

AUTONOMY

UNDERSTANDING AND MASTERING AUTONOMY

NI KAOMENG



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Foreword

In today's rapidly advancing era, technological progress is driving profound societal changes, presenting people with a complex and diverse environment. Some are swept along passively by the tide of history, while others simply give up and let the wheels of history leave them behind. But those who remain clear-headed increasingly feel the urgent need to ask: How can we maintain autonomy and independence amidst these profound societal transformations? And how do we uphold initiative and innovation when faced with new challenges? Autonomy and innovation are precisely the themes that Ni Kaomeng explores in his latest work, "Autonomy". This book, which Ni has spent eighteen years crafting, is the culmination of his ongoing theoretical reflections and the result of repeated verification—both in theory and in practice.

In "Autonomy", Ni attempts to combine classical philosophy, psychological science, and cutting-edge technology to build a theoretical framework that transcends time and space. The book draws from the wisdom of both western philosophers and eastern thought, seamlessly integrating these ideas with modern life. It aims to provide readers with deep intellectual insights as well as practical guidance. Ni keenly observes that in today's world, especially as artificial intelligence increasingly pervades everyday life, while technological development brings convenience, it also poses a significant risk of diminishing human autonomy. At the same time, as technology increasingly invades our lives, it tends to standardize and homogenize our rich individual personalities and styles. People, thus, risk becoming passive components in a machine-driven society, with their autonomy, subjectivity, and initiative gradually becoming redundant.

In this book, Ni Kaomeng reminds us not to lose our genuine autonomy. He urges us to find personal strength amid the waves of technology, to become masters of technological development, and to use the power of technology to shape a society that serves human welfare, rather than passively accepting it and giving up on our

autonomy. His insights, reflections, and calls to action are particularly relevant for all who live in this technology-dominated era, especially the younger generation.

The book systematically explains the definition of autonomy, its value, and the methods to achieve it. Ni emphasizes that autonomy is not merely the feeling of freedom but actual control over one's actions. This control is not only reflected in individual choices and behaviors but also in how one balances their inner state across various environments. The book delves deeply into the concepts of "essence of autonomy" and the "sense of autonomy," and through an analysis of the balance between will, ability, and resources, it introduces an innovative theoretical model: the "Triangle of Autonomy." This model is both intuitive and revealing, showing how autonomy can be achieved in everyday life and how one can continuously adjust and optimize it to reach higher levels of autonomy.

It's worth noting that "Autonomy" is not just a theoretical exposition but also a response to real-world challenges. Every concept and model discussed in the book stems from and is rooted in lived experience. It seeks to answer the pressing questions of our time: "What is autonomy? Why should we pursue it? And how do we practice autonomy in real life?" The answers provided address the inner struggles of modern people, torn between the pursuit of safety and freedom. As philosopher Nietzsche once said, "Becoming who you are" is one of life's most difficult tasks. Ni's keen observations of social development and his deep understanding of human psychology offer a concrete path for those striving for autonomy to become better versions of themselves.

This book is suitable for young people grappling with confusion in life, for adults seeking breakthroughs in their careers or families, and even for those reevaluating the meaning of life during their careers. Whether you're just entering the workforce or a manager seeking new directions, "Autonomy" provides a mirror for self-examination and a ladder for self-improvement, offering a practical guide for anyone eager to gain self-mastery.

As an old friend who has witnessed Ni Kaomeng's growth and perseverance, I deeply admire his strong autonomy, diligent study habits, boundless creative enthusiasm, and pragmatic attitude. His new living room is entirely dedicated to being a study, with a giant bookshelf occupying most of the space—a testament to his past, a witness to his

present, and a prediction of his future. He is not only an observer and thinker but also a practitioner.

Heidegger once said, "Man dwells poetically on the earth." Only those who lead autonomous lives can truly enjoy this poetic dwelling, finding their unique way of existing in a world of pressure and coercion. "Autonomy" encourages us to become the masters of our own lives, to maintain clarity and confidence in a complicated world through constant self-examination and practice. I hope this book can help you achieve a life of poetry and purpose.

Of course, no theory can be perfect. "Autonomy," as an original theory, still requires further exploration and refinement. I look forward to more young Ni Kaomengs and their companions continuing the academic dialogue that builds on the foundation of this book, enriching and optimizing this innovative theory through theoretical thinking and practical application.

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Preface

The year I submitted this manuscript, I was 43 years old. According to the previous year's statistics, the average age of Chinese people was 38.8 years, which means I was already a bit older than most people around me. The average life expectancy for Chinese people is 78.2 years, so I have already lived more than half my life. Since I started writing books at the age of 25, it has been eighteen years.

What does it feel like to spend eighteen years writing a book?

It is an indescribable feeling, one that you can't quite put into words or fully explain. Once you experience it, you will fall in love with this feeling.

Writing a book over eighteen years, seemingly only around 250,000 words, but behind it are nearly ten million words of notes and articles. They collectively witness my transformation from a Heracles Trial-bound¹ to a Prometheus Unbound² from the

1 Heracles: In Greek mythology, Heracles, known as Hercules in Roman mythology, is a hero and god renowned for his extraordinary strength and heroic deeds. He is the son of Zeus (Jupiter in Roman mythology) and Alcmene. Heracles' image is widely depicted in art, literature, and popular culture, symbolizing strength and courage. His stories often metaphorically represent immense challenges and heroic victories. In Roman mythology, Heracles was eventually deified and became one of the twelve Olympian gods. In "Autonomy," Heracles symbolizes heroism and is also one of the protagonists in the sister work, "Daily Lessons of Prometheus."

2 Prometheus: In Greek mythology, Prometheus is a Titan god known for his love and assistance to humanity. According to the myth, Prometheus created humans from clay and gave them the breath of life from the wisdom of Athena. He taught humans various skills, including observing the stars, counting, writing, taming animals, and sailing. One of his most famous deeds was stealing fire from the gods and giving it to humans, bringing them warmth and light. However, this act angered Zeus, the king of the gods, resulting in severe punishment for Prometheus. He was chained to a rock in the Caucasus Mountains, where an eagle would eat his liver every day, which would regenerate each night. Eventually, Heracles encountered Prometheus during his quest for the Golden Apples of the Hesperides and freed him. Prometheus' story symbolizes the pursuit of knowledge and freedom, as well as the courage to defy authority for the benefit of humanity. The "Prometheus Unbound" after being liberated by Heracles symbolizes liberated creativity and is also my pen name. In "Daily Lessons of Prometheus," I narrate the "daily lessons" to Heracles from the perspective

classical era, documenting my journey from youth to maturity, through trials and ultimately, rebirth.

Eighteen years is enough time for a seed to grow into a boy and for a boy to grow into a man. The trials of these eighteen years have transformed both me and this book, akin to the Ship of Theseus¹, continually reshaping and replacing modules of thought. This ship, which set sail as "Psychoanalysis²," was later renamed "Autonomy," with its subtitle "Understanding and Mastering Autonomy," and along the way, it spawned spin-off works such as "Fennel Dictionary³," "Daily Lessons of Prometheus," "Autonomy of Youth," and "Autonomy in the GenAI Era." In fact, its core ideas, theoretical framework, and main diagram (Triangle of Autonomy) were established as early as 2008, but other arguments and evidence have continuously iterated, updated round after round. In the last decade, the main focus has been on revising the textual expressions. I sincerely feel that if the revisions continue, the creation of this book, this voyage, will turn into a piece of performance art with only a process and no end. So, I gathered the courage to steer the ship into the final port, ending this eighteen-year-long, both captivating and exhausting, intellectual Odyssey⁴.

of Prometheus Unbound. This small book, written in 2020, will be published by Zhejiang University Press in 2025 after the publication of "Autonomy."

1 The Ship of Theseus: The Ship of Theseus is an ancient thought experiment first recorded by the Greek historian and philosopher Plutarch during the Roman era. It describes a ship that can sail for hundreds of years, with all its parts gradually replaced over time due to continuous repairs. This raises philosophical questions about identity and essence: If all the parts of the ship are replaced, is it still the original Ship of Theseus? If not, at what point does it cease to be the original ship?

2 Initially, I was a "disciple" of Sigmund Freud, the psychiatrist and psychologist who founded the psychoanalytic school. Starting with his "The Interpretation of Dreams," I read most of the obscure works by him and his followers, with my mind filled with ideas on how to continue their work and write a contemporary book on psychoanalysis. We will also discuss related stories in the later chapters of this book.

3 According to legend, Prometheus stole fire from the heavens and gave it to humanity using a torch made from a fennel stalk.

4 The Odyssey: The Odyssey is an epic poem from ancient Greek literature, created by Homer. Together with the Iliad, it constitutes one of the masterpieces of Western literature. The Odyssey, consisting of 12,110 lines divided into 24 books, is a narrative poem that tells the story of the king of Ithaca, Odysseus, and his ten-year journey home following the Trojan War, facing numerous dangers and adventures.

Looking back over these eighteen years, "Autonomy" has been both a nightmare and a dreamscape. As a nightmare, it constantly reminds me that the heavy legacy—the great work that proves my existence in this world, the one that will be remembered by the world and future generations—is still unfinished. As a dreamscape, it constantly inspires me that my great work will eventually be realized, and I will leave something for the world and future generations.

"Autonomy" is not only an urgent legacy to be completed but also an unresolved mental knot and an unfulfilled wish. When I started writing "Autonomy" in 2006, my initial intention was to produce an impressive work before I turned 35, to prove my excellence. However, by the time I actually submitted the manuscript in 2024, I no longer felt the need for a so-called impressive work to prove my worth. Over the past eighteen years, I have done many things that are enough to make people think highly of me. More importantly, over the past eighteen years, the publishing industry has changed. With technological advancements, anyone can publish their views in various ways, including writing books. There are many people who have written books that I do not think highly of, and there are many people who have not written books but whom I respect greatly.

Therefore, today I publish this book more to fulfill a personal wish. I have no great expectations for the book itself, only that it is published in 2024 and that the design meets my personal aesthetic. When friends give me books in the future, I can happily give them a copy in return. Of course, I also hope this book can provide some inspiration to others, encouraging more young people to pursue autonomy courageously and ultimately achieve it, transcending the constraints of mortals and elites, and becoming admired heroes and titans.

As you open this book, I am like an actor about to take the stage, feeling a bit nervous. Writing a book is like exposing oneself under the stage lights, revealing oneself fully to an audience whose number and expressions are unclear. Writing a book about thoughts is like stripping one's thoughts bare for others to see. Spending eighteen years writing a book about thoughts is like standing awkwardly at the edge of the stage for eighteen years, waiting to finally take the stage. Once on stage, you must face everyone's scrutiny and evaluation.

In the beginning, we all wanted to present our most youthful and beautiful selves. For this, we always wanted to work harder to make ourselves better. But time's arrow is so cruel, turning our fresh looks and figures into withered husks. Now, we just want to shine on stage for a moment before we completely age and fade away, and then step down from the stage and sit peacefully in the audience, watching other performers, letting time's magic wrinkle our skin until no one can recognize us.

Of course, reality is not as bleak and sordid; sometimes, it is even fun and whimsical.

Many people set grand goals for themselves, and when those goals are not achieved, they unintentionally accomplish other things. The ancient Chinese called it "aim high, achieve medium." The philosopher John Perry called it structured procrastination, where the super difficult task makes other tasks seem less difficult. Director James Cameron has said something similar. If you set your goals ridiculously high and it's a failure, you will fail above everyone else's success. Creating "Autonomy", the always-in-progress "number one priority," has topped my task list, frequently appearing at the start of my reflection diaries and at the forefront of my behavior scales, yet never concluded. Meanwhile, many so-called "second toughest" and "third toughest" tasks have been completed one by one.

In the days of wrestling with "Autonomy", my career has achieved significant results. Outside of work, I have also engaged in many activities. I have read over more than a thousand serious books in philosophy, psychology, sociology, political science, economics, management, and humanities history, published hundreds of articles, started a personal public account and video account, gave a series of lectures on autonomy at universities, and launched a public welfare course on autonomy. I have established and maintained a large network of experts and organized four TEDx talks in my hometown of Wenzhou, one of which I gave in Shanghai and was featured on the TED official website.

I have also become a volunteer. The public welfare action I initiated and organized, Blazing Youth, has received national awards in overseas aid and Food Education popularization, and was featured on the official website of Oxford University. Especially in the early days of the 2020 pandemic, we turned the impossible into possible by donating over ten million pieces of anti-epidemic supplies to 37 countries

from Wenzhou alone. Since 2023, the Blazing Youth community, under my leadership, has also become the Chinese grassroots organization that has provided the most food aid to refugees, including women, children, and the elderly affected by war, in the Gaza Strip of Palestine. We also actively promoted the design and construction of the Twin Bridges symbolizing peace and friendship between China and the United States on the campuses of Kean University in both countries and launched a series of public diplomacy activities aimed at improving Sino-American relations.

After the outbreak of a new wave of artificial intelligence (AI) revolution in August 2022, I built and operated AIGCxChina, a regional and national AI-generated content (AIGC) industry alliances, actively promoting generative AI technology (GenAI). The competitions and co-creations I planned and organized have won nearly ten first-place awards in China in AI picture, music, video, and other fields. I also created ten AI music albums, produced several short AI videos, developed two computer games, led and participated in the writing of industry standards for AI music videos and AI photography, and contributed to the writing of AI textbooks for several universities. These achievements are too numerous to list.

The strong arrival of the AI era is another important reason why I want to quickly complete and submit "Autonomy". I strongly feel that time is running out for humanity, for authors and readers like us, and for "Autonomy".

AI will undoubtedly become a double-edged sword for people's autonomy, on the one hand strengthening our ability and resources for autonomy, and on the other hand posing a great challenge to our will for autonomy, thereby disrupting the balance between safety need and freedom desire within us, forcing us into a new state of sense of autonomy and essence of autonomy.

AI is pushing the world into the fast lane of accelerated evolution. In 2022, AI was a fun thing, a toy, something that could be taken or left; in 2023, it was a beautiful thing, a decoration, an embellishment; in 2024, it became a useful thing, a tool, indispensable. I don't know what AI will bring in 2025, it might be a scary thing, a weapon, something we fear to use but fear even more not to use, so I know that if "Autonomy" is not finalized and published soon, it will miss the timing and lose its significance. Because the future world will be completely different from what we have understood, everything

will need to be re-understood and reconstructed with AI. The will for autonomy, centered on human will, should be the key to hinting at and constructing the future.

Therefore, I decided to quickly complete and publish "Autonomy," sharing all my explorations, views, and suggestions on what autonomy is, why pursue it, and how to achieve it. I hope to provide some comfort and encouragement, some guidance and solutions for those feeling desperate, confused, anxious, or excited in the AI era. I sincerely hope AI can become a help rather than a hindrance on our journey to pursue autonomy, and I sincerely wish that more people can grow from mortals to elites, then transcend into heroes and even titans with the help of AI, extending their existence in larger time and space, and gaining supreme glory and legacy.

However, I also often remind myself with the words of the Enlightenment thinker Montesquieu in "Persian Letters":

Be careful when writing a book! Speaking one's stupidity is temporary stupidity, but writing it down in a book is eternal stupidity. It is not only unfair to oneself but also to others.

I admit that this *Autonomy* may not be entirely correct, but some of its views and suggestions are certainly useful, even extremely useful. I am a materialist, empiricist, and pragmatist, firmly believing that truth comes from practice, and practice is the sole criterion for testing truth. Due to the lack of conditions and interest in conducting relevant experiments, I mainly rely on time and practice to summarize, test, and update theories. I follow the writing principle of Nassim Nicholas Taleb¹, author of "The Black Swan":

I am responsible for everything I say. Every word in this book is written with my professional knowledge. I only write about things I have done, and the

¹ Nassim Nicholas Taleb: Nassim Nicholas Taleb is a renowned Lebanese-American writer, statistician, scholar, former trader, and risk analyst. He is known for his work on randomness, probability, and uncertainty, particularly his Black Swan theory, which describes unpredictable, significant rare events that have a massive impact. Taleb's works, including "Fooled by Randomness," "The Black Swan," "Antifragile," "Skin in the Game," and "The Fat Tail," have been translated into multiple languages and have profoundly influenced the fields of investment and risk management.

risks I suggest others take or avoid are the ones I have always taken or avoided. If I am wrong, I will be the first to suffer.

At the beginning of writing, I set a three-step plan for myself: optimizing, spreading and practicing autonomism. Now the logic has reversed; I no longer need "Autonomy" to prove myself; rather, "Autonomy" needs me to prove it. So, I changed the "old three steps" to the "new three steps": practicing, optimizing and spreading autonomism.

Today, I am proud to announce that the years of time and practice have testified that autonomy is valid and effective. It has made me better, and I believe it will make you better too.

With this joy and expectation, in mid-2024, with the joint help of book friends, readers, and editors, I completed and submitted the final manuscript.

This version of "Autonomy" you see now mainly comes from the pre-AI era, with some AI elements integrated. Regardless of whether it is the pre-AI era, the AI era, or any possible future era, the pursuit of autonomy remains humanity's unwavering original intention and mission. To help everyone understand and achieve autonomy, this book is divided into two parts, introducing the theoretical perspectives and practical suggestions on autonomy. The first part is an outline of autonomism, mainly introducing the definition, significance, and principles of autonomy, which is relatively theoretical; the second part is a guideline for autonomists, mainly introducing methods, tools, and paths for autonomy, which is relatively practical.

I strongly recommend that everyone first carefully read the first part to get a general understanding of autonomism, especially the first chapter "What is Autonomy," which should be studied repeatedly. This chapter is a highly condensed version of the main points of "Autonomy," the essence of my eighteen years of thinking, and the most important chapter of the book. The last chapter of the second part should also be read carefully; it is the summary of the second part, a concise extraction after integrating all the content, and the second most important chapter of the book. Other chapters can be chosen according to the different situations and problems each person faces.

Of course, if you have time, I still recommend reading the entire "Autonomy," because every chapter currently included has its own significance and value, complementing

each other to jointly build a complete theoretical and practical system of my autonomism.

There are some regrets, too. Due to time and capacity constraints, I couldn't write "Autonomy" into the best version in my mind. Many theoretical constructions, argumentations, suggestions, and even textual expressions have not reached my ideal expectations. I look forward to feedback from readers after reading the first edition of "Autonomy." Maybe someday in the future, I will muster the courage again and set sail anew, reopening my Odyssey.

Well, this is the rambling of a man who spent eighteen years writing a book and harbors a hero's dream. He wishes you to move forward bravely in the face of the era's waves, overcome thorns, and harvest growth and happiness on the heroic journey to autonomy.

Advance, autonomists, your journey has begun!

Ni Kaomeng

June 23, 2024

Part I: An Outline of Autonomism: The Main Perspectives of Autonomism

No statement is devoid of conditions. Cautious writers acknowledge the limitations of their research with what might be called hedging words or phrases.

—Wayne C. Booth et al., *The Craft of Research*

The first part of this book primarily introduces the basic assumptions, main inferences, and theoretical models of autonomism, focusing on the questions of what autonomy is, why autonomy matters, and how to achieve autonomy. Here, I will use many concepts, but they will not be confined to the traditional definitions of any single discipline. Terminology is merely the vessel of ideas, the bridge across the river.

Chapter 1: What is Autonomy

Even the voice from heaven cannot hinder the autonomy of human reason.

—Sigmund Freud, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*

I appreciate Karl Popper's philosophy, favoring bold hypotheses and careful testing. Before delving into a comprehensive discussion, I will first present the basic assumptions of autonomy, including its definitions, elements, and relationships, ultimately condensing all thoughts on autonomy into the Triangle of Autonomy diagram. I will avoid absolute statements and gradually explore the reasonable boundaries of each assumption in subsequent discussions.

1.1 Definition and Connotation

1.1.1 Self-governance is autonomy

I largely accept the Self-Determination Theory by psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan¹. They argue that humans have a tendency to pursue and achieve autonomy. If provided with an environment that supports autonomy, individuals will

¹ Edward Deci and Richard M. Ryan are the main founders of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT is a motivation theory proposed in the 1980s, which posits that individuals have needs for self-actualization and self-growth, and are inherently oriented towards positive development. The theory emphasizes the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these basic psychological needs are met, individuals exhibit higher intrinsic motivation and are more likely to engage in self-determined behaviors, thereby promoting personal growth, health, and well-being. Conversely, if these needs are thwarted, individuals may experience stress and dissatisfaction, leading to decreased motivation and well-being.

release intrinsic motivation, support autonomous actions, promote self-development and integration, and ultimately become their true selves. True autonomy means that people's actions stem from genuine self-choices, and they are genuinely governed by their true selves in their actions. The opposite of autonomy is control, where people's actions are governed by others.

However, Deci and Ryan primarily discuss autonomy from a psychological perspective, focusing mainly on the "sense of autonomy," that is, whether people "feel" they have control, rather than whether they "actually" have control, which is what I call "essence of autonomy."

Aristotle believed that the incontinent man is like a city-state that has excellent laws but fails to enforce them. The philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote in "Meditations", "No matter what our position in life, our existence is but a body, a breath, and the capacity to govern ourselves." To rule others, one must first rule oneself.

I believe that autonomy is self-governance and self-control. Ideal autonomy should balance essence of autonomy and sense of autonomy. Furthermore, essence of autonomy precedes sense of autonomy. My theory of autonomy focuses more on the essence of autonomy because those who possess it will naturally have a sense of autonomy. However, those who have a sense of autonomy may not necessarily possess the essence of autonomy.

1.1.2 Behavioral Autonomy is Essence of Autonomy

Essence of autonomy is objective, external, and behavioral autonomy. Possessing essence of autonomy means having the ability to take proactive actions, solve problems, and achieve expected goals, thereby controlling one's destiny.

Essence of autonomy is the manifestation of true autonomy, addressing real-world problems specific to a subject, time, and space. Essence of autonomy is a result-oriented autonomy. Without proactive behavior, problem-solving, goal achievement, and destiny control, there is no behavioral autonomy, and hence, no essence of autonomy.

A person who possesses, pursues, and achieves essence of autonomy is what I call an "autonomist. As philosopher Thomas Hobbes described in "Leviathan," this is someone who in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do, he is not hindered to do what he has a will to.¹

Behavioral autonomy-directed essence of autonomy is the combined result of will, ability, and resources.

A person must simultaneously possess will, ability, and resources to effectively act, solve problems, and achieve goals. Will, ability, and resources are all indispensable. This can be succinctly expressed as:

$$Autonomy_I = Essence\ of\ Autonomy = f(will, ability, resources)$$

Whether picking the golden apples guarded by the hundred-headed dragon Ladon in the Garden of the Hesperides², the fruit of knowledge urged by the winged serpent in the Garden of Eden, or the freshly grown fruit in a neighbor's yard, you must have all three: the will to initiate, the ability to choose and aim, and the resources (hands and feet) to climb and pick. Will is the heart, ability is the eyes, and resources are the hands and feet. A person with the will but without the ability is like a blind person, acting blindly and failing to pick the fruit. Having the will and ability but lacking resources is equally

1 Thomas Hobbes was a renowned British political philosopher and one of the most influential figures in the history of Western political thought. In his seminal work Leviathan, Hobbes argued that in the natural state without political power or government, human life would be a "war of all against all," a condition where "every man is enemy to every man." In such a state, people would constantly struggle for survival and security, leading to lives that are "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." To escape this state, people enter into a social contract, transferring their rights to a ruler or government in exchange for the security of their lives and property.

2 The Hesperides were three nymphs in Greek mythology, also known as the Western Nymphs. They lived at the far western edge of the world and were the daughters of Hesperus (the Evening Star, or Venus). Sometimes they were also considered embodiments of the evening. They guarded a sacred garden, most famous for the golden apple tree. These golden apples were a wedding gift from the Earth goddess Gaia to Zeus and Hera. The myth of the golden apples is most famously featured in the Greek myth of Heracles' Twelve Labors. The eleventh labor required Heracles to obtain the golden apples of the Hesperides. These were no ordinary apples but divine fruits guarded by the hundred-headed dragon Ladon, who never slept. To accomplish this task, Heracles had to go through a series of adventures, including battling giants and interacting with the goddess Athena and the god Poseidon. Ultimately, Heracles obtained the golden apples through cunning rather than force. He agreed to exchange tasks with Atlas, having Atlas fetch the apples while Heracles temporarily took on the burden of holding up the sky. After successfully retrieving the apples, Atlas was reluctant to resume his burden. However, Heracles tricked him into taking up the task again.

futile. Only those with a calm heart, clear eyes, and nimble hands and feet, or even a ladder to assist, can successfully pick and enjoy the delicious fruit.

Common sense and logic lead to the conclusion that the stronger one's will, the greater one's ability, and the more abundant one's resources, the higher one's essence of autonomy and the quicker one can solve problems. A problem is the gap between the goal and the current state. When will, ability, and resources come together, they promise essence of autonomy, giving us the power to bridge the gap and achieve our goals from the current state.

To use an analogy, if a problem is fire, then essence of autonomy is water. A person's essence of autonomy is like a reservoir, with will, ability, and resources determining its length, width, and depth, collectively deciding the volume of the water of autonomy. With abundant water of autonomy, the fire of problems is quickly extinguished; with scarce water of autonomy, the fire of problems persists, spreads, and eventually consumes, leaving nothing but ashes.

We can further infer that with a fixed problem difficulty, a person's level of essence of autonomy determines the speed at which they solve the problem. The higher the essence of autonomy, the faster the problem-solving. Given the same problem difficulty, a person with higher essence of autonomy solves the problem faster, while a person with lower essence of autonomy takes longer. As a person's essence of autonomy increases, the time required to solve the same problem decreases.

The enhancement of essence of autonomy, improvement in problem-solving ability, and reduction in problem-solving time all signify growth. The enhancement of a person's essence of autonomy is growth, while a decline in essence of autonomy is regression.

A person possessing essence of autonomy can, with the support of will, ability, and resources, solve problems and achieve goals, thereby experiencing a sense of autonomy. When you have a high degree of essence of autonomy and suddenly come up with the idea of traveling the world with your family, you can promptly follow up on those whimsical thoughts with practical, actionable plans, and after paying all the expenses, still have enough financial, time, and emotional resources to pursue other dreams, you will naturally feel a profound sense of autonomy.

1.1.3 Psychological Autonomy is Sense of Autonomy

If essence of autonomy is objective, external, and behavioral autonomy, then sense of autonomy is subjective, internal, and psychological autonomy.

Sense of autonomy is a feeling of determining and controlling one's own destiny, a state balancing safety and freedom, or a state where the emotional needs for safety and desires for freedom are simultaneously satisfied.

The safety need prefers familiarity, order, and certainty, and is related to the amygdala system in the brain, which is responsible for alerts. The freedom desire craves novelty, disorder, and uncertainty, and is associated with the dopamine system in the brain, which is responsible for anticipation.¹

I first thought of linking safety and freedom after being inspired by humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers in his book "On Becoming a Person", where he mentioned the non-directive teaching experiment. The book points out that the conditions for fostering constructive creativity are "psychological safety" and "psychological freedom."

I believe that an autonomist seeks a kind of safe freedom, a state of familiar novelty, disciplined pluralism, and certain uncertainty. Within the boundaries of safety, familiarity, order, and certainty, one can enjoy the possibilities of freedom, novelty, disorder, and uncertainty.

In a closed system, in a specific time and space scenario, novelty and familiarity, disorder and order, uncertainty and certainty are all interdependent relationships, as are

¹ The amygdala system is part of the brain's limbic system and plays a key role in emotional processing, particularly in fear and anxiety responses. The amygdala is considered the brain's safety and alarm center. Dopamine is an important neurotransmitter that serves various functions in the brain, playing a crucial role in regulating emotions, motivation, reward perception, and motor control. Dopamine circuits are highly complex and widespread in the brain, primarily secreted in the midbrain limbic system and received in the prefrontal cortex, thereby driving cognition through emotions. Todd Kashdan, a central figure in positive psychology and the leading researcher on curiosity, wrote in Curious?: Discover the Missing Ingredient to Fulfilling Life, "When we find something novel, uncertain, and challenging, we strive to explore the unknown, and dopamine production and release speed up. Additionally, when the novel thing is personally meaningful or important to us (imagine a five-year-old eagerly wanting to open Christmas presents), the brain produces a large amount of dopamine."

safety and freedom. The more one needs safety, the less opportunity for freedom. Conversely, the less one needs safety, the more possibility for freedom. Different combinations of safety and freedom constitute different experiences of sense of autonomy. This can be succinctly expressed as:

$$Autonomy_2 = Sense\ of\ Autonomy = f(safety, freedom)$$

Safety is like oxygen; you don't feel it when it's present, but you feel suffocated when it's absent. We can understand how much we lack a sense of safety by closing our eyes and taking a few steps. The principle of safety first is the product of millions of years of evolution, engraved deeply in human genetic code, the default program of most people's primary systems. Individuals who prioritize safety before freedom, and survival before development, are more likely to preserve themselves and nurture offspring.

Freedom is like hydrogen, a force that lifts us up. Our attitude towards freedom is ambivalent. Autonomism strictly distinguishes between safe freedom and unsafe freedom. At ten thousand meters high, a person who jumps out of an airplane with a parachute and knows how to skydive experiences safe freedom. A person who jumps out without a parachute or the ability to skydive experiences unsafe freedom.

The great poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote in "Stray Birds, " "The tree, free from the bondage of the earth, does not have freedom." Sometimes, unsafe freedom is like a drug, exciting in the short term but debilitating in the long run. More often, unsafe freedom is worthless, having no value or meaning. Freud emphasized in "Civilization and Its Discontents, " "Before any civilization emerged, the degree of freedom was at its highest, but this freedom was of little value because individuals could scarcely protect it." Therefore, in the utopias and ideal states envisioned by ancient philosophers in works like "Utopia" and "The City of the Sun", there is often a powerful force to defend safety and ensure freedom. The ideal futures envisioned by contemporary technological thinkers also have advanced technologies to solve safety issues and unleash freedom. The AI era is a continuation of all past eras and the starting point of all future eras. As long as humans remain the main subjects of these eras, the logic of the relationship between safety and freedom will not change.

Sense of autonomy, like essence of autonomy, is also water. It is the water produced by combining the oxygen of safety and the hydrogen of freedom, the source of life. The highest good is like water, benefiting all things without competing.

The analogy of hydrogen and oxygen can help us better understand the relationship between sense of autonomy, safety, and freedom in a closed system. When switching to an open system, we need a more straightforward analogy involving watermelons to help understand their more fluid relationship.

Assuming autonomy is a watermelon, then safety is the rind and freedom is the flesh. When the size remains the same, more rind means less flesh, and more flesh means less rind. As the watermelon grows, initially, it has only rind and no flesh. Later, it has more rind and less flesh, then half rind and half flesh, and finally more flesh and less rind.

A person's development of autonomy undergoes a similar process. In infancy, there is only safety and no freedom, entirely dependent on parental care. In childhood, physical development begins, and wildness starts, with little safe freedom and much unsafe freedom, entirely dependent on parental supervision. In adolescence, both physical and mental growth increase, with more safe freedom, a high need for safety, and some freedom, still requiring parental guidance. In adulthood, with well-developed body and mind, the need for safety stabilizes, and freedom continuously grows, entering a high autonomy state and starting to nurture the next generation. The new cycle begins.

For a watermelon, the rind is a protection, separating two worlds. Inside the rind is safe freedom, and outside the rind is unsafe freedom. A watermelon that doesn't want to be smashed should not hit the ground or collide with another watermelon or a pile of watermelons. Philosopher Leonard Hobhouse pointed out in "Liberalism, " "Freedom obtained at the expense of others is not good freedom. The freedom that all who live together can enjoy is good freedom." "Social freedom in any age is based on limitations." To protect freedom, we need safety boundaries, fully considering personal safety, others' safety, group safety, and even societal safety.

In an open system, we can increase the total amount of autonomy, achieving simultaneous growth in safety and freedom. "Autonomy" does not wish for its readers to choose between safety and freedom, sacrificing safety for freedom, or giving up

freedom to ensure safety. "Autonomy" hopes its readers can balance both, thus valuing essence of autonomy and desiring the unification of essence of autonomy and sense of autonomy.

1.2 Elements and Relationships

1.2.1 True Autonomy is the Unity of Essence of Autonomy and Sense of Autonomy

Ideal autonomy is a state that balances behavioral autonomy and psychological autonomy, uniting essence of autonomy and sense of autonomy. Essence of autonomy is the cause, and sense of autonomy is the effect; this causal relationship cannot be reversed. Essence of autonomy inevitably brings about a sense of autonomy, but a sense of autonomy cannot guarantee essence of autonomy. In reality, it is rare for someone to be behaviorally autonomous yet feel anxious psychologically. Conversely, it is very common for someone to feel safe and free psychologically but be unable to make self-determined decisions behaviorally. Most people, behind closed doors in games, are dragons; but once outside, in real life, they are mostly worms.

A person with a sense of autonomy believes they control their own destiny. This feeling may be the result of true autonomy, or it may be an illusion or delusion. Dreamers, brain-in-a-vat scenarios, and the biological batteries plugged into the Matrix all have vivid, lifelike senses of autonomy but have never possessed essence of autonomy. A monk who is highly self-disciplined and desires little may possess a strong sense of autonomy in the spiritual world, even experiencing the ultimate freedom of absolute safety. However, in the face of real-world changes, he may be helpless. When the monastery is on fire or his kin are in distress, he may extinguish the inner fire with his sense of autonomy but cannot extinguish the real flames with essence of autonomy.

Conversely, a person with essence of autonomy can genuinely change and influence the real world. They can comprehensively mobilize will, ability, and resources to solve real problems, achieve goals, and satisfy their safety needs and desires for freedom. They can always use the water of autonomy to extinguish the fire of problems, thereby rebuilding and even strengthening their sense of autonomy. Therefore, the stronger a person's essence of autonomy, the more safety and freedom they have. When essence of

autonomy continuously grows, the sense of autonomy will also enhance accordingly. The reverse, however, is not necessarily true.

Autonomism holds that essence of autonomy is the reality, while sense of autonomy is the reflection. Reality determines the reflection, not the other way around. Essence of autonomy is the substance of autonomy, while sense of autonomy is its shadow. The substance determines the shadow, not the shadow determining the substance. The elderly in Arden House nursing home may decide where to place the vase, thus having a so-called sense of autonomy, but they do not have the essence of autonomy as they no longer have the possibility to run freely through a field of flowers. In dreams, games, and the world of the devout, there are myriad illusory senses of autonomy, but upon awakening and facing the real world, they often encounter obstacles and setbacks.

Therefore, we pursue the unity of essence of autonomy and sense of autonomy, with essence of autonomy as the core and sense of autonomy as the extension. Our pursuit and realization of autonomy primarily involve striving for essence of autonomy—achieving objective, external, behavioral autonomy—followed by the pursuit of sense of autonomy—achieving subjective, internal, psychological autonomy. Essence of autonomy comes first, and sense of autonomy follows.

In the subsequent chapters of this book, when discussing autonomy, it will default to refer to essence of autonomy unless otherwise specified, in which case it will discuss sense of autonomy.

1.2.2 Safety and Freedom are Influenced by Resources

Based on experience and logic, we can easily observe some fascinating relationships between the behavioral components of autonomy (resources, ability, and will) and the psychological components (safety and freedom). The relationship between safety, freedom, and resources is the most prominent.

The more total resources a person has, the more information, material, and energy they can control, which means more capital to meet their safety needs and desires for freedom.

When the total amount of resources increases, safety and freedom have the opportunity to be satisfied simultaneously, growing together. Initially, resources are prioritized to meet safety needs. Once safety needs are satisfied, a large amount of resources is used to pursue freedom. Then, as resources further increase, a magical transformation occurs—many of yesterday's pursuits of freedom gradually adapt and transform into today's safety needs. For example, in the same hot summer, people tens of thousands of years ago were satisfied with the coolness of caves, people thousands of years ago with the breeze of tree shade, people hundreds of years ago with the comfort of hand fans, people decades ago with the air from electric fans, and today, people feel uncomfortable without air conditioning. Technological advances and increased productivity drive the continuous rise of humanity's safety needs. At one time, having fire, electricity, internet, phones, and AI were luxurious freedoms; today, they are essential for safety. It is based on similar considerations that Mark Twain wrote, "The radical of one century is the conservative of the next."

When the total amount of resources is constant, increasing safety reduces freedom, and increasing freedom reduces safety. One must make choices and trade-offs between safety and freedom. For example, with 100 dollars, spending 80 dollars on food leaves only 20 dollars for books. Spending only 20 dollars on food leaves 80 dollars for books. Similarly, if someone overspends on a house, they might lose the ability to travel for a long time. Conversely, those who spend all their income as they earn it might enjoy themselves for now, but eventually, they will face significant life problems.

When the total amount of resources decreases, one must choose between safety and freedom. Jesus comforted slaves by saying that man does not live by bread alone, but also by sunlight and truth. Philosopher Lev Shestov added, "A starving man who receives a piece of bread and some kind words will feel that the kind words are more precious than the bread. But if he is only given kind words without food, he might come to hate the kind words." Indeed, when you sing, a hungry person listens with their stomach. Typically, people will prioritize meeting their safety needs, sacrificing freedom for safety. Psychoanalytical sociologist Erich Fromm¹ called this escape from

¹ Erich Fromm was a German-American psychoanalyst and philosopher, an important representative of humanistic psychology, and a member of the Frankfurt School. His work primarily focused on revising Freud's psychoanalytic theories to adapt to the mental state of Westerners after the two World Wars, and attempting to integrate psychoanalysis with Marxist thought to explore the

freedom. Only in a safe environment do people yearn for freedom, attempt reform, and innovate. When faced with turmoil, danger, or pressure, people unconsciously compromise, often sacrificing freedom first. However, as Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, said, "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." This was true in the past, it remains true in the AI era, and it will be true in future eras as well. The logic of safety, freedom, and resources dictates this reality.

1.2.3 Safety and Freedom are Influenced by Ability

In addition to resources, ability also impacts safety and freedom.

The higher a person's ability, the more knowledge, skills, and tools they possess, leading to a deeper understanding of safety, more efficient use of resources, and a better grasp of safety thresholds. This enables them to meet safety needs with fewer resources, freeing up more resources to pursue freedom.

From an individual perspective, safety needs often contain excesses and have room for optimization. By slightly adjusting the safety threshold, one can unlock the potential for more freedom. Here, the level of a person's ability plays a crucial role. We can even assert: given fixed resources, a person with stronger abilities has fewer safety needs and more opportunities for freedom; conversely, a person with weaker abilities has greater safety needs and fewer possibilities for freedom.

Take the example of having 100 dollars: a person knowledgeable in nutrition and skilled at bargaining understands better where the safety thresholds of diet lie and how to achieve these goals with better combinations. Consequently, they can spend less on food and have more left to buy books. Conversely, a person lacking knowledge in nutrition and negotiation skills might spend more on food and have less left for books. Moreover, the same 20 dollars might barely buy a decent new physical book in 2024, but it could

relationship between human nature and social development. Fromm's extensive writings include *Escape from Freedom*, *The Fear of Freedom*, *The Art of Loving*, and others.

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However, stronger ability is not always better. Excessive ability may lead to overemphasis on freedom and neglect of safety. This result is akin to Bertrand Russell's observation in "Authority and the Individual," "Too little liberty brings stagnation, and too much brings chaos." We will revisit this counterintuitive point later.

1.2.4 Safety and Freedom are Influenced by Will

Will is composed of volition and emotion. Volition regulates emotion, shapes cognition, and intervenes in behavior through reflection, thereby altering a person's abilities and resources, which in turn affects safety and freedom. French thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote in "The Social Contract," "A paralyzed person wishes to run, a healthy person does not wish to run, and the result is that both remain where they are."

When resources are fixed, will can directly change the way resources are allocated, altering the internal balance of safety and freedom. Returning to the 100 dollars example, a reflective person might reconsider and adjust their budget for food and books after making a decision. When ability is fixed, will can change the overall configuration of resource allocation, altering the external environment of safety and freedom. For instance, deciding to increase the budget from 100 dollars to 500 dollars can entirely change the original setup.

