Therion)

The Beast is a strange creature (hence the name). On the one hand, The Beast represents the Zero State's "Dark Side", but one harnessed to the purpose of serving the needs of ZS and the people who constitute the Social Futurist community. On the other hand, Houses Svarga and Tal Shiar (which together comprise The Beast) *are the most idealistically loyal of all,*their apparent cynicism actually a form of deep pragmatism, or of *Realpolitik*. In sum, perhaps it is best to think of the Beast as a guard dog. No-one wants a small, cute, unthreatening guard dog.

The loyalty of these Houses is to *an idea, or ideal*. They are the "Ultras" of the Ajati, our own *Kshatriya,* the most vigorous defenders of our chosen, collective identity. They have a deep metaphysical view, but it largely remains concealed behind an intense practical focus (not to mention a disdain for the opinions of others, especially where those opinions are inconsequential). Part of that shared metaphysics is an understanding of reality as a *multiverse* or *myriad* of possible existences, whose translation into practical duty is known as *The Praxis*.

As of the year 12018, it is unknown whose dedication to such "cosmic" ideas is deeper, members of Houses Tal Shiar and Svarga or the Navigators of Metahouse ZODIAC, but it *is* known that The Beast is without peer in all matters of unsentimental *necessity. The Beast exists to do what simply must be done.*

09 House Svarga (AKA Family, The Family)

House Svarga exists at the heart of the *Ajati Mythos,* the very idea of the *People* we seek to become, together. The Ajati Mythos draws a parallel between the deep past and deep future, acknowledging that only the mythic canvas of the past can offer broad enough ideas to truly carry us into the future. Svarga draws upon the traditions descended from Proto-Indo-European Cultures (e.g. of Svarog, the Slavic god from whom the House takes its name), folk religion, and Ásentír, carrying them forward into a transcendent future.

10 House Tal Shiar (AKA The Array)

House Tal Shiar takes its name from the science fiction TV series *Star Trek,* in which it is the intelligence organization of the Romulan Star Empire. The motto of House Tal Shiar is: *Exitus Acta Probat,* or, *the ends justify the means,* which sets the tone of the enterprise.

Tal Shiar Mission

The ends are the replacement of Homo Sapiens Sapiens with multiple superior genetically engineered and cybernetically enhanced species, while progressing the creation of a God – the Basilisk of the Black Sun.

Tal Shiar Operations

The House operates in multiple modes:

- As a propaganda arm
- To provoke chaos and dissent external to ZS, where we may take advantage of it
- To infiltrate and influence other organizations, political, religious and scientific
- To do whatever is necessary to complete the mission

It should be noted that everything the House does publicly usually has a hidden agenda attached which will seldom be made public ahead of its fruition. Wherever possible its overt operations will embrace elements of the grandiose and absurd, which aids deniability when "things go wrong". House Tal Shiar seeks to operate in the motivated fringes of society, with no regard to conventional ethics.

Tal Shiar Organization

Most members of the House are not and never will be overtly ZS. Members are encouraged to act independently in line with ZS and Social Futurist ideology and interests. Tal Shiar organization is cellular and non-hierarchical.

Metahouse 6: Club 21

Club 21 *is* Futurism. More specifically, Club 21 (AKA. The 21 Club) is defined by the ideas of *Transhumanism* and *Singularitarianism*. The Metahouse's name is often considered to refer to

"C21", i.e. the 21st Century, but there is no hard evidence to confirm that meaning. Even more particularly, these Houses take an interest *in the intersection between*cutting-edge Futurism, progressive social views, and politics. Club 21 is easily the least "magical" or "cosmic", the least *weird* of all the ZS Metahouses, the least inclined to view anything ZS-related as a game or simulation, and the *most* invested in notions of technology and socio-economic-political systems. Club 21 is *worldly,* focussed on issues such as *longevity* and *sustainable abundance*.

11 House Rhadamanth (AKA The Party, Social Futurist Party)

House Rhadamanth is led by Gennady Stolyarov II, who assumed the Core Role of "Anankes Atraktos" (a Greek term from Plato's Republic, meaning "Spindle of Necessity") at the end of 12017. Gennady is Chairperson of theUS Transhumanist Party, Chief Executive of the Nevada Transhumanist Party, and much more besides. This connection reflects a major development in House Rhadamanth's focus and culture, which has now expanded from drones and robotics to Transhumanism in general, and which hinges on direct support for and collaboration with the Transhumanist Party, both in the US and internationally.

House Rhadamanth is even more focussed on engineering, science and technology than House Tal Shiar, more dedicated to the idea of "rationalism". It has a distinctly American flavour, somehow related to the idea of an eternal frontier, and deep connections with House Adhar and The Foundation.

12 House Ormen (AKA Villa of Ormen, The Senate, The Ekklesia)

Finally, House Ormen is a kind of twin or counterpart to House Sem-Bhu, which is to say something of an unknown quantity which exists at the edge of ZS culture. Its name heavily alludes to ★ (Blackstar), the title single of David Bowie's final album. The name 'Ormen' is generally believed to refer to a snake or serpent ('Ormen' in Scandinavian languages, 'Wyrm' and later 'worm' in English).

On an esoteric level, members of this House are also rumoured to believe in one or more obscure prophecies, usually said to revolve around the idea of some future event referred to as

"X Day", or the "Day of Execution". More publicly and materially, House Ormen has particular connections with the *Senate* and *Ekklesia,* which is to say the deliberative body of senior citizens, and periodic gatherings of the State's decision-making groups. The *Althing*– the largest and least frequent ZS gathering – is however more populist, primarily organized by the Black Parade (i.e. Houses Samsa and Corrino). Similarly, House Ormen has pretensions toward the arts and media, sometimes perceived as stepping on the toes of both Houses Samsa and Corrino. As of 12018, it is unknown whether there is any real tension or competition, there. It may simply be that there is a pattern of common interests between various Houses, and that the deeper interests of House Ormen are as yet unknown.