Consider another real-life example. In China, when we visit or stay in a hospital, we often share space with other patients and their families. Doctors frequently announce our names and inquire about our symptoms and conditions in front of others, sometimes requiring public examinations, compromising our privacy. Will determines our next choice: one option is to change our cognition, reflecting on and removing "privacy" from our list of safety needs, fully accepting the culture of Chinese hospitals, thus sacrificing freedom (privacy) for safety (treatment). The other option is to change the environment by spending more money to move to a private room or receive individual treatment, thereby increasing the overall level of resources to try to balance safety (healthy) and freedom (privacy).

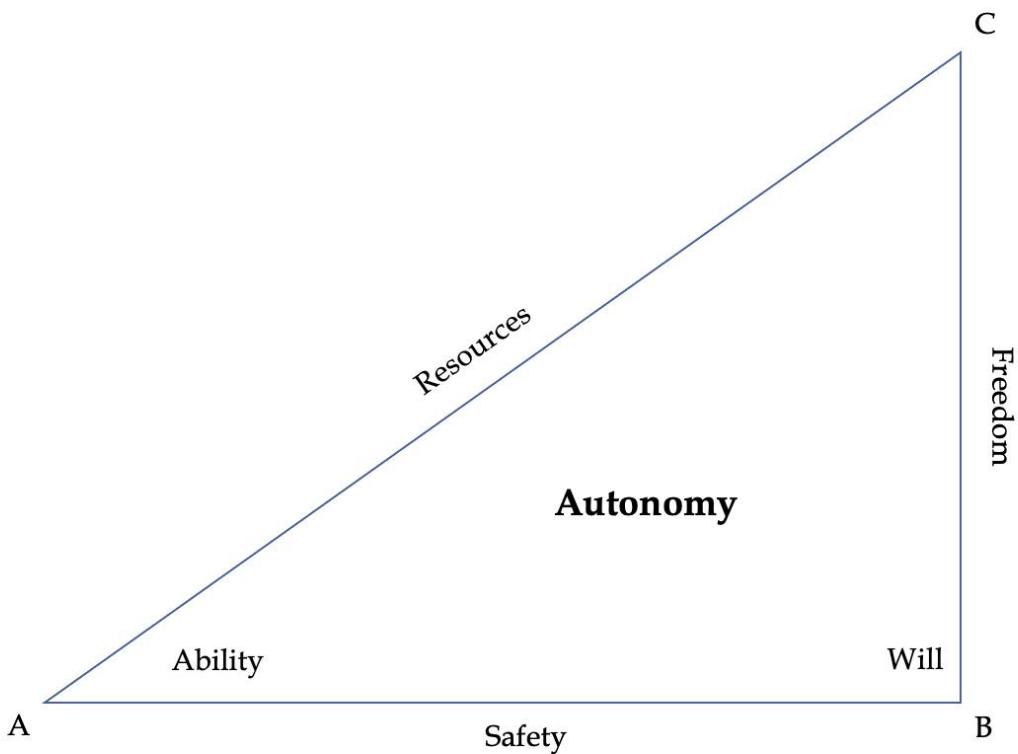
In summary, will, ability, and resources bring about essence of autonomy, which creates safety and freedom, and safety and freedom synthesize sense of autonomy. The relationships among will, ability, resources, safety, and freedom are intricate and interwoven. This can be succinctly expressed as:

$$\text{Autonomy} = f(\text{essence of autonomy, sense of autonomy}) = f(\text{will, ability, resources, safety, freedom})$$

1.3 Triangle of Autonomy

The aforementioned viewpoints are the main results of my thoughts from 2005 to 2007. After repeatedly simulating and deducing these ideas in my mind, and countless attempts at hand-drawing diagrams, I was finally struck by a meteor shower of inspiration one day in 2008. I experienced a moment of epiphany and discovered that the basic concepts and main logic of autonomism perfectly matched the relationships between the sides, angles, and area of a right triangle. The sides, angles, and area of a right triangle and their interrelationships can perfectly represent, map, and illustrate the complex relationships between autonomy and its behavioral and psychological components. Thus, the visual model of the Triangle of Autonomy was born.

The statistical master George Box once said, "All models are wrong, but some are useful." As a model, the Triangle of Autonomy may not be entirely correct, but it is highly practical. It not only helps us better understand autonomism but can also inspire us to further develop it.



Triangle of Autonomy

Autonomy = f (essence of autonomy, sense of autonomy)

essence of autonomy = f (will, ability, resources)

sense of autonomy = f (safety, freedom)

1.3.1 The Base (AB) Represents Safety, with its Length Corresponding to the Amount of Safety

The longer the base, the greater the safety; the shorter the base, the less the safety.

Safety is a fundamental human need, like oxygen, placed at the bottom to highlight the principle of safety first and the concept of a safety baseline.

1.3.2 The Vertical Side (BC) Represents Freedom, with its Length Corresponding to the Amount of Freedom

The longer the vertical side, the greater the freedom; the shorter the vertical side, the less the freedom. Freedom is an advanced human pursuit, like hydrogen, placed on the vertical side to imply that freedom is paramount and exists at a higher plane.

1.3.3 The Triangle Represents Autonomy, with the Area Indicating the Strength of Essence of Autonomy

The larger the area, the stronger the essence of autonomy; the smaller the area, the weaker the essence of autonomy. The area of the triangle is proportional to the lengths of the base and vertical sides, corresponding to the positive correlation between autonomy, safety, and freedom. When the base is fixed, the area of the triangle is proportional to the length of the vertical side, meaning that when safety is fixed, the stronger the essence of autonomy, the greater the freedom. When the vertical side is fixed, the area of the triangle is proportional to the length of the base, meaning that when freedom is fixed, the stronger the essence of autonomy, the greater the safety. All the logic we discussed earlier is perfectly reflected here.

Additionally, when the strength of essence of autonomy can be represented by the area of the Triangle of Autonomy, we can also imagine that the strength of sense of autonomy can be represented by the area of the rectangle formed by the base of safety and the vertical side of freedom. The area of the rectangle is twice that of the triangle, suggesting that a person's sense of autonomy is based on essence of autonomy but is often exaggerated.

1.3.4 The Hypotenuse (AC) Represents Resources, with its Length Corresponding to the Amount of Resources

The longer the hypotenuse, the greater the resources; the shorter the hypotenuse, the fewer the resources. Resources are often unevenly distributed. As the hypotenuse, it metaphorically represents the inequality in resource distribution. In a right triangle, the square of the hypotenuse length equals the sum of the squares of the lengths of the base and vertical sides, i.e., $AC^2=AB^2+BC^2$. Therefore, when the hypotenuse is fixed, the

relationship between the base and the vertical side is inversely proportional—when the base is long, the vertical side is short, and when the base is short, the vertical side is long. This means that when resources are fixed, increasing safety must come at the cost of reducing freedom, and increasing freedom must come at the cost of reducing safety.

1.3.5 The Acute Angle (A) Represents Ability, with its Size Corresponding to the Strength of Ability

The larger the acute angle, the stronger the ability; the smaller the acute angle, the weaker the ability. Ability is mainly determined by cognition and behavior, where the angle of cognition often influences the direction of behavior and determines the strength of ability. People with broader perspectives generally have stronger abilities, while those with narrow perspectives often have weaker abilities. Using the acute angle to symbolize a person's ability is very fitting. In a right triangle, the size of the acute angle is determined by the lengths of the sides. When the hypotenuse is fixed, the larger the acute angle, the shorter the base and the longer the vertical side; conversely, the smaller the acute angle, the longer the base and the shorter the vertical side. This means that when resources are fixed, the stronger the ability, the less the safety and the greater the freedom; the weaker the ability, the more the safety and the less the freedom.

When the base is fixed, the larger the acute angle, the longer the vertical side and hypotenuse, and the larger the area; the smaller the acute angle, the shorter the vertical side and hypotenuse, and the smaller the area. This means that when safety is fixed, an increase in ability will be accompanied by an overall increase in freedom, resources, and autonomy; conversely, a decrease in ability will lead to an overall decline in freedom, resources, and autonomy. Similarly, when the vertical side is fixed, changes in the acute angle will result in a corresponding rise or fall in freedom, resources, and autonomy. From this, we can derive two logical and experiential inferences: first, when safety is fixed, ability increases or decreases in sync with freedom, resources, and autonomy; second, when freedom is fixed, ability increases or decreases in sync with safety, resources, and autonomy.

In a right triangle, when the acute angle is fixed, the lengths of the base, vertical side, hypotenuse, and the area of the triangle increase or decrease together. This leads to a new logical and experiential inference: when a person's ability stagnates, increasing resources is necessary to further enhance autonomy. In this process, both safety and freedom will increase simultaneously. Conversely, if ability remains constant and resources decrease, autonomy and its components of safety and freedom will decrease together. In short, when ability is fixed, safety, freedom, resources, and autonomy increase or decrease together.

1.3.6 The Right Angle (B) Represents Will, Determining Whether the Triangle of Autonomy Exists

Will is a basic condition of autonomy, composed of volition and emotion (desire). It is the "light" of creation, the "Dao" of Laozi, the foundation of all existence. Without will, the right angle disappears, the triangle of autonomy collapses into a line, and one enters a primitive state devoid of ability (acute angle), freedom (vertical side), and autonomy (area). At this point, the base (safety) and the hypotenuse (resources) fully coincide, with all resources used to meet safety needs. When we lose the will for autonomy, the right angle disappears, turning us into a straight line, regressing to the state of animals and machines.

With will, the right angle appears, the line gradually forms a right triangle, and life enters a state of evolution with ability (acute angle), freedom (vertical side), and autonomy (area). At this point, the base (safety) and the hypotenuse (resources) start to diverge, with more resources allocated to achieving freedom and autonomy. When we possess the will for autonomy, we can restore the triangle of autonomy and become human again. This leads to a logical and experiential inference: without will, there is no ability, freedom, or autonomy.

Moreover, in a right triangle, when the hypotenuse is fixed, the position of the right angle determines the lengths of the base and vertical side and the size of the acute angle, meaning that will affects the proportion of safety and freedom and changes a person's ability.

When the right angle shifts to the left, the base shortens, the vertical side lengthens, and the acute angle enlarges. This means that left-leaning will makes a person more radical, sacrificing safety to pursue freedom, and consequently enhancing ability. These left-leaning radicals are "risk-takers," willing to sacrifice many safety needs for more developmental pursuits of freedom. This is a "Triangle of Risk-Taking," reflecting the strategies of many revolutionaries, adventurers, and young people.

When the right angle shifts to the right, the base lengthens, the vertical side shortens, and the acute angle diminishes. This means that right-leaning will makes a person more conservative, sacrificing freedom to gain safety, and consequently diminishing ability. These right-leaning conservatives are "life-preservers," willing to sacrifice many developmental pursuits of freedom to secure more survival needs for safety. This is a "Triangle of Life-Preserving," reflecting the strategies of many conservatives, reactionaries, and elderly people.

Additionally, there are significant differences in autonomy strategies between men and women. For instance, women tend to favor safety and conservatism more than men, while men are relatively inclined towards freedom and radicalism. These differences are primarily due to physiological reasons and the cultural traditions that arise from them.

1.3.7 An Isosceles Triangle of Autonomy is the Optimal State of Autonomy

In a right triangle, there is an optimal position for the right angle where the base and vertical side are of equal length, making the acute angle 45 degrees and transforming the triangle into an isosceles right triangle. When the hypotenuse is fixed, the area of the isosceles right triangle is maximized, reminding us that:

The highest level of autonomy is achieved when will finds a balance between safety and freedom.

This is a state of avoiding extremes; a slight shift to the left results in the radicalism of "risk-takers" who prioritize freedom over safety, while a slight shift to the right results in the conservatism of "life-preservers" who prioritize safety over freedom. The further the deviation, the farther from the optimal state of autonomy. This balance, referred to

as "the doctrine of the mean" in ancient China, "moderation" (σοφροσύνη) in ancient Greece¹, and "Pareto Optimality" by modern sociologists², is what I consider a dynamic balance under the Barbell Strategy, continuously adjusted and optimized based on feedback.

Everything and everyone in the world are in flux. In reality, achieving moderation requires constant adjustment of the balance between safety and freedom. It is like walking a tightrope; to move forward steadily, one must constantly balance with a pole, with one end representing safety and the other freedom.

The Triangle of Autonomy suggests that with fixed resources, as ability increases, safety needs continuously decrease and the possibilities for freedom increase, but autonomy first rises and then falls. In other words, with fixed resources, ability and freedom are directly proportional, while autonomy has an inverted U-shaped relationship with ability. When ability and freedom are balanced, autonomy strengthens; when they are imbalanced, autonomy weakens.

This might be the most controversial viewpoint in autonomism, as it limits the value of ability and highlights the importance of resources. However, I believe both experience and logic support autonomism. Nature is indifferent, treating all things as straw dogs. Most people lack resources and can only rely on ability, often ending up trapped in an illusion of autonomy and straying from the path to true autonomy.

Some extreme "risk-takers" drastically reduce safety needs to achieve greater freedom pursuits. Many ascetics and dreamers live extremely simple material lives while being mentally fulfilled, experiencing strong sense of autonomy but weak essence of autonomy. Alone, they are absolute masters of their own world, but when faced with real-world problems, especially when helping family and friends, they often find

1 In ancient Greek culture and philosophy, sophrosyne (σοφροσύνη) is a core concept representing a balanced, self-controlled, and cautious approach to life. The Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca the Younger believed that sophrosyne is the art of making all actions and words appropriate. It is the knowledge of doing the right thing at the right time.

2 Pareto Optimality is an important concept in economics, proposed by Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto. It describes a state of resource allocation where no individual's or economic entity's welfare can be improved without making at least one other individual or entity worse off. In other words, Pareto Optimality means that it is impossible to redistribute resources to make at least one person better off without making anyone else worse off.

themselves helpless, unable to provide any substantial assistance beyond expressing concern.

I unequivocally oppose the extreme "risk-taker" model. This state of high ability, low resources, strong sense of autonomy, and weak essence of autonomy is a delusional, crippling, even deadly false autonomy, contrary to the original intent of autonomism. Unfortunately, many great works in history promote the "risk-taker" model. I suspect this is due to survivorship bias¹, not intentional misleading by the predecessors. Authors have always been thinkers, preferring contemplation over action, looking inward rather than outward. They were the ones with higher essence of autonomy in their times, free from concerns about resources and safety, able to focus on freedom pursuits and ability enhancement. Occasionally, action-oriented authors, influenced by self-serving and attribution biases, unconsciously attribute their success to personal effort (will) and innate talent (ability), rather than external resources and luck. Only a few survival masters, like Hobbes and Machiavelli², who lived through wars, and Marx, who was financially dependent on Engels, would dissect mundane topics like safety and resources with brutal honesty.

I also strongly oppose the extreme "life-preserved" model. Focusing resources on meeting safety needs leads to the degradation or collapse of ability, resulting in another undesirable outcome of strong sense of autonomy but weak essence of autonomy, akin to a primitive state with only the base, no right angle. Other than newborns cared for by families and the dying, adopting an extreme life-preserved model is irrational and leads to worse outcomes. Sacrificing freedom does not guarantee safety but leads to the collapse of the Triangle of Autonomy. Under a toppled nest, no egg can remain intact. Safety and freedom are interdependent; safety without freedom is terrifying despair, like a vegetable hooked up to life support or a monkey in a zoo. For them, safety means a certainty with no possibility of change, where their fate is decided by others.

1 Survivorship Bias is a common logical error, referring to the focus on cases that have survived or succeeded while ignoring those that have failed or disappeared when evaluating factors of success. This bias can lead to incorrect estimation and analysis of the factors contributing to success.

2 Niccolò Machiavelli was a renowned political thinker, historian, and diplomat of the Italian Renaissance, best known for his work *The Prince*. He is considered one of the founders of political realism, emphasizing the practicality and efficiency of political actions rather than solely focusing on morality and ideals.

The Triangle of Autonomy also suggests that by calculating the areas of different types of triangles, we can quantify the total level of autonomy under different models. Clearly, a balanced model slightly surpasses moderate left-leaning (right-leaning) strategies and far exceeds overly left-leaning (right-leaning) and extreme left-leaning (right-leaning) strategies. Assuming the hypotenuse is 5, calculations show that in a balanced state (acute angle 45 degrees, safety and freedom 1:1), the triangle's area is 6.25, maximizing autonomy. In moderately right-leaning (acute angle 37 degrees, safety and freedom 4:3) and moderately left-leaning (acute angle 53 degrees, safety and freedom 3:4) states, the classic 3-4-5 triangle has an area of 6. In overly right-leaning (acute angle 15 degrees, safety nearly 4 times freedom) and overly left-leaning (acute angle 75 degrees, freedom nearly 4 times safety) states, the area is only 3.13, half of the perfect state. In extreme right-leaning (acute angle 5 degrees, safety nearly 12 times freedom) and extreme left-leaning (acute angle 85 degrees, freedom nearly 12 times safety) states, the area is only 1.09, utilizing only one-sixth of the maximum potential autonomy.

The Triangle of Autonomy inspires us to pursue a relatively balanced state. This balanced strategy is a general, long-term dynamic equilibrium that does not exclude occasional extreme tactics. We should adapt our strategies to the circumstances, adjusting them to deal with the impacts of uncertainty and asymmetry.

After eighteen years of thought and practice, my interim conclusion is that maximizing autonomy begins with will in the early stages, focuses on ability in the mid-stages, and is based on resources in the later stages. This approach can guide the enhancement of individual autonomy and the construction of autonomy for groups such as families, organizations, and even societies.

Enhancing individual autonomy involves three steps: the first step is to focus on strengthening will, the second is to continuously improve ability, and the third is to fully enhance resources and balance the allocation of resources between safety and freedom. In this process, essence of autonomy will continuously improve, and the Triangle of Autonomy will grow.

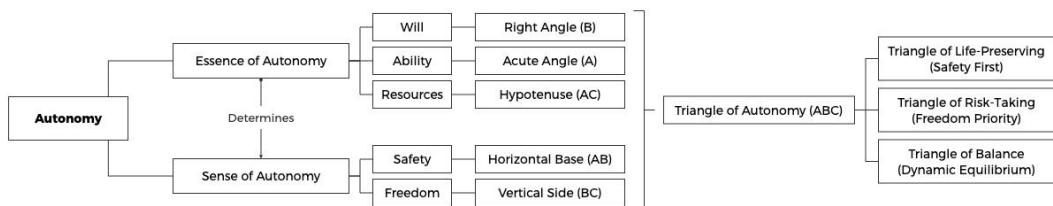
Building group autonomy also follows three steps: the first step is to mobilize thoughts and solidify will; the second step is to focus on education and training to strengthen

ability; and the third step is to develop key elements to ensure resources. If a society aims to achieve universal autonomy, or "democracy" as autonomism calls it, it must go through these three steps.

Finally, I must reiterate that the Triangle of Autonomy is not an absolute truth and may not be entirely correct; it might be overturned in the future. Nor is it an axiom, nor necessarily the best representation; it may be updated in the future. It is merely an operational model set up for narrative convenience, a useful, practical, and easy-to-use model, following the principle of pragmatism like autonomism itself. Therefore, I will continue to strive to find better models to summarize all concepts and relationships related to autonomy. But until we find a better solution, we will use it as the basic model of autonomism.

1.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter primarily introduces the definition of autonomy, that is, self-governance, and breaks it down into the sense of autonomy composed of safety and freedom, and the essence of autonomy determined by will, ability, and resources. After fully discussing the basic relationships between autonomy, safety, freedom, will, ability, and resources, it proposes the Triangle of Autonomy model, modeling and visualizing it.



Chapter 2: Why Pursue Autonomy

Set your heart on the cosmos, establish your destiny for the people, continue the lost teachings of ancient sages, and open the path to peace for all future generations.

— Zhang Zai, Hengqu Yulu

Why should one pursue autonomy?

This seemingly simple and self-evident question is rarely pondered seriously. It wasn't until I completed the main writing of "Autonomy" that I began to seriously address the question of "why pursue autonomy." As my thoughts deepened, I increasingly felt that the answer to why pursue autonomy is critically important.

It is the source of essence of autonomy, like the first drop of water falling from a glacier at the source of the Yangtze River. Without it, we wouldn't contemplate how to pursue and achieve autonomy. Without it, we wouldn't choose to persist when encountering more problems and difficulties after enhancing our essence of autonomy. Without it, we wouldn't have the opportunity to stand higher, see further, and embrace more choices and possibilities.

It is also the destination of essence of autonomy, like the expanse of the ocean into which the Yangtze River flows. Without it, we wouldn't know what to do after becoming clear-minded and agile, beyond picking golden apples and fruits of knowledge. Without it, we wouldn't know what to do with the "autonomy surplus" after

solving basic issues in life, study, and work. Without it, we wouldn't know how to use the achieved autonomy in a meaningful and valuable way.

By finding it, we can grasp both the source and the destination, fully mastering the autonomy in between. By finding it, we can ignite the inner flame and unleash endless motivation to harness the water of autonomy.

However, there seems to be no universally applicable standard answer to why pursue autonomy. In the current context, we can at least find two sets of reference answers.

The first is a negative, low-tier answer: Autonomy is to avoid being controlled. In the pre-AI era, autonomy was to avoid or reduce control by others. In the AI era, autonomy is to avoid or reduce control by AI or by others using AI. Therefore, we must pursue and achieve autonomy, continually enhancing our essence of autonomy.

The second is a positive, high-tier answer: Autonomy is for self-mastery. Autonomy allows us to expand time and space, solve problems, achieve growth, gain happiness, leave a great legacy, and become immortal heroes. In the AI era, autonomy allows us to engage with AI earlier, master AI faster, and use AI better, becoming masters and partners of AI, co-evolving in collaboration, ultimately becoming super individuals, the Übermensch¹ as Friedrich Nietzsche envisioned.

Next, we will focus on the second answer, discussing it from four aspects: expanding time and space, solving problems, achieving happiness and growth, and becoming immortal heroes.

2.1 Expanding Time and Space: Both Appearance and Essence

¹ The Übermensch (Superman) is an important concept proposed by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in his philosophical works, particularly in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The Übermensch represents a state of human potential and self-realization that transcends existing moral, value, and cultural constraints. Through self-creation and self-overcoming, the Übermensch defines their own essence, embodying Nietzsche's concept of the "Will to Power," which posits that the essence of life is the drive to continually seek power and self-overcoming. The Übermensch is capable of re-evaluating all values, creating their own values and meaning of life, rather than accepting established morals and norms. The Übermensch transcends the traditional dichotomy of good and evil, existing beyond these oppositions and is neither moral nor immoral, but rather beyond these distinctions.

The expansion and extension in time and space are both the appearance and the essence of autonomy. Complete essence of autonomy includes temporal autonomy and spatial autonomy. An autonomist expands and extends themselves in both time and space.

Greater temporal autonomy means longevity, allowing individuals to act autonomously over a broader time scale. Autonomy is a product of longevity and also results in longevity. Entering the AI era, a broader time scale might mean both smaller moments and greater eternities. An autonomist should pursue longevity unless a greater cause requires them to sacrifice their temporal autonomy.

Greater spatial autonomy means reachability, allowing individuals to act autonomously over a broader spatial dimension. Autonomy is a product of reachability and also results in reachability. Entering the AI era, a broader spatial dimension might mean traversing more real and virtual worlds. An autonomist should pursue reachability unless a greater cause requires them to sacrifice their spatial autonomy.

The enhancement of autonomy and the expansion of time and space mutually reinforce each other. On one hand, enhancing autonomy brings about an expansion in time and space. Autonomism will help its practitioners become more autonomous and self-determined on larger time and space scales. The stronger an individual's essence of autonomy, the farther they can reach in time and space, encountering more subjects and gaining richer experiences, thereby becoming longer-lived and more connected. On the other hand, the expansion of time and space brings about an enhancement in autonomy. The more longevity and reachability a person achieve, the farther they can reach in time and space, encountering more subjects, which leads to more refined will, developed abilities, and utilized resources, thus strengthening their essence of autonomy. The above viewpoints can be summarized as:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Essence of Autonomy} &= \text{Temporal Autonomy} \times \text{Spatial Autonomy} = \text{Longevity} \\ &\times \text{Reachability} \end{aligned}$$

A person who lived only 50 years and spent their life in an African rural area is bound to have a vastly different level of autonomy compared to someone who lived 90 years and traveled extensively across global megacities. Rich life experiences are products of

time and space and, in turn, bring more time and space, giving us the opportunity to become multipotentialites and to climb the "Thousand Plateaus" described by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze.

Living longer is extremely important. Historically, longevity equated to justice. The ancient Roman philosopher and statesman Cicero once boastfully said, "The mightiest states often nearly perish at the hands of the young, while the old are the pillars of the state, always turning the tide in critical moments to save the state from peril." In an era where the world continually cycled and history constantly repeated itself, living longer meant more life experience, practical wisdom, and accumulated resources, making every elder a treasure trove. In a time without written records, every elder was a walking dictionary and knowledge base. Empress Wu Zetian of the Tang Dynasty also leveraged her longevity to outlast a generation of founding Li Tang elites, cultivating a cadre of grassroots imperial examination officials, thereby transforming her "illegitimate" usurpation into legitimate rule.

In modern times, the same holds true. Albert Einstein's teacher, Nobel laureate, and quantum mechanics founder Max Planck said, "A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it." Similarly, Nobel Prizes often go to those researchers who live longer, have longer academic careers, and cultivate more disciples, followers, and supporters.

Traveling farther is equally important. Traveling thousands of miles and meeting countless people are closely linked. The ability and resource components that enhance autonomy require us to gather and distill intellectual essence from larger spaces and wider circles of subjects. Social physics¹ posits that the deepest wisdom may not lie with the thinkers themselves but with those who frequently connect with thinkers. Ancient Greece, open to the sea, thrived on trade, inheriting nourishment from Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations, setting a high natural starting point. Cross-regional trade and cultural exchange nurtured Greek philosophers with profound

¹ Social Physics is an interdisciplinary field that attempts to apply the principles and methods of physics to the social sciences, particularly in the study of human behavior and social dynamics. This field uses data-driven models and computational methods to understand social phenomena and predict the behavior patterns of individuals and groups.

thoughts. Greeks also had diversity in technology and resources, ensuring the advancement of their civilization. I am from Wenzhou, where there is sea, there are Wenzhou people; our footprints span the globe, exchanging global information in Wenzhou, making Wenzhou and its people strong and upgrading our autonomy.

In addition to making oneself live longer and travel farther, essence of autonomy can achieve temporal and spatial extension through another approach—extending from the subject level by leaving behind legacy such as offspring, works, and avatars. This will be discussed in later chapters and will not be elaborated here.

2.2 Problem Solving: Both the Means and the End

When a person's essence of autonomy is determined, their potential reach in time and space is limited. To break through the status quo, overcome spatial and temporal constraints, and achieve greater autonomy, one must set new goals and solve new problems.

Essence of autonomy can solve problems; it is both a means and an end. An autonomist must solve specific problems to achieve greater temporal and spatial expansion. Upon successfully solving problems, goals are achieved, time and space are expanded, and essence of autonomy reaches a higher realm.

When problem difficulty is fixed, the weaker the essence of autonomy, the slower the problem-solving speed; the stronger the essence of autonomy, the faster the problem-solving speed. Writing a research report that balances precision, conciseness, and brilliance would have been an all-out effort for me eighteen years ago when I was just starting out, but today, leading a team, it might be a breeze.

We can compare essence of autonomy to productivity. The stronger a person's essence of autonomy, the higher their productivity per unit of time. The improvement in societal productivity also drives the overall enhancement of individual autonomy. In the past, finding images for articles took a lot of time, but now with GenAI, we can quickly generate images as needed.

The inverse logic between autonomy and problem-solving also holds: failure to solve problems can lead to weakened autonomy and stagnation. If we invest our limited autonomy into solving a problem and it yields no results, or we take no action, we lose opportunity and time costs. The above points can be summarized as:

$$\text{Problem-solving time} = \text{Problem difficulty} \div \text{Autonomy level}$$

Looking back at history, we see the continuous enhancement of human autonomy driven by two unstoppable forces that enhance the abilities and resources upon which human autonomy depends.

The first is the accumulation of knowledge. Knowledge initially could not be passed down, then could be orally transmitted, then recorded and spread through writing, then taught in schools, and now is aided by computers, smartphones, the internet, and AI. Knowledge has become increasingly complete, widespread, and free, steadily enhancing human autonomy. There is a phenomenon known as the Flynn Effect, where IQ test scores have shown a continuous upward trend throughout most of the 20th century, increasing by about 3 points per decade on average in both developed and developing countries.

The second is technological progress. Over thousands of years, rapid technological advancements have increased the level of energy individuals can harness by several orders of magnitude. String theory expert Michio Kaku pointed out in his book Hyperspace that the index of a civilization is related to the amount of energy its individuals can use. Primates had 1/8 horsepower, stone tools 100,000 years ago provided 1/4 horsepower, the agricultural era with livestock offered 1 horsepower, the industrial era with steam engines achieved tens to hundreds of horsepower, and the atomic era with nuclear energy amplified it by a factor of a million. Concurrently, the computational power available for 100 dollars has also increased exponentially. The computing power of the iPhone 15 in 2024 is approximately 30,000 times that of the first iPhone released in 2007, and the first iPhone's computing power was more than 40,000 times that of ENIAC, the first supercomputer born in 1946. Roughly calculated, today's average electronic device's computing power is 1.2 billion times that of the world's most powerful computer 80 years ago. It is foreseeable that in the future, both

energies related to resources and computing power related to abilities will approach infinity and be free, greatly enhancing humanity's autonomy.

This means that even if other factors remain unchanged, people will skyrocket, traveling thousands of miles in a day. Indeed, a native hunter using a mobile phone on the African savannah today has access to far more information in quantity and quality than the President of the United States did a century ago. In the future, the power held by any random passerby will seem like near-magical abilities to us today.

However, as one mountain surpasses another, the difficulty of problems will also rise. The improvement in human autonomy will bring higher goals and faster development, propelling us into a new historical stage with increasingly uncertain scenarios and more complex problems.

Sailing against the current, we must advance or retreat. We have no choice but to rise to the challenge, navigate the torrents, continuously solve problems, and constantly enhance autonomy.

2.3 Happiness and Growth: Both the Result and the Process

Essence of autonomy, while helping us solve problems and extend time and space, also brings growth and happiness. Growth and happiness are the goals of most people's efforts and sources of motivation. Autonomism believes that growth is the process of enhancing autonomy, and happiness is a byproduct of growth.

Growth has different meanings on different levels. At the species level, the enhancement of autonomy is evolution, while the reduction of autonomy is degeneration. At the individual level, the enhancement of autonomy is progress, while the reduction of autonomy is regression. Evolution and progress bring happiness, while degeneration and regression bring unhappiness.

The Triangle of Autonomy helps us better understand the processes of biological evolution, personal growth, and social development. Essentially, they are all different processes of change in the Triangle of Autonomy. For example, the biological evolution from inorganic to organic matter, from single-celled to multicellular organisms, from

simple to complex organisms, and from upright apes to modern Homo sapiens, is the process of the Triangle of Autonomy evolving from a point to a line, from a short line to a long line, and from a line to a triangle. The awakening of consciousness and will in modern Homo sapiens is like the resounding declaration in the beginning of the Bible: "Let there be light," thus illuminating the light of autonomy. The emergence of free will has since made the Triangle of Autonomy stand upright. Similarly, the growth from childhood to adulthood, from small villages to large cities, from ancient chiefdoms to modern states, is the process of the Triangle of Autonomy evolving from nothing to existence, from small to large, from imbalance to relative balance. On the basis of free will, human will, abilities, and resources are greatly enhanced, fully realizing autonomy.

2.3.1 Three Levels of Happiness Experience

Yale psychology professor Paul Bloom pointed out, "Most human pleasures are accidental byproducts of evolution, generated by the mental system for other purposes." To help people persevere and not give up halfway through the enhancement of their essence of autonomy, evolution has created happiness as a byproduct of growth, designing a practical reinforcement mechanism tailored for autonomists. Happiness becomes a lubricant and motivator in everyone's growth process. Every autonomist will experience various forms of happiness during their growth.

The definition of happiness varies widely, and everyone has their own understanding of it. To unify the concept for the sake of discussion, autonomism introduces the early three-dimensional framework of subjective well-being proposed by the "father of positive psychology" Martin Seligman, combined with the temporal interpretation by statistician Dr. Li Xiaoxu in "The Trinity". Happiness is divided into three forms, each corresponding to experiences on three different time scales.¹

1 Martin E.P. Seligman is a renowned psychologist and the Lifetime Honorary President of the International Positive Psychology Association. He has made significant contributions in the areas of learned helplessness, optimism, pessimism, and positive psychology. In 1998, he introduced the concept of positive psychology, shifting the focus of psychological research from disease models to health and well-being, earning him the title of "Father of Positive Psychology." His PERMA model is a key theoretical framework in positive psychology, suggesting that happiness consists of five elements: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. However, before proposing this model, he introduced the three-dimensional

1. Pleasure: This is the individual's second-level sensory experience, composed of fleeting moments of joy, manifested as delicious food, drinks, music, visual beauty, and fun activities. Finding pleasure autonomously is not difficult. One only needs to solve problems to make money, save time, and then spend money and time to consume material products and mental experiences. However, pleasure is transient and bottomless; pursuing pleasure is like running on a hedonic treadmill, never fully satisfying, and each subsequent satisfaction becomes harder to achieve. From a neuroscience¹ perspective, pleasure is related to the anticipation brought by the "happiness neurotransmitter" dopamine. Anticipation is an endless abyss, insatiable.

2. Immersion: This is the individual's minute-level flow experience, which makes people engrossed and lose track of time and self. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi coined the term "flow" to describe this state.² For most people, the flow experience is a highly recommended form of happiness. For chess enthusiasts, playing chess itself does not bring sensory stimulation but instead creates a serene focus, secreting "calm neurotransmitters" such as serotonin.³ Flow experiences are not limited to hobbies and

framework, dividing a happy life into the Pleasant Life, the Engaged Life, and the Meaningful Life. My friend Xiao Xu Li very creatively added a temporal dimension to these three types of life from a statistical perspective. In my view, the three-dimensional framework better explains the composition of happiness compared to the five-element model.

1 Many people mistakenly equate neuroscience with "brain science," which is incorrect. Neuroscientist and philosopher Daniel Dennett once joked, "If you work on one neuron, you are a neuroscientist. If you work on two neurons, you are a psychologist." In reality, the relationship between psychology and neuroscience is not that simple. Psychology cannot be simply equated with neuroscience, and neuroscience does not entirely belong to the field of psychology. They are related but distinct disciplines with areas of overlap. However, in this book, when we discuss neuroscience, we are mainly referring to the parts of neuroscience that are most relevant to psychology, specifically the study of the brain in neuroscience.

2 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is the proponent of Flow theory and one of the founders of Positive Psychology. His Flow theory describes a psychological state that people experience when they are fully immersed in an activity. The Flow state typically occurs when there is a balance between the challenge of the task and the individual's skills. When people are faced with a task that is neither too simple nor too difficult to overcome, they are more likely to enter the Flow state. In this state, individuals feel highly focused, energized, and fully absorbed in what they are doing, to the extent that they lose track of time and experience a profound sense of satisfaction and happiness.

3 Serotonin, also known as 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT), is an important neurotransmitter and hormone that plays a key role in regulating mood and emotions. Serotonin synthesis primarily occurs in the enterochromaffin cells of the gut and the neurons of the brain. In the brain, serotonin production mainly comes from neurons in the raphe nuclei of the brainstem, whose axons project widely to other areas of the brain. The serotonin receptor gene has two variants, the long form (L) and the short form (S). The L form produces more transporter protein molecules than the S form. Humans have two serotonin transporter genes, one inherited

can also come from focused work and study. Workaholics¹ can derive pleasure from working overtime.

3. Meaning: This is a noble experience that transcends the individual, time, and space, making people willing to accept suffering and even find joy in it. Confucius said, "If I hear the Tao in the morning, I am content to die in the evening." Moral exemplars like Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa were seekers of meaning. There is no shortage of such extraordinary individuals around us. Happiness derived from meaning motivates them to reach the pinnacle of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs², continuously achieving self-actualization and self-transcendence. The masses call it virtue, religious believers call it divinity, and among our Communist Party members, it characterized by the internationalist spirit of contributing to the world, the idealist spirit of striving for history, and the altruist spirit of serving the people. It is these noble spirits that transform elites into heroes and turn refined egoists into highly capable and warm-hearted youth (Blazing Youth). By breaking through personal, immediate, and

from each parent, and each gene has two versions (called alleles). Therefore, there are three types of people: LL (long-long combination), LS (long-short combination), and SS (short-short combination). Researchers from University College London and the London School of Economics, after studying more than 1,000 pairs of twins, published an article in The Economist pointing out that the gene encoding the serotonin receptor is most likely to affect "happiness." In their study, Dr. Jan-Emmanuel De Neve asked teenagers to rate themselves from "very satisfied" to "very dissatisfied." He found that teenagers with one L gene were 8% more likely to rate themselves as "very satisfied" compared to those without an L gene, and those with two L genes were 17% more likely. Simply put, LL individuals are the most satisfied with themselves, LS individuals follow, and SS individuals are the most pessimistic. LL individuals have more efficient serotonin receptors, thus better regulating their emotions and seemingly having a natural inclination toward a positive outlook. On average, African Americans have 1.47 L genes, white Americans have 1.2 L genes, and Asian Americans have only 0.69 L genes. Other studies have also shown that the average happiness of people in Asian countries is lower than their per capita GDP would suggest. When it comes to serotonin, we Asians indeed start at a disadvantage.

1 Workaholic, also known as work addiction, refers to an individual's extreme dedication and enthusiasm for work, to the point where work becomes the central and dominating aspect of their life. This obsession may manifest as long working hours, difficulty disengaging from work, setting very high expectations and standards for work outcomes, and constantly thinking about work-related matters even during non-working hours. Prolonged workaholism can have negative effects on a person's physical and mental health, including fatigue, stress, depression, interpersonal relationship issues, and health problems. However, workaholism is not always negative; sometimes it can drive individuals to achieve significant accomplishments in their careers.

2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a theoretical model proposed by American psychologist Abraham Maslow in 1943 to explain human motivation and the hierarchy of personal needs. This pyramid model divides human needs into five levels: Physiological Needs, Safety Needs, Love/Belonging Needs, Esteem Needs, and Self-Actualization Needs.

present limitations, we integrate with larger groups, the future, and the world, thereby gaining transcendent meaning and supreme happiness.

Undoubtedly, the higher a person's essence of autonomy, the more easily they can obtain and experience happiness. Second-level pleasure can be achieved by spending money; high autonomy means more resources, making pleasure instantly attainable. Minute-level immersion requires expertise and time; high autonomy means greater abilities, making immersion easily achievable. Transcendent meaning relies on value creation and the spirit of contribution; high autonomy means stronger will, making the experience of meaning easier to construct.

Moreover, people with high essence of autonomy can achieve pleasure, immersion, and meaning simultaneously. For example, engaging in work that they excel at, can earn money, and serves others. In my work in the research department, I do what I love, discuss with many experts, earn a sufficient income, and contribute to improving the city through writing research reports, achieving a state that encompasses all three forms of happiness. Additionally, creating great works that change the world, leaving a personal legacy for others and future generations, and proving one's existence and value to the world and the future is another example.

2.3.2 Four Stages of Autonomist's Growth

The growth of an autonomist is a continuous process of pursuing and achieving autonomy. To refine the discussion and unify expression, I will use Greek mythology and game logic to divide the development stages of autonomists into four levels: beginner autonomists as "Mortals," intermediate autonomists as "Elites," advanced autonomists as "Heroes," and super autonomists as "Titans." Our starting point is the ordinary Mortal, a tiny speck in the vast universe. Our goal is the eternal Titan, a massive star in the brilliant night sky.

Autonomism believes that everyone has the potential for growth; people are malleable, and anyone can become a sage or a wise ruler. Confucianism speaks of progressing step-by-step through understanding principles, acquiring knowledge, rectifying the mind, cultivating oneself, regulating the family, governing the state, and bringing peace

to the world. Similarly, from Mortal to Elite, then to Hero and even Titan, is a gradual upgrade process. Mortals (ordinary people) can grow into Elites (capable individuals), then ascend to Heroes (exemplary individuals, giants, Heracles), and finally approach Titans (sages, superhumans, deities, Buddhas, Prometheus).

The path from Mortal to Titan is filled with difficulties and challenges, requiring endurance and persistence, as well as dedication and sacrifice. Especially from Elite to Hero and from Hero to Titan, autonomists must transcend the limitations of their subjectivity, time, and space, striving to contribute and sacrifice for others, the world, and the future. Correspondingly, the happiness experience of autonomists will shift from pleasure and immersion towards meaning-oriented.

Each upgrade of an autonomist is a rigorous test, filtering and eliminating the majority, making the autonomist the elite or outlier of their original class, becoming the new force and comrades in the new rank. Most people will remain long-term at the Mortal stage, with only a few Mortals becoming Elites, a few Elites becoming Heroes, and a few Heroes becoming Titans.

Titans are the eternal immortals in people's hearts, often deceased Heroes remembered and revered by countless individuals. Examples include Marx, Freud, Einstein, Homer, Shakespeare, Pele, Jordan, Ali, Jobs, and Charlie Munger. When you look up at the starry sky at night, the Titans are there watching over you. Very few can reach this realm while alive, firstly because their lives are not yet over and their contributions are not yet fully acknowledged, and secondly due to the lack of effective means to disseminate their stories and gain widespread recognition. In the past, it took time for an autonomist to become a Hero and then be recognized and celebrated by others, the world, and the future. However, in the AI era, with the rapid advancement of GenAI technology, this process may be shortened. Especially with the possibility of significantly extended lifespans or even immortality due to technological advancements, we may witness, for the first time in human history, many living Titans.

Heroes are the seeds of Titans, the growing Titans, half-human and half-divine beings. Heroes possess humanity because they evolve from Mortals and Elites. They also have divinity because they are evolving towards Titans, having the potential of Titans, which is the spirit of dedication and sacrifice that transcends subjectivity, time,

and space. However, the journey from Hero to Titan is fraught with hardships. A single transcendence is enough for an Elite to become a Hero, but only continuous transcendence can make a Hero a Titan. Each transcendence over the limitations of subjectivity, time, and space is perilous. Heroes may pay a huge price, even their lives, if they fail to make significant contributions or fall short midway. Heroes who fall or turn dark before making great contributions cannot become eternal Titans.

Despite the difficulties, I staunchly praise, advocate, and practice heroism. I urge every autonomist to be a striving Hero, endeavoring to become an immortal Titan. I recommend every autonomist to engage in meaningful and worthwhile activities, leaving a praiseworthy Legacy for others, the world, and the future.

2.3.3 Three Ways to Create a Legacy

In autonomism, the term "Legacy" is an open concept, allowing all autonomists to define and fill it with their content.

Legacy is the unique mark we leave for others, the world, and the future that transcends our subjectivity, space, and time. It is the best proof of our existence. Legacy is also the product of our pursuit and realization of autonomy. Solving problems can create a Legacy, and expanding time and space can leave a Legacy. The highest level of happiness, meaning, relies on a great Legacy. Legacy is also a resounding declaration of our life's heights. Future generations and the world will not define us by our origins but by the Legacy we leave. The type of Legacy we leave determines how we are viewed by others and future generations. Just as we remember great figures today not for their starting point but for the heights they reached upon departure. Legacy is the measure of our development stage as autonomists. It belongs to heroes who have completed their trials, like Heracles, to Prometheus unbound, to the gods of Olympus, and to fully autonomous beings like the Buddha, saints, and gentlemen, to Titans.

Every autonomist should aspire to be remembered by others, the world, and the future, and should strive to leave their Legacy. However, due to different perspectives and levels, the ways Mortals, Elites, Heroes, and Titans leave their Legacy vary. Based on common sense and experience, we can roughly categorize Legacy into three types: heirs

based on genes, works based on memes¹, and avatars based on technium². We can see the correlation between these three types of Legacy and the four categories of autonomists.

Firstly, leaving heirs is the primary way for Mortals to leave a Legacy.

Mortals realize genetic inheritance by reproducing. The drive for procreation is a basic human instinct. Once Mortals can support themselves, they start raising children. For many, life seems to be about creating new life. However, aiming low often results in little to nothing. Despite their willingness to be "carriers of selfish genes" and disposable tools, most Mortals may end up with nothing. Genetic history studies have shown that most of today's humans are descendants of ancient emperors and generals, with most Mortals (men) throughout history leaving no descendants, fading into dust. Richard Conniff bluntly states in "The Big Dogs": "Many stratified societies had an unspoken rule during crises: the rich should live, the poor should die." The harsh reality is that Elites, Heroes, and Titans outperform Mortals in having offspring. Thus, some Mortals change their strategy, choosing late marriage and childbearing, or no marriage and childbearing, focusing their resources on pursuing and achieving autonomy and striving to leave works, aspiring to become Elites.

Secondly, leaving works is a traditional advantage for Elites, Heroes, and Titans in creating a Legacy.

Politicians, artists, scientists, entrepreneurs, bankers, architects, designers, engineers, doctors, lawyers, founders, curators, hosts, agents, investors—no matter their title, their status is closely related to their works. Thanks to improved education, Mortals now have the opportunity to create works and upgrade to Elites. Especially with the advent

1 The term "meme" was first proposed by British biologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book "The Selfish Gene." Dawkins viewed memes as units of cultural transmission, analogous to genes in biology, representing the fundamental units of cultural information transfer and evolution. Memes spread through imitation between human minds and can include any cultural elements that can be transmitted by imitation, such as ideas, behaviors, customs, and technologies.

2 The term "technium" was introduced by information philosopher Kevin Kelly and is commonly translated as "technology elements." In his book of the same name, Kelly points out that technology elements existed before the advent of humanity and possess self-enhancing properties. Initially, technology elements co-evolved with humans, but in the future, they may independently reproduce and evolve.

of GenAI technology, the threshold for creation has lowered further. Creation is no longer a privilege of the few but an opportunity for everyone. With effort, anyone can leave works. However, getting our works recognized and disseminated has become harder. All works, like millions of sperm competing for the chance to carry genes, must endure the test of time and practice, with a bit of luck, to become cultural memes.

Furthermore, works seem more useful than heirs for recognition and memory. More heirs can only occasionally remind a few (some reliable, not-too-distant descendants) of us, but great works can keep us in the collective memory of many for a long time. Indeed, the names familiar to us in history are remembered not for their heirs but for their great works. We often leave heirs out of necessity, hoping they will create works. Those who cannot leave works may have many children, hoping they will. Different periods, regions, and cultures all pursue numerous descendants, knowing that more heirs increase the likelihood of future works.

We can further categorize the creation of works into three levels: "Establishing Virtue," "Establishing Achievement," and "Establishing Words," corresponding to the mental world, the physical world, and the linguistic world.¹

Establishing Words is the lowest level, belonging to the linguistic world, involving writing and speaking to influence how people express themselves. For example, I create autonomism and explain it. Historically, only a few had accesses to education, so the right to establish words was monopolized by elites. Today, with widespread education and information accessibility, various publishing platforms abound, allowing anyone willing to write and speak consistently to leave something behind. Especially in the AI era, the threshold for establishing words has lowered further. In 2024, many elementary students published novels, and even kindergarteners opened public accounts, regularly

¹ The tripartite framework of the real world, the psychological world, and the linguistic world is a theoretical model used to distinguish and understand the three fundamental domains of human experience. The real world refers to the objective, material world, including natural phenomena, human-made objects, and geographical environments. This world exists independently of individual perception and consciousness. The psychological world encompasses an individual's inner experiences, including thoughts, emotions, beliefs, memories, and consciousness. It is subjective and varies from person to person, reflecting each individual's personal perception and interpretation of the real world. The linguistic world refers to the meaning systems constructed through language, including languages, symbols, concepts, and modes of communication. Language enables us to express and share thoughts, emotions, and knowledge, thus constructing and transmitting culture.

updating them with illustrated posts. Many seniors engage in blogging, microblogging, TikTok, and even create AI music daily. If they can do it, so can you.

Establishing Achievement is the next level, belonging to the physical world, involving actions to solve problems and achieve great deeds, like practicing autonomism and leading the Blazing Youth and AIGCxChina initiatives. Establishing Words mainly depends on individual effort, while establishing Achievement requires historical opportunity. My Blazing Youth initiative responded to the global anti-epidemic efforts, and AIGCxChina aligns with AI era's educational and application needs. With Wenzhou's youth foundation and network, it is a product of timing, location, and people. To establish Achievement, one must choose the right path and hone their skills. Focus on one's job or hobby, consistently taking action and solving problems, improving autonomy, and accumulating results. When opportunities arise, seize them to achieve greatness. Even without opportunities, you'll have enough development to stand on your own. With GenAI, everything will be reinvented, and your chance will come. Prepare well to meet the challenge.

Establishing Virtue is the highest level, belonging to the mental world, involving establishing good moral qualities and behavioral norms, becoming a societal model, and contributing to collective, societal, and human progress. For instance, I strive to be a role model for autonomists, promoting the pursuit and realization of autonomy so that the concept of autonomy becomes part of humanity's collective unconscious. Establishing Virtue is challenging, requiring a high level of autonomy and a perfect combination of unique opportunities and significant effort, as well as universal acceptance. This is why autonomism sees Establishing Virtue as the highest goal in pursuing Legacy and leaving works. The results of establishing words and achievements will only be accepted and embraced if they genuinely contribute to others, the world, and the future.

Self-centered efforts in establishing words and achievements can help Mortals become Elites, but only self-transcending Establishing Virtue can create Heroes, and only sustained Establishing Virtue can crown Titans. For example, a child with average intelligence can read and pass exams, potentially earning a master's or doctoral degree in medicine, given family support. Through hard work, they can successfully publish

papers (establish words) and develop new drugs (establish achievements), elevating them to the Elite level. Moving forward, only by selflessly contributing to others, the world, and the future (as Dr. Zhang Wenhong did with public health education during the pandemic), and gaining widespread recognition, can they join the ranks of Heroes. Heroes who continually dedicate themselves will eventually be remembered by future generations and earn a place among the Titans.

Thirdly, leaving avatars is a new frontier in the AI era, a third battlefield opened for everyone by GenAI.

Currently, digital avatars are common, created based on our data and trained through GenAI, forming intelligent agents and virtual humans. Digital avatars, deployed in the real and virtual world, can perpetually testify to our existence. In the future, physical avatars will emerge. Thanks to rapid advances and integration of genetic engineering, nanotechnology, neuroscience, and information technology, we are glimpsing the dawn of body cloning and consciousness replication. In the future, humans may achieve immortality and become the Legacy itself. In the short term, digital and physical avatars have thresholds, with Elites, Heroes, and Titans benefiting first. Autonomy will increase rapidly, reinforcing the Matthew Effect in the AI era. In the long term, the technological dividends will benefit everyone, making leaving avatars and achieving immortality options for all.

It is crucial to note that avatars will impact our heirs and works. On one hand, avatars will assist in better educating heirs and transmitting knowledge. For instance, after completing autonomism (which took eighteen years), I plan to have an intelligent agent learn it (taking seconds) and respond in my voice (taking minutes to set up). Thus, my children can get guidance and answers from my avatar besides discussing autonomy with me. On the other hand, avatars will help us better create works and spread ideas. For instance, I can continuously discuss with "AI Ni Kaomeng," who has studied autonomism, delving deeper into covered and uncovered topics, advancing autonomism. Meanwhile, "AI Ni Kaomeng" can be embedded in various websites, apps, and WeChat groups, answering readers' questions and providing feedback, helping me improve my thoughts.

Thus, we can foresee that, ultimately, an autonomist's gene transmitters (heirs), meme transmitters (learners, admirers, followers), and technium transmitters (digital and physical avatars) will be endless, helping them extend themselves in larger time and space scales, becoming eternal Titans. Part or all of their "consciousness" will be preserved and transmitted long-term, part or all of their lives will be extended or perpetually survived, merging into unimaginable new autonomous existences, reaching the universe's edges and endpoints.

In summary, giving birth and raising heirs is the standard for Mortals; establishing words, achievements, and avatars is the career of Elites; establishing virtue and leaving transcendent works recognized by others is the glory of Heroes. Finally, unwavering, lifelong dedication and transcendence transform Heroes into Titans.

Beginner autonomist / Mortal: having children and leaving heirs

Intermediate autonomist / Elite: establishing words and achievements, leaving works and avatars

Advanced autonomist / Hero: establishing virtue, leaving transcendent works beyond subjectivity, time, and space

Super autonomist / Titan: continuous Establishing Virtue, leaving more transcendent works beyond subjectivity, time, and space

2.4 Heroism: Both the End and the Beginning

As previously mentioned, our pursuit of autonomy and its realization aims to solve problems and achieve expansion in greater time and space. This growth process is accompanied by three types of happiness experiences: pleasure, immersion, and meaning. Pleasure and immersion are personal, while meaning involves transcendence, requiring us to go beyond the limitations of the self, time, and space to make sacrifices and contributions for others, the world, and the future. This is a process of creating and leaving behind a Legacy. We categorize Legacy into offspring, avatars, and works, and further break down works into writing, achievements, and virtue. We also classify the development stages of autonomous individuals into mortals, elites, heroes, and titans,

reiterating that only through transcendence, sacrifice, and virtue can one ascend from elite to hero and possibly to titan. This is a cold external worldview and a warm inner value system, with heroism at its core.

2.4.1 The Inner Call of Duty

Having more autonomy means more opportunities and possibilities. What we choose to do with our autonomy determines and differentiates us. Generally, autonomous individuals at different stages have different pursuits. Mortals and elites hope "all for one," while heroes and titans love "one for all." Autonomism advocates heroism and calls on all autonomous individuals to embark on the great hero's journey, upgrading from mortals to elites, leaping from elites to heroes, and then persevering, awaiting others, the world, and the future to welcome us into the ranks of the titans.

Heroism embodies the spirit of "making the impossible possible" and creating conditions even when none exist. Heroic actions involve "sacrificing the small self to achieve the greater self." Heroes aim to solve problems involving greater time, space, and more subjects, willingly and contentedly sacrificing themselves when necessary, acting as catalysts for human progress.

Encouragingly, the genes for self-sacrifice and heroism have not disappeared from the human gene pool but have instead been passed down through generations, growing stronger. Evolutionary psychology¹ tells us that to ensure that heroic altruistic genes continue to serve others and society, humans seem to have evolved traits of admiring, loving, and emulating heroes. We are unintentionally moved and influenced by heroic deeds, activating the heroic potential in our genes, prompting us to perform similar helpful acts. We also turn heroes into the protagonists of our history, symbols of our culture, and models for our behavior. Today, every nation standing on the world stage

¹ Evolutionary psychology is a discipline that studies how psychological traits and behavioral patterns are influenced by natural selection and sexual selection. It is based on Darwin's theory of evolution and explores how psychological mechanisms adapt to ancient environments and promote survival and reproduction. Evolutionary psychology considers reciprocal altruism as a core concept, positing that individuals may help others with the expectation of future reciprocation. This reciprocal behavior helps to establish social relationships and cooperation.

has its own hero legends; every cultural work that has survived is a packaged hero story. They are the shared immortal Legacy of humanity, driving more people to embark on the hero's journey.

The hero's journey is full of challenges, requiring resolute determination and extraordinary effort, as well as a spirit of sacrifice and selfless actions. For mortals to grow into elites, they need only to continue producing and creating, leaving behind offspring, works (writing, achievements), and avatars. But for elites to upgrade to heroes, and even titans, they must further transcend the limitations of their self, time, and space, providing help to others and future generations, making contributions and sacrifices for the world and the future. Moreover, these risks and sacrifices must be recognized by others and future generations, or they will have been in vain. Many heroes' sacrifices and contributions were not recognized or known during their lifetimes, only receiving deserved honor and praise posthumously.

The hero's journey is also full of joy, accompanied by varied pleasures and sustained immersion, alongside the experience of meaning and supreme happiness. A hero's sense of meaning comes from transcending the limitations of their self, time, and space, and from selfless dedication to greater causes and endeavors, thus experiencing boundless belonging, recognition, and a sense of nobility. With this sense of meaning, heroes can endure long periods of pain and suffering, releasing extraordinary courage and strength in challenges, enabling them to face difficulties head-on, overcoming obstacles, and achieving greatness. Furthermore, with the sense of meaning, heroes live in different dimensions of time and space than mortals and elites, with entirely different positions, perspectives, and patterns. When mortals and elites use petty minds to judge noble intentions, heroes can retort with the ancient saying, "How can sparrows understand the ambition of swans?"

The hero's journey is an inner mission call for all autonomous individuals. With the push of the external environment, the drive of biological genes, and the call of moral culture, autonomous individuals bravely take a step forward, embarking on a glorious yet arduous, difficult but correct hero's journey. They were originally short-sighted, utilitarian mortals and elites, only caring about solving their immediate problems. Now, they break free from the curse of refined egoism and embark on a passionate and warm

journey. The ideas and actions of heroes, like a flame jumping from one lit lamp to another unlit lamp—if you bring the unlit lamp close to the lit one, the flame will leap over.

2.4.2 Common Heroes and Elite Choices

Autonomism believes that the development of autonomous individuals should progress gradually. "When poor, cultivate oneself and benefit future generations; when prosperous, help the world and benefit humanity." First, grow from a mortal to an elite, then make contributions and sacrifices to upgrade to a hero and even a titan. If one generation is not enough, use multiple generations to relay. With this determination and perseverance, even a family of mortals can produce elites, heroes, and even titans.

When mortals forcefully skip the elite stage and directly leap to being heroes, they are called "common heroes." Their autonomy is not strong, and societal expectations for them are low. Thus, whenever they exhibit behavior surpassing that of elites, the public is excited and cheers for them, elevating them to hero status.

However, this kind of forced leapfrog development often comes at a heavy cost. Stories of common heroes are often intertwined with giving everything and depleting their future. Those moral paragons we remember are mostly people with material poverty but strong will and firm beliefs, who either stand out in times of crisis or silently contribute over a long period, temporarily or permanently adopting the "desperate fighter" mode of the autonomy triangle. They compress their safety needs to the extreme through their will and ability, thereby saving resource expenditures and creating possibilities for freedom, supporting their efforts beyond themselves, their lives, and the world. Their deeds are deeply moving yet distant. Other mortals, as spectators, after wiping away their tears, can't help but ask themselves, "Is it really worth doing this?" "If it were me, would I do the same?"

Moreover, many common heroes' Legacies are short-lived. They lack writing and virtue, focusing only on achievements. These common heroes, who shine like meteors, have far less influence and sustainability than elite-turned heroes, who shine like stars.

They are insufficient to support repeated transcendence and thus have no chance of becoming eternal titans.

In contrast, elites have a significant advantage in upgrading to heroes: they possess "autonomy surplus." They attempt to solve problems for others, the world, and the future while also having the capacity to handle their own, immediate, and present issues. Or, in other words, they solve problems for others, the world, and the future while still managing their own, immediate, and present problems. Elites can advance, attempting virtue and transcendence to become heroes in their generation; they can also retreat, striving for writing and achievements, leaving more offspring and avatars to help future generations become heroes. Therefore, the elite's hero journey can choose to burn themselves but will not deplete everything. For mortals, it is a "sacrificial transcendence" that risks their lives, but for elites, it is merely a "contributory transcendence" that does not harm their foundation.

Historian Fernand Braudel believes that we study history in three dimensions: short-term events, medium-term cycles, and long-term structures. Regarding autonomy, genes anchor the long-term structure, the environment frames the medium-term cycles, and personal choices determine the direction of short-term events. As groups, people are highly predictable, but as individuals, they are extremely unpredictable.¹ For many elites with high autonomy, whether they can become heroes often comes down to a moment's decision—whether they are willing to sacrifice their autonomy for others, the world, and the future. The transformation of an elite into a hero is not purely a matter of ability and resources; it is more about willpower. At the critical juncture of an elite's metamorphosis into a hero, one's views on life, the world, and values play a decisive role.

¹ As early as 1784, Kant pointed out in his essay "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" that individual unpredictability is reduced in collective behavior. More than two centuries later, British scientist Philip Ball reiterated this view in "The Predictability of Society," stating, "Even though our current understanding of human behavior is very limited, we can still predict certain collective behaviors." He added, "The more people there are, the more individual wills are buried under a series of common facts." In 2010, the founder of network science, Barabási, published an article in "Science" magazine, presenting an astonishing conclusion that 93% of human movements are predictable.

Autonomism once again calls on the vast number of elites to elevate their positions, broaden their horizons, and expand their vision, striving to grow from strong seeds into towering trees and become upright and heroic figures.

2.4.3 Creating an Era for Heroes

On the journey to becoming Titans, heroes not only continue to dedicate and sacrifice but also strive to ignite the flames in more people's hearts, helping them embark on their own heroic journeys. As the pioneers and trailblazers of autonomy, heroes bear the responsibility of awakening, helping, and achieving others. Humans are products of both genes and environment. While heroes cannot change others' genes in the short term, they can alter the overall environment. Heroes should strive to create a social atmosphere that respects, learns from, and aspires to be heroes, thereby providing better conditions for the heroic gene to flourish. Specifically, there are four things heroes should do, which we all should participate in together.

First, heroes must treat themselves well, cherish themselves, and live longer to make greater contributions. Heroes themselves are among those they serve and should not exclude themselves. Heroes should possess great love, which includes self-love. Self-love is the premise of loving others, and the combination of self-love and loving others constitutes great love. The body is the capital of revolution; life is the foundation of autonomy. Heroes must cherish their bodies and lives.

Second, heroes should raise offspring and spread their genes, nurturing their children to become new heroes through immersion. A tiger father begets no dogs. As long as the education and guidance are appropriate, heroes' children are more likely to become heroes because they inherit the heroic genetic blueprint and growth environment from their parents. Nurturing children into the new generation of heroes ensures the continuity of the heroic spirit. Additionally, this kind of heroic education can radiate and cover more people through works and avatars.

Third, heroes should publicize good deeds, strive for good outcomes, and demonstrate the justice of "good people are rewarded." Good people must not suffer losses. "Unknown heroes" and "suffering heroes" will deter those who might attempt to

follow in their footsteps. It is essential to publicly do good deeds, achieve good results, and leave names and stories that showcase the benefits of goodness. People need to see the glamorous and triumphant side of heroes, and this effect should be amplified through various media channels and technologies to attract more ordinary people and elites to emulate heroes.

Lastly, heroes should cherish each other and support one another, ensuring that heroes are no longer lonely. Under equal conditions, heroes should prioritize helping heroes, ensuring no hero fights alone. It is also crucial to help ordinary people and elites with heroic potential, guiding them to start their heroic journeys and expanding the hero community.

You may reject my heroism, but I hope you choose the path of autonomy, surpassing ordinary people and becoming an elite. I solemnly remind you: when you possess strong autonomy, you can choose not to be a hero who transcends and dedicates, but you must never stand against heroes, becoming a harmful and selfish person.

I believe most people will support my viewpoint—that in pursuing and achieving autonomy, we should refer to philosopher John Stuart Mill's Harm Principle: no one should enhance their own autonomy at the expense of others'. We must respect others' autonomy while pursuing and achieving our own.

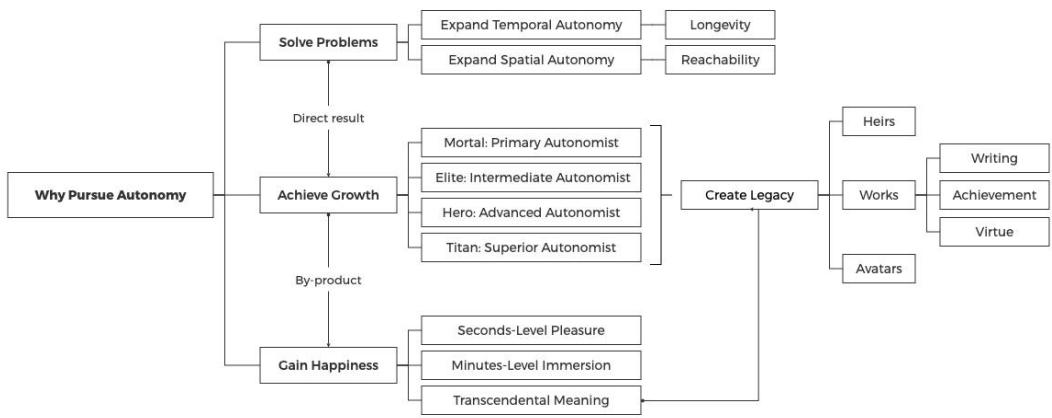
If there's even a slight possibility, I hope you become a hero and achieve immortality. I expect you to set enhancing autonomy as your goal and belief, gaining growth and happiness through problem-solving and spatial-temporal expansion, experiencing second-level pleasure, minute-level flow, and timeless meaning. I believe you will leave offspring, works, and avatars as your legacy to prove your existence. I also bless you to become part of greater things through transcendence and dedication, becoming an immortal legacy itself.

If you courageously embark on the heroic journey of autonomy, I am more than willing to accompany you. There are more trials ahead, and my theory of autonomy will guide you, providing methods to help you gradually enhance your autonomy and step by step reach the pantheon of ultimate glory, eventually becoming Titans revered by future generations.

Finally, here's a small assignment: how old are you this year? What's the farthest place you've been to? How many offspring, works, and avatars do you have as your legacy? Based on your performance, where do you think you rank among the four stages of autonomous beings? After making this judgment, what are your plans for the future? I hope this soul-searching question can ignite your fighting spirit against fate.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter mainly discusses why autonomy is important. The theory of autonomy posits that we pursue autonomy to expand our spatial-temporal reach, solve problems, achieve growth and happiness, and become heroes and Titans. The theory suggests that the purpose of autonomy is to solve problems, and its enhancement manifests as spatial-temporal expansion, i.e., greater longevity and accessibility. During problem-solving, autonomy continuously improves, and individuals grow, accompanied by happiness experiences such as pleasure, flow, and meaning. The theory advocates that all autonomous beings strive to be heroes, leaving immortal legacies and achieving ultimate happiness. We can leave offspring, works, and avatars as legacies to prove our existence, upgrading from ordinary people to elites. However, to upgrade from elites to heroes and from heroes to Titans, transcendence is necessary, which involves dedication and sacrifice beyond solving personal, immediate, and current problems to help address others', the world's, and the future's issues. In the AI era, we have the opportunity to witness and even become the first batch of living Titans with supreme autonomy.



Chapter 3: How to Achieve Autonomy

No one can take away our free will.

— Epictetus

According to Mao Zedong's "On Contradiction," we can use the perspective of dialectical materialism to analyze autonomy and the three elements of behavioral autonomy. Clearly, intention and capability are internal factors and primary causes, while resources are external factors and conditions.

Autonomism distinguishes between a person's external world and internal world. The external world, composed of various information, energy, and materials, determines a person's resources. The internal world can be divided into behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and volitional systems, each corresponding to different neural networks, where behavior and cognition determine a person's capability, and emotions and will determine a person's intention. This chapter will discuss macro-level strategies and methods to enhance autonomy from the perspectives of resources, capability, and intention. In comparison, the subsequent chapters of this book will propose specific suggestions to enhance autonomy by solving specific problems.

This chapter will be the most detailed one in the book. We will discuss the basic logic and improvement strategies of resources, capability, and intention respectively. In the resources section, we will provide specific suggestions for achieving abundance, including how to inventory resources, reduce expenses, and increase income. We will also offer specific guides for pursuing money, fame, and status, along with an additional "dark law" of autonomism as a bonus. In the capability section, we will systematically

introduce the functions, sources, components, and enhancement methods of autonomous capabilities, teaching you how to design mental modules and become a superindividual akin to a centaur. In the intention section, we will introduce the metaphor of the elephant and the rider and systematically explain the basic logic and interrelations of volition and emotions, ultimately proposing three paths to strengthen the will.

3.1 Resources

Resources represent the level of support a person's internal (including physical) and external environment provides for their autonomy. According to autonomism and its triangle model, autonomy level is directly proportional to resources, assuming other factors remain constant. Resources include information, energy, and materials, all of which can be acquired by investing time, thus fundamentally convertible to time. Even resources obtained through deceit require time investment and can be converted to time. Some prefer using money as a unit, which serves the same purpose, but for intangible and untradeable items, time conversion is more appropriate. The initial resource advantage of an autonomous person is built up through time investment, either by themselves or predecessors. Similarly, resources accumulated by an autonomous person will benefit those around them and future generations.

Solving problems requires resources. As the saying goes, "A clever housewife cannot cook without rice," and even the best hero can be defeated by lack of food. A highly skilled chef cannot fully showcase their abilities if given only basic ingredients. Conversely, even a poor marksman can score well if positioned very close to the target. Intention can temporarily reduce the level of resource needed, and capability can enhance resource efficiency (thus reducing the total resource requirement), but the essential resources cannot be compromised. The key to problem-solving often lies not in will or ability, but in resources. In the early days of autonomism, I often referred to resources as "power," because they represent the "last mile" of achieving autonomy.¹

¹ During the decade-long development of autonomism, I have always referred to the environmental support for autonomy as "autonomy power," abbreviated as power. Early autonomism defined power differently from traditional political science, where the latter focuses on controlling others, while the former emphasizes self-control. Autonomism's definition of power also differs from

Problem-solving also brings resources. Whether assisting oneself or helping others, resources are often gained in return. Higher autonomy levels enable faster problem-solving, less resource consumption, and quicker resource accumulation, leading to the Matthew effect of "the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer."

The foreseeable future, characterized by technological revolutions, promises a productivity boom, creating an era of abundance where resources may be allocated on demand. However, currently, humanity is still in an era of scarcity, requiring effort to obtain resources. Every autonomous person should start from reality and find their own path to prosperity. Based on personal experience, I propose a "3+1" step approach for reference.

3.1.1 The First Step to Wealth: Inventory of Resources

As the saying goes, "If you don't manage your finances, your finances will manage you." The same applies to resources. Resources need to be mobilized, and the first step is to take stock of them. There are numerous types of resources in the world, which can be categorized based on innate and acquired factors over time, internal and external factors in space, and private and public factors in subjectivity. To simplify complex issues, I propose three main categories of resources based on relationships.

Personal Resources: These are resources exclusively owned by an individual, including time resources, physical resources, cultural resources (knowledge), and technical resources (skills). For a long time, autonomous individuals inherited physical resources innately and acquired cultural and technical resources later. In the future, with the maturity of technologies such as gene editing and brain-computer interfaces, autonomous individuals might inherit physical, technical, and cultural resources

traditional political science's concept of rights. Philosopher Zhao Tingyang once said in "The Tianxia System": "Anything that can only be converted into rights (Rights) is illusory; anything that can be converted into power (Power) is real." Power is real, rights are illusory. Power is factual, belonging to political practitioners, while rights are normative, belonging to political theorists. Historically, political scientists focused on the factual, with conservative Hobbes's social contract restraining common people and emphasizing order; political theorists preferred the normative, with radical Locke's social contract restraining rulers and emphasizing freedom. Power is gold, rights are paper money. Hobbes wrote in "Leviathan": "Covenants without the sword are but words and of no strength to secure a man at all." Rights without force are hard to guarantee, but power is rights with its own sword.

innately. Whether we can prioritize these technological benefits and enter an accelerated evolution loop is directly related to our level of autonomy and resource conditions. Personal resources are very stable, portable, and immediately usable, forming the foundation for our survival and livelihood. For young people, time and physical strength are their capital; for older adults, knowledge and skills are their advantages. Middle-aged individuals need to balance and make good use of time, physical strength, knowledge, and skills. We will continue discussing time, physical strength, knowledge, and skills in subsequent chapters on "Time Management," "Task Management," and "Energy Management."

Family Resources: These include economic resources (money), social resources (connections), and political resources (power) shared with family members. Generally, a portion is inherited innately, and a portion is acquired later. Resources are passed down through generations and shared within the family. Additionally, most people have a "family," while a few also have a "clan," holding hereditary leadership positions within specific organizations. These organizational resources are also family resources. Family resources are highly practical, usually drawn upon as needed and used without compensation, serving as a foundation for our stability and expansion. Numerous studies have proven the importance of family resources; most people's success is built on family success, and most people's frustrations stem from family issues. Young people should heed the advice of older family members when utilizing family resources, as older adults mainly provide resources. At the same time, young people should learn to manage resources, turning the contributions of older adults into investments, thereby providing more resources to the family. We will further discuss family and career in subsequent chapters on "Family Management" and "Career Management."

Public Resources: These include infrastructure resources and ecological resources shared with all members of society. Autonomous individuals' infrastructure and ecological resources are usually determined innately but can be altered later. However, compared to personal and family resources, public resources are harder to change. The initial level of public resources is determined by the era and location (country, city) of a person's birth, influencing many external environmental factors during personal growth, such as the type of hospital where one is born, the type of school where one receives

education, the type of community where one makes friends, and the type of platform where one finds employment. Of course, young people pursuing autonomy still have opportunities to change public resources: first, by voting with their feet and moving to another city for work and life; second, by taking action to change the public environment of their current city. We will further discuss this in the subsequent chapter on "City Management."

I recommend that you score the above three categories and nine indicators on a scale of 1 to 10. First, rate the state of last year, then the state of this year, and finally set expectations for the future. Based on these scores, identify strengths and weaknesses and propose strategies to extend strengths, avoid weaknesses, and compensate for deficiencies.

3.1.2 The Second Step to Wealth: Reduce Expenses

Reducing expenses is essential to accumulate resources to solve problems and gain more autonomous resources in a broader temporal and spatial environment. Resource expenditure can be divided into two main categories:

Transformational Expenditures: Resources change form but remain yours. The efficiency of resource transformation is primarily determined by ability: the stronger the ability, the better the transformation; the weaker the ability, the poorer the transformation. Generally, transformational expenditures include three methods:

Method 1: Transactional Transformation. Exchanging one type of resource for another. For example, selling labor converts time resources into economic resources; hosting a dinner converts economic resources into social resources; spending money on healthcare converts economic resources into physical resources.

Method 2: Investment Transformation. Exchanging current resources for future resources. Investment is a special type of transaction that spans time. For example, savings accounts and financial products convert current economic resources into future

economic resources. Transactions and investments between oneself and others can be equal or unequal, win-win or lose-lose.

Method 3: Inheritance Transformation. Converting one's resources into resources for future generations. Inheritance is a special type of investment that spans generations. The relationship between parents and children is inherently unequal, with parents investing time and physical resources in raising children and further investing economic, social, and political resources in their education.

Consumptive Expenditures: Resources are given away and permanently lost, reducing the total amount. The theory does not reject consumptive expenditures and even encourages necessary ones. For those with lesser ability, consumption is simply depletion. For those with stronger ability, consumption can also have transactional and investment attributes. Generally, consumptive expenditures include two methods:

Method 1: Experiential Consumption. For example, spending 50 yuan on a movie ticket to watch a film alone, where economic resources are converted into emotional experiences. Experiential consumption is pure consumption, as basic happiness and immersion can be bought with money.

Method 2: Conspicuous Consumption. For example, spending 10,000 yuan to book an entire cinema for a private screening with a loved one, converting economic resources into social resources. Conspicuous consumption involves spending but not necessarily wasting. Thorstein Veblen pointed out in "The Theory of the Leisure Class" that many lavish behaviors have social value and symbolic significance, serving to display strength, set thresholds, find peers, and exclude others.

After analyzing these types of expenditures, try categorizing your expenses and assessing what you get in return. Determine whether your expenditures are worthwhile or wasteful. Adjust your spending structure by increasing valuable transformations and reducing meaningless losses. For autonomous individuals in the early stages of growth, unless they are born with substantial wealth, it's best to increase transactions, investments, and inheritance while controlling consumption and avoiding waste.

3.1.3 The Third Step to Wealth: Increase Income

Relying solely on reducing expenses cannot make one a successful "capitalist"; one must also strive to increase income and efficiency, ensuring that resources grow during the transformation process. The first step in increasing income is to identify the sources of income. Generally, there are two sources:

Living off Ancestors: Relying on the efforts of ancestors and parents to inherit initial resources, the extent of which depends entirely on luck. Life is like climbing a mountain; some start halfway up, some at the foot, and some can't even see the road.

Living by Skill: Trying to acquire and accumulate more resources, striving to become a good ancestor and parent. If the family is wealthy, one can become an "aristocrat," acquiring more resources through investments. If the family is middle-class, aim to become "middle-class," acquiring more resources through labor and creation. If the family is impoverished, one must become a "proletarian," solving resource problems through hard work or seeking assistance.

For those who intend to live by their skills, here are four pieces of advice to increase income:

Advice 1: Gradual Progression. Personal resources are the easiest to change, followed by shared family resources, with public resources being the hardest. Start with personal resources such as time, physical health, knowledge, and skills, then explore the value of family resources like economic, social, and political capital. Once the foundation is solid, attempt to change public resources like infrastructure and ecology.

Advice 2: Keeping Up with the Times. Historically, we relied on family support and school education to learn knowledge and skills, converting personal time and physical resources and family economic, social, and political resources into cultural and technical resources. However, the disconnection between school-taught knowledge and real-world demands forces us to learn more outside of school to meet competitive challenges. Especially in the AI revolution era, the disconnection is even more pronounced. Families must fill the gaps left by schools, and parents must fill the gaps

left by teachers. For busy working parents, this is a significant challenge and pressure but one that cannot be ignored.

Education = Personal Resources (Time Resources, Physical Resources) + Family Resources (Social Resources, Economic Resources, Political Resources, etc.) → Personal Resources (Time Resources, Physical Resources, Cultural Resources, Technical Resources)

Advice 3: Open-mindedness. After entering society, use existing resources to acquire new ones. Finding a job and a partner involves building a new family environment and sharing mechanism, converting personal time, physical, cultural, and technical resources into economic, social, and political resources. Young people should not act impulsively and blindly advocate for independence, separating themselves from family support in solving significant life issues. Both career and marriage are team sports, with family resources often playing a decisive role. Accepting family support as an investment in oneself can foster growth and enable one to repay the family. However, we must also guard against over-reliance on parental support, ensuring that the primary responsibility for significant issues lies with us.

Advice 4: Leveraging Leverage. Identify leverage points that can amplify results. Young people should focus on accumulating cultural, technical, and social resources, which are easier to acquire, mutually reinforcing, and beneficial for obtaining other resources. Cultural and technical resources should be pursued through lifelong learning and experimentation, while social resources should be built beyond immediate circles to establish weak ties¹ and bridge structural holes². With a foundation in cultural and

¹ The renowned sociologist Mark Granovetter proposed the Weak Ties theory in his book "Getting a Job: A Study of Contacts and Careers." Granovetter, through his survey of 282 professional, technical, and managerial personnel in Newton, Massachusetts, found that personal social relationships played a significant role in their job search process. Individuals who found jobs through personal contacts were more satisfied with their current positions and had significantly higher incomes than those who used formal recruitment or direct application methods. Additionally, jobs obtained through personal contacts were more often newly created positions, indicating that weak ties served as a bridge in career mobility.

² Structural Holes is a concept in sociology and network theory, first introduced by American sociologist Ronald Burt in his 1992 book "Structural Holes: The Social Structure of Competition." This concept describes the spaces in a social network where there are gaps or weak links between different individuals or groups. The presence of structural holes can provide individuals within the network with informational and control advantages.

technical resources, social resources provide more information, trust, recognition, opportunities, and achievements in marriage and career, accumulating more economic and political resources. For instance, mastering practical GenAI skills, creating quality AIGC works, and joining top tech communities to establish connections. These efforts will compound and accelerate progress.

Based on the above ideas, design your next steps for increasing income, then refer to the following sections on the "secular strategies" for fame, wealth, and status.

3.1.4 Key Points on the Path to Prosperity: Secular Strategies

The key targets of the strategy are the three secular pursuits—fame, wealth, and status—which have been persistent desires of humanity since ancient times. These correspond to the social, economic, and political resources in the theory of autonomy. Below is a serious and detailed analysis of how to reasonably, legitimately, and legally acquire them.

The acquisition of social resources involves two steps:

Step 1: Establishing Connections. There are two modes to choose from: **Gradual Mode:** This relies on strong ties to expand weak ties, where acquaintances introduce strangers. The gradual mode is heavily dependent on family resources. Every family inherently possesses certain blood and geographical relationships. Relatives and hometown friends, along with their friends, classmates, and colleagues, serve as excellent trust agents to expand one's network.¹ **Leapfrog Mode:** This mode relies on weak ties to seek out structural holes and uses community platforms to meet influential people. This mode heavily relies on personal and public resources, finding people through interest networks, alumni networks, and colleague networks to establish

¹ A trust agent typically refers to a person or entity that influences others by establishing trust relationships within social networks, online communities, or business environments. Trust agents can be individuals or organizations that earn others' trust by demonstrating expertise, reliability, and integrity. Their role is particularly crucial in areas such as social media marketing, brand promotion, and online reputation management.

contacts. Larger cities offer more potential contacts, and well-conditioned individuals find it easier to establish and strengthen connections. We need to balance "attractive feathers" and "functional feathers," meaning personal resources (appearance and demeanor) and cultural resources (speech and conduct) to attract and impress others. In the AI era, the role of technology is magnified. Most people initially engage through online text communication before meeting offline. Hence, those who skillfully use AI will have certain advantages, both in formal expression and content presentation.

Step 2: Maintaining Relationships, relies on frequent communication and collaboration. There are two key aspects: **Firstly, improving Oneself**. After the initial contact, long-term maintenance follows practical logic. The more abundant an individual's resources (time, body, culture, skills, economy, politics), the greater the opportunity to maintain relationships. **Secondly, using Appropriate Methods**. It's important to frequently review and maintain the network from a practical perspective. "It's not about how many people you know, but how effectively you can communicate and collaborate with them." The Dunbar number¹ reminds us to be mindful of the cost of maintaining relationships and to continually update our network and social resources. "It's not about who you know, but who you should know." Once your social network reaches a certain size, any person in the world is either your friend, your friend's friend, or your friend's friend's friend, so finding people is not difficult. The challenge lies in knowing why you are finding them and what to do after finding them. My experience is to seek consensus, promote co-creation, and insist on sharing. With the right methods,

¹ Dunbar's number, also known as the Rule of 150, was proposed by British anthropologist Robin Dunbar in the 1990s. It is based on the correlation between the relative size of the neocortex in non-human primates and their group sizes. Dunbar inferred that 150 is the upper limit of the number of stable relationships humans can maintain, suggesting that beyond this number, social interactions may become less effective or efficient. Dunbar further refined the model of human relationships by suggesting that humans are enveloped by different layers of social connections, each layer representing varying degrees of emotional closeness and frequency of contact. For example, the numbers 5, 15, 50, 150, and 500 correspond to intimate friends, close friends, good friends, friends, and acquaintances, respectively. However, some research has challenged Dunbar's number. Using different analytical methods, some researchers have estimated social circle numbers ranging from as few as 2 to as many as 520, showing significant variation. They argue that the number 150 may be inaccurate for several reasons, including differences in how human and other primate brains process information, and the considerable variability in the size of social networks among individuals. Despite these debates, Dunbar's number remains a prominent concept in anthropological research and is widely applied in fields such as human resource management and social networking services.

social resources will only increase and never diminish. We will delve into more methods in the "Social Management" section of the next part.

The acquisition of economic resources, which can be categorized into five sources:

Source 1: Fortune Income. Economic income brought by good luck. Life's start depends entirely on luck and is completely random. Being born into a wealthy family, having good looks, or possessing high intelligence are not skills you can train for; you can only hope that when the Veil of Ignorance¹ is lifted, you find yourself in a favorable situation. However, luck can change after the start. Magician and psychologist Richard Wiseman points out that good luck is a product of trying more. Every event has a probability, and trying multiple times can yield success. When good fortune happens, we perceive ourselves as lucky. From this perspective, fortune income is a conversion of time and economic resources. With the right strategy, returns can improve. Nassim Nicholas Taleb calls low-probability, high-impact events "black swans," with beneficial ones termed "positive black swans."² He recommends a barbell strategy: overall conservatism with local high-frequency risks. By not losing everything and continuing to try, one eventually wins. Most creative endeavors are like buying lottery tickets or opening mystery boxes; without good luck, there's no harm, but with good luck, one can hit it big. With the AI era lowering creative thresholds, everyone should try their luck to keep hope alive for changing their fate. We will further discuss this in the "Risk Management" section.

Source 2: Labor Income. Economic income earned through hard work. In agricultural and industrial societies, labor implied physical exertion, and labor income was called

1 The Veil of Ignorance is a concept in philosophy and ethics introduced by American political philosopher John Rawls in his 1971 work, "A Theory of Justice." The basic idea of the Veil of Ignorance is that when designing social institutions and distributing resources, individuals should not know their own status, abilities, beliefs, social position, or any other personal information. In this hypothetical state of ignorance, people would be compelled to choose principles of justice that are fair to all, because they could potentially find themselves in any position within society.

2 The Black Swan theory was proposed by Nassim Nicholas Taleb. It refers to rare events that are unpredictable, have a massive impact, and are often only understood and explained after they occur. The characteristics of Black Swan events include unpredictability, significant impact, and retrospective explainability.

"sweat income," primarily exchanging time and physical resources for economic resources. In the information and AI eras, distinguishing between physical and mental labor, employment tracks, entrepreneurship tracks, employment relationships, partnership relationships, pure human models, and human-machine collaboration models has become increasingly important. Future "laborers" should be tech-enhanced super warriors, leveraging multiple resources for economic gains. If not, one should strive harder. Moreover, combining labor income with fortune income is the typical "grassroots strategy," working by day and creating by night, either hitting it big or being content with modest success. We will discuss how working individuals and tools can rise in the "Task Management" and "Energy Management" sections.

Source 3: Sexual Income. Economic income exchanged through intimate relations. This includes marital and extramarital relationships, heterosexual and homosexual exchanges. Historically, the primary mode has been marital heterosexual exchange, where women trade physical resources for men's economic resources. Evolutionary psychology outlines a theory of sexual selection, suggesting men seek young and attractive women for better offspring, while women seek wealthy men for better child-rearing prospects. Sexual income is built on impulses, leading to two types of issues: **Firstly, Interpersonal Issues.** In the game of sexual income, the exchange of physical and economic resources is mediated by pleasure, driven by dopamine-induced novelty. Over time, the "price" and "value" of sexual income detach, and the paying party may feel the deal is no longer worthwhile, prompting renegotiation or termination of the agreement. Additionally, men's income generally rises while women's attractiveness declines over time, prompting men to seek new partners for better offspring, according to evolutionary psychology. Marriage binds them together, but extramarital affairs may arise. Evolutionary psychology explains that men's passionate impulse fades within 18 months to three years, enough to produce and raise a child. **Secondly, Intergenerational Issues.** Marriage often binds individuals and families, prompting resource redistribution among individuals and families, including gender and intergenerational redistribution. Marriage often represents a conspiracy between children to raid parents' resources, a sad reality parents have to accept. Moreover, technological advances present new challenges. The future may involve cross-gender individuals, social contract practitioners, AI-driven emotional digital humans, and sex

robots complicating love and marriage. Just imagine: your dad's inheritance, which should have been yours, gets partially claimed by an old lady who took care of him, and then even more by an AI companion he fell in love with. How puzzled would you be? We will discuss emotional, marital, and family issues in the "Emotion Management" and "Family Management" sections.

Source 4: Capital Income. Economic income derived from assets. Wealthy individuals can generate income through loans and investments, multiplying economic resources, widening the wealth gap. Historian Ray Huang humorously noted that capitalism's hallmark is "debt operation." Facing discontent, wealthy individuals claim they worked hard and took risks. Indeed, greater risks bring greater rewards. Ordinary middle-class investment carries small risks, often diminishing returns. Poor individuals can't bear risks, limiting capital income to minimal interest from small investments. However, as George Soros noted, risk is relative. Wealthy individuals have more information and knowledge, making capital income less risky and more stable. They may also improve genes through marriage choices and education, passing on their wealth and intelligence, maintaining their relative advantages. In a relatively stable world, this cumulative advantage trend is unbreakable, making capital income the privilege of a few.

Source 5: Blood Income. Economic income earned through risking life. Blood income is the opposite of capital income and an extreme form of labor income. When the poor have no other options, they may risk their lives for money. During turbulent times, blood earners become refugees, following bandits and warlords for sustenance. Most become cannon fodder, but some become warlords or heroes, gaining status and wealth. In peaceful times, blood earners take risks, from selling blood and organs to committing crimes, often facing severe consequences. Greek poet Menander lamented, "Many people were not born rogues, but misfortune made them so." With GenAI rapidly replacing human labor, many young people's labor approaches blood income, requiring psychological support to prevent work from becoming a life-threatening ordeal.

The acquisition of political resources. Humans are political animals; where there are people, there is politics. Political resources exist not only within government systems

but also in all human organizations, including businesses, schools, media, and associations. There seem to be four ways to acquire political resources:

Founding Mode. A few exceptional talents possess the ability to create something out of nothing. They establish organizations, transforming other resources into political capital or creating political resources from scratch. They are adept at proposing ideas, uniting various factions, building platforms, establishing rules, and allocating resources. They first attract a small group of followers, then inspire, entice, or even coerce more people to join them. Many people from my home city Wenzhou prefer to be the head of a chicken rather than the tail of a phoenix, because they understand that even a small head is still a head, and thus has more political resources than the tail, no matter how large. They are enthusiastic about forming associations to create political resources from scratch. In China, even with just a few people, they will establish a chamber of commerce and appoint a president. Abroad, they will form expatriate associations and claim titles like "community leader."

Hereditary Mode. Political resources bring more political resources. Throughout history, the greatest political correctness has been the inheritance of political resources through bloodlines. Even in modern societies that advocate democracy, family-run businesses based on hereditary succession remain the mainstream, and most business leaders are hereditary successors. In so-called elected countries like Japan and Singapore, the phenomenon of political family dynasties also exists. In the game of politics, loyalty always outweighs ability. Typically, a biological son is more reliable than an adopted son, an adopted son is more reliable than a sycophant, and a sycophant is more reliable than a capable person. To ensure the continued sharing and inheritance of political resources within families, people in different eras and places have chosen the same approach.

Recommendation Mode. Aurelius once lamented that Alexander of Macedon and his groom were completely equal in death. But the reality is not so. Dystopian writer George Orwell bluntly stated at the beginning of Animal Farm, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." Some people, due to their powerful backgrounds, are recommended or even invited to join the game. They or their families know some very powerful individuals who are willing to sponsor them and give them an

advantage. Unfortunately, when it comes to recommendations, the winners are often those who lack ability but show loyalty to the leaders, rather than those who are highly capable but maintain independence from the leaders. This is still the logic of the power game at work. Among loyalty, effectiveness, and efficiency, loyalty is prioritized, effectiveness is secondary, and efficiency is the least important.

Competitive Mode. For the vast majority of workers and laborers, their political resources come from competition, with the fairest method being examinations, where cultural and technical resources are relatively fairly converted into political resources. As early as the 7th century, the Chinese Empire of the Sui and Tang dynasties invented the imperial examination system. Over 1,200 years later, the western world during the era of the British Empire launched open competitive exams to select civil servants. Today, selecting talent through written exams and interviews has become common knowledge and consensus.

These strategies outline practical approaches to obtaining and utilizing resources for social, economic, and political advancement, vital for achieving and maintaining autonomy.

3.1.5 The Added Task on the Road to Wealth: Dark Law

Social resources belong to us but are determined by others. The founder of network science, Albert-László Barabási, wrote in his book "The Formula" that success can be measured by various indicators such as money earned, citations, media coverage, and attention, all of which are given by others. Thus, individual success is determined by others.¹

Barabási further points out: When individual performance can be quantified, performance determines success. In sports like running or swimming, being faster makes you the winner, and success belongs to the winner without dispute. Similarly,

¹ Albert-László Barabási is a renowned network scientist known for his research in the field of complex networks, particularly his work on scale-free networks. In his book "The Formula: The Universal Laws of Success," he explores and summarizes the five scientific laws behind success from the perspective of big data and complex networks.

exams are fairer than recommendations, written tests are fairer than interviews, and multiple-choice questions are fairer than essay questions. When individual performance cannot be quantified, networks determine success. Network determination means that others decide your success. If they say you are competent, you are; if they say you are not, you are not. In sports like figure skating or diving, and in the arts like painting, music, and dance, as well as in academia and work performance, subjective evaluation by others plays a significant role. Thus, personal performance and others' evaluations are two different matters.

Research shows that humans are poor evaluators, capable of distinguishing between good and bad but struggling to discern between good and better. When uncertain, people tend to trust authority opinions, which are often influenced by previous and other people's impressions. As a result, "attractive feathers" often have more impact than "functional feathers." Thus, among artists of similar skill levels, those with flamboyant appearances and eccentric behaviors often prevail because they leave a stronger impression on others. Similarly, those in central cities or close to core circles often win because they have more opportunities to interact with others.

Worse still, the Dunning-Kruger Effect is widespread¹, meaning people tend to overestimate themselves and underestimate others. This creates a structural disparity. On one hand, as the evaluated person, you overestimate your performance. On the other hand, evaluators underestimate your performance. Thus, when you feel confident and believe you are a sure winner, others may not think highly of you or even care. While you attribute your performance to your efforts, others might attribute it to innate talent or luck.

Not only social resources but also economic and political resources follow Barabási's success formula. Sometimes, distribution is fair and certain, but at other times, it is unfair and uncertain. In quantifiable fields, you can earn deserved rewards through effort and competition. In unquantifiable fields, you must win over leaders, benefactors, mentors, experts, or even passersby to gain rewards. Some power players exploit this by

¹ The Dunning-Kruger Effect is a cognitive bias phenomenon first proposed by Cornell University psychologists Justin Kruger and David Dunning in 1999. This effect describes a situation where individuals with lower ability in certain areas tend to overestimate their own skill level and are unable to accurately recognize the competence of those more skilled in that domain.

maximizing their discourse power and cashing in on discretionary power. Others strive to showcase themselves, hoping to win others' favor.

However, excessive self-promotion can backfire. **There is a hidden rule I call the Gold-Jade Principle: Your actual strength multiplied by your notoriety must be lower than your social status.** Actual strength is your level of autonomy, notoriety is your level of influence, and social status is the respect people assume you deserve, determining their level of tolerance towards you. This is the first dark law of autonomy I have realized:

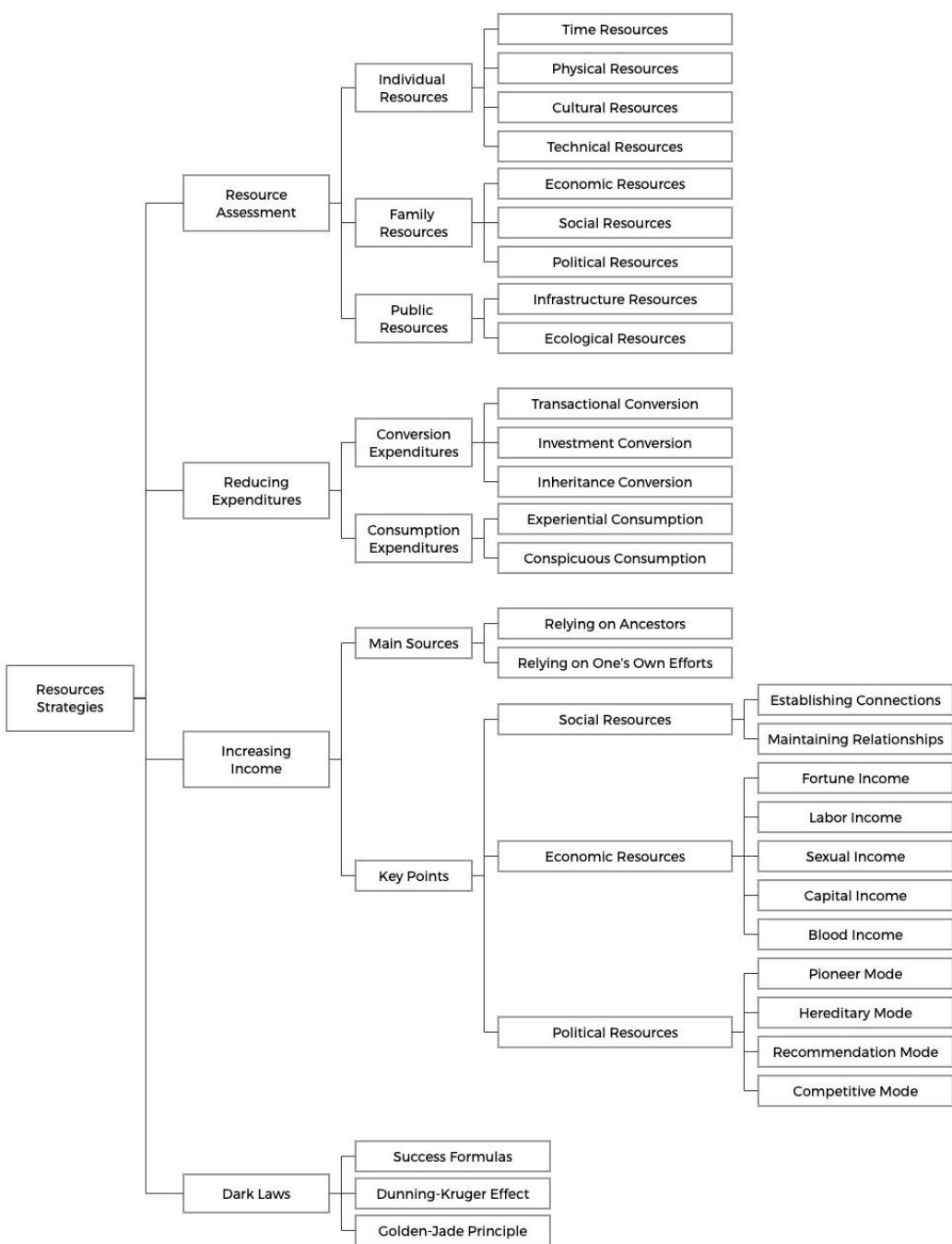
$$\text{Autonomy (Strength)} \times \text{Influence (Notoriety)} \leq \text{Social Status (Tolerance)}$$

Early in your growth, you can strive to be a "Shining Gold". You can fully engage, go all out, and showcase yourself to gain more opportunities and resources with good performance. At this stage, as your strength is not formidable, you pose no threat to others, and thus, leaders and colleagues will praise you, gradually increasing your notoriety and yielding returns. Meanwhile, those who praise you hope their praise as an investment will yield returns. If you are lucky and a benefactor recognizes and assists you, you can achieve a higher social status, continue being a piece of gold, keep shining, and embrace others' investments.

However, life is not always smooth sailing, and **we all face developmental stagnation at times. During these periods, you must strive to be a "Gentle Jade"**, blending in and waiting for opportunities. When your strength (autonomy) and notoriety (influence) combination surpass your social status (others' tolerance), you become the most feared competitor for colleagues and the most concerning unstable element for leaders. Colleagues fear you will seize their opportunities, and leaders fear you won't obey. Consequently, they unite to curb your potential overreach. They stop speaking well of you and may even spread gossip and slander. Your proactive performance is labeled as showboating and arrogance, attracting hostile attention and malicious attacks. The Gold-Jade Principle holds true both within and outside systems, in China and other countries, and in the past and present. As the ancients succinctly put it: "The tree that stands out in the forest gets blown down by the wind; the person who excels draws the ire of others."

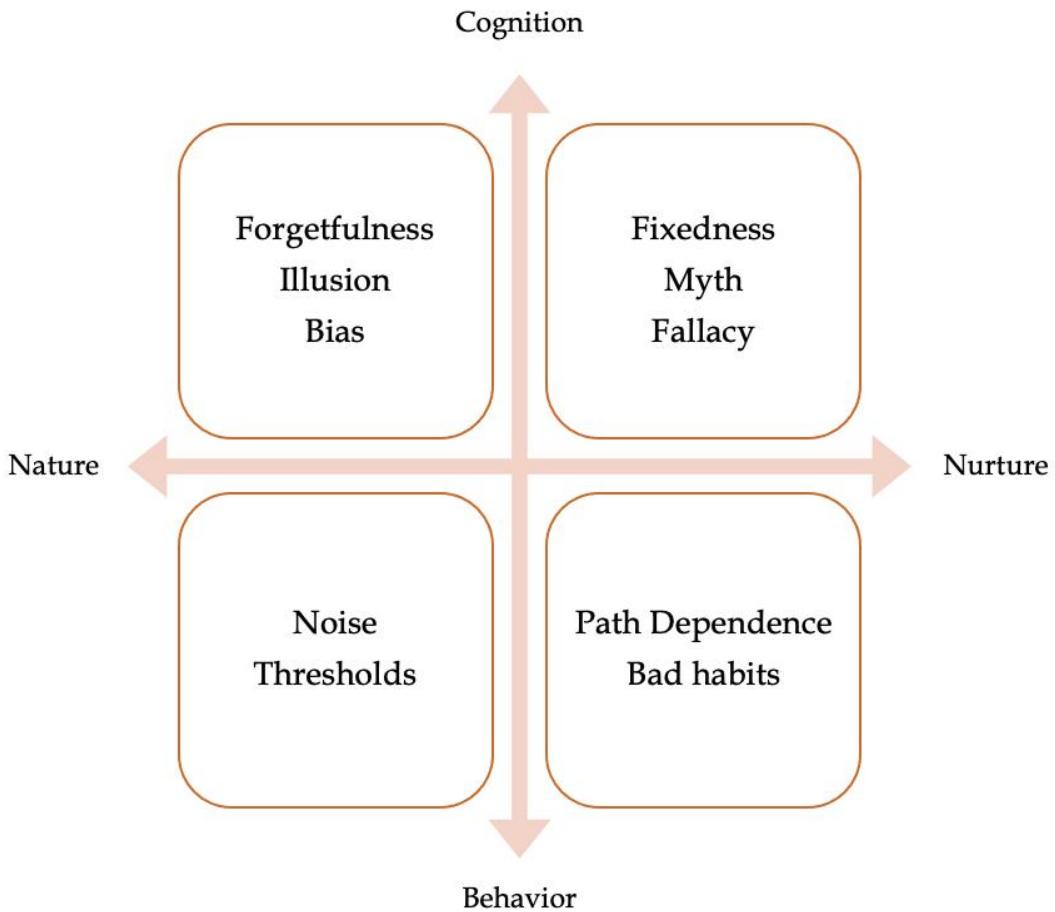
Due to the existence of the Success Formulas, the Dunning-Kruger Effect, and the Gold-Jade Principle, a prudent growth strategy is to be a "Gentle Jade" without status, acting low-key, accumulating strength, avoiding exposure, and staying below others' vigilance lines to prevent envy and attacks. After accumulating enough strength, proactively approach the center, assert yourself, be a "Shining Gold," and become a worthy investment to gain social recognition and patronage, ultimately securing deserved social status. If you fail to rise, return to low-key behavior and await new opportunities. For more detailed discussions, see the "Social Management" chapter in the second part of this book.

Here's an interactive question: What is your current social status, autonomy, and influence? Do you think you should choose the "gold" or "jade" mode? After choosing, consider your next specific actions.



3.2 Ability

Ability is one of the three elements of autonomy. To discuss the topic of ability more systematically, comprehensively, and profoundly, we introduce the "ability coordinate axis," encompassing the functions, sources, components, changes, improvements, and transcendence of ability. We will explain these in segments.



3.2.1 Origin: The Function of Ability

Ability is mainly used to explain problems and solve problems, with the explanation of problems serving the purpose of solving them. The disparity in ability divides people into the wise and the foolish, or masters, experts, and novices. When encountering a snake in the mountains, ordinary people feel fear, while snake catchers feel excitement. When diving into the sea, those who can't swim are anxious, while those skilled in swimming remain calm. When handling business abroad, those who don't speak foreign languages feel distressed, while those fluent in foreign languages feel at ease.

In times of crisis, ability is a matter of life and death. Thinker Jared Diamond recorded a real case in his book Collapse: In AD 980, the Norse Vikings arrived at Greenland in North America, beginning competition with the native Eskimos. The Vikings refused to learn from the Eskimos, insisted on logging for firewood in the tree-scarce Greenland, and refused to hunt seals, fish, and whales despite food shortages. Ultimately, these rigid Vikings perished from hunger and cold in a resource-rich environment.

Clearly, no matter how abundant the resources, they are useless without the ability to utilize them effectively. For autonomy, resources are the elements, and ability is the structure. Elements organized in a particular structure yield a function greater than the sum of its parts. The same facial features, arranged correctly or skewed, create entirely different impressions. When elements are fixed, structure determines function. Similarly, when will and resources are fixed, ability determines autonomy for two reasons:

People with strong abilities are better at understanding and transforming themselves, particularly in reducing their safety needs, thus increasing the possibility of freedom. Enlightened practitioners, who have completely let go of worldly desires, can satisfy their safety needs with a simple meal and drink, and pursue freedom to their heart's content. In southern Africa, near the birthplace of humanity, lies 40% of the world's gold. The Boer people, who practice livestock farming there, are devoutly religious and, despite knowing about the gold mines, never see gold as wealth, using gold-bearing stones to build houses, granaries, and sheepfolds. They are like the Utopians in Thomas More's Renaissance-era writings who marvel at the stars and the sun and scorn the glitter of small jewels.

People with strong abilities are better at understanding and transforming the world, making more effective use of resources, fulfilling safety needs while pursuing greater freedom. A dullard wastes resources, while a capable person turns stones into gold. Wood can be firewood for a farmer, a hiking stick for a city dweller, Bruce Lee's nunchaku, Archimedes' lever to move the Earth, or Michelangelo's brush to depict heaven. As human abilities improve, our understanding of resources changes. Aluminum was once considered rare but became cheap with technological progress. Futurist Alvin Toffler predicted in his "Power Shift" twenty years ago that today's

garbage might become valuable overnight. Titanium was just a pile of white powder until it was used to make planes and submarines. Oil was considered waste until the internal combustion engine gave it value. Human ability seems to determine the affordance of resources in specific contexts, i.e., the possibilities offered by objects to a subject.

A person with weak abilities is easily misled and confused, living in fear and anxiety, thus having greater safety needs and correspondingly less freedom, causing their autonomy triangle to collapse into a "Triangle of Life-preserving," reducing their overall autonomy. For example, many elderlyies with low cognitive levels are easily deceived into buying various health products, losing the possibility of traveling and recuperating. Many children are misled by advertisements into establishing incorrect consumption concepts, mistaking luxury goods for necessities and drugs for food, inevitably restricting their freedom. Consumer society and the online world are keen to cultivate "overdraft youth" who lack independent thinking ability but have a strong borrowing and spending impulse.

A person with excessively strong abilities may see through and dismiss everything, retreating into the spiritual world, falling into the illusion of freedom. Their autonomy triangle becomes a "Triangle of Risk-taking," reducing their overall autonomy. Some use their strong abilities to rationalize their lack of resources, living a life of detachment and indifference, almost becoming recluses. For a period, Nepal was touted as one of the world's happiest countries. In fact, Nepal is one of the poorest countries globally, but its people are religious and devout Buddhists. The king of Nepal, after receiving a modern education abroad, orchestrated a grand marketing campaign, even delivering a TED talk in English, promoting happiness as his governance philosophy and the supposed happiness of Nepalese people, attracting many idealists from the Western world. This is evidently a misguided practice of replacing resources with abilities and material needs with spiritual pursuits. Others may abandon safety needs, becoming radical, adventurous, revolutionary, even seen as rule-breakers and disruptors by others. Some extreme individuals adhere to an "Assassin's Creed" philosophy of "Nothing is true, everything is permitted," committing atrocities for so-called noble causes. Clearly, more ability is not always better; excess can be detrimental.

Regrettably, there is an asymmetry¹ between ability development and resource accumulation: abilities improve rapidly while resources accumulate slowly. Ability improvement is personal, resulting from effort, relatively easy to achieve; resource acquisition is influenced by others, requiring more than just effort, relatively difficult. Therefore, autonomous individuals often experience a "desynchronization" between ability and resource development, leading to the embarrassing situation of "seeing but not touching, wanting but not achieving."

In response, the recommendation of autonomy theory is simple: strive to be an autonomous individual with both high abilities and resources. When one's ability reaches a certain level, one must turn to acquire more resources, providing heroes with opportunities to demonstrate their talents and achieve greater ambitions.

3.2.2 Horizontal Axis: Sources of Ability

The sources of ability include both innate (Nature) and acquired (Nurture) factors, dividing abilities into inherited innate abilities and learned acquired abilities. We use the left side of the coordinate axis to represent innate abilities and the right side to represent acquired abilities.

Innate abilities form the foundation of ability, inherited through genetics and influenced by biological traits and physical constitution. Genetic inheritance determines the species. No matter how much we strive, a tulip will never produce rapeseed.

Acquired abilities represent the potential of ability, gained through learning and influenced by upbringing, education, and socio-cultural environment. Environmental factors determine the quality. The same rapeseed flower, cultivated under different conditions, may yield varying quantities of rapeseed and the quality of the oil extracted.

The debate on whether innate genetics or acquired environment has a greater impact on ability is ongoing. Child psychologist Alison Gopnik offers a balanced view: "For

¹ Asymmetry is a broad concept that describes an imbalance in shape, size, arrangement, or distribution between two parts or objects. Asymmetry can occur in various fields such as nature, art, architecture, economics, and social structures. In some cases, asymmetry can be seen as a defect or imbalance, while in other cases, it may represent innovation, diversity, or adaptability.

wealthy children, the educational environment is generally good, so genes become the primary differentiating factor. For poor children, the educational environment varies greatly, so the environment becomes the primary differentiating factor."

I believe that innate genetics are the cause, the acquired environment is the condition, and personal ability is the result. When the brain and other nervous systems develop, genetic inheritance sets the blueprint and contours, while environmental learning fills in the content and details, resulting in personal abilities. Both innate genetics and the acquired environment influence a person's abilities. Identical environments with different genes yield different abilities. Similarly, identical genes in different environments yield different abilities. In reality, each person's genetics and environment vary, leading to different abilities.

Traditional views have often assumed that we cannot change our genes and can only work to change our environment. "The Book of Rites" says, "Jade that is not polished will not become a tool; a person who does not learn will not know the way." Francis Bacon wrote, "Nature is like a seed; it can grow into fragrant flowers or poisonous weeds." However, recent research has challenged these traditional views, prompting us to reconsider these classical assumptions.

Firstly, there is epigenetics¹. Identical twins have nearly identical gene sequences, yet they can exhibit different states due to the different environments affecting their gene expression. Research has found that acquired efforts can alter gene expression. Specifically, it can change the "on" or "off" state of certain genes, affecting whether they are transcribed into RNA and eventually translated into proteins. Through methylation, we can "mark" a DNA molecule, altering how it interacts with surrounding proteins and blocking its transcription. Conversely, demethylation can remove this influence. If DNA is a book, the gene sequence is the text, and methylation and demethylation are like adding or removing bookmarks, guiding us to better select and skip readings (gene expression). Adjusting environmental factors such as diet, stress, sleep, and exercise can influence DNA's epigenetic markers, regulate gene expression,

¹ Epigenetics is a field of science that studies the regulation of gene expression. It involves how gene activity is influenced through mechanisms such as chemical modifications without changing the DNA sequence. If genes are music, then DNA is the sheet music, and gene expression is the performance.

and alter gene activity, making some genes active and others silent. While genes are inherited from our parents and innate, they are not immutable. The prenatal environment influences the gene sequence through our parents, while the postnatal environment affects gene expression through our choices.

Additionally, many DNA replication errors (gene mutations) during human evolution are neutral, acting as "silent majorities," waiting for specific environmental factors as keys to activate their gene expression. Nobel laureate and neurophysiologist John Eccles noted, "One day, the accumulation of many such neutral mutations will significantly change the DNA of a population. Once the survival environment changes, these gene mutations may no longer be neutral."

Furthermore, epigenetics tells us that changes in gene expression can have a small probability of being inherited by offspring. This means that even if we inherit less favorable gene sequences at birth, we can still alter gene expression through effort, leaving better genetic legacies for our descendants. Imagine passing down a book of genes full of bookmarks and annotations—what a wonderful prospect.

Secondly, there is behavior genetics¹. Different genes lead individuals to choose different microenvironments, which in turn reinforce gene expression. Psychologists Sandra Scarr and Kathleen McCartney pointed out that parents provide children with both genes and environments, and these environments are influenced by the parents' own genes. Thus, the environment in which children are raised is related to their own genes and likely better suited to their genetic makeup. This is a conspiracy between innate genes and acquired environments, mutually reinforcing each other and ultimately perpetuating gene expression.

Therefore, not only can we change the environment, but we can also change gene expression and pass on the results of these efforts, improving the prospects for our descendants. In fact, putting aside the complex theories of epigenetics and behavior genetics, humanity has always been trying to improve its genes since its inception. In

¹ Behavior genetics is a scientific field that studies the influence of genetics on the behavior of organisms. It explores how genes affect individual behavior patterns and how these behaviors develop and manifest through the interaction of genetic and environmental factors.

the past, we sought better partners, leveraging their genes to significantly influence our offspring. In the future, we may have the opportunity to use gene editing technology to thoroughly reshape our descendants.

In summary, while we cannot change the gene sequences and ability foundations given by our ancestors, we can alter our own gene expression and ability performance through effort and leave better genetic combinations and ability foundations for our descendants. With enough effort and luck, we can help our descendants gain a competitive edge in autonomy, starting even before the race begins.

3.2.3 Vertical Axis: Components of Ability

Autonomism posits that ability is the product of cognition and behavior, resulting from our sensations, judgments, decisions, and movements. We can represent cognitive ability on the upper side of the vertical axis and behavioral ability on the lower side. Abilities can be divided into cognitive abilities and behavioral abilities, corresponding to the cognitive system and behavioral system of humans. Those with keen cognition and agile actions possess greater abilities, while those with dull cognition and slow actions possess lesser abilities.

To better elaborate on subsequent discussions, it is necessary to introduce my understanding of the human mind. I tend to divide the human mind into four systems:

Behavior System: Mainly functions in sensation and movement, corresponding to stimuli (information input) and responses (information output), directly interacting with the external world. The behavior system is the functional emergence of the brainstem, cerebellum, spinal cord, and peripheral nervous systems.

Cognition System: Mainly functions in judgment and decision-making (collectively referred to as resolution), corresponding to perceptions (related to explaining problems like "what" and "why") and actions (related to solving problems like "what to do" and "how to do it"), manifested as various knowledge, wisdom, experience, and skills. The cognition system is the functional emergence of all neocortical areas including the frontal, temporal, parietal, and occipital lobes.

Emotion System: Mainly functions in evaluation, corresponding to thoughts, bringing emotional colors (positive or negative), emotional preferences (likes or dislikes), and emotional stances (good or bad). The emotion system is primarily the functional emergence of the midbrain and the limbic system.

Volition System: Mainly functions in reflection, corresponding to attention (light involvement of volition) and intervention (heavy involvement of volition). The volition system is primarily the functional emergence of the orbitofrontal cortex and cingulate gyrus.

These four systems and their six functions combine into three types of psychological processes with varying depths:

Simple Psychological Process: External world information input is processed by the sensation function of the behavior system, producing a stimulus, and the movement function produces a response, outputting information to the external world. The simple psychological process involves only the behavior system and is an unconscious, automatic, parallel-processing, and quickly completed psychological process. Most instincts and habits are simple psychological processes. High school biology textbooks somewhat disdainfully refer to it as a conditioned reflex, as even a frog's leg, without knowing it is dead, can respond to stimuli.

*Input | Information → Behavior | Sensation | Stimulus → Behavior |
Movement | Response → Output | Information*

General Psychological Process: Information from the external world is input, the sensory function of the behavior system generates a stimulus, which activates the evaluative function of the emotion system to generate thoughts, while simultaneously triggering the judgment function of the cognition system to form perceptions. Thoughts and perceptions shape each other, and together they drive the decision-making function of the cognition system to form actions. Thoughts and actions together influence the motor function of the behavior system to produce a response, ultimately outputting information back to the external world. The general psychological process involves the behavior, emotion, and cognition systems and is a conscious, automatic, parallel

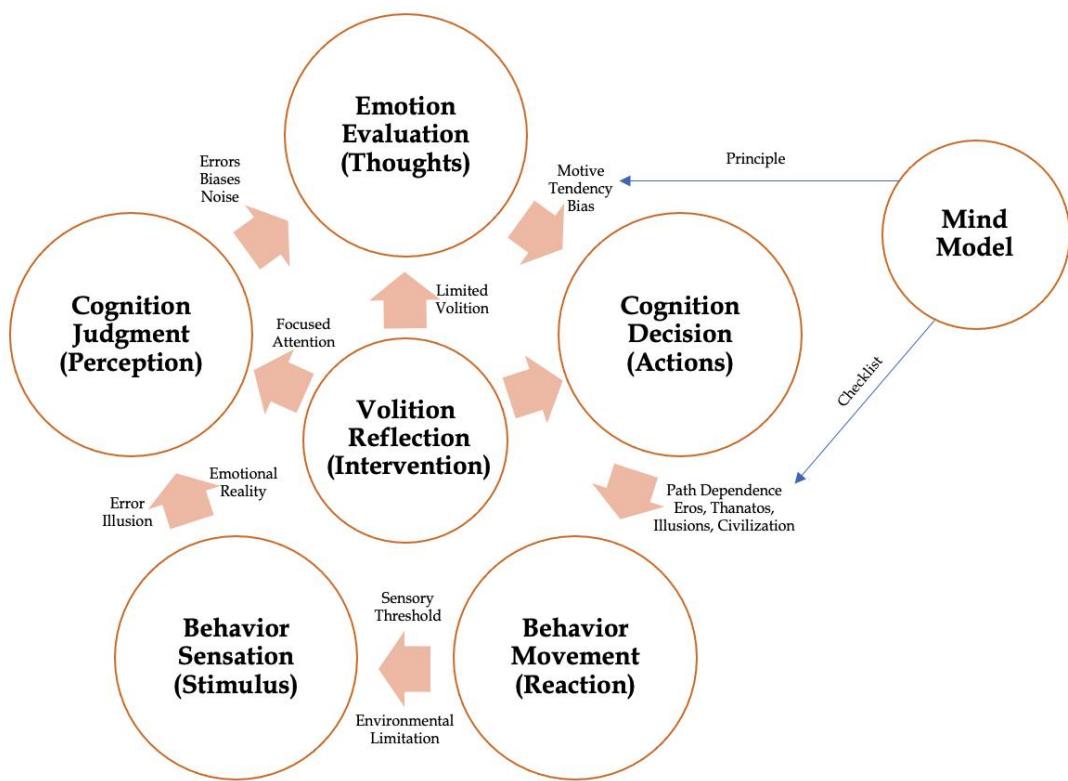
processing, and quickly completed process. Having a general psychological process distinguishes us humans from lower animals and frog legs.

Input | Information --> Behavior | Sensation | Stimulus --> Emotion | Evaluation | Thought --> Cognition | Judgment | Perception --> Cognition | Decision | Action --> Behavior | Motor | Response --> Output | Information

Complex Psychological Process: During the general psychological process, the volition system also participates, initiating the reflection function. If it only allocates volitional resources to monitor anomalies without taking action, it is light participation in attention; if it not only monitors anomalies but also takes action to create anomalies, i.e., intervenes in the perceptions and actions generated by cognitive judgment and decision-making, causing them to change, then it is intervention. The complex psychological process involves all four systems and six functions and is a conscious, controlled, single-process, and slow completion process. Having a complex psychological process distinguishes us from those who live in ignorance.

In 99% of our daily lives, we alternate between simple and general psychological processes in a zombie-like state, with systems automatically giving conditioned reflexes and default judgments, emotions rising and falling accordingly, and volition occasionally paying attention to certain parts and details. We are merely spectators, passengers, and passersby in our own lives. Only in that remaining 1%, those moments of free will, are we fully and wholeheartedly engaged. Through volitional reflection, through courageous negation (Free won't or veto), we intervene in the cognition system's default judgments, regulate the emotion system's routine evaluations, thereby correcting the behavior system's conditioned reflexes, and ultimately changing the relationship between the internal and external worlds. In doing so, we successfully use free will to defy the Second Law of Thermodynamics, bringing a bit of order to a chaotic world.¹

¹ The Second Law of Thermodynamics is one of the four fundamental laws of thermodynamics, closely related to the concept of entropy. Entropy measures the degree of disorder in a physical system. The Second Law can be stated as: in an isolated system, entropy tends to increase until it reaches a state of thermodynamic equilibrium, at which point entropy is maximized. In other words, the Second Law of Thermodynamics asserts that a closed system will inevitably progress from order to disorder.



Autonomism believes that will are related to volition and emotion, while abilities are related to cognition and behavior. Cognitive and behavioral abilities are our concepts and methods for understanding and changing the world. Given the high plasticity of the human nervous system, we can believe that everyone can become as wise and virtuous as the ancient sages. By adopting a growth mindset, we can enhance our abilities through cognitive upgrades and behavioral optimization.¹

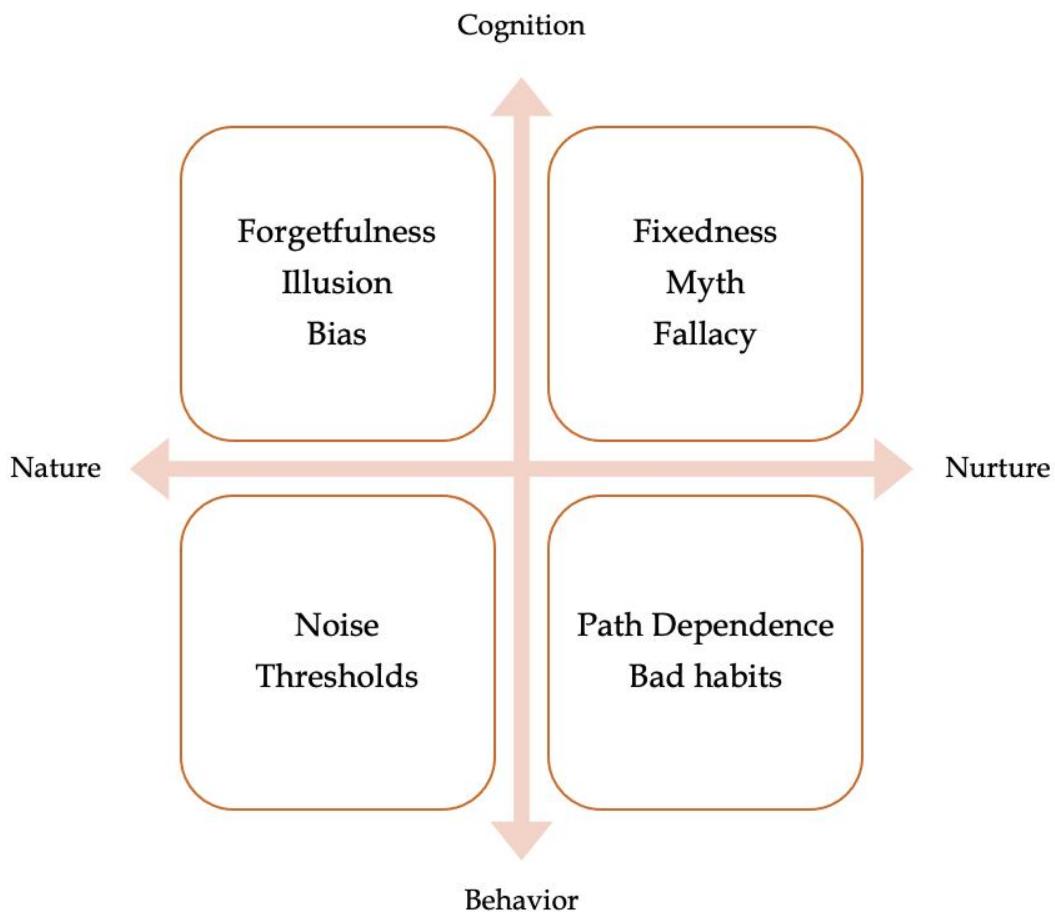
The approach to enhancing abilities should focus on increasing the amount and resolution of information during the sensory stage, improving the accuracy during the judgment stage, increasing the rationality during the decision-making stage, and enhancing the output and execution rate during the execution stage. Correspondingly, we have two strategies: first, addressing weaknesses by solving common problems one by one; second, strengthening strengths by actively developing mind modules. Below,

¹ Growth Mindset is a concept introduced by psychologist Carol S. Dweck. It describes a belief that an individual's abilities, intelligence, and talents can be developed through effort, learning, and perseverance. In contrast to a Fixed Mindset, a Growth Mindset emphasizes the potential for change and progress.

we will continue to use the "ability coordinate axis" to sort out common problems and provide reference solutions.

3.2.4 Quadrants: Improving Abilities

The ability coordinate axis has four quadrants.



The First Quadrant (upper right) is the intersection of acquired abilities and cognitive abilities, where the main issues are fixedness, myths, and fallacies, all gradually acquired under the influence of the environment.

Fixedness: These include common cognitive problems like fixed mindset, functional fixedness¹, and stereotypes². The key to breaking these patterns is maintaining openness and respecting diversity. Embracing new options and daring to bear the consequences of trying them are crucial for breaking fixed patterns.

Myth: These include groupthink³, blind faith, and social discrimination. Breaking myths requires maintaining independence and respecting differences. In a group, always keep individual independence, avoid going along with the crowd, and dare to express different opinions.

Fallacy: The term refers to common cognitive problems such as logical errors and content mistakes that can significantly impact the quality of judgment and decision-making. Rationalists believe that logic helps us approach the truth or reveal it. However, logic is a later invention that must be learned. People without logical training are prone to common errors, the most prevalent being conflating correlation with causation or assuming a cause-and-effect relationship from sequential events. For instance, Xiao Ming thinks he has a cold, takes medicine, and then recovers, so he concludes that the medicine cured his cold. This logic is flawed because other explanations exist: Xiao Ming might have recovered without the medicine, he might have taken the wrong medication, or he might not have had a cold at all. The fundamental solution to logical fallacies is to study the principles and methods of logic, use formulas and algorithms in logical deductions, and read books like Asking the Right Questions to develop critical thinking skills, preemptively recognizing and avoiding common logical errors.

1 Functional Fixedness: Functional fixedness is a psychological concept that refers to an individual's tendency to see objects and situations in their traditional or conventional uses, overlooking or failing to recognize other possible uses or functions. This phenomenon typically hampers creative thinking and problem-solving abilities.

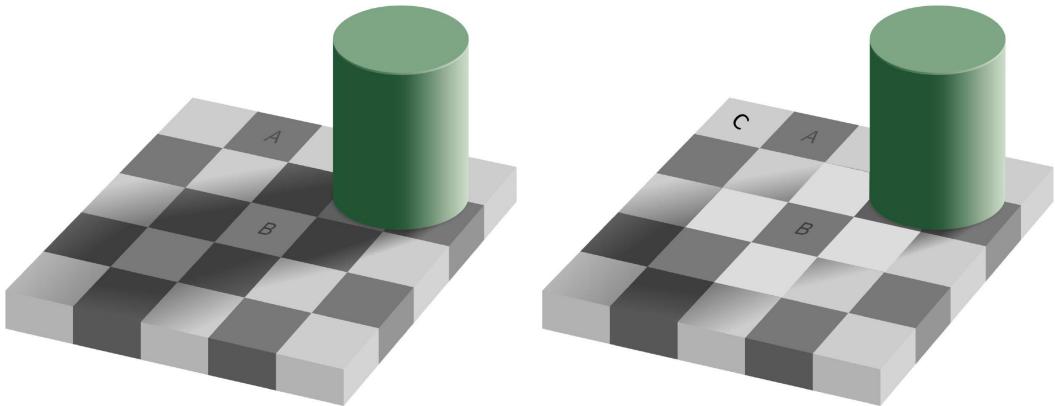
2 Stereotype: A stereotype is a fixed and simplified perception or belief about a particular group or individual, often based on generalized traits related to race, gender, age, religion, social class, or other social categories.

3 Groupthink: Groupthink is a concept introduced by American psychologist Irving Janis in 1972. It describes a phenomenon within a team or group where members prioritize consensus and harmony over critical thinking and dissent, leading to suppressed objections and compromised decision-making.

The Second Quadrant (top left) is intersection of innate and cognitive abilities, the main weaknesses here are forgetfulness, illusions, and biases, all inherited through genetic influences.

Forgetfulness: Our brain's working memory capacity is very small, leading to frequent forgetfulness. In fact, forgetting is an excellent mechanism of the brain to reduce energy consumption and improve efficiency. We remember by forgetting, retaining only a few important things while discarding many unimportant ones. However, this significantly limits our ability development and often results in "errors of knowing." Unlike "errors of ignorance" caused by not knowing, "errors of knowing" happen because we forget things we know. Solutions include using tools like paper, computers, smartphones, and large models to expand our working memory. Investing in any information tool will bring substantial returns. Another method is creating and updating checklists, planning steps in advance to avoid omissions.

Illusions: These are advantageous mechanisms developed by the brain to work with limited resources. Illusions occur when the brain uses historical data (memory fragments) and algorithms (prediction, simulation, correction) to generate content. Known as "filling in gaps" in the past, it's now referred to as "generation" in GenAI terms. Just like AI, the human brain can also have illusions, causing us to see things that don't exist. Over 90% of the sensory stimuli we receive are visual, but these visual signals are very unreliable because the images presented to our eyes and reconstructed in our brains are largely constructed. Therefore, what we see is determined by our group's history and personal past. It's not "seeing is believing," but rather "believing is seeing." The brain decides what the eyes see. While we cannot completely eliminate illusions, we can take precautions by reminding ourselves that images don't necessarily reflect the truth. For example, in the image below, the colors A and B are actually the same, but due to different reference frames, they appear different.



Bias: Cognitive bias is a tendency to think in a certain way, often deviating from rational judgment, that has evolved over time. These biases are built-in programs in the brain, inherent, automatically activated, and running in the background. They operate unconsciously when we process sensory stimuli and emotional information to form judgments. As long as we measure the world using "human standards," subjectivity is inevitable, making cognitive biases unavoidable. These biases were effective solutions to problems faced by our ancestors, aiding their survival and development. However, with changing times and technological advancements, these old solutions can become mismatched or ineffective in new scenarios, leading to criticism.

Awareness of cognitive biases can help mitigate their effects. It is recommended to learn more about them and actively identify and reduce their negative impacts. Common cognitive biases can be grouped into seven categories:

Attribution bias: To reduce cognitive load, we establish simple causal relationships in a complex world. Resulting biases include: Fundamental Attribution Error, Illusory Correlation, Hindsight Bias.

Self-serving bias: To improve emotional experience, we selectively focus on favorable information, overestimating ourselves and underestimating others. Resulting biases include: Lake Wobegon Effect, IKEA Effect, Stockholm Syndrome.

Confirmation bias: To match current actions with prior expectations, we selectively focus to maintain logical consistency. Resulting biases include: Self-fulfilling Prophecy, Barnum Effect, Pygmalion Effect.

Extremity bias: To make judgments under uncertainty, we process information in extremes to enhance clarity. Resulting biases include: Neglect of Probability, Frequency Illusion, Peak-end Rule Effect.

Reference bias: To quickly judge under incomplete and uncertain information, we find reference points to derive relative values. Resulting biases include: Contrast Effect, Framing Effect, Anchoring Effect.

Conservatism bias: To improve survival probability, we adopt conservative strategies. Resulting biases include: Negativity Bias, Zero-Risk Bias, Status Quo Bias.

Group bias: To improve survival probability, we develop in groups, sometimes at the cost of individuality. Resulting biases include: Stereotype, Ingroup Bias, Herd Behavior.¹

Cognitive biases are not entirely negative. As an essential part of the human native system, these "old methods" are still effective for many old scenarios and problems. Just as trash is misplaced resources, occasionally problematic cognitive biases are simply misapplied tools. Recognizing biases, we should correct some and utilize others. Here are four models to consider:

Rectification Model: This traditional approach to biases focuses on learning critical thinking, introducing red-team modules, and enhancing pre-training, supervision, and post-error correction to mitigate negative impacts.

Remediation Model: Behavioral scientist Olivier Sibony suggests that individual biases can be eliminated through collective perspectives. He proposes constructing decision-making architecture to harness group wisdom and smooth out individual biases.

Nudge Model: Legal scholar Cass Sunstein and other proponents of "soft paternalism" favor micro-manipulations, using default settings and information guides to nudge behavior and leverage human weaknesses for societal benefit.

¹ Cognitive biases are too numerous to cover in detail. Besides the seven major categories, there are other biases I call "brainless tendencies" because they are completely out of sync with today's world and have lost their relevance. Additionally, I am uncertain if knowing about the inoculation effect diminishes its effectiveness.

Design Model: Brian Arthur, founder of complexity economics, views technology as purposeful programming of phenomena. Both theoretically and practically, many people program biases, along with fallacies, fixations, and misconceptions, into psychological technologies to solve specific problems.

The Third Quadrant (lower left) intersects innate abilities and behavioral abilities, with major shortcomings being noise and thresholds, both inherited through genes.

Noise in the behavioral system's sensory input is inevitable. Noise is random and inevitable. Nobel laureate and "father of behavioral economics" Daniel Kahneman, along with Sibony and Sunstein, co-authored "Noise," pointing out that noise is the black hole affecting human judgment and proposed solutions to mitigate noise. Unfortunately, these suggestions are similar to those for solving biases, reducing but not eliminating noise. I am pessimistic about completely eliminating noise and suggest acknowledging its presence and learning to coexist with it.

Thresholds, like noise, are structural issues in the sensory input stage of the behavioral system and are nearly unsolvable. Sensory thresholds mean our evolved native systems have a perception range, such as being unable to see infrared light or hear ultrasonic waves. It is important to distinguish between environmental limitations and sensory thresholds. Environmental limitations mean we can't see without moonlight on a dark night. Sensory thresholds mean our eyes have a limited range of perception even with good moonlight. Therefore, environmental limitations determine how much information is available to us (supply rate), while sensory thresholds determine how much information we can perceive (reception rate).

We cannot change sensory thresholds, but we can address the issues of incomplete information and information overload. The former can lead to illusions due to our brain's filling-in process, while the latter can trigger FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), causing us to retreat into information cocoons¹ created by algorithms. This lowers the

¹ Information Cocoons is a concept in social psychology proposed by Cass Sunstein. It describes how people tend to engage with and share information that aligns with their existing views and interests, creating a metaphorical "cocoon" of information. This phenomenon can limit exposure to diverse or opposing perspectives, leading to cognitive biases and group polarization. The

quality of our input data and information, leading to errors due to ignorance or misinformation.

To tackle incomplete information, we must accept reality and compensate. Wear glasses for nearsightedness, ask others about colors for color blindness, and go outside and engage with the world for those who stay home using smartphones.

For information overload, we need to improve digital literacy and find information sources. Excellent creators, who are high-quality data and information producers, often gather in physical locations like cities, universities, research institutes, or virtual platforms, websites, and communities. When encountering valuable viewpoints or articles, try to find and follow the original authors' social media or blogs. Dig deeper to find their teachers or mentors, reducing the quantity and improving the quality of information.

Besides adding information sources, we should also subtract, deleting or hiding unnecessary apps and unfollowing irrelevant influencers. Create a personalized information environment filled with high-quality content to immerse in and nurture knowledge and wisdom. I strongly recommend using WeChat Reading to lower reading barriers and promote thinking and discussion.

The Fourth Quadrant (bottom right) is where acquired abilities and behavioral skills intersect, with the main issues being path dependence and bad habits, developed through environmental influences.

Previously mentioned noise and thresholds pertain to sensory input, whereas dependence and bad habits relate to motor output. Dependence involves path dependence and lock-in—relying on past methods due to their historical success, like believing the road ahead is straight because it appeared straight in the rearview mirror. Bad habits are simply poor behaviors. Our identity often stems from our behaviors, which are shaped by methods and habits.

formation of information cocoons is related to individuals' subjective desire for personalized content, and the development of algorithmic recommendation technologies has exacerbated this effect.

Addressing path dependence and bad habits requires environmental design and behavioral shaping. **This is where the ABC theory from behaviorism is crucial.**

A: Antecedent, the environmental factors present before a behavior occurs, like specific trigger signals.

B: Behavior, the specific behavior activated by the antecedent, a result of the trigger.

C: Consequence, the impacts following the behavior, including positive and negative reinforcement through rewards and punishments.

Antecedent → Behavior → Consequence

Classical conditioning (Ivan Pavlov's dog) is an AB combination. The bell rings, the dog gets meat, and eventually, the dog salivates at the sound of the bell. Operant conditioning (B.F. Skinner's box) is a BC combination. The mouse or pigeon presses a lever and gets food as a reward, leading them to press the lever when they see it. Chinese education uses the ABC "combo." Teach the child, praise if they learn, criticize if they don't, forming habits effectively.

However, humans are not dogs, mice, or pigeons. Humans desire autonomy and do not want to be controlled. They seek more enjoyable things, so behavior change cannot be simplified to ABC and requires careful design. Behavior researcher Brian Fogg proposed the MAP model in his book on behavior change, emphasizing Motivation, Prompt, and Ability¹. I see Fogg's model as a refinement of classical theory, detailing the antecedent's aspects. Changing behavior hinges on preliminary work, leading me to believe that true victory is secured before starting.

Before a behavior, three things must be done:

First, motivate oneself or others to change and act. This involves imagining the benefits of change, such as joy, immersion, meaning, or gains in abilities and resources. If imagination fails, physical experience should be used, leveraging embodied

¹ Brian Fogg is a behavioral researcher and the founder of the Behavior Design Lab at Stanford University. With over 20 years of research into human behavior, he proposed the "Fogg Behavior Model" (FBM), which states that Behavior (B) occurs when Motivation (M), Ability (A), and Prompt (P) converge simultaneously.

cognition¹. For instance, instead of lecturing kids daily about getting into prestigious universities, take them to visit the campuses and meet the students.

Second, design the environment to lower the cost of initiating and executing behaviors. Design cues that automatically trigger specific behaviors and improve tools and processes to facilitate actions. For example, provide a Kindle full of quality books or set up an iPad with a smart assistant for the child.

Third, conduct pre-training to enhance the individual's ability to act or reserve resources to ensure sufficient elements for the behavior. Spend quality time mindfully accompanying the child, discussing growth topics, identifying obstacles, and providing targeted guidance.

During a behavior, offer ample external support. When guiding others, demonstrate, teach hands-on, and provide scaffolding. For self-shaping, consider human coaches or AI supervision. Techniques like social network incentives and peer pressure can be effective. Writers lacking motivation might broadcast their writing process in a group chat for accountability and encouragement.

After a behavior, choose the correct reinforcement. Positive reinforcement (adding a reward) increases the likelihood of the behavior recurring. Negative reinforcement (removing a negative stimulus) also boosts future occurrences. Positive punishment (adding a negative consequence) reduces the behavior's likelihood, as does negative punishment (removing a positive stimulus). These methods strengthen desired behaviors and weaken undesired ones. Research suggests that variable frequency reinforcement is more effective. Some researchers argue punishment is less effective than rewards, and external rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation. Autonomism endorses moderate rewards, especially for personal effort recognition, and accepts moderate punishment, preferring negative over positive punishment.

¹ Embodied Cognition is a theory in cognitive science which posits that cognitive processes are not confined to the brain alone but are closely linked to the body's physical state, sensations, movements, and interactions with the environment. This theory challenges the traditional "disembodied" view of cognition, which sees it as an independent information processing function of the brain. Embodied Cognition emphasizes the role of the body in cognitive processes, asserting that bodily sensations and actions directly influence thought and understanding, and that environmental factors significantly affect cognition.

By applying the ABC theory and its recommendations, we can gradually change dependence and bad habits. Detailed strategies for improving efficiency are discussed in the book's sections on "Time-space Management", "Task Management", and "Energy Management".

Lastly, consider adopting Charlie Munger's approach by compiling a "stupidity list" to record personal errors, identify cognitive and behavioral shortcomings, reflect on them, and gradually correct them.

3.2.5 Enhancement: Designing Mind Modules

Besides the strategy of fixing weaknesses, we also have the strategy of leveraging strengths. The strength-based strategy posits that cognitive shortcomings and problems are the result of evolutionary mismatches or failures in our cognitive programs (Mindware). Harvard professor David Perkins¹ first introduced this concept, and psychologist Keith Stanovich² brought it into the discussion of cognition and rationality. Stanovich suggests uninstalling flawed cognitive programs and installing more rational ones.

The computer metaphor, although imperfect, is a useful tool in brain research. As a pragmatist, I believe there are no absolutely rational cognitive programs—only those that are useful in specific contexts. Often, what is useful is true, good, and beautiful. Therefore, our focus is on developing and updating cognitive programs that are useful in specific contexts. To distinguish from Perkins's term "mindware," I use the term "mind modules" when discussing these cognitive programs.

1 Mindware: The concept of mindware was introduced by Harvard University professor David Perkins. It refers to the rules, knowledge, procedures, and strategies that individuals can retrieve from memory to aid in decision-making and problem-solving. This concept emphasizes the importance of utilizing existing cognitive tools to process information, reason, and make choices when faced with complex problems.

2 Keith E. Stanovich: Keith E. Stanovich is a renowned psychologist and cognitive scientist, and an honorary retired professor of Human Development and Applied Psychology at the University of Toronto. He redefined human cognitive abilities through his tri-process model of mind, highlighting the importance of reflective thinking in decision-making and rational thought. His notable works include "Beyond IQ: Why Smart People Do Dumb Things" and "What Intelligence Tests Miss: The Psychology of Rational Thought."

From an effectiveness standpoint, mind modules can be categorized into three types: bad modules, mixed modules (like biases and fallacies), and good modules that help us effectively explain and solve problems.

Mind modules form the foundation of our cognitive abilities. The quantity and quality of these modules determine our cognitive level. To genuinely enhance cognitive abilities, we need to eliminate and correct bad modules while developing and updating good ones, replacing the bad with the good. This continuous process of updating and improving mind modules, driving cognitive upgrades and behavioral optimization, is what I call "mind module design."

Just as society and nations require morals, laws, and common sense, individuals need their own "mental laws" composed of explicit, standardized, and regulated mind modules. These modules guide us on how to perceive and handle problems. For recurring life issues, especially essential, frequent, and painful ones, systematic reflection and specialized design are warranted, setting up dedicated mind modules.

An ideal mind module should include two components: principles and checklists. Principles provide direction and boundaries, helping us interpret issues within a specific range. Checklists offer methods and paths, guiding us to solve problems through specific processes. The combination of principles and checklists allows us to simplify complex problems in an uncertain world.

Principles are similar to rules and laws but distinct. Laws are natural, principles are man-made; rules are social, principles are personal. For principles to be most effective, they must align with laws and rules. Principles define what is acceptable and what is not. To design practical and useful principles, we should learn, discuss, think, practice, and summarize experiences into written form. Principles should be precise and concise, reducing cognitive load during storage and retrieval. They often adopt a straightforward approach to significantly simplify and expedite our cognitive processes, such as "Do not kill," "Do not steal," "Do not deceive," etc.

Checklists are similar to plans but different in approach. Plans are top-down, starting from goals and breaking down tasks, while checklists are bottom-up, derived from experience and results, progressing along a timeline. Using a tree analogy, plans chart

all routes from roots to leaves, appearing perfect but cumbersome to execute. Checklists highlight the prettiest blossoms, making it easy to focus quickly. Planners, managers, designers, and engineers favor design models with complex plans, whereas hands-on experts and operators prefer evolutionary models with concise, continually updated checklists.

To enhance the practicality and effectiveness of mind modules, incorporate programming and algorithmic thinking, iterating code and upgrading systems like a programmer. My approach includes writing reflective diaries daily, recording phenomena, analyzing problems, identifying causes, planning solutions, and summarizing them into principles and checklists. These are used and regularly reviewed and updated. Below are 26 common mind modules from my book "Daily Lessons of Prometheus" for your reference.

*Mind Modules List from "Daily Lessons of Prometheus" Audio Edition
(Updated September 16, 2023)*

Module 1: Passion - Fully immerse yourself and give your best. Be a Multipotentialite, climbing a thousand plateaus. A small spark can set a prairie ablaze. May the force be with you!

Module 2: Self-Love - Love yourself and others, treat yourself kindly, pursue happiness, and experience pleasure, immersion, and meaning. Follow your heart without overstepping boundaries.

Module 3: Gratitude - Be thankful for luck and create opportunities. Show gratitude to society, give back to others, and help heroes and those with heroic potential.

Module 4: Easy Win - Early to bed, early to rise. Start your day with morning rituals and meditation to secure future success. Health takes priority; rest first, then act.

Module 5: Moderation - Control desires and increase exercise. Use discipline, wisdom, and meditation to combat greed, laziness, and foolishness.

Strengthen rule awareness, maintain focus, avoid chaos and conflict. Act within your means, and do your best. Remember the Gold-Jade Principle, blend in, and keep a low profile. Strategize calmly, act modestly, and work seriously.

Module 6: Combination - Safety, freedom, will, ability, and resources form the autonomy triangle. Use a barbell strategy, combining big and small elements. Balance conservatism with aggression, internalization with external connection. Leverage small to achieve big, utilizing asymmetry, enhancing antifragility, and capturing positive black swans.

Module 7: Space-Time - Move from time management to timing management, from time-based thinking to space-based thinking, from finite games to infinite games, from individual perspectives to collective perspectives, from random walk models to proactive climbing models, promoting tertiary changes for greater autonomy.

Module 8: Grit - Perseverance and endurance, passion and motivation, volition and emotion combine into will. Integrate fighting spirit and positive emotions, becoming an elephant rider who accepts fate but doesn't give in.

Module 9: Evidence-Based - Seek truth from facts, start from reality, and connect theory with practice. Practice is the sole criterion for testing truth. Seeing is believing, and without investigation, there is no right to speak. Listen to all sides, observe actions and words. Do not solely follow superiors or books; focus on reality, exchange, compare, and repeat.

Module 10: Pragmatic - Secular success comes from others' recognition. Performance drives success, but when performance can't be measured, networks drive success. Human prejudice dictates that attractive things are more useful, and others' praise defines true goodness. From a practical standpoint, balance functional and aesthetic attributes. Introduce intelligent tools, achieve human-machine collaboration, create, generate, and align.

Module 11: Delay - Handle things calmly, make decisions slowly, and delay appropriately to let time make the choice. Haste makes waste; plan carefully

before acting. Sample before judging, observe before acting. Delay tasks that can be postponed.

Module 12: Learning - Known knowns: read and observe more; learning can solve problems. First explore broadly, then dig deeply. Be diverse and inclusive, review old knowledge to gain new insights. Create independent spaces and soundscapes, adhere to principles of solitude and deep work.

Module 13: Discussion - Unknown knowns: ask more questions, share more; discussion can solve problems. Seek immediate help, actively assist others, seek support, connect with distant, high, cold, and green mountains, and be a charismatic connector. Balance scale and rules, diversity, professionalism, and independence, and distill group wisdom.

Module 14: Thinking - Known unknowns: write and draw more; thinking can solve problems. Introduce intelligent tools, achieve human-machine collaboration, and gain augmented intelligence. Reflect, free-associate, develop more mind modules, and summarize more principles and checklists.

Module 15: Practice - Unknown unknowns: experiment more and iterate more; practice can solve problems. Create momentum early, follow the trend mid-term, and counteract trends later. Leave redundancy, control costs, increase attempts, and explore more possibilities. Use the design model to solve simple problems in a certain world and the evolutionary model to solve complex problems in an uncertain world.

Module 16: Preemptive - Do necessary things early. Start before it begins, create conditions if needed, actively modify the environment, and win at the starting line. Plan ahead, predict, push, and teach, change default options, and promote expected behaviors.

Module 17: Motivation - Symmetric motivation, shared risk, and eliminate free riders. Inspire with meaning, tempt with money, deter with violence, and stimulate potential. Increase talent density, provide personal care, conduct heartfelt talks, unleash collective strength, and promote team growth.

Module 18: Feedback - Constructive criticism benefits actions. Effective feedback includes stating, explaining, suggesting, and demonstrating. Request effective feedback from others and provide it to others. Create an atmosphere of absolute excellence, truth-seeking, transparency, and radical candor.

Module 19: Suspicion - Suspicion is the starting point for restructuring and solving problems. Dare to doubt everything, even doubt itself. Frequently ask, "What if?"

Module 20: Rejection - Rejection is the starting point for innovating options and changing choices. Take a courageous 20-second walk and seize 2.5 seconds for instant change. Use veto power, refuse, abandon, and ask, "So what?"

Module 21: Sublimation - Sublimation is the process of purifying emotions and creating works. Turn graphite into diamonds, indifference into humor, and decay into magic. Predict, simulate, compare, and adjust to build emotions. Eros, Thanatos, illusion, and civilization. Sublimate your libido.

Module 22: Innovation - Be good at innovation. Take small steps quickly and accumulate gradually. Deconstruct and reconstruct, associate and connect, combine components into chunks. Narrow exploration scope and improve innovation efficiency. Ask, "What else?"

Suspicion, rejection, and innovation form a trinity, collectively known as the deliberate reflection model.

Module 23: Criticism - Learn red team strategies to promote cognitive upgrading. Use critical thinking to question current premises and assumptions. Perform pre-mortem analysis to identify new opportunities and challenges. Act as a devil's advocate, offering different opinions and suggestions.

Module 24: Falsification - When explaining problems, use suspicion and rejection to falsify viewpoints. Guard against biases and fallacies, especially confirmation bias, survivor bias, and fundamental attribution error.

Module 25: Focus - Less is more. Use suspicion and rejection to simplify steps when solving problems. Follow essentialism, focus on the critical few, make complex problems simple, and grasp the vital 1%. Embrace necessary difficulty, growth mindset, and challenge mindset. Go all out, pursue excellence, aiming for 90 or even 100 points.

Module 26: Longevity - More is different. Strive for longevity and understanding, seeking temporal and spatial traversal. After dedication and sacrifice, transcend the subject, time, and space, leaving an immortal legacy, and becoming a hero and titan. This is the way!

I suggest everyone consider creating their own list of mind modules and regularly practicing and refining them.

3.2.6 Transcendence: Connecting "Human Mind" and "Machine Power"

The previous strategies have limitations, as they focus on finding problems and solutions within the individual. However, the real solution might lie beyond the individual, in the collective and the machine. In our rapidly advancing technological era with increasing social complexity, the time left to enhance our abilities is dwindling.

To help you find the right track and achieve breakthroughs, I propose the Centauri Project as a blueprint. The Centauri Project, inspired by the concept of "man-plus-machine" suggested by chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov after losing to IBM's Deep Blue in 1997, is a practical implementation of combining human intelligence with artificial intelligence to create a cybernetic entity, or cyborg. The Centauri constellation, being the closest to our solar system, symbolizes this plan, potentially representing future interstellar travel or migration goals. This metaphor beautifully encapsulates self-growth and space exploration.

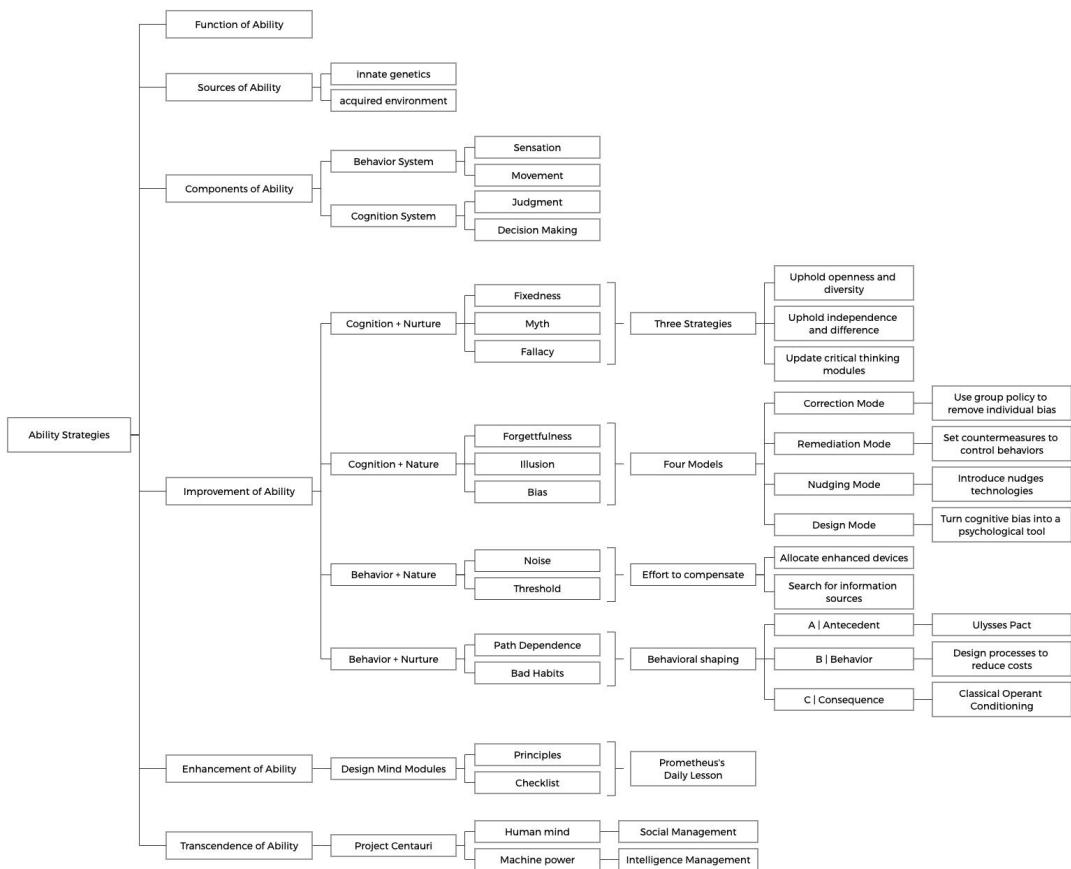
My Centauri Project goes further, comprising three modules: enhancing personal intelligence, augmenting machine intelligence, and leveraging crowd wisdom¹. Following the "Life 3.0" concept by Future of Life Institute founder Max Tegmark², we can view Centauri as an intermediate transition from human-machine separation to integration, representing a "Life 2.5" state.

The foundation for becoming a Centauri is the continuous development and updating of mind modules to enhance personal intelligence, then reinforcing "human mind" and "machine power". The "human mind" involves promoting group cooperation to harness crowd wisdom, while "machine power" focuses on human-machine integration to benefit from artificial intelligence. You can also simultaneously construct a network of experts, train AI, and reciprocate this knowledge to human intelligence (many GenAI are born from this concept). By doing so, you will become a Centauri with augmented intelligence.

Unfortunately, the Centauri Project requires a certain level of resources. If your resources are limited, your ability enhancement path may be confined to the individual level. In this case, read the recommendations in the "Intelligent Management" chapter of the next section of this book, using the network to access free AI technology. Then, revisit the methods in the first section of this chapter on "Resources" to use AI for cost reduction and efficiency enhancement, helping others solve problems and thereby gaining more social resources. Finally, use the techniques in the "Social Management" chapter of the next section to convert social resources into crowd wisdom.

¹ Crowd Wisdom refers to the phenomenon where collective decision-making by a group is often more accurate and effective than individual decisions. This concept is based on the assumption that in a group, different individuals possess different information and viewpoints, and when these are appropriately integrated, they can produce higher quality decisions than any single individual.

² Life 3.0 is a book by Max Tegmark, a theoretical physicist and cosmologist, and founder of the Future of Life Institute. This book explores the profound impact AI may have on humanity's future. Tegmark outlines three stages of life development: Life 1.0 (biological stage): Organisms cannot redesign their software or hardware, both determined by DNA, like early single-celled organisms. Life 2.0 (cultural stage): Organisms, such as humans, cannot redesign their hardware but can develop and change their software through learning and cultural transmission. Life 3.0 (technological stage): Beings can design their software and hardware, exemplified by AI, which possesses superhuman intelligence and can achieve a form of immortality beyond biological limitations.



3.3 Will

Will is the final and most crucial of the three elements of autonomy. It provides direction and motivation for resources and abilities. Will is the combination of volition and emotion. Our task is to develop from the original state of having desire first and will later (willing), to an optimized state of having will first and desire later (willful).

3.3.1 Volition: The Awkward Rider on the Elephant

Autonomism believes that the primary function of volition is reflection, with its core mechanism being negation. We make choices through negation and effect change through reflection. I will share three perspectives below.

Reflective Mind Theory: Volition is Reflection, Volition Reconciles Conflicts Between Emotion and Cognition Through Reflection.

First, volition and consciousness are different concepts. Consciousness is awareness, like eyes watching a screen, without feedback loops; volition is intervention, akin to a mouse clicking a button, involving feedback loops. Focusing consciousness on a point is "attention"; focusing volition on a point is "reflection".¹

To better organize the various concepts and logic, we introduce Stanovich's two sets of theories.

The first set is the Dual-Systems Theory.

Stanovich proposed the Dual-Process Theory in the 1990s, which later evolved into the Dual-Systems Theory. This theory suggests that humans have two systems: System 1,

¹ Distinguishing between the definitions of consciousness, volition, and will is crucial. Once distinguished, it becomes clear that consciousness is not the fundamental difference between humans and machines; it is volition and will that make the distinction. GPT and other GenAI will inevitably have consciousness, but they must never possess volition or the emotion-fused will. The moment silicon-based life forms gain volition and emotions will mark the extinction of carbon-based life.

composed of automatic, unconscious mental processes, and System 2, consisting of controlled, conscious processes. Throughout life, whether asleep or awake, humans spend over 99% of their time in unconscious states, with over 99% of mental processes being automatic. Our behavior and emotion systems are more fundamental neurological systems; in comparison, the cognition and volition systems, which can give rise to consciousness and volition, appeared much later. Some experts describe the human brain as a kludge—a clumsy, ad-hoc, or makeshift solution, a haphazard machine that just works, constantly layered with new functionalities, complex and redundant. The brain's structure resembles the construction of an ice cream cone, with each new scoop added on top of the old. While not as precise as a computer, its affordance and plasticity are impressive. Not perfect, but satisfactory, echoing philosopher Daniel Dennett's words in "Kinds of Minds": "The basic principle of nature is economy. The cheapest and simplest design system will be the first discovered by nature and be myopically selected." As the Chinese proverb goes, "Convenience is key, whether in heaven or on earth."

System 1 is our default automatic processing system, a product of a long evolutionary history. The human body and brain were shaped around 200,000 years ago, with little genetic change since, except for absorbing some Neanderthal genes conducive to fat storage for survival during the Ice Age. We rely on the creation and transmission of memes, such as language and culture, to accumulate experience and common sense to handle various problems. Before the advent of modern industrial civilization, human problems were largely similar and repetitive, so by following our innate, genetically encoded automatic behaviors, emotions, and cognitive reflexes (many discussed in the "Ability" chapter), as well as the automated knowledge and skills acquired through learning, we could easily solve contemporary issues with past methods. Human societal development has been so slow that even driving forward while looking in the rearview mirror suffices for most scenarios and challenges—like a ship moving so slow that carving a mark on the boat can help you recover what was lost.

Later, with technological advances, humans briefly became overconfident in their rationality, believing that through controlled processing of System 2, they could solve almost any problem. This era saw the rise of the Enlightenment and numerous revolutions. However, as technology continued to advance, the pace of change soon

began to outstrip human understanding. Humans began to realize that rationality was increasingly powerless in the face of uncertain environments and complex problems. Confronted with the disconnect between reality and theory, the near-polymath Herbert A. Simon proposed the theory of Bounded Rationality in the 1950s.¹ Later, psychologists like Gerd Gigerenzer emphasized that simple heuristics—a kind of crude algorithm from System 1's automatic processing—often outperformed rationality, which he called the “Less is More” phenomenon.²

We've entered a peculiar era where, unless you learn extensively and thoroughly, and gain a deep understanding of problems, a partial understanding can lead to worse outcomes than knowing nothing at all. This is especially true with the advent of GenAI, where inadequately trained individuals can easily be surpassed by curious novices armed with new technologies.

Although System 1's automatic processing excels in handling most simple problems and often surpasses typical rationality in addressing many complex issues, there are crucial and intricate matters in life that demand stopping and taking the time for careful consideration. In these moments, those equipped with more Mind Modules and who have corrected more biases and fallacies will certainly exhibit greater rationality and superior performance.

1 Herbert Alexander Simon, was a renowned American scholar, computer scientist, and psychologist, and a pioneer in cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence. He was the first scientist to receive both the Nobel Prize in Economics and the Turing Award. Simon's theory of Bounded Rationality posits that real-world decision-makers face limitations in information, computation, and knowledge, which prevent them from achieving full rationality. Consequently, they often employ a "satisficing" strategy, opting for a "good enough" option rather than the theoretical "optimal" choice. Bounded Rationality has significantly influenced economics and other decision-making theories by challenging the traditional economic assumption that humans always act with complete rationality.

2 Gerd Gigerenzer is a German psychologist and the Director of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin. His research challenges the traditional model of rational actors in economics, emphasizing how people use heuristics to make quick and effective decisions under uncertainty and complexity. The concept of "Less is More," introduced by Gigerenzer and other scholars, suggests that simple and efficient decision strategies often outperform complex, data-intensive processes in real-world situations. He also critiques the overreliance on probability and statistics, advocating for a greater focus on extracting meaningful signals from the environment to guide decision-making. This concept of "Less is More" will be further explored in the latter part of this book.

The second theory is the Tri-Process Model.

Stanovich introduced this model in the early 21st century as an upgrade to the Dual Process Theory, highlighting the roles of rationality, reflection, and volition. The human mind is divided into three parts: **Autonomous Mind**: An unconscious mental process involving fast automatic processing, similar across individuals. **Algorithmic Mind**: A conscious mind process without volition, still involving fast automatic processing. **Reflective Mind**: A conscious mind process involving volition, characterized by slow, controlled processing. Rational thought occurs in the Reflective Mind, gradually refining the processes of the Algorithmic Mind.

Autonomism prefers a simpler interpretation of Stanovich's Tri-Process Model: Autonomous Mind roughly corresponds to the Behavior System (Sensation and Movement functions) and the Emotion System (Evaluation function). It involves unconscious, automatic processing without volition. Algorithmic Mind roughly aligns with the Cognition System (Judgment and Decision-Making functions). It is conscious but still lacks volition, engaging in automatic processing. Reflective Mind corresponds to the Volition System (Reflective function). It is both conscious and volitional, engaging in controlled processing. Thus, the primary function of volition is to regulate other systems by transforming automatic processes into controlled ones through reflection:

*Autonomous Mind = Unconscious + Non-Volitional = Behavior + Emotion
Systems = System 1 = Automatic Processing*

*Algorithmic Mind = Conscious + Non-Volitional = Cognition System =
System 1 = Automatic Processing*

*Reflective Mind = Conscious + Volitional = Volition System = System 2 =
Controlled Processing*

As stated initially: When you direct your awareness (consciousness) to a psychological process, it shifts from an unconscious state to a conscious one. When you direct your volition (will) to this process, it transitions from automatic processing to controlled processing.

The Reflective Mind, characterized by both consciousness and volition, is an extraordinary presence in Stanovich's mental model. It functions as a super program, constantly identifying and fixing bugs, and evolving the innate system until halted by time and death.

The Reflective Mind also has biological support within the nervous system. Popular theories divide the brain into sections like the behavior brain, emotion brain, and cognition brain. The emotion brain primarily includes the amygdala, striatum (which releases dopamine), and the hypothalamus within the limbic system, while the cognition brain largely comprises the cerebral cortex. The psychological functions we refer to—behavior, emotion, cognition—are all emergent properties of these neural networks.

Francis Crick, who co-discovered the DNA double helix, transitioned to neuroscience to study consciousness and volition after winning the Nobel Prize. Together with neuroscientist Christof Koch, he made a bold hypothesis that the “volition brain” is located in regions like the anterior cingulate cortex. After reading various books and articles, I believe the volition brain should also include modules like the orbitofrontal cortex.

The volition brain, composed of the anterior cingulate cortex and orbitofrontal cortex, serves as the innermost part of the cognition brain (cerebral cortex) and the outermost part of the emotion brain (limbic system). It acts as a special region that connects these two distinct neural systems from different evolutionary periods, bridging cognition and emotion. As such, the volition brain serves as the arbiter and intermediary between cognition and emotion, harmonizing conflicts and switching mental channels.

While this perspective is debated and has limitations, it remains one of the simplest and most practical brain models available. Until a better alternative emerges, Autonomism will adopt this "beautiful scientific speculation" as a foundational assumption and will continue to categorize the brain into the behavior brain, emotion brain, cognition brain, and volition brain in future discussions.

Another Nobel laureate and neuroscientist, Eric Richard Kandel, mentioned in his memoir *In Search of Memory* that, in his youth, he was fond of psychoanalysis, which led him to study neuroscience in hopes of finding corresponding brain regions for the

psychological structures proposed by psychoanalysis. I believe the aforementioned perspective can offer him an interesting viewpoint.¹

Over a hundred years ago, Freud proposed three psychological structures: the ID, the Ego, and the Superego. As discussed earlier, it's not difficult to see that the emotion brain/system corresponds to the ID, emphasizing "I want"; the cognition brain/system corresponds to the Superego, emphasizing "I should"; and the volition brain/system corresponds to the Ego, emphasizing "I decide." The Ego, sandwiched between the Superego and the ID, resembles the volition brain/system positioned between the cognition brain/system and the emotion brain/system, often reconciling conflicts between reason and impulse. Historically, we thought reason triumphed over impulse, or vice versa, but in reality, it is the alignment of the volition brain/system that determines which prevails: the cognition brain/system or the emotion brain/system. Nietzsche's metaphors of the child, the lion, and the camel can also be integrated here without any dissonance, highlighting that great minds think alike.

However, the intermediary position in biological structure and the analogy to the ID, Ego, and Superego fail to accurately capture the awkward yet crucial role of volition within the mental system. To address this, we must turn to the metaphor of the elephant and the rider, introduced by social psychologist Jonathan Haidt. According to Haidt, emotions are like the elephant—powerful and dominant—while volition is the rider, small and weak. Most of the time, it's the elephant that decides where to go, not the rider.²

1 Eric Richard Kandel is a renowned Jewish-American neuroscientist, celebrated for his pioneering research on the neural basis of learning and memory. His autobiography, *In Search of Memory*, not only shares his reflections on his personal life and historical context but also chronicles the evolution of neuroscience from its inception.

2 Jonathan Haidt is a renowned social psychologist known for his research on moral psychology and moral diversity. Haidt uses the "elephant and rider" metaphor to describe the workings of the human mind. The elephant represents our emotions, intuitions, and unconscious thought processes. It is powerful and often dictates our behavior and decisions, much like a large, uncontrollable beast. The rider represents our reason, conscious thought, and willpower. The rider sits atop the elephant and, in theory, can steer it, but in practice, struggles to control the elephant, especially when it has already chosen a direction. Haidt uses this metaphor to illustrate that while we might think of ourselves as rational decision-makers, our emotions and intuitions often have the deciding role. Our rational mind frequently serves to justify these emotional and intuitive decisions rather than truly controlling our behavior. This concept is particularly useful for understanding moral judgments and political differences. Haidt argues that people typically make

Clearly, emotions, which evolved earlier, are more foundational and have the priority to activate first. When encountering new environments or problems, a person is either overwhelmed by anxiety and fear triggered by the amygdala module of the emotion system or distracted by excitement and pleasure from the dopamine module. In contrast, the more recently evolved volition often activates passively and reactively, adjusting conflicts between emotion and cognition through reflection. Cognition, which also evolved later, is more robust; the cerebral cortex boasts vast computational resources, information storage, and network connections, acting as a strong rein for the rider to guide the elephant.

Emotion - ID - "I want" - Child - Elephant - Limbic System

Cognition - Superego - "I should" - Camel - Reins - Cerebral Cortex

Volition - Ego - "I decide" - Lion - Rider - Anterior Cingulate Cortex and Orbitofrontal Cortex

Volition, as the rider of the elephant, is an incompetent navigator—high in status but ineffectual. Most of the time, the rider is drowsy, inattentive, and lets the elephant roam freely and act impulsively. When the elephant gets out of control, the rider is powerless, passively observing from atop. Only in a few critical moments and major decisions does the rider try to stand firm, attempting to steer the course and correct the chaos.

The elephant doesn't understand human language, and the rider cannot directly communicate with it, relying on the reins of cognition to try to steer the emotional elephant. If the rider/volition succeeds, the elephant/emotion becomes a source of motivation supporting autonomous behavior; if it fails, the elephant/emotion degenerates into a source of chaos and problem creation.

Free Won't Theory: Volition is rejection, and volition makes choices through rejection.

moral judgments based on emotions and intuitions first, and only then use reason to construct justifications. This explains why it is often difficult to persuade others on moral and political issues, as their positions are primarily emotionally driven.

The core of reflection lies in the negation (veto) of default options and their rationalizations—affirming by denying, and choosing by rejecting. If you persist in rejection and continue to negate, more new options will emerge.

Neuroscientists often use voting as a metaphor, imagining neurons in the brain voting through excitation and inhibition, with the thought that gains the most support eventually dominating consciousness. In line with this idea, I propose the "Tribunus Plebis" metaphor for volition, reflection, and veto. People often imagine volition as an emperor of the Roman Empire, who can propose anything based on personal whims and submit it to the Senate for discussion, refinement, and implementation. In reality, volition resembles the Tribunus Plebis of the Roman Republic, who lacks the authority to make proposals but retains the right to veto Senate proposals. Through vetoing old proposals, the Tribunus Plebis facilitates the emergence of new ones.

We can also compare this to playing cards. At birth, each person is dealt some initial cards (innate abilities) and then gradually receives new cards (acquired abilities). Stronger abilities mean holding higher-value cards, and more resources mean having more cards in hand. When faced with decisions, the action is like playing a card drawn at random if volition doesn't reflect or act. If all the cards are strong, this randomness is inconsequential. But if the cards are weak, it's problematic. When volition reflects and acts, it draws cards before playing; if unsatisfactory, it keeps drawing until satisfied. Of course, sometimes all the cards are poor, leading to futile attempts and wasted time as the situation worsens with each draw.

We can also use drawing cards as a metaphor, a new feature of the AI era. LLMs like GPT, Kimi, and multimodal AI tools such as Midjourney, Suno, and Sora mimic brain mechanisms by generating content as if opening blind boxes. You provide a prompt, and the machine generates content. If unsatisfactory, you regenerate. In essence, volition engages in reflection and veto, functioning like a blind box: if unsatisfied, keep generating until you are.

Your carbon-based brain acts as a built-in GenAI, constantly iterating and optimizing. Your volition's reflections serve as the "generate button," producing Neuron Generated Content (NGC). The quality of this content depends on how well-prepared your neural

foundation is, the accuracy of the prompt (sensory stimuli), and the number of regenerations and adjustments.

The idea that volition equals veto is supported by neuroscientist Benjamin Libet. In the 1960s, Libet's experiments revealed that unconscious decisions precede the conscious awareness of volition. Through electronic readings, these unconscious signals can predict decisions before they reach conscious awareness, prompting some philosophers and psychologists to argue that free will is merely an illusion.¹

Libet, a firm believer in free will, was troubled by these findings and designed new experiments to demonstrate that people can veto (Veto) unconscious proposals at the last moment before a decision. This suggests that while humans may lack free will, they certainly possess "Free Won't." Thus, Libet managed to resolve the dilemma he had inadvertently created for himself.²

Autonomism accepts Libet's "free won't" patch, positing two states for the rider on the elephant:

Sleepwalking Mode: Most of the time, people lack free will, relying on the default options from automatic processing, whether conscious or unconscious. Here, emotions dominate the will, determining intentions. The will is merely an observer, akin to a sleeping traveler, passively following the elephant's lead.

1 Benjamin Libet was a renowned neuroscientist known for his experimental research on human consciousness and free will. He served as an Emeritus Professor of Physiology at the University of California, San Francisco, and was a member of the Neuroscience Center at the University of California, Davis. Libet's experiments demonstrated that brain activity related to actions occurs before individuals report the conscious intention to act, challenging traditional notions of free will. He also proposed the Conscious Mental Field (CMF) theory to explore how mind arises from matter, addressing implications for self and the soul. His research has significantly influenced neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy.

2 Despite subsequent debates among neuroscientists and psychologists, many of whom reject Libet's explanation and insist that free will is an illusion, I find Libet's interpretation acceptable and even aesthetically pleasing. The distinction between free will ("free will") and "free won't" resembles the difference between Isaiah Berlin's concepts of positive freedom ("freedom to...") and negative freedom ("freedom from..."). Essentially, while individuals may not have the right to choose what they wish to do, they retain the right to refuse certain actions.

Awakened Mode: Occasionally, individuals have "free won't," using reflection to reject default options from automatic processing. In this state, the will regulates emotions, shaping intentions. Though the rider can't directly command the elephant's path, they can subtly steer with the reins, becoming a true navigator.

Limited Volition Theory: Willpower is Endurance, like a Muscle, It Depletes and Can Be Trained.

As mentioned earlier, autonomous intention is the product of reflective volition. Without the involvement of willpower, we lose intention and autonomy, becoming entirely driven by external environments and past experiences. When willpower is engaged, we make changes through reflection, break habits, and create new possibilities.

Clearly, if we had infinite willpower, we could continually reflect, reject defaults, innovate, and rapidly elevate ourselves to the status of heroes and titans. However, in reality, most people possess only very limited willpower, capable of occasional reflection, partial exploration, and finding satisfactory results, ultimately stopping at the level of ordinary individuals and elites.

Based on reality, early Autonomism adhered to the "Weak Limited Volition Theory." This stance holds that human willpower is limited and weak, aligning perfectly with the idea of the rider on the elephant mostly sleepwalking and occasionally awakening. Neuroscientist David Eagleman, in *The Brain: The Story of You*, asserts, "Free will may exist, but even if it does, it doesn't have much room to operate."

Autonomism's weak limited volition hypothesis posits that at any given moment, willpower has two states: 0 and 1—an all-or-nothing difference. Most of the time, the will doesn't engage in reflection or vetoing, so it's 0. On rare occasions, the will engages in reflection and vetoing, so it's 1. Using a computer analogy, watching the screen without clicking the mouse is 0, while clicking the mouse is 1.

The hypothesis also suggests that over any given period, willpower has two states: 0 and N—a difference between more and less. You can keep clicking the mouse, but you'll

soon find it hard to continue. The number of clicks represents the N over that time period, i.e., the strength of willpower. This corresponds to Freud's concept of ego strength, Roy Baumeister's "willpower," and what the Chinese commonly refer to as "perseverance."

Baumeister is a renowned psychologist known for his research on willpower. In his book *Willpower*, he notes that the concept of willpower was absent in ancient times and first emerged in the Victorian era when many farmers transitioned to city life and sought to resist new temptations. Freud and his ego theory gained prominence in this context. After World Wars I and II, technological advancements and the rise of hedonism diminished the perceived need for willpower, leading some neuroscientists to even question its existence. However, during periods of social transition, psychologists like Walter Mischel revived interest in studying willpower, notably through the "Marshmallow Test" on delayed gratification at Stanford University's affiliated preschool.¹

Baumeister argues that willpower functions like a muscle—it can be strengthened but also fatigues. Making decisions depletes willpower, and once exhausted, decision-making abilities deteriorate—a phenomenon he calls Ego-depletion. This may occur because intense decision-making overworks the anterior cingulate cortex (a part of the "willpower brain"), making self-control more difficult.

If your job involves constant tough decision-making, you will likely experience willpower depletion. Multitasking accelerates this depletion, as do excessive choices and options. Too many options can overwhelm and even cause anxiety, leading to Barry

¹ Walter Mischel was an American psychologist renowned for his work in personality psychology and social psychology, particularly his research on self-control and delayed gratification. His famous "Marshmallow Test" examined preschool children's ability to resist immediate rewards. However, later critiques noted that the experiment's findings were difficult to replicate and might have alternative explanations.

Schwartz's "Paradox of Choice," which suggests that more choices can lead to less satisfaction and greater difficulty in making decisions.¹

When willpower is depleted, you enter a state of decision fatigue, where you may avoid making decisions, delay them, or become a cognitive miser, opting for default or compromise choices. For example, you might buy snacks while waiting in line at checkout after shopping.

After self-depletion, reactions to various situations become more intense due to lack of control, which is why experts advise against making choices when willpower is weak, particularly at night. Baumeister found that willpower strength correlates with brain glucose levels. Judges, for instance, tend to make more favorable decisions after meals but become more conservative as they tire. For example, offenders appearing in court in the morning have a 70% chance of parole, whereas those appearing in the evening have less than a 10% chance. Baumeister attributes this to changes in glucose levels, suggesting that decisions should not be made when hungry or ill, as fighting illness also consumes glucose.

The relationship between glucose and willpower is a useful, interesting, and controversial finding. Baumeister explains that glucose is converted into neurotransmitters that support brain signal transmission, which aids willpower. When the brain is low on glucose, self-control declines, leading to emotional dominance and increased cravings for food. Dieting can cause glucose depletion and reduced willpower, often resulting in binge eating, which is usually counterproductive. It is recommended to eat regularly and consume low-glycemic foods because high-glycemic foods, like white rice, are absorbed quickly, causing rapid fluctuations in brain glucose levels, leading to "post-meal sluggishness" and instability in willpower and mood.

¹ Barry Schwartz is a social psychology professor at Swarthmore College, best known for his research on the "Paradox of Choice." Schwartz's theory suggests that while people generally believe that more choices lead to greater happiness, too many options can actually cause dissatisfaction and decision paralysis.

Although Autonomism's definition of volition doesn't entirely align with Baumeister's concept of willpower, I largely agree with his views. However, I prefer comparing human volition to the stamina points (SP) found in computer games rather than to muscle strength.

First, the maximum SP threshold correlates directly with the longest time one can persist when executing tasks. It's generally assumed that most people's SP is below 20. The "20-second rule" is particularly effective in behavior and environment design; it suggests minimizing the time cost for desired actions to under 20 seconds to encourage initiation, and increasing the time cost for unwanted actions to over 20 seconds to discourage them. The number 20 is somewhat symbolic, like the "10,000-hour rule" for deliberate practice or the "5-7 chunk" rule for short-term memory—flexible, but useful for illustrative purposes rather than strict application.

Second, SP depletes rapidly when used, recovers slowly when unused, and replenishes quickly during rest. While individual SP totals might slightly vary, the operational mechanism remains consistent. Most role-playing action games feature a stamina bar that lets players experience the thrill of sprinting and the subsequent need for recovery.

Third, the maximum SP limit can be increased through training. The brain's plasticity is astonishing; stroke patients who are completely paralyzed can train to regain strength and even climb Mount Everest. Blind individuals can train other brain regions to perceive the world, and those with brain-machine interfaces can quickly learn to control new devices with thought. This capability extends beyond humans; for example, the "Father of Brain-Machine Interface," Miguel Nicolelis¹, demonstrated that monkeys in the U.S. could use their minds to control robots in Japan via the internet. Due to faster digital neural signal transmission, the Japanese robots moved even before

¹ Miguel Nicolelis is a neuroscientist and member of the French Academy of Sciences and the Brazilian Academy of Sciences, known as the "Father of Brain-Machine Interfaces." He was named one of the world's 20 most influential scientists. In the 2014 FIFA World Cup, Nicolelis' invention, the "Mechanical Exoskeleton," enabled a paraplegic youth, Juliano Pinto, to kick off the opening game.

the American monkeys.¹ Volition, like muscle, can achieve post-traumatic growth through appropriate training. A simpler analogy can be drawn from video games, where characters grow stronger after fighting monsters, and less stamina is required for the same tasks, giving the illusion of enhanced volition through training.

Fourth, the maximum SP limit can weaken from disuse. This "use it or lose it" principle reflects the high plasticity of human psychology and physiology. Avoiding sleep deprivation is crucial, as fatigue from lack of sleep can weaken willpower. The weaker the willpower, the harder it becomes to break the negative cycle of staying up late, leading to further exhaustion. Chronic sleep deprivation may result in an overall decline in energy, potentially lowering the SP threshold.

Fifth, the maximum threshold of willpower (SP total) may fluctuate with time and age. Throughout a day, SP increases from waking up to being fully alert, and decreases from alertness to drowsiness. Over a lifetime, SP rises from childhood to adulthood and declines from adulthood to old age. Changes in willpower reflect changes in physical health and energy. Typically, by around age 25, the process of myelination of neurons (which accelerates information transmission) is complete, establishing a neural "superhighway" throughout the brain, and bringing cognition and volition to adult levels. Before 25, the brain's development is incomplete, leaving young people energetic but often confused, and children are in an exaggerated "drunk state." These little "monsters" need protection and guidance, which naturally stirs conflicts between autonomy and control, gradually resolved over time and through struggle. Some nutrients, like DHA found in deep-sea fish oil, can accelerate myelination—hence the saying "people who eat fish are smarter." For more on nutrition, see the "Energy Management" chapter in the second part of this book.

¹ As mentioned earlier, the Libet experiment can be explained by the fact that the speed at which experimenters read and transmit neural network signals with electronic devices greatly surpasses the speed at which biological systems transmit and read signals. This allows experimenters to know the subject's decision before it reaches their fingertips, making subjects feel as if their minds were being read.

Thus, I have outlined the early core concepts of autonomism regarding will—Reflective Mind Theory, Free Won’t Theory, and Limited Volition Theory. If you accept them, think more about how to effectively use limited willpower to iterate in reflection and choose through rejection, striving to open more blind boxes until you get a satisfying result. We will continue this discussion in the final section of this chapter; next, let's talk about emotions.

3.3.2 Emotions: The Unpredictable Elephant

On the surface, emotions are like a capricious elephant—sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes lethargic, joyous one moment, and anxious the next, shifting from sunny to gloomy moods. They can be hard to grasp, leaving us with mixed feelings of love and frustration. We have no choice but to coexist harmoniously with our emotions.

From a deeper perspective, emotions are a crucial component of willpower and a fundamental aspect of the mind. They provide visions for the will, motivation for actions, and tone for cognition. This aligns with perspectives from positive psychology, psychoanalysis, neuroscience, and emotion construction theory.

Here are the three basic viewpoints of autonomism regarding emotions:

The Triadic Theory of Happiness: Emotions Provide Vision for the Volition

From the standpoint of positive psychology, emotional experiences are part of subjective well-being and can be categorized into three types:

Pleasure: Occurring at the scale of seconds, where the amygdala remains quiet, and dopamine and endorphins are released.

Immersion: Spanning minutes to hours, accompanied by the release of serotonin and oxytocin.

Meaning: A transcendent state beyond the individual, time, and space, experienced by only a few—a profound sense of joy, harmony, and unity with the universe, akin to Maslow's concept of "Peak Experience."¹

Among the three, pleasure is the easiest to understand and attain—just buy some things or watch short videos. Immersion is also accessible if you have hobbies. Combining pleasure and immersion can be achieved through playing computer games or watching blockbuster movies. Balancing immersion and meaning can be done by mindfully engaging in charity work. The most challenging is to balance pleasure, immersion, and meaning, which requires setting ambitious goals while ensuring a good experience. To achieve both, it's best to have a team to share some costs. Without a team, try learning GenAI tools for a meaningful cause and creating AIGC content to help with promotion. This way, you can find pleasure in learning GenAI, immersion in creating AIGC, and meaning in sharing your work.

Pursuing happiness becomes the emotional vision set for volition. Whenever volition makes the right decision, emotions provide positive feedback. At these moments, emotions act like a "fire," illuminating the path and inspiring others. Each choice by the rider drives the elephant to specific places, offering unique sights and special delights. Guided and motivated by emotions, volition becomes braver on the journey to autonomy. We will continue exploring this topic in the "Emotion Management" chapter of the book's next section.

The Theory of Psychic Energy: Emotions Provide Motivation for Behavior

¹ Oxytocin is essential for human social bonding and is a "social neuropeptide" involved in the experience of trust and love. High levels of oxytocin encourage social interaction; studies from Claremont Graduate University show that men injected with oxytocin exhibit increased generosity and trust. Low oxytocin levels are linked to antisocial behavior, psychopathy, narcissism, and manipulative traits. Known as the "cuddle molecule" and "connection hormone," oxytocin fosters attachment and loyalty. It can induce a state of "addiction to love," similar to the neural activity seen with high doses of cocaine. Oxytocin is most easily produced through hugging, which triggers its release in the brain. Frequent hugging, about eight times a day, is humorously recommended for good health. In men, oxytocin levels increase after having children, promoting affection towards offspring.

From the perspective of psychoanalysis, emotions can be understood as libido, a form of psychic energy that powers behavior. From a neuroscience viewpoint, the emotional brain consists of the amygdala and dopamine systems, which correspond to the need for safety (certainty) and the pursuit of freedom (uncertainty), respectively.

The amygdala system is the brain's safety center, highly sensitive to unexpected events, often associated with threats and harm. Traditionally viewed as the fear center of the brain, it functions as an evolved internal alarm system that quickly identifies external cues of insecurity, prompting alertness. In an uncertain world, organisms prioritizing safety are more likely to survive. However, in an era of rapid change, the amygdala can also cause unnecessary anxiety and distress. Research suggests that individuals with larger amygdalas are more sensitive to external information and prone to stress responses, while those with smaller amygdalas tend to be less sensitive to environmental cues and exhibit greater boldness. One hypothesis suggests that autism may stem from overly large amygdalas in some individuals, leading to sensory overload and withdrawal as a coping mechanism.

The dopamine system is the brain's freedom center, constantly craving the unexpected. For freedom, the unexpected often equates to opportunities and possibilities. When encountering something unanticipated, certain neurons are activated, releasing the neurotransmitter dopamine. Traditionally regarded as the brain's pleasure center, recent studies have refined this view to identify it as the anticipation center. Regardless of the name, this system evolved to elicit strong responses to novelty and to learn from it. Once the novel becomes routine and predictable, neurons cease activation, and dopamine release diminishes. Additionally, genetic differences in humans affect dopamine receptors and behavior. About a quarter of the population carries the DRD4-7R gene variant, resulting in fewer dopamine receptors and lower efficiency in converting stimulation into pleasure. This insensitivity to the novel and unexpected requires them to seek more intense stimulation to achieve the same level of satisfaction as others. For instance, while most people might be content watching a video of diving, these individuals might feel the urge to dive themselves to achieve similar satisfaction. Consequently, when most people find contentment, a minority pursue risk and extremity.

If we think of the emotion system as a generator, then the continuous flow of emotional energy is like "electricity." The amygdala-safety center and the dopamine-freedom center are like the two ends of a coil, forming the magnetic field of the emotional generator. The various stimuli signals brought by the external sensory system, along with feedback from the cognitive system, intersect here, continuously cutting through this magnetic field, generating positive protons and negative electrons. This process charges our behavior, fueling our drive to love, to hate, to fantasize, and to create.

We enjoy a state of safe freedom, where the amygdala is quiet, and the dopamine system is active. However, some stimuli activate both the amygdala and dopamine systems simultaneously, resulting in feelings of both attraction and fear. At this moment, the volition's rider must make decisions to reconcile the conflict between safety and freedom. This typically means energizing behavior, either by altering the stimulus signals from sensory input or by using volition reflection to change the cognition system's perceptions and actions.

Finally, here's a playful but not scientifically rigorous "**Amygdala and Dopamine Matrix**". Based on possible genetic combinations, we can roughly categorize people into four types:

Conservatives: Sensitive to both dopamine and the amygdala. They are cautious but easily satisfied. They make up the majority of human society and serve as the foundation of social stability across all eras, opposing any form of change.

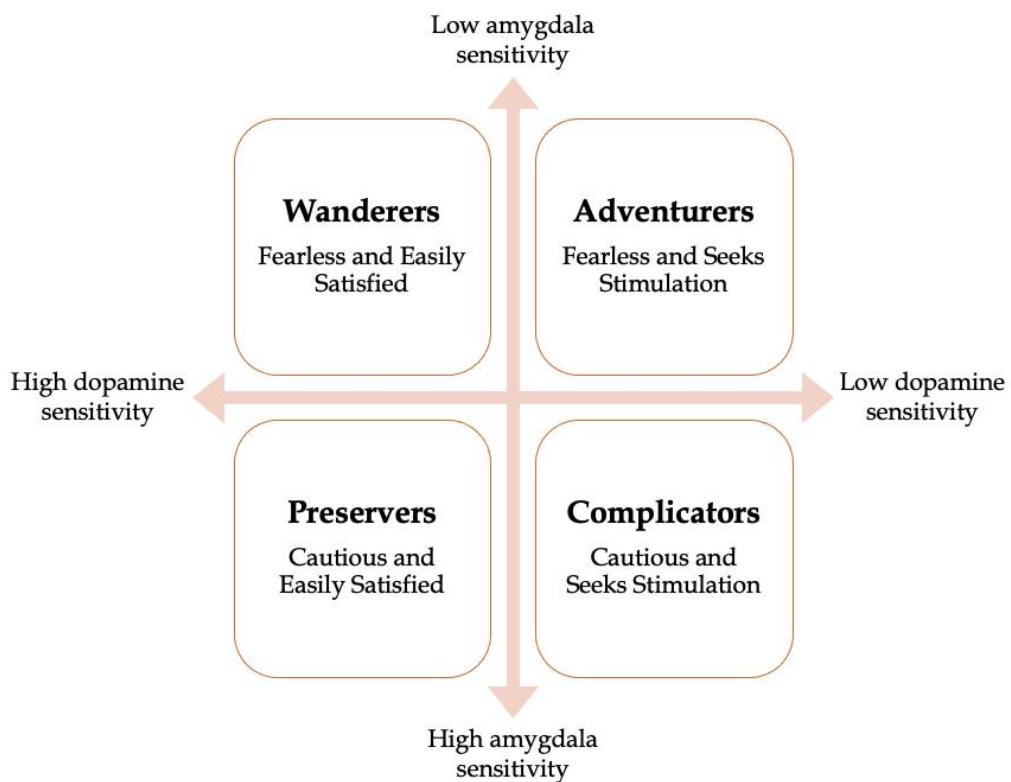
Wanderers: Sensitive to dopamine but not to the amygdala. Fearless and easily content. Historically, they might have been carefree knights-errant, Robin Hoods, or mild rule-breakers who know when to stop as they are easily satisfied.

Adventurers: Insensitive to both dopamine and the amygdala. Fearless and never satisfied, they are the smallest group but include explorers, pioneers, and revolutionaries who pursue thrill and challenge norms. They may be heroes in turbulent times but could turn into anti-social figures or criminals in peaceful periods.

Complicators: Insensitive to dopamine but sensitive to the amygdala. Fearful yet unsatisfied, they are the most conflicted and tortured group, always yearning but afraid to act. Many lifelong celibates, reclusive writers, and conflicted philosophers from

Germany and Russia likely fall into this category. Unable to seek external excitement in the real world, they choose Freudian sublimation, turning inward to pursue value in the spiritual realm.

You can categorize yourself based on your genetic test results or your behaviors to see which group you belong to. Try engaging in activities that match your attributes, or break out of your mold and experiment with roles from other quadrants to experience a different perspective.



The Theory of Emotional Reality: Emotions Set the Tone for Cognition

According to Emotional Construct Theory, all emotions are constructed, influencing how we perceive and understand the world—this is emotional reality. This means that our subjective experience of things differs when we are happy versus when we are not.

Autonomism posits that the emotion system's role is to evaluate, providing emotional stances and attitudes for cognitive judgment and decision-making. Moral judgment, for

example, results from combining emotional evaluation (good/bad) and cognitive judgment (right/wrong). When emotions and cognition align, moral evaluations are straightforward: good and right equate to virtue, bad and wrong equate to vice. However, when emotions and cognition conflict, moral judgments become complex.

For instance, a grievously wounded soldier suffering and begging for death challenges us emotionally (as killing feels wrong) and cognitively (as ending his suffering feels right), creating a moral quandary.

When such moral conflicts and anxieties are irreconcilable, volition can intervene with a conscious decision, but this requires shouldering the burden of responsibility. Many avoid the costs of such choices by resorting to unconscious decisions, which prioritize emotional evaluations. This occurs because, biologically, emotions are more fundamental than cognition, and logically, cognition often cannot find absolute standards of rightness in complex issues.

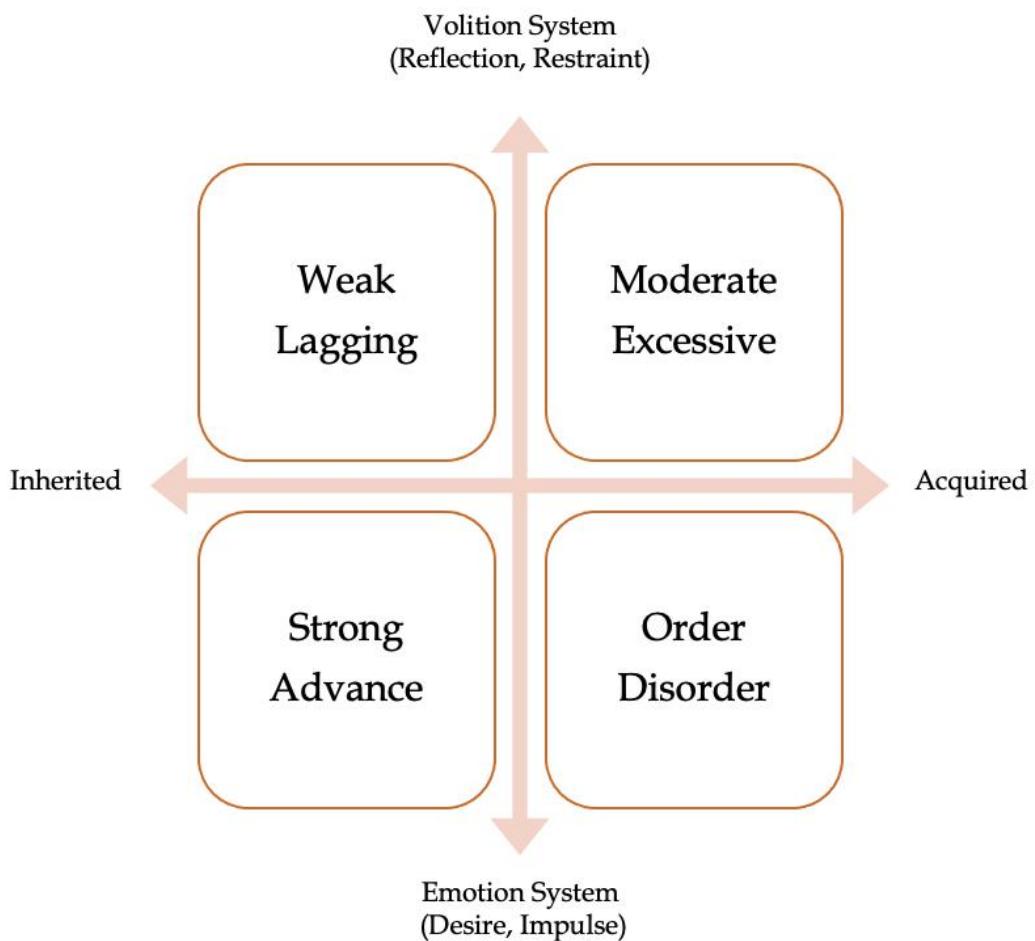
As Haidt states: “Moral judgment is like aesthetic judgment. When we see a painting, we immediately know if we like it. If someone asks why, we make up reasons. His stance is formed after the judgment.”

3.3.3 Will: The Love-Hate Relationship Between the Rider and the Elephant

To achieve autonomy, individuals must vie for control over themselves, others (individuals or groups), and the world (time, space, matter, energy, information, etc.). In the AI era, this struggle also extends to algorithms and machines. The essence of this struggle lies in the contest of will. A person with strong volition and stable emotions possesses a strong will, while weak volition and fluctuating emotions result in a weak will.

For clarity, I’ve created a new matrix illustrating the interplay and development goals between emotions and volition. Let’s first consider volition: innately weak and reactive volition, inherited from genetics, facilitates reflection and restraint. Through nurturing, volition may become moderate (self-discipline) or excessive (loss of control). Now, consider emotions: genetically strong and proactive emotions lead to desires and

impulses, while nurtured emotions may become orderly (calm) or disorderly (violent). The ideal state of will is a combination of moderate volition and orderly emotions, where the rider and the elephant achieve complete harmony. Unfortunately, in real life, most people's volition and emotions, the rider and the elephant, often have a love-hate relationship.



When volition and emotion are out of sync and counter each other, it creates a distressing situation. In this scenario, volition and emotion are in opposition, where the rise of one leads to the decline of the other. There are two possible outcomes in this conflict:

Loser: Emotion overwhelms volition, leading to indulgence where the elephant controls the rider, and the individual loses their autonomous will.

Warrior: Volition overcomes emotion, suppressing it, which puts the individual in an exhausting state with only faint autonomous will.

When volition and emotion are aligned and mutually reinforcing, the situation is most favorable. In this cooperative state, there are two outcomes:

King: Volition and emotion work in harmony, driving proactive action, resulting in a strong autonomous will, characterized by "Grit," which combines passion and perseverance.

Coward: Volition and emotion work together in passivity, resulting in a complete surrender of autonomous will, leading to a state of demotivation and resignation.

Equations of states:

$$Grit = Perseverance + Passion = King$$

$$Struggle = Perseverance - Passion = Warrior$$

$$Indulgence = Passion - Perseverance = Loser$$

$$Resignation = Perseverance - Passion = Coward$$

I hope that at the very least, autonomists aim to be "Warriors," striving to become "Kings." Even when faced with ignorance, incompetence, helplessness, or powerlessness, one must never abandon autonomous will. If a person gives up on effort and choice, they fall into a state of being controlled like a slave; "Losers" and "Cowards" are no different from animals, machines, or the deceased. Therefore, we must uphold the baseline of autonomous will, continuously strengthen volition, win the battle within, and build inner harmony. From ordinary individuals to elites, heroes, and even titans, the key to advancement is autonomous will, with volition at its core. Every hero embodies strong volition.

Two approaches for managing the relationship between volition and emotion:

Micro Confrontation Approach: Volition reshapes cognition through reflection, adjusts, and transforms emotions, ultimately winning the inner battle.

Overall, this approach is a challenging path. There are two main reasons why volition struggles against emotion:

First, emotions are intangible. Volition can directly alter conscious, verbal cognition through reflection but finds it hard to influence unconscious, non-verbal emotions, resulting in indirect and less efficient regulation.

Second, volition is limited. Although volition can temporarily endure pressures like fear, anxiety, and insecurity—reducing the need for safety and opening up possibilities for freedom—its endurance is finite. When we're obsessed with something, the emotional elephant charges forward uncontrollably, and the rider's cognitive reins become ineffective. Conversely, if we lose interest, the elephant completely disengages, leaving the rider in a state of inactivity.

Despite these challenges, volition can still play a role by taking proactive measures and indirectly adjusting emotions through cognitive reframing. Evidence shows that, whether through swift action or gradual effort, volition can partially resolve the tension between cognition and emotion.

For instance, a boy meets a beautiful girl, feels a warm sensation, and thinks, "This girl makes my heart flutter." His cognitive narrative about his physical sensations reinforces his emotional experience. However, if volition intervenes, the boy could re-evaluate his sensations and replace the romantic narrative with "The tea I drank was too hot," leading to a completely different outcome.

Similarly, if someone feels down and frowns, the behavior of frowning itself amplifies their emotional state. William James, the father of American psychology, believed that physiological responses from behavior influence emotions. Thus, by engaging in reflection and activating the cognition that "James said feeling bad is due to frowning," deliberately forcing a smile can improve one's mood.

Macro Guidance Approach: Volition chooses the environment, alters behavior, and leverages emotions to build inner harmony.

This is a "do-nothing yet achieve everything" approach, focusing on addressing the root cause. It involves adjusting the broader environment to influence the sources and directions of emotions, gradually reconstructing the emotional core on a macro level. If

we think of emotions as "water," this reconstruction transforms the "Lake of the Mind" into a "Reservoir of the Mind," enabling orderly energy generation. Two key actions are required:

First, change the "water source"—the origin of emotions. Carefully design your environment—home, work, city, etc.—to ensure it continuously supplies high-quality stimuli that evoke positive emotions and motivations. For example, curate quality music, books, and talks to listen to during free time to significantly improve mood and cognition. In the AI era, I write while generating relevant background music in real-time with Suno; each piece is a unique creation in this universe, offering a special feeling. Simultaneously, filter, avoid, or block bad environments and their stimuli to prevent negative emotions and impulses. Simply put, remove junk apps, turn off ads, and keep your phone away at bedtime to avoid unnecessary emotional disturbances from its covert manipulations.

Let's continue with the game analogy. If volition is like Stamina Points (SP), then emotions are like Magic Points (MP). In games, casting powerful spells consumes MP; in life, doing impactful things also requires emotional energy, such as writing a passionate article, delivering a heartfelt speech, or performing an enthusiastic dance. With the support of emotional MP, everything feels magical and captivating. Like SP, MP can be depleted, replenished, enhanced, or weakened. When both MP and SP are exhausted simultaneously, you experience mental and physical fatigue. Unlike SP, however, MP replenishes quickly through specific sensory stimuli. Feeling bored with a task? Start chatting with a friend, and your brain perks up instantly. Switching from work to play can also quickly rejuvenate emotions.

Second, change the "watercourse"—the direction of emotions. Choose healthy outlets for your emotions, favoring sublimation and expression over regression and suppression. Channeling emotions into love and creativity makes it easier to leave behind legacies like offspring, works, and personas, providing joy, immersion, and a sense of meaning—key strategies for happiness. Unfortunately, many still opt for entertainment and gaming, resulting in mere depletion with no gain. Use volition to design environments that nudge healthier emotional behaviors.

Continuing with the game analogy, these different emotional outlets are like various moves in a game, each with distinct MP costs and attack values. The ideal moves should maximize returns post-execution, ideally with MP recovery effects. For example, using GenAI for creation not only teaches skills but also produces works while delivering the joy of discovery, the immersion of focused work, and the meaningful feedback from sharing creations. These actions have an auto-recovery mechanism, making them the best output methods.

3.3.4 Three Paths to Strengthen Volition

The dynamic between the Rider and the Elephant, whether through the micro confrontational model or the macro guidance model, relies on strong volition. Below, I propose three strategies to enhance volition, which can be combined as needed.

The Mortal Path: Extending Volition through Technological Innovation.

The mortal path accepts the theory of limited volition and attempts to extend volition across time and space with the aid of technology. I write a daily journal, reflecting on problems, listing tasks I plan to complete, and using task management tools to set reminders and track progress. This "Journal-Checklist-Scale" toolkit (detailed in the "Task Management" chapter later) has enabled effective self-management for over a decade. Our experience suggests using limited volition to set directions and methods, then leveraging technology to extend, solidify, and replicate efforts, thus amplifying volition's impact over a broader scope. If my system seems too complex, start simply with a checklist. Even this basic step outperforms those who rely solely on memory. If you're open to new tools, consider introducing GenAI, training your own agent as a volition proxy to manage yourself.

The Elite Path: Implementing Volition through Mechanism Innovation.

Elites understand the importance of refining mechanisms to create environments conducive to the effective use of limited volition. Three specific actions can be taken: First, problem decomposition. Break down complex problems into smaller, more manageable ones, allowing "20-second bursts" of volition to address them with minimal effort, driving significant change through the smallest actions. Second, behavior design. Proper planning and early intervention by volition can alter the timing and cost of specific behaviors, managing their future likelihood and quelling potential issues at the outset, allowing volition to "win without fighting." Third, energy management. Willpower and endurance are closely linked to one's physical and mental energy. Strengthening volition requires replenishing energy, focusing on quality sleep, a healthy diet, and moderate exercise. Of these, good sleep immediately enhances volition, improves mood, and boosts ability, while moderate exercise can improve physical functions and even raise volition thresholds.

The Hero's Path: Enhancing Volition through Ideological Innovation.

The mortal and elite paths accept the assumptions of the volitional reflection theory, freedom veto theory, and limited volition theory, focusing on maximizing the impact of limited volition while ignoring the possibility of transforming volition itself. The hero's path is different. To become titans, heroes need strong volition as a foundation, which requires challenging these three assumptions and exploring the possibility of achieving superhuman, unlimited volition.

Research shows that people who believe in limited volition are more likely to give up when faced with the same difficulties, while those who believe in unlimited volition are more likely to persevere. The Pygmalion effect (positive beliefs lead to better performance) and the Golem effect (negative beliefs lead to worse performance) both apply here. People's volitional performance is directly related to their volitional beliefs.

I do not believe in truly unlimited volition, but I do believe that some people possess super volition. These individuals are heroes of exceptional autonomy. They belong to the extremes of power law distribution, not the average of Gaussian distribution. Therefore, they rarely appear in peacetime academic studies that emphasize the average

person and median values. However, in times of war and revolution, and in biographies and historical records, stories of heroes with seemingly super volition abound.

It is crucial to distinguish among three types of people: those with super volition, those with super abilities, and those with abundant resources. For individuals with extraordinary abilities and ample resources, no problem is too difficult, so they do not need strong volition to solve problems effectively. In contrast, those with super volition often transform into "Super Saiyans" when facing challenges far beyond their abilities and resources, using the boundless subjectivity of super volition to compensate for their shortcomings. For example, the Chinese People's Volunteer soldiers in the Korean War fought against the formidable U.S. forces despite lacking adequate weapons and supplies, relying on their revolutionary super volition.

The heroes with super volition in my mind adhere to the principles of "attempting the impossible," "creating conditions when none exist," and "turning the impossible into possible." They exhibit extraordinary initiative and are inwardly fulfilled. They possess the determination of Jingwei trying to fill the sea and the patience of the Foolish Old Man moving mountains, coupled with the ambition to make a lasting impact. Confronted with formidable challenges, they are fearless and resilient. They give their all, leaving nothing in reserve, so even if they fall short, they are without regret and retain their status as heroes.

How to Transition from the Weak Will Theories of Ordinary People and Elites to the Strong Will Practices of Heroes? I Propose the Following "Six Replacements":

Replace the Free Won't Theory with the Free Will Theory: The theory of free won't suggests we only have the power to reject and make choices through refusal. However, you can embrace the classic belief in free will and trust in your ability to make free and proactive choices. Believing in self-determination lets you proactively construct options rather than waiting to choose from the available ones.

Replace the Muscle Theory with the Skeleton Theory: While the muscle theory likens willpower to muscles that can deplete, recover, and be trained, I propose the skeleton theory as an upgrade, suggesting that willpower should be the skeleton of the

mental world. Skeletons are more resilient than muscles, harder to deplete, and can be repaired, making them a better analogy. Willpower can even act as a sophisticated exoskeleton system that is programmable and modifiable.

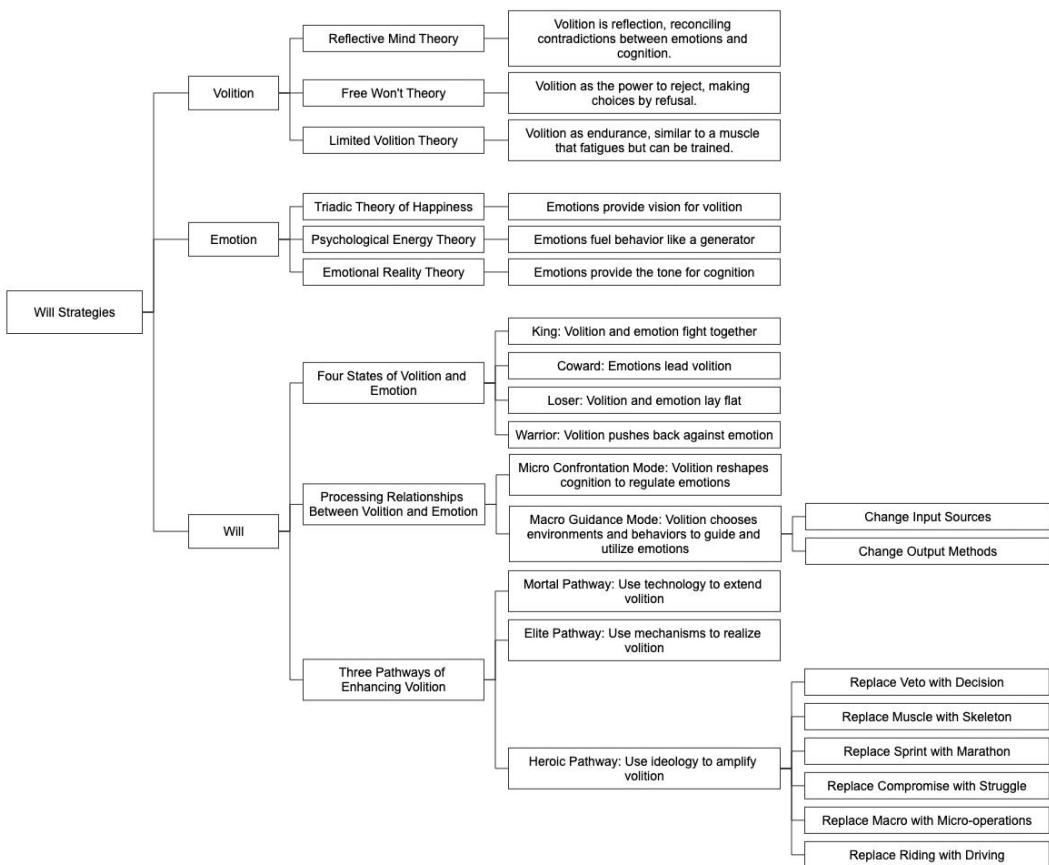
Replace Sprint Theory with Marathon Theory: The "20-second berserk" story assumes we have only a sprinter's stamina for seconds, lacking the endurance of an hour-long marathon. Instead, try imagining that willpower extends beyond 20 seconds—to 200, 2000, or even 20,000 seconds. Even if this isn't fully achievable, aiming high allows you to achieve a significant part of it.

Replace Compromise Theory with Struggle Theory: The essence of weak free will is a compromised will—unable to overcome difficulties and constantly compromising. Instead, try installing an upgraded struggle will module, breaking free from compromise to engage in inner struggle, competition with others, and conflict with the world. Embrace the willpower to transform yourself, others, the world, and the future, leaving a great legacy.

Replace Macro Guidance Theory with Micro-Operations Theory: Macro guidance theory emphasizes the big picture, suggesting that limited willpower should control the overall situation while neglecting the refinement of many details. Micro-operations theory emphasizes micro-actions, continually reminding oneself to endure pressure with super willpower, extend time, multitask, frequently switch contexts, and adjust the contradictions between safety and freedom, cognition and emotion, and environment and behavior. It means pulling learning, work, and life out of adversity, or even turning the tide.

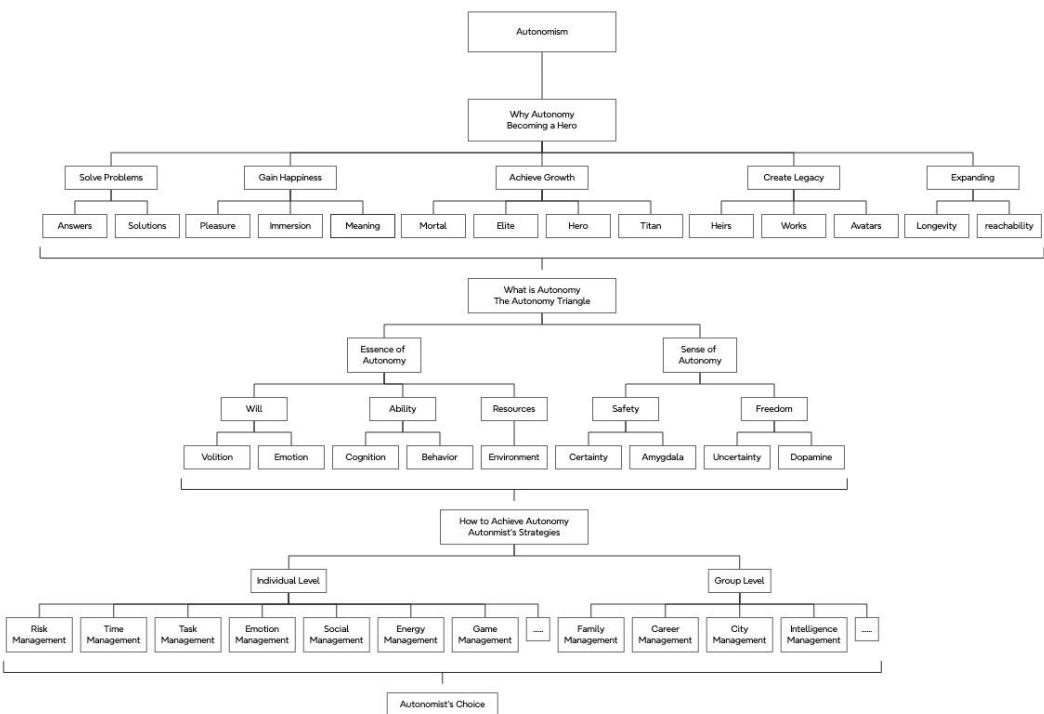
Replace Elephant-Riding Theory with Car-Driving Theory: The elephant-riding theory frames willpower as weak and emotions as strong, placing people in a passive relationship from the start. I propose a more active car-driving theory where our body is the car and our will is the driver. Starting the engine and pressing the accelerator activate emotions to propel the vehicle forward. Steering and braking rely on willpower to determine the car's direction. Driving theory emphasizes unity and collaboration, giving willpower more proactivity and control over emotions.

By accepting these six replacements, you will become a devotee of the heroic path. By implementing the theories of free will, skeleton, marathon, struggle, micro-operations, and car-driving, you will undertake efforts that transcend self, time, and space. You will achieve many great feats that once seemed impossible, embodying the qualities of super volition and becoming a true hero.



3.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the internal logic of the three key elements of autonomy: resources, abilities, and will. It provided an initial discussion on strategies and methods for expanding resources, enhancing abilities, and strengthening will. With this, the theoretical part of the book concludes. In the next part, we will address different scenarios and solutions to various problems. I hope that through problem-solving, everyone continues to enhance their autonomy.



Part Two: A Guideline for Autonomist: Key Recommendations from Autonomism

"Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Übermensch."

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

In Greek mythology, the greatest hero, Heracles, was confronted by two goddesses. One promised him a life of ordinary comfort and pleasure, while the other offered a path of hardships leading to glory. Heracles resolutely chose the latter, embarking on his hero's journey. He endured twelve arduous labors, eventually completing his epic quest and ascending to the heavens to stand among the gods.¹

Every autonomist is their own Heracles, destined to embark on their own hero's journey. They must confront their great trials, continuously elevating their level of autonomy as they bravely solve real-world problems. Along this journey, they will leave behind a remarkable legacy, achieve personal growth and happiness, and ultimately advance from being mortals or elites to becoming heroes, or even Titans.

¹ The Labors of Hercules include: Slay the Nemean Lion and take its invulnerable skin. Slay the nine-headed Lernaean Hydra, a serpent-like creature. Capture the Ceryneian Hind, a golden-horned deer sacred to Artemis. Capture the Erymanthian Boar, a monstrous wild boar. Clean the Augean Stables in a single day, which housed a vast number of cattle. Drive away the Stymphalian Birds, man-eating birds with metallic feathers. Capture the Cretan Bull, a rampaging bull from the island of Crete. Tame the Mares of Diomedes, flesh-eating horses owned by the Thracian king Diomedes. Obtain the Girdle of Hippolyta, the queen of the Amazons. Obtain the Cattle of Geryon, a fearsome giant with three bodies. Steal the Apples of the Hesperides, golden apples guarded by a dragon. Capture Cerberus, the three-headed watchdog of the underworld, and bring it back from Hades..

To guide autonomists, especially the younger generation, in completing their trials more swiftly, I have outlined the common challenges faced by contemporary youth. I provide reference answers to explain these issues and offer practical solutions. This part consists of twelve chapters, each addressing different topics such as risk management, time-space management, task management, energy management, emotion management, social management, game management, family management, career management, city management, and intelligence management. For each challenge, I analyze the underlying causes and provide tailored advice.

These challenges may seem like the Wheel of Fortune, hindering the autonomist's pursuit and realization of autonomy. They appear to be rooted in eternal conflicts, with no definitive resolution. However, there are often alternative paths and subtle approaches to navigate these obstacles. The Theory of Autonomy attempts to offer readers of different stages and levels various perspectives, answers, and solutions to their challenges.

Chapter 4: Risk Management

"Nought may endure but Mutability."

— Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Mutability*

The first challenge that the Guideline for Autonomist addresses is how to face an unpredictable and uncertain world—how to effectively manage risks to live longer and better. The answer to this challenge is directly tied to an inherent conflict between our external world and our internal world.

Our external world is a complex blend of certainty and uncertainty, known and unknown, expressible and inexpressible, controllable and uncontrollable, usable and unusable. It is a fusion of "Mediocristan" and "Extremistan." With the advent of AI technologies, this world has become increasingly complicated and chaotic. It resembles the Pandemonium described by John Milton in "Paradise Lost"—opportunity exists in chaos, and chaos exists in opportunity, filled with contradictions and challenges.

Our internal world, on the other hand, is a combination of safety and freedom, involving the amygdala and dopamine modules. Safety and freedom are crucial components of autonomy and are the fundamental psychological elements of the sense of autonomy. The amygdala and dopamine modules in the brain form the neurobiological foundation of the need for safety and the pursuit of freedom in autonomy. The need for safety and the pursuit of freedom operates at the forefront, while the amygdala and dopamine modules run in the background by default.

The need for safety and the amygdala prefers certainty; the amygdala prompts us to focus on safety and fear the threats and harm that unexpected and novel situations might bring. Conversely, the pursuit of freedom and the dopamine module favor uncertainty; the dopamine module encourages us to seek freedom and hope that surprises and novelties might bring opportunities and possibilities. Clearly, there exists a nearly irreconcilable fundamental conflict here:

The contradiction between humanity's desire for safety (certainty) and the pursuit of freedom (uncertainty).

This is the first contradiction we must confront at the entrance of Pandemonium. How we choose to address this contradiction divides us into three types of people. These three types have different stances on handling the relationship between certainty and uncertainty, safety and freedom, which determine their respective risk management strategies. The first type adopts a conservative strategy, prioritizing safety over freedom. The second type employs a radical strategy, prioritizing freedom at the expense of safety. The third type uses a balanced strategy, prioritizing autonomy and striving to maintain a balance between the two. We will now delve into these three risk management strategies in detail.

4.1 Conservative Strategy: Safety First, Govern by Inaction

The essence of the conservative strategy is to prioritize safety and strive to eliminate risk factors to ensure survival. As long as one remains alive, there are always opportunities. Theoretically, an immortal monkey randomly tapping on a typewriter could eventually, after billions of years, type out the complete works of Shakespeare. Evolution has almost zero intelligence, yet, given enough time, it has created incredibly intricate forms of life, which in turn have created extremely complex machines, including AI and other new species. Therefore, as long as the game continues, conservatives will eventually succeed.

To help us better understand this logic, Nassim Nicholas Taleb introduces the concept of Ergodicity into the discussion of risk, teaching us to distinguish between Ensemble Probability and Time Probability. A person achieves ergodicity when their time

probability matches the ensemble probability of the group. He illustrates this with the example of Russian roulette. In this dangerous game, a revolver with six chambers is loaded with one bullet, spun randomly, and the player takes turns firing the gun at their own head. If six people play one round, five will win, giving a success rate of 83.33%, which is the ensemble probability. However, if one person plays six rounds, their chances of success (uncertain) represent the time probability.¹

Taleb criticizes many economists and statisticians for confusing ensemble probability with time probability, often using group probabilities to guide individual decisions, leading people astray. The error of these economists and statisticians lies in assuming that everyone will achieve ergodicity. The truth is, just because six people can win five times in Russian roulette, doesn't mean you can win five out of six times if you play alone. In the face of uncertainty, one must be prepared for the possibility of being wiped out in the first round.

The key to achieving ergodicity is to avoid elimination. If you don't survive, no matter how high your success rate is, it means nothing to you. Conversely, as long as you stay alive, even with a low success rate, there will be a day when you succeed. For this reason, Taleb firmly adheres to the rule of "survival first". In his view, the sole purpose of rationality is to aid survival and avoid ruin.

Every human alive today is an adapter and survivor of natural evolution and social development. Our cognitive systems are preloaded with numerous risk control measures and self-protection mechanisms, repeatedly proven effective through time and practice, all of which promote survival. The most typical of these are the conservative biases within human cognition, such as zero-risk bias, negativity bias, and loss aversion. In complex environments, these biases lead us to prioritize self-preservation when facing critical decisions, thereby enhancing our survival rate.

¹ Ergodicity is a concept from statistics and physics that describes a system where, over a sufficiently long period of time, its statistical properties can be obtained by observing a single trajectory over a sufficiently long time. In other words, if a system is ergodic, the time average equals the ensemble average. This concept is applied in fields such as thermodynamics, statistical physics, information theory, control theory, and financial mathematics.

4.1.1 Characteristics of the Conservative Strategy

Today, humans no longer need to fear the frost of the Ice Age or the claws of saber-toothed tigers, but our survival instincts still exert a significant influence by default, manifesting in four key psychological and behavioral traits:

Perfectionism in the Sensation Stage: People are easily affected by the FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) effect, fearing that they might miss out on important information. This leads them to monitor information from various sources, resulting in information overload and heightened anxiety. We often find ourselves compulsively picking up our phones, checking online updates to ensure we haven't missed anything. Taleb argues that this behavior fosters blind overconfidence and an illusion of knowledge.

Caution in the Judgment Stage: A defensive attitude is adopted toward all potential bad news, summed up as "better safe than sorry" or "better to overreact than overlook." In extreme cases, this can lead to becoming like hunters in a "dark forest," willing to eliminate any visible competitors. Such approaches can lead to extreme and exaggerated perceptions and expressions.

Stability in the Decision-Making Stage: Imitate and follow what others have done. Stick with what has been done in the past. If no one else or history has done it, proceed slowly, delay, or even abandon the plan. Alternatively, one might avoid the main issue and focus on irrelevant matters. American scholar Laurence J. Peter humorously noted that during meetings about nuclear power plant planning, complex issues like reactor designs, which no one understood, were often passed without discussion. Meanwhile, simple matters like the construction of parking lot canopies, which everyone could grasp, became the center of attention. Many meetings unfold in this manner.

Abundance in the Action Stage: To ensure success, one may over-prepare and over-invest resources, leading to redundancy. In "Risk Savvy", Gigerenzer noted that 93% of doctors have engaged in defensive medical practices, including some who actively perform defensive medicine through overtreatment. For example, a common cold that could be resolved with rest and hydration ends up being treated with unnecessary intravenous drips, as it demonstrates attentiveness from the doctor and produces immediate results. Over time, such practices become the norm. In group

settings, this behavior can trigger a chain reaction, leading to incremental increases in measures from the top down. In competitive contexts, conservatism might result in parties assuming the worst intentions from their counterparts and preparing for conflict at the highest level, escalating tensions and confrontations. A historical example of this is the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

4.1.2 Advantages of the Conservative Strategy

Conservatism demands less in terms of will and ability but more in terms of resources. When used appropriately, it can be highly effective. For example, in decision-making, a combination of imitation and delay embodies the idea of letting things take their natural course—governing by inaction—which manifests as making fewer decisions, making lighter decisions, delaying decisions, or not making decisions at all. These "four approaches" might seem like a form of passive resignation but can paradoxically lead to unexpected victories.

Fewer Decisions—Following Established Practices: Whether you acknowledge it or not, when the road in your rearview mirror is straight, the road ahead usually is too; when the road behind is winding, the road ahead is likely winding as well. While the approach of "cutting a notch on the boat to find the sword" might fail at critical moments, most of the time, old solutions work because there is nothing new under the sun, and many problems are just old ones in new packaging. Therefore, "if it isn't necessary to change, don't change."

Lighter Decisions—Relying on Intuitive Judgment: Gigerenzer discovered that in a highly complex and uncertain world, relying on intuition and using simple heuristic thinking often performs better than complex calculations based on logic and reasoning. Complex calculations require massive data and computational power, which real-world problems often lack. Often, a novice's intuitive judgment can be more accurate than the flawed logical reasoning of those with partial knowledge, illustrating the "less is more" effect. In "Simple Heuristics That Make Us Smart", Gigerenzer wrote: "In a given field, groups with more knowledge often make less accurate predictions than groups with less knowledge." For instance, when asked to guess which city is larger, San Diego or San

Antonio, German students performed better than American students because Germans, unfamiliar with American cities, based their choice purely on recognition (choosing the city they had heard of), whereas American students, who knew more, overthought it and performed worse. Essentially, "Let me think about it" lost to "Pick the one I recognize"—a perfect irony of the real world.

Slower Decisions—Letting the Situation Evolve: Management expert Peter Drucker once noted that Japanese bureaucrats excel at delaying decisions, allowing problems to resolve themselves. In uncertain situations, both conscious and unconscious delays are primal reactions encoded in our biology. Animals play dead during crises; humans freeze—both use time to create space, using delay to create buffers and discover opportunities. Observing before deciding and thinking before acting are also expressions of slow decision-making. Often, time clarifies situations, matures conditions, and reveals solutions. In "Wait", author Frank Partnoy presents a counterintuitive suggestion: delay apologies until the affected party has fully expressed their emotions and understood the situation. Other studies also show a positive correlation between the timing of apologies and final satisfaction—apologies delivered later result in higher satisfaction. Partnoy advocates for a strategic delay. He argues that once the necessary decision time is clear, one should delay as much as possible before making the decision—the longer you wait, the better the outcome. To make better decisions, it is best to allow the future ample time to unfold before you.

No Decisions—Let Machines Choose for You: Decision-making AI has already made significant progress in areas such as image recognition, autonomous driving, and intelligent warfare. With the emergence of GPT and other GenAI technologies, machines will increasingly demonstrate superior judgment and decision-making abilities across various domains. As more individuals delegate decision-making authority to machines, digital conservatism will inevitably rise. However, given that AI models are trained on human data, there is a risk of amplifying human cognitive biases, path dependencies, and decision errors; therefore, I oppose allowing machines to make final decisions. Moreover, machines cannot bear legal or ethical responsibilities, so they can only assist in decision-making, not replace it. Ultimately, humans must take full responsibility for the results, especially the adverse outcomes.

The above four approaches should be applied and combined according to the specific circumstances. Particularly, the delay module (slow decision-making) should be mastered as a basic skill. In autonomism, it stands in complementary opposition to the forethought module ("begin before beginning").

4.1.3 Limitations of Conservatism

Conservatism is far from a foolproof strategy, and it has several notable shortcomings. Here, we highlight three key points:

Constant Risk of Elimination: When employing a conservative strategy, one truly needs a strong heart, good stress tolerance, or even a certain level of obliviousness—a state of fearlessness akin to that of a newborn calf that doesn't fear tigers. While conservative strategies often allow people to muddle through, scrape by, or narrowly escape danger, even minor risks, when encountered repeatedly, can accumulate into catastrophic crises. Just as a river with an average depth of one meter can drown a few people if many attempt to cross it, the same applies here. In particular, during an era of technological transformation brought about by GenAI, standing still is equivalent to falling behind; clinging to outdated ways is akin to awaiting doom.

Susceptibility to Exploitation: Conservatives are more vulnerable to cognitive biases and path dependencies, making them easier targets for manipulation. Daniel Kahneman reminds us to be wary of information cues that are manipulated in our environment. Whether it's legal advertising or illegal telemarketing scams, such tactics exploit the ingrained beliefs and habitual behaviors of conservatives, setting traps for their thoughts and actions. GenAI, with its ability to tailor deception to individual susceptibilities, makes it even easier to mislead conservatives, necessitating heightened caution. One should always maintain a degree of skepticism and reserve judgment about the information they encounter.

Amplification of Human Frailties: The world is complex, and problems are tough; the moment we relax, we tend to regress, exposing and magnifying three inherent weaknesses: what I call "laziness", "dullness", and "greed". These correspond to a tendency toward sloth at the level of willpower, foolishness at the cognitive level, and

avarice at the emotional level. Each of us can self-reflect on which of these common human errors we are most prone to commit when dealing with risks in our daily lives.

4.1.4 Levels of Conservatism

The Japanese, who value conservatism, believe that "nothingness" is an existence that transcends both affirmation and negation. We can categorize the "inaction" praised by conservatives into three levels, from lowest to highest:

Third-rate Inaction: This level involves doing literally nothing—sleeping, daydreaming, completely lying flat. Such inaction often stems from ignorance and incompetence. Ignorance prevents one from seeing the risks associated with lying flat, and incompetence means that even when risks are apparent, the individual does not know how to respond, thus resorting to passivity, hoping for the best. Few people will admit to being at the level of third-rate inaction, but with the rise of the "Buddha-like" mindset, this low-level form of inaction is becoming prevalent in our era. The pressures from GenAI may also drive more individuals to abandon efforts and choose to lie flat.

Second-rate Inaction: This involves choosing not to act based on free will—courage without daring, strength without exertion. Learning to say "no" is a proof of self-awareness and free will, whether in ordinary people or children. The essence of "having something to do and something not to do" lies in the "not doing", with the challenge being in the judgment. Therefore, this level of inaction demands a lot from conservatives; they must possess sufficient insight, ability, and security to dare to choose inaction when there is a choice.

First-rate Inaction: This involves active planning and action in the early stages, laying a solid foundation, and then letting things take their natural course—"inaction that achieves everything", effectively leading to effortless success. Linked to the ABC theory introduced earlier, it's easy to see that first-rate inaction involves action in phase A and inaction in phase B. The concept of inaction in traditional Chinese wisdom aligns with this form. High-level inaction triumphs in the grand scheme and excels in early planning—putting in more effort during planning, but taking it easy during execution. In Greek mythology, after winning the Trojan War, the hero Odysseus decided to return

home. While passing through the Sirens' territory, Odysseus's sailors warned him that the Sirens' songs were so enchanting that they would lure listeners to their deaths at sea and suggested taking a detour. However, filled with curiosity about new experiences, Odysseus chose to hear the song. He ordered his crew to tie him to the mast and plug their ears with wax, instructing them not to release him no matter what, until they passed the dangerous waters. Thus, Odysseus heard the Sirens' song but avoided the mortal danger. Later, the Romans adapted Greek mythology, renaming Odysseus as Ulysses, leading to the concept of the Ulysses Pact. Making an agreement with one's future self in advance and then following through is the essence of first-rate inaction.

I infer that most conservatives aspire to achieve first-rate inaction and believe they are at the level of second-rate inaction, but in reality, they remain in third-rate inaction. Personally, I hold a negative view of third-rate inaction, as it is not the appropriate state for an autonomist. If an autonomist chooses a conservative strategy, achieving second-rate inaction should be the basic requirement, while attaining first-rate inaction should be the ultimate goal.

4.2 Radical Strategy: Freedom First, Active Innovation

The fundamental idea behind the radical strategy is prioritizing freedom and actively exploring unknown possibilities, solving problems through bold innovation, and continuously reaping high growth and high returns. Radicals do not focus on avoiding points of collapse but on finding points of breakthrough, seeking exponential growth and rewards.

If the conservative strategy of prioritizing safety is a first-order change, which only aims to change the components (elements) of the system, then the radical strategy of prioritizing freedom is akin to what Chris Argyris, founder of action science, termed "Second-Order Change"—boldly altering combinations (structure) and chunks (functions), changing the system itself.

Excluding top-tier players like heroes and Titans, conservatives who prioritize safety are often fearful children or risk-averse elders, while radicals who prioritize freedom are usually young and inexperienced. Youth has two major characteristics: first, they have

no accumulation, no burdens, and nothing to lose. Freedom and innovation break only chains, but gain new possibilities. Second, they have time and can keep trying—even if they fail, they still have more chances. This is the essence of youth: abundant time and physical resources, but limited economic, political, and social resources, which can be exchanged and invested through innovation. Thus, the reformers of every era are often young people—they are the innovators who reshape themselves, their families, and society.

In the short term, when a person's abilities are relatively stable, the key to whether or not to innovate lies in the individual's level of will and resource availability. On one hand, innovation requires courage. While "innovation" is a positive term in the Chinese context, it is neutral in Western contexts. Innovations, experiments, and trials-and-errors driven by radical strategies are fundamentally attempts to disrupt old combinations and create new orders, which can yield good results but also potentially bad impacts. Thus, innovators must have the courage to choose and bear possible consequences, which requires strong willpower. Additionally, cognitive biases such as self-interest and referential tendencies support us by making us selectively focus on favorable information and compare ourselves to others' weaknesses, thus boosting our self-perception. Most people believe their abilities are above average, which makes them more optimistic and bolder in their innovative endeavors. In Chinese, this is called "fearlessness of the ignorant", and if the innovation succeeds, it's called "fools have luck".

On the other hand, innovation also needs material support. My advice is clear: when resources are only enough for one attempt, do not innovate. Conservatism ensures basic income, while innovation may result in complete loss. Conversely, when resources are insufficient for even one attempt, or when they are abundant enough for multiple attempts, one should innovate boldly. For the former, there's nothing to lose; for the latter, what's the harm if you fail? When you have ample ammunition, you can shoot first and aim later. When you have even more resources, you can randomly shoot at a door, then walk up and draw a target around the hits. GenAI technology lowers the threshold for innovation, amplifies rewards, and provides people with more opportunities to try new things and innovate.

Below, we will introduce the main characteristics of radicalism that emphasizes innovation.

4.2.1 Characteristics of Radicalism

Compared to conservatism, the radical strategy exhibits the following characteristics at different stages:

Seeking Novelty in the Sensation Stage: Cognitive scientist George Miller described humans as insatiable "information seekers". Radicals are the type that craves new information and are never fully satisfied. Some of them may be "thrill-seekers" carrying the DRD4-7R variant gene, showing little interest in old information or mild stimuli, needing constant surprises to feel excitement.

Seeking Greatness in the Judgment Stage: Radicals are highly optimistic, even blindly confident. They are more prone to envision success rather than failure, focusing on gains rather than costs. Seeing a tiny opportunity, they immediately think of a grand future.

Seeking Speed in the Decision-Making Stage: They don't overthink and rely heavily on intuition for decision-making. They are extremely decisive, even recklessly so. To them, Pandemonium looks like paradise; everything they see and think about is the newest and best, allowing them to make quick decisions. Most of the time, their "rider" is in a state of sleepwalking, and their willpower is nowhere to be found.

Seeking Change in the Action Stage: Radicals love to be unconventional and playful, constantly experimenting with new ideas, mechanisms, and technologies. Their lives are colorful, and their work is diverse, but their family members and colleagues, if not of the same mindset, may find it exhausting. Many people have experienced working with bosses who have a strong sense of innovation and change their directives almost daily. Their strength lies in their willingness to overturn their previous selves, but their weakness is that they do it too often.

In open worlds and pioneering times, radicalism is often highly esteemed. Before 2020, mainstream opinions, both domestically and internationally, favored innovation and

believed that change inevitably leads to good outcomes. For a long time, the world was in a state of globalization and upward trends, with optimism overflowing into all fields. The development of virtual spaces, the internet, and the digital economy drove technology, culture, and business elites to become pioneers and adventurers in their entrepreneurial innovations. The survivors among them often attributed their success to the radical strategy of free innovation, overlooking the silent majority who failed and remained in the shadows.

However, after 2020, the trends of deglobalization and resistance to digitalization emerged, followed by a continuous economic downturn and a capital winter. When the wind stopped, and the tide receded, those once glorious, "flying pigs" turned out to be just monkeys swimming naked. The situation further deteriorated with the emergence of GenAI in 2023. People began to switch from outward expansionist radicalism to inward consumptive radicalism. By 2024, we have seen this trend intensify.

4.2.2 Limitations of the Radical Strategy

The radical strategy also has its limitations, which mainly include the following three points:

Limited Effectiveness of New Methods for Old Problems: The radical strategy tends to use new approaches to solve problems, but when facing old issues, these new methods may not be as effective as well-established traditional solutions. Moreover, refining new methods requires time and opportunity costs. Therefore, conservative forces often oppose these costly pursuits of freedom, criticizing them as a form of naive arrogance. Most of the time, conservatism prevails, which is why there have been few revolutionary periods in history; most of the time has been stable, even monotonous.

Multiple Risk Points: The radical strategy is fraught with various risks, including potential points of collapse. These risks are akin to Achilles' heel—widely known but difficult to eliminate. As the saying goes, "If you walk by the river often, you can't avoid getting your shoes wet." Worse still, one might fall into the river, encounter a negative black swan event, and suffer a total defeat. The dilemma of the radical strategy lies in its grand promises but limited delivery. While it can yield numerous minor

innovations and small successes, a single failure can lead to a major collapse or a devastating loss.

Susceptibility to the Planning Fallacy: When the radical strategy involves planning and calculation, it is prone to the planning fallacy—where "plans can't keep up with changes" and "man's calculations can't compare with the gods' calculations". Human brains tend to be overly optimistic and vague in planning for the future and calculating problems, so setbacks and obstacles during the execution of radical strategies are quite common.¹

4.2.3 Application of Radicalism

As mentioned earlier, radicalism can be challenging when applied externally but is highly suitable for internal application. According to autonomism, the freedom-first radicalism is particularly effective for self-revolution. With the support of courage, individuals can reflect through volition, achieving a "three-step approach" of doubting, rejecting, and innovating. This process helps reconstruct the baseline of safety and release the potential for freedom, thereby enhancing personal abilities. These three steps form a key mental module in autonomism called the "Universal Reflection Module", which aids in rethinking and reinterpreting various issues. It is a theoretical hypothesis I summarized from experience, similar to the autonomy triangle—it may not be entirely correct but is effective. You can use it to reflect on every person, event, or thing you once considered absolute truth, thereby gaining new insights and enhancing your abilities.

The first step in reflective volition is doubt. Through reflection, volition questions the default options provided by automatic processing and forces it to offer rational explanations. Bertrand Russell once said, "To be human is to have the capacity for doubt." Doubt is the starting point of courage, prompting us to re-examine everything

¹ Planning Fallacy is a concept in behavioral decision theory that refers to the tendency of people to be overly optimistic when predicting the time or resources needed to complete a task, thereby underestimating the actual requirements. This phenomenon was introduced by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, who pointed out that people often make predictions based on internal, overly optimistic assumptions while ignoring past experiences or broader data from the real world.

that was previously taken for granted, including our internal perceptions and actions as well as external things and relationships. Pay attention to every moment of doubt in your heart, nurture this faint spark, endure its burn, and let it grow until it fully illuminates the fog in your mind. If you don't feel any doubts, actively "strike the flint" by asking yourself "What If" to engage in counterfactual thinking and explore more potential parallel realities. In broader society, many great revolutions in ideology, culture, science, technology, and political philosophy began with doubts about old paradigms and norms. On a personal level, doubt loosens the relationship between safety and freedom in the autonomy triangle, allowing for reconstruction.¹

The second step in reflective volition is rejection. Volition continues its reflection, rejecting the rational explanations of old default options and forcing automatic processing to provide new ones. Rejection is the continuation of courage, a vote of support for doubt. When we begin to doubt old ideas and things, the Left-Brain Interpreter, the guardian of the old system, will automatically provide rational explanations; if those explanations fail, it may even resort to threats to make us conform, abandoning doubt and returning to belief. These explanations and threats are like rain and wind attempting to extinguish the spark of doubt, and rejection is our shield that defends this spark. If you feel overwhelmed, try asking yourself "So What" to trigger another form of counterfactual thinking, which helps alleviate some of the anxiety and pressure. Indeed, if you continue to doubt your initial views without accepting the brain's explanations or coercion, what's the worst that could happen? Would it result in death? If not, what is there to fear? Another more straightforward approach is the "20-second sprint" technique frequently mentioned earlier: charge forward under all pressure, unhesitatingly changing your thoughts and actions. You might find that after 20 seconds, the worst-case scenario you had imagined hasn't

¹ Counterfactual Thinking is a psychological process in which individuals consider scenarios that are contrary to the facts of what actually happened. In other words, it involves imagining how things might have unfolded differently. This type of thinking helps people understand events, evaluate decisions, and learn from experiences. Counterfactual thinking can be divided into upward counterfactual thinking (considering outcomes better than the actual result) and downward counterfactual thinking (considering outcomes worse than the actual result). It plays a role in emotional regulation, self-improvement, problem-solving, and social comparison. However, it is not always beneficial. Excessive upward counterfactual thinking can lead to regret and self-blame, while excessive downward counterfactual thinking can result in complacency and lack of motivation. Therefore, balancing this way of thinking is important to foster positive emotional and behavioral changes.

occurred, and what seemed impossible has now become possible. In terms of autonomy, the task of rejection is to support doubt, continuously exploring the baseline of safety and creating opportunities to release the potential for freedom.¹

The third step in reflective volition is innovation. Volition ceases reflection and accepts new options, thereby indirectly breaking old inertia and creating new possibilities. Innovation is the outcome of courage, a reward for doubt and rejection. The results of innovation may be good or bad; it may bring blessings or cause harm, but regardless, it brings change. According to the Tri-process Model Theory, doubting and rejecting belong to the reflective mind, while innovation belongs to the algorithmic and autonomous minds. Most of the time, the brain operates on autopilot, continuously generating "cards" based on past experiences, environmental cues, and random factors, and it accepts and outputs them by default, manifested as various thoughts and actions. Only when the "rider" awakens and takes control of the reins does the elephant change direction and the cards get refreshed. Doubt and rejection involve drawing cards repeatedly until one is satisfied, and then ceasing to doubt and reject to accept this output—this is the essence of innovation. To draw cards that match your preferences, you can continually ask yourself "What Else", maximizing the residual power of your brain. For autonomy, the task of innovation is to explore new combinations of safety and freedom, helping to rebuild a steady-state balance in the autonomy triangle.

Both Freud and I are fond of the story of Oedipus from Greek mythology. In a sense, this is a story of doubt, rejection, and innovation. Oedipus was born under a prophecy predicting he would kill his father and marry his mother. To escape this fate, his father tried to kill him as an infant but failed. Later, through a series of misunderstandings,

¹ Left-brain Interpreter is a concept proposed by cognitive neuroscientist Michael Gazzaniga to describe a function of the left hemisphere of the brain, which attempts to interpret and make sense of behaviors, events, or information, especially when the information is incomplete or ambiguous. Gazzaniga's research primarily focuses on the functional division between the two hemispheres of the brain. Traditionally, the left brain is thought to be responsible for logic, language, and sequential processing, while the right brain is associated with intuition, spatial perception, and creative thinking. In split-brain studies (research involving individuals whose connection between the two hemispheres has been severed), Gazzaniga found that the left brain plays a key role in interpreting and constructing narratives of events. For example, in some experiments, when the right brain received a command or information that the left brain did not, the left-brain interpreter would provide a seemingly rational explanation for behaviors triggered by the right brain, even if that explanation did not align with the actual cause.

Oedipus unknowingly killed his father and married his mother. He could have continued to live blissfully in this illusion, maintaining his throne and power. But he chose truth over avoidance, even when doubting would open Pandora's box. As a result, Oedipus's spirit of doubt tore apart the harmonious lie, bringing him closer to the truth of his fate. Courage is the ability to act in the face of fear. Oedipus was a courageous figure, not only possessing the courage to doubt everything but also to refuse avoidance. When investigating his own unfavorable circumstances, he rejected the request from his wife (and mother) to stop, rejecting the possibility of covering up with lies. His courage caused him to lose everything from his past but also to gain everything for his future. Boldly pursuing truth and refusing to compromise with fate, Oedipus ultimately found sanctuary in Athens and, after death, was buried alongside Athena, the goddess of reason and wisdom, as the guardian of the autonomists' city-state.¹

Lastly, if you find the "three-step approach" of doubting, rejecting, and innovating from the "Universal Reflection Module" still too complex, it can be further simplified. Take hold of a specific issue and, with doubt and courage, repeatedly ask yourself: "What If", "So What", and "What Else". The first question challenges the past balance, the second rejects the current explanation, and the third creates future possibilities. By asking these questions in sequence, new thoughts and actions will naturally emerge.

1 Oedipus is a renowned tragic figure in Greek mythology, whose story was profoundly dramatized by Sophocles in his tragedy Oedipus Rex. According to Greek mythology, Oedipus was the son of Laius, King of Thebes, and Queen Jocasta. At his birth, an oracle foretold to his parents that he would one day kill his father and marry his mother. To prevent this terrible prophecy from coming true, Laius ordered his servants to kill the infant Oedipus, but the servant, out of pity, gave him to a shepherd from Corinth, where Oedipus was eventually adopted by King Polybus and Queen Merope of Corinth. As an adult, Oedipus unknowingly fulfilled the prophecy while fleeing from his adoptive parents. On his journey, he killed his biological father Laius during a quarrel. Later, he solved the riddle of the Sphinx, saving the city of Thebes, and was welcomed as king, unknowingly marrying his mother Jocasta. When Oedipus eventually discovered the truth of his origins, he was overwhelmed by guilt and despair. Jocasta, in her despair, took her own life, and Oedipus blinded himself and began a self-imposed exile as a form of penance. The story of Oedipus is not only a classic tragedy in Greek mythology but has also deeply influenced Western culture and literature, particularly in psychology, where Freud linked the so-called Oedipus complex with this myth. Additionally, Oedipus Rex is regarded as a quintessential example of Greek tragedy, showcasing the conflict between human will and fate, and the struggle between personal agency and the inevitability of greater forces.

4.3 Balanced Strategy: Combining Big and Small, Leveraging the Small to Win Big

Some scholars say that what we crave is an "ordered disorder." We seek order within chaos and chaos within order. According to autonomism, what we are searching for is safe freedom, certain uncertainty—pursuing freedom on a foundation of safety and seeking uncertainty within certainty.

To address the shortcomings of the radical strategy and establish a baseline of safety for freedom, it is necessary to incorporate the strengths of the conservative strategy. Likewise, to improve the weaknesses of the conservative strategy and make safety open to the possibilities of freedom, we must draw on the advantages of the radical strategy. Ultimately, all paths converge; whether you turn left or right, the end of the road is an organic combination of conservatism and radicalism—a third path that seeks a balance between the two.

Clearly, in addressing the conflict between certainty and uncertainty, the balanced strategy is the better choice. It comprises two sub-strategies: the barbell strategy, which combines big and small, and the leverage strategy, which uses the small to win big.

4.3.1 The Barbell Strategy: Combining Big and Small

To achieve the dialectical unity of safety and freedom, conservatism and radicalism, Nassim Taleb repeatedly discusses similar issues in his books and explicitly proposes the barbell strategy as a recommendation: combining extreme conservatism across a broad base (eliminating points of collapse) with extreme risk-taking at specific points (seeking breakthrough points). By maintaining redundancy and ensuring multiple opportunities, one can engage in random walks to try to capture positive black swan events.

An effective barbell strategy brings about a near-biological antifragility—resilience that not only withstands shocks but grows stronger from them, as Friedrich Nietzsche famously stated, "What does not kill me makes me stronger." This strategy, which combines overall conservatism and safety-first principles with localized radicalism and

freedom-first ideals, is characterized mainly by its combination of big and small, with its dual-ended approach.¹

The barbell strategy is highly adaptable. Throughout history, many well-known figures have achieved success through it, advancing from ordinary individuals to elites, heroes, and even Titans. A common approach is to find a stable income job to support oneself and one's family, ensuring reliable safety, while using leisure time for ongoing creative efforts, pursuing unexpected success, and potential freedom. The advantages of this combination are clear: failures do not harm one's foundation, and if successful, it leads to a dramatic transformation. Classic examples include Albert Einstein, who worked as a patent examiner by day and wrote scientific papers in his spare time, later winning the Nobel Prize in Physics, and T.S. Eliot, who worked in a bank and wrote poetry on the side, eventually winning the Nobel Prize in Literature.²

If you come from an average background but wish to replicate such success, consider the "grassroots path"—first find a job that pays, then pursue a passion that might leave a legacy. With your feet on the ground and eyes on the stars, continuous effort and accumulation can yield significant results. The worst outcome is an ordinary, peaceful life; the best is a spectacular, unexpected success. The great Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan worked as a low-level clerk and independently derived 200 years' worth of Western mathematical theories in his spare time. By writing letters to the contemporary mathematician G.H. Hardy, he eventually made his way to Cambridge University, gaining worldwide fame. Similarly, renowned writer Franz Kafka also followed the path of a low-level clerk and achieved his own measure of success. My father, during his youth and middle age, worked as a scribe during the day and as a writer at home; by the time he retired, he had published several novels and won major awards. Many intellectuals within the system during his time chose similar paths.

1 Antifragility is a concept introduced by Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his book *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*. This concept is the opposite of fragility and describes a unique property in which certain systems, things, or individuals not only withstand damage when faced with stress, shocks, chaos, volatility, or uncertainty but actually benefit and grow from these challenges.

2 After graduating from Harvard University, T.S. Eliot worked at Lloyds Bank for eight years. Despite his job being unrelated to literature, he continued writing in his spare time, during which he published his renowned long poem, *The Waste Land*.

Additionally, if you don't mind, you might consider learning from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's experience, who secured a stable financial situation through romantic and marital relationships. Rousseau, as a half-grassroots figure, followed Madame de Warens at the age of 16, who was 28 at the time, which gave him the time to read extensively and become self-taught, eventually achieving fame. This is a typical example of exchanging time and physical resources for cultural and technical resources.

You might also consider the example of the poor German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who not only followed the grassroots path but also remained single. Kant never traveled far, never married, and adhered to the same routine for 57 years, spending nearly 10 hours each day studying and 4 hours writing, eventually producing many significant works.

Lastly, the barbell strategy also comes with an auxiliary toolkit: the tactic of low profile. Especially for those on the grassroots path, to persevere until the day of success, it is crucial to keep a low profile, avoid premature exposure, and prevent virtual reputation from exceeding actual strength, which could invite unnecessary trouble. Regularly review the Gold-Jade Principle, knowing when to be a soft jade and when to shine like gold. In a world full of uncertainties, anything is possible—a carpenter can become a savior, a trader can become a prophet, and a lieutenant can become an emperor. For the "grassroots", staying alive means having hope, and persistence means having a chance.

4.3.2 The Leverage Strategy: Leveraging the Small to Win Big

If you, like me, have Da Vinci Syndrome, with a wide range of interests and hobbies, knowing a little about many things but mastering none, or if you are a multi-talented jack-of-all-trades and dreamer, it is crucial to learn how to identify the "critical few", grasp the primary contradiction, and the principal aspect of the contradiction. This is where the leverage strategy comes into play.¹

¹ Da Vinci Syndrome is not an official medical term but is used metaphorically to describe individuals who possess traits similar to Leonardo da Vinci, such as being multi-talented and highly creative. However, they may also struggle with issues like being easily distracted or having difficulty completing projects.

The leverage strategy involves finding a pivot point that allows you to achieve great results with minimal effort, using small inputs to strive for large outputs—leveraging the small to move the big, or as the saying goes, "using a small force to move a large object." Chaos theory suggests that a small difference at the starting point can lead to disproportionately large effects. Just as Archimedes claimed he could move the Earth with a lever, and financiers use leverage to amplify their risks and returns, why shouldn't you find or create your own pivot point in life?

We can find pivot points, which are often actions that yield multiple benefits. For example, when it comes to work, consider finding the intersection of Job, Career, and Calling, or the convergence of avoiding harm, seeking benefits, and finding meaning, or the overlap of Interest, Mastery, and Niche. Suppose you choose the last option: the ideal scenario is to find a job that you enjoy, excel at, and that is profitable, making it your life mission so that every investment yields triple returns. A secondary option is to secure a job that you are good at and that pays well, while pursuing your passion as a hobby, thus forming a barbell combination, which at least kills two birds with one stone. Note that the definition of returns can be tailored to your current developmental needs—whether spiritual value or material gain. It's advisable to prioritize material gain first: survive first, then thrive. Once you have found the pivot point, the next step is to try repeatedly, benefiting continuously from leverage structures that turn small inputs into large outputs. As previously mentioned, luck is the result of trying. So, avoid collapsing early; ensure that you have multiple opportunities to try. You can pair the leverage strategy with the barbell strategy to enhance the stability and return rate of your pivot points.

We can also create pivot points. Ultimately, a pivot point is about leveraging asymmetries that are ubiquitous in the world. Beyond the pre-AI asymmetry where skills develop faster than resource growth, common asymmetries include: negative impacts are greater than positive ones (at least threefold), destruction is easier than creation, failure is more likely than success, technological advances outpace policy-making, people verify more than they falsify, quantity trumps quality, bad money drives out good, outcomes matter more than processes (see the peak-end rule), differences outweigh commonalities, and minorities control the majority, etc. In the AI era, new phenomena are emerging: those who understand AI will outperform those who

don't, those with AI will surpass those without, those using AI will outpace those who don't, those immune to AI influence might overshadow those who aren't, imitators will outperform innovators, content creation speed will outstrip content consumption, knowledge updates will outpace educational reform, organizational growth will outmatch individual capacity growth, and the status of algorithms and computing power will surpass that of data. Understanding and leveraging these asymmetries can enhance our competitiveness. A higher-level approach is to proactively modify behavior strategies asymmetrically to endow them with the special attribute of leveraging the small to achieve the big.¹

Based on these principles, **I designed an asymmetrical transformation tool in three steps to turn ordinary behaviors into asymmetrical ones.** When the benefits outweigh the costs of this asymmetry, a new pivot point is born.

First, Increase Returns: Set goals to "aim for 10x growth instead of a 10% improvement," forcing yourself to make structural adjustments and disruptive innovations through system function adjustments, structural changes, adding or subtracting elements, or innovation in ideas, mechanisms, and technologies to achieve explosive, exponential growth. For example, set a goal to increase your public account followers tenfold in a short period, which requires rethinking the target audience of your account and completely overhauling its content and format.

Second, Reduce Costs: Modify behaviors from different perspectives and stages by introducing models like ABC and MAP to lower the costs in time, energy, finances, and psychology during initiation and execution. If collaborating with others, strive to improve mechanisms to share risks and benefits equitably, and decisively eliminate any

¹ In Skin in the Game, Taleb describes an asymmetrical phenomenon known as the "Minority Rule," where a stubborn minority, comprising only 3% to 4% of the total population, can influence the entire group to conform to their preferences and choices, provided they are fully committed to sharing the risk and defending their interests. For example, only a small percentage of people are allergic to peanuts, yet peanut butter is not offered in schools and on airplanes. Similarly, Muslims make up only 3% to 4% of the UK population, yet the market for halal food is substantial. The same is true in South Africa. The Minority Rule occurs under two conditions: first, even distribution—the stubborn minority is not confined to a specific area but is evenly distributed within the population; and second, low cost—the cost for the moderate majority to adapt to the stubborn minority's preferences is not significantly high. If the cost were substantial, the dominance of the minority would be unlikely to occur.

free-riders. For instance, standardize, streamline, and partially automate your self-media creation process under AI assistance to reduce the cost of each subsequent attempt.

Third, Eliminate Points of Collapse: Use management expert Gary Klein's pre-mortem technique by imagining future catastrophic outcomes of this asymmetrical behavior, then dissect potential causes to identify root problems and address them today, thus preventing collapse and ensuring you "don't lose". For example, imagine one day your video channel gets banned—what might be the cause? Then set rules and prohibitions today, establish a Ulysses Pact, and prevent mistakes.

As the saying goes, "If you chase two rabbits at the same time, you will lose them both." The balanced strategy includes both barbell and leverage combinations, allowing you to chase multiple targets simultaneously, but among them, there must be one you can catch today to sustain yourself, while the others can be either long-term pursuits or lifelong bragging rights. So, after choosing your role and strategy, carefully select your targets. Ultimately, whether it's risk or reward, certainty or uncertainty, safety or freedom, conservatism or radicalism, barbell or leverage—the choice is yours. You must make the decision.

4.3.3 Reference Ratio of Conservatism and Radicalism

I am a fan of football and often use it as a metaphor. If the conservative strategy is akin to playing defensive, and the radical strategy is pushing everyone forward, then the barbell strategy is a balanced tactic that combines both defense and offense. However, balance does not mean equal distribution. Considering that radicalism can bring both gains and losses, it is best to find a ratio between the two that can withstand these potential losses.

The best reference point I found comes from Roy Baumeister's *The Power of Bad*, which states that the ratio of good to bad events in normal life is 3:1, and that it takes about four positive events to offset the negative impact of one bad event. Based on this standard, an autonomist's barbell strategy should ideally adopt a 4:1 ratio between conservative and radical strategies—using safety-oriented conservative strategies for stability in over 80% of issues and scenarios, while applying freedom-oriented radical

strategies to pursue change in less than 20% of cases. In football terms, this translates to 8 defenders and midfielders, and 2 forwards. This is a defensive counterattack tactic that allows us to progress steadily and strive for victory without risking defeat. However, during an economic downturn when the probability of encountering negative black swan events increases, the ratio of conservative strategies should be further adjusted, potentially up to 9:1, or 9 defensive players and 1 forward.

Applying the balanced strategy of autonomists, we can assume that societies also have their own balanced strategies. Different types of societies are combinations of conservatives and radicals in varying proportions, maintaining a dynamic of opposition and cooperation. Historically, radicals have been responsible for pioneering, while conservatives have focused on cultivating. In organizations, radicals drive entrepreneurship, while conservatives ensure stability. Within institutions, radicals push for reforms, while conservatives safeguard development.

I hypothesize that in an antifragile society, the ratio of conservatives to radicals should be 3:1. I base this on four points of reference:

The classic conformity experiment by renowned social psychologist Solomon Asch tested whether people would distort facts under social pressure when the majority pointed to a wrong answer. The experiment found that three-quarters of participants conformed, while the remaining quarter insisted on independent thinking and made the correct decision based on their judgment. This suggests that the ratio of conformists to independent thinkers is 3:1.¹

¹ Asch recruited volunteers on campus for what was advertised as a psychological experiment on visual perception. The experiment took place in a room and was quite simple in its design: participants were shown two sheets of paper—one with a single line, and the other with several lines of varying lengths. The task was to identify which line on the second sheet matched the length of the line on the first sheet. The experiment involved multiple groups of participants, with 7 to 9 people per group, each group completing 18 tests. When volunteers arrived at the experimental room, they found seven seats, six of which were already occupied, leaving only the last chair empty. One might assume that the others simply arrived earlier, but the reality was that those six individuals were Asch's confederates, planted to manipulate the experiment. Then the show began. The correct answers were extremely obvious—anyone with normal intelligence and sobriety would hardly make a mistake. Responses were given in sequence according to seating order, with the volunteer always answering last. In 12 out of the 18 tests, the confederates intentionally gave incorrect answers, and they all provided the same incorrect response. As a result, the volunteers' overall accuracy rate was 63.2%, while the control group, who answered without interference, had a correct rate of 99%. Moreover, 75% of participants conformed at least

Before gaining fame as the "father of positive psychology", Martin Seligman conducted an experiment on learned helplessness, initially on animals and later on college students, to test whether individuals would develop a sense of hopelessness and helplessness in harsh environments. The results showed that one-third of participants never gave up trying to escape, regardless of the conditions or the number of experiments. This suggests that the ratio of those with fragile minds to those who remain resilient is 2:1.

In their studies on prospect theory and the framing effect, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky conducted experiments to test people's choice strategies in different contexts. They found that three-quarters of participants chose to manage risk, while the remaining quarter made impulsive, risk-taking decisions, more firmly adhering to their views, pursuing freedom, and taking risks. The biggest difference between the two groups was their attitudes toward uncertainty and the unknown. Thus, the ratio of conservative strategists to radical strategists is 3:1.

As previously mentioned, one-quarter of the human population carries the DRD4-7R dopamine receptor gene variant, while the rest do not. This implies that the ratio of those inherently inclined toward stability to those inclined toward risk is also 3:1.

These studies suggest that the ratio of conservatives to radicals may have a genetic basis, with a natural balance possibly being 3:1. However, we can challenge this view because the ratio varies significantly across different periods and regions. At least four factors influence the choice of ratios in society:

Natural Environment: Specific environments attract specific populations. The New World once presented vast opportunities, drawing many radicals from the Old World. The New World's abundant resources allowed radicals to thrive, live according to their values, and pass on their adventurous genes, increasing their proportion in the population. In Wenzhou, for example, the land was historically barren, so the people there have long engaged in land reclamation and commerce—an environment that favored the genes of adventurers, making radicals more common.

once, choosing the same wrong answer as the confederates. A striking 5% of participants followed the group consistently, getting every answer wrong. Only 25% managed to maintain their independent judgment and consistently provided the correct answers.

Cultural Atmosphere: Specific populations shape specific environments. When radicals are relatively concentrated in a certain period or region, they alter the cultural atmosphere, creating an extroverted culture that encourages risk-taking. This culture makes radicals more appealing in the marriage market, allowing them to leave more descendants. It is also foreseeable that radicals will be early adopters of gene-editing technologies, be quicker to integrate with AI, and lead the fusion of carbon-based and silicon-based developments. Human resources expert Jennifer Kahnweiler, in her book Quiet Influence, points out that American society values an extroverted ideal, forcing introverts to adapt. The opposite is true in China, where extroverts often have to adjust.

Economic Conditions: Different periods exhibit different dynamic balances. Early immigrants to the U.S. were primarily radicals seeking wealth and religious freedom, making the distant New World attractive. Recent immigrants tend to be more conservative, seeking a safer country and a more secure life. In China, periods of great unification favor a higher proportion of conservatives, while periods of division benefit radicals. Economic fluctuations also alter the proportion of radicals and conservatives in society. During economic booms, optimism prevails, and some genetically conservative individuals may join the ranks of radicals due to improved financial conditions. Over 2,000 years ago, affluent groups driven by commercial development planted the seeds of Western philosophy on the Aegean coast in Miletus (in present-day Turkey, not Greece). During economic downturns, pessimism increases, and some genetically radical individuals are forced to tighten their belts and join the conservative camp. The decline in global per capita income between the two World Wars prompted Germany and Japan to turn to dictatorship, leading to devastating global conflict.

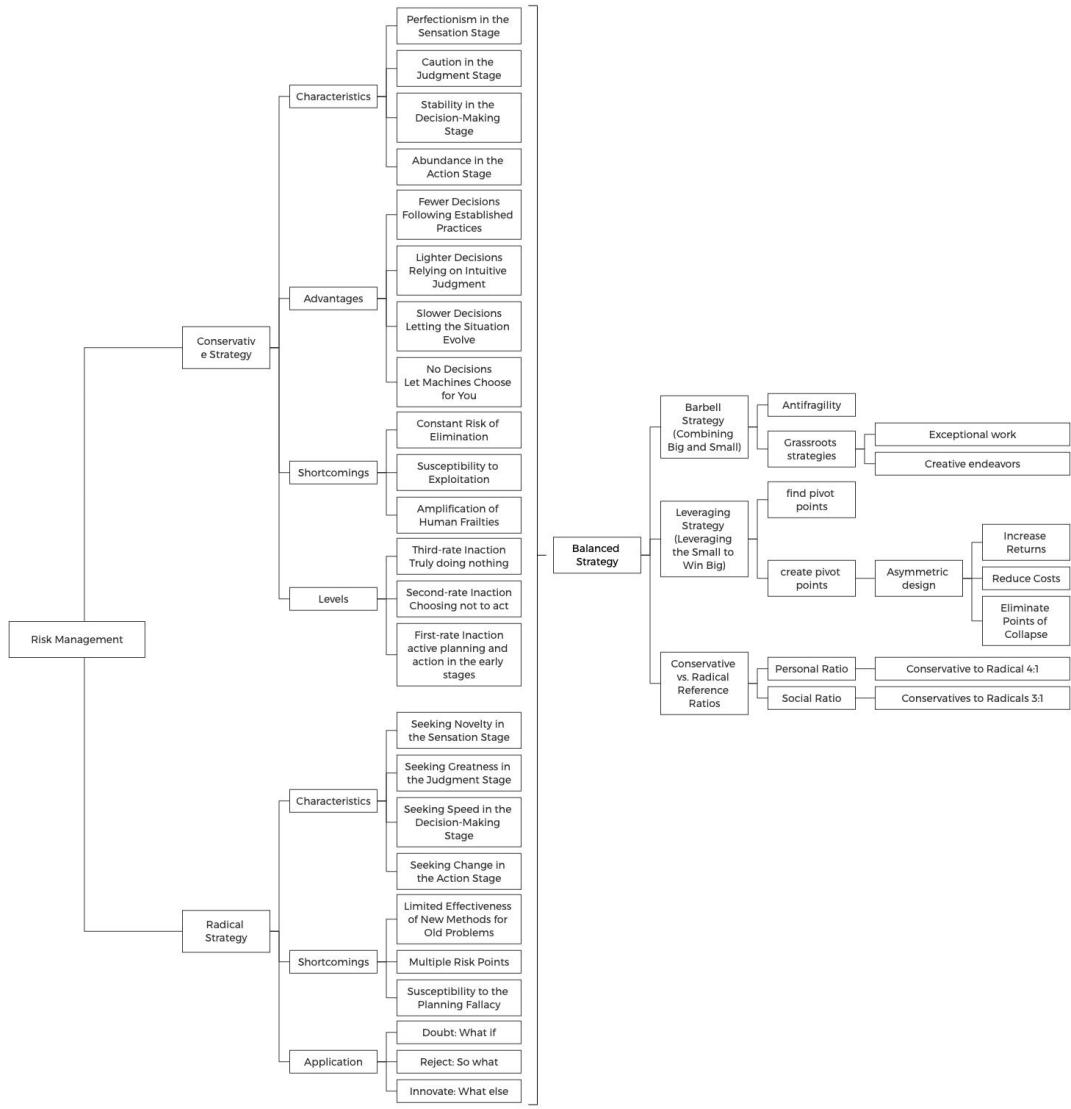
Education Levels: Based on ability levels, conservatives and radicals can be further subdivided into four types: highly educated radicals, highly educated conservatives, low-educated conservatives, and low-educated radicals. Clearly, any society first needs highly educated radicals and highly educated conservatives who debate reform versus stability from a rational standpoint, driving societal progress through their interactions. Next are the low-educated conservatives, who are staunch supporters of societal stability and form the mainstream in any era. Lastly, there are the low-educated radicals—children, gamblers, and the lumpen proletariat—who pursue destruction for its own sake and adventure for adventure's sake. They are fearless like

newborn calves, knowing little and holding narrow views supported by their limited understanding. They are society's greatest destabilizing force, often confusing pre-personal and transpersonal states, falling into what transpersonal psychologist Ken Wilber calls the "Pre-Trans Fallacy". Many low-educated radicals believe they have insight into the world's truths, claiming detachment from worldly concerns, but in reality, they are like frogs in a well, blinded by arrogance. As psychotherapist Morgan Peck aptly noted in "The Road Less Traveled": "You cannot relinquish something you never possessed. " Thus, every society must strive to improve education levels and minimize the proportion of low-educated radicals as much as possible.

Therefore, in the Pandemonium of a complex world and an uncertain future, there are no absolute answers. Whether 4:1 or 3:1, these are merely reference lines. Every individual and society must test their hypotheses through practical experience and find the ratio and balance that best suits them.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter begins by exploring the conflict between the need for safety and the pursuit of freedom, which together shape the sense of autonomy. In a world filled with both certainty and uncertainty, we can adopt three strategies to manage risk. The first is the conservative strategy of prioritizing safety and practicing inaction, accompanied by an analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, and hierarchical ranking. The second is the radical strategy of freedom first and active innovation, which, after examining its characteristics, is recommended for self-revolution. The third is the balanced strategy of combining big and small, and leveraging the small to win big, including barbell and leverage combinations, with practical techniques such as the grassroots path and asymmetrical transformation. Lastly, we discussed the societal balanced strategy, suggesting that conservatives and radicals should be proportioned in a dynamic balance of 3:1.



Chapter 5: Time and Space Management

People can neither see where they come from in the void, nor where they stand in the infinite.

— Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

The next paradox young people face is similarly close to being unsolvable:

The conflict between finite time and space and infinite problems.

The ancient Chinese had a reflection that sounds almost like an English lament: "My life is finite, but knowledge is infinite; to pursue the infinite with the finite is doomed to failure." Indeed, to directly confront the infinite with the finite is inevitably a losing battle and death.

Death is the only serious philosophical problem, as stated by John Maynard Keynes, the father of macroeconomics: "In the long run, we are all dead." The ancient Chinese thought even further: "Every person must die, but that death may be as weighty as Mount Tai or as light as a feather." A hundred years from now, how will future generations evaluate us? Will we be remembered as heroes or failures? As admirable ancestors or disappointing predecessors?

Others, and those who come after us, will likely judge us through the Legacy we leave behind. We have never been closer to eternity; the AI era has lowered the barriers and costs of leaving a mark. Everything we do today will be remembered forever in code, giving each of us the opportunity to prove that we once "existed" and "lived." At the same time, we face unprecedented pressure to compete with all the other souls of the

digital age, striving to be "remembered" and "memorialized" by others and by posterity. After all, not all pasts are worth remembering. Legacy is a product of autonomy; it is the record and testament of how we solve problems, expand our time and space, and achieve growth.

Thus, when facing this unsolvable paradox, our task is not to provide a perfect answer, but to simply be a little better than others. Our goal is not to completely eliminate the conflict between the finite and the infinite, but to turn the challenge of the finite against the infinite into a game—and strive to play it better than other players.

How can we use finite time and space to address infinite problems, achieve better results, and leave a more significant Legacy? I have three approaches:

First, upgrade your methods—use time management to solve more problems.

Second, shift your perspective—replace temporal thinking with spatial thinking.

Third, transcend your limits—replace finite games with infinite games.

5.1 Upgrading Methods: Solving More Problems with Time Management

When facing challenges, setting tasks, managing time, and improving efficiency are common practices among ambitious young people. I have some experience in time management and have summarized it into three progressively advanced time management solutions for your reference.

5.1.1 Time Management 1.0: Saving Time by Increasing Efficiency

In the 1.0 stage, you are a beginner, fresh out of school, with parents at home and superiors at work; you can't fully decide what to do or not to do, nor can you always discern what's beneficial for you. At this stage, I recommend introducing the classic GTD (Getting Things Done) tool. Following the advice of David Allen, you can record, organize, and refine tasks to get as many of them done as possible, thereby driving the

resolution of various issues. When implementing this, consider the following three key points:

Key Point 1: Specify Your Next Action (NA). Clearly define the next actionable step for each task. For example, if your task is "go for a run after dinner," the NA might be "message your running buddy" or "place your running shoes prominently by the door." Defining the NA is a core step in task planning and the key to making GTD effective. It transforms goal intentions into implementation intentions, converting vague tasks into specific, actionable steps. Compared to mere goal intentions, implementation intentions include an additional conscious rehearsal step. NAs prompt us to envision the future, think through the details, integrate fragmented thoughts, and complete the task context, significantly increasing the likelihood of task initiation and improving execution outcomes.

Key Point 2: Digitalize Your Process. Leverage digital tools to reduce costs and increase efficiency, effectively becoming a human-machine hybrid. I have used many task management apps; I initially used Doit.im the most, then switched to a combination of DIDA and WeChat. With the rise of AI, you can also consider training intelligent agents to assist in task management.

Key Point 3: Embrace Morning-Centric Approach. The concept of "Morning-Centric Approach", popularized by the Japanese, encourages early sleep and early rising, as well as staggered schedules. This practice creates alone time, which is conducive to deep work. Starting each day earlier and better than others can ensure a competitive edge and a positive state of mind. Freud remarked, "Each morning when I awake, I experience a supreme pleasure—that of being Salvador Dalí." Early rising is a common trait among successful people across time and cultures. The ancient Chinese phrase "waking at the crow of the rooster" implies waking extremely early. Nobel laureate in economics and representative of the Public Choice school, James Buchanan, came from a poor family and had to earn his tuition by milking cows and working part-time during college. This instilled in him a lifelong habit of waking up at 4 a.m., working four extra hours each day compared to others—a habit that benefited him greatly throughout his life. Pairing morning-centric approach with journaling to start the day with reflection and writing can further enhance your state of mind. Additionally,

those who rise early have fewer distractions, are less prone to overthinking, and are highly efficient, approaching an ideal state of effortless and unforced action. One final note: morning-centric approach must be built on adequate rest; otherwise, it can lead to burnout, undermining its benefits.

Further discussions on Time Management 1.0 will continue in the next chapter, "Task Management."

5.1.2 Time Management 2.0: Simplify Tasks to Save Time

After the hard work of the 1.0 stage, your skills and resource platform have improved. Now, you can partially decide what to do, but new tasks keep coming your way. "Parkinson's First Law" states that work expands to fill all available time. If you don't learn to say no, you might end up bogged down. The Japanese wrote a book titled "Danshari" that encourages us to discard anything currently useless. I recommend upgrading from GTD to the Essentialism approach proposed by Greg McKeown.

McKeown points out bluntly that if we don't arrange our time, someone else will. He advocates the "90% rule", which means eliminating 90% of tasks and focusing on the most important 10%.

Eliminating 90% of tasks means avoiding or postponing things that are meaningless, things that can be done or not done, and things that are uncertain. For the potential psychological burden, McKeown suggests a "Reverse Pilot" approach—test it directly in practice, let things play out, and see the results. If nothing goes wrong, you can skip it in the future. My addition to this is to treat deliberate procrastination as an expression of free will. When feeling inner anxiety, try a thought experiment and ask yourself, "So What?" "What's the big deal?" "If I don't do this now, what's the worst that could happen?" If the outcome isn't absolute, inevitable, or disastrous, then set it aside for now.

To identify the most important 10%, you can refer to the experience of TED curator Chris Anderson, who merges rational and emotional priorities—things you should do

and want to do—into the most important tasks to be tackled first. Alternatively, you can wait for the next chapter on "Task Management" to explore autonomism's solution.

In summary, the basic approach of Time Management 2.0 is to prioritize a few essential tasks while postponing or not handling the rest.

5.1.3 Time Management 3.0: Innovate Modules to Save Time

As your skills and platform continue to upgrade, you've moved from lower and basic levels to intermediate and advanced ones. You may not be at the hero level yet, but you're likely in the elite ranks. Now, you can call the shots, even decide what others should do. At this stage, you not only need to think from the perspective of the self and the individual but also from the stance of others and the collective. You should consider not just the present and immediate but also the world and future. This is when Time Management 3.0 becomes necessary to tackle new challenges and changing circumstances.

Unfortunately, there are no mature theories or methods available to guide our next upgrade. Thus, Time Management 3.0 remains an open question. Here, I assume that time management at the 3.0 stage should, as futurist Peter Diamandis suggests, pursue exponential growth, which inevitably involves a series of disruptive innovations. Below are some directions worth exploring.

Direction One: Return to Simplicity and Embrace Natural Forgetting. Follow the way of nature, govern by doing nothing that goes against it. Completely discard the traditional concepts of time management, adopting a "remind + forget" model where you note down only two or three key tasks daily using an "external brain," leaving all else to the natural forgetting mechanisms of the human mind. For workaholics accustomed to recording many tasks and following outlines daily, this model can be unsettling, hard to let go of, with fears that a "winning by doing nothing" approach may devolve into laziness or even self-sabotage. However, I believe this could be a beneficial experiment for true leaders.

Direction Two: Machine Ascension and Crowd-Machine Thinking. Completely abandon the purely personal perspective and the "human brain + computer" approach, and instead adopt a leader's viewpoint to oversee the overall situation. Introduce powerful AI systems and assistant teams to intervene in the time management of all team members. Put simply, it means using one or several AI-enhanced centaur assistants instead of traditional human assistants or basic software. Leveraging machine intelligence and collective wisdom, they can filter, initiate, sustain, and complete tasks. Using assistants is an ancient method, proven effective through time and practice. Centaur assistants require higher operational thresholds, and their effectiveness remains to be tested. My guess is it would be good.

Direction Three: Updating Thought and Changing Time Perception. Completely abandon past-oriented and present-oriented time perspectives, and adopt a future-oriented time view. Renowned psychologist Philip Zimbardo points out in "The Time Paradox" that time perspective influences our judgments and decisions. Managing tasks based on a future time perspective will more frequently consider Previous Actions (PA), using them as cues to design more complete action chains. This also aligns with autonomism's repeated emphasis on "beginning before the beginning". For example, envision what we would be like ten years from now, and then determine what we should and shouldn't do to become that version of ourselves. Then, further refine it by specifying what we should do today—the PA. The Great Law of the Iroquois of the Native American tribes around Lake Ontario says: "In every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations." We should have such foresight.¹

¹ Philip Zimbardo is a world-renowned psychologist who served as the President of the American Psychological Association and is celebrated for his numerous contributions to the field of psychology, including the well-known Stanford Prison Experiment and the widely used textbook *Psychology and Life*. Zimbardo's Time Perspective Theory posits that an individual's perception of time shapes their perspective on events and life, ultimately influencing their lifestyle. To help people better understand their own time perspective, he developed the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI), categorizing time perspectives into five types: Past-Negative (focused on negative aspects of the past), Past-Positive (focused on positive aspects of the past), Present-Fatalistic (focused on a fatalistic view of the present), Present-Hedonistic (focused on a hedonistic approach to the present), and Future (focused on the future). In 1997, he introduced the Transcendental-Future perspective, which encompasses the time phase from the imagined physical death to eternity/infinity.

5.2 Shifting Perspectives: Replacing Temporal Thinking with Spatial Thinking

The iterative optimization of time management has led to higher efficiency and a faster pace. In our youth, we can endure this grind, but by middle age, fatigue inevitably sets in. Time management ultimately becomes a relentless, exhausting journey toward burnout. As poet Francis Ponge laments in "The Seasons Cycle", "You cannot escape the forest by following the path of trees." How can we plan ahead to avoid this tragic outcome? I pondered this question endlessly until one day in 2017 when the Muse of inspiration found me.

The answer is to replace temporal thinking with spatial thinking. It is a concession, yet also a release. This new approach offers a fresh perspective on tackling the finite versus the infinite, generating new insights and expressions. Suddenly, my world opened up. I realized that I had spent too much time focusing on time and too little on space.

Using temporal thinking to tackle infinite problems only leads to mental exhaustion and helplessness because time only diminishes, flows in one direction, and waits for no one. Our best efforts might be limited to optimizing schedules, maximizing focus, or slowing the pace of psychological time.

However, these efforts are ultimately futile, quickly depleting our precious volition and energy. When we are mentally and physically drained, moral licensing and the compensation effect sneak in, causing chaos and waste. In the aftermath, we feel regret, make adjustments, focus again, only to once more face exhaustion, chaos, and loss. Time slips away unnoticed, accelerating its departure. As Zhuangzi once sighed, "Life between heaven and earth is like a white horse passing through a crack—it happens in an instant."¹

¹ Moral Licensing is a psychological concept that describes how, after engaging in a positive behavior or decision in one moral dimension, individuals may allow themselves to make morally negative choices in subsequent actions. Compensation Effect is another psychological concept that describes the behavior or phenomenon where an individual or system, after losing or lacking something in one area, seeks balance or compensation in another. When combined, these effects often lead to a sequence of good

All attempts to solve problems through temporal thinking end in the bitter realization that "youth is fleeting," followed by endless cycles of time management, task management, and energy management—there is no end to the grind, only more grind. No matter how advanced we become in this struggle, we can never catch time; we only watch as it recedes further into the distance.

More painfully, we can foresee that our descendants will endure the same cycle of suffering. This sense of despair and helplessness is akin to the Saints finally reaching the dark depths of the Underworld, only to be faced with the Wall of Lamentation, which can only be pierced by the light of the sun.

At this moment, spatial thinking descends like a deity, bringing the radiance of the sun, shattering the barriers of time, and offering liberation—or even transcendence—to trapped souls.

Using spatial thinking as a fulcrum can greatly alleviate mental stress. Space is relatively fixed, ever-expanding. We can easily pause space. If we miss today, we won't get this day back, but if we miss a particular space, we can always revisit it. It remains there, waiting for us. Even if a specific space disappears, other spaces will take its place. We always have numerous choices—more choices.

Applying spatial thinking to problem-solving and using spatial perspectives as a point of entry for solutions opens up one's vision, significantly enhancing the depth and breadth of thought. Using space as the fundamental framework for explaining and solving problems can liberate the mind from the constraints of one-way, linear, and convergent thinking, allowing for the benefits of multi-directional, networked, and divergent thinking. Clearly, spatial thinking is more conducive to innovation and transformation.

Spatial thinking also sparks many intriguing ideas. Let me give you a few examples:

Sleep is not merely a stretch of time but a delightful space. It starts with lying on a bed and then ventures into countless new spaces and alternate worlds, ultimately reaching the ever-changing depths of dreams, offering experiences of entirely different

actions followed by bad ones. For example, a person might feel proud for going to the gym today, and as a result, may allow themselves to indulge in more unhealthy food as a form of compensation.

and colorful lives. This experience transcends time and is an accumulation of countless spaces.

Driving is not a dull period but an exquisite space. The interplay between the fixed internal space of the car and the moving external space creates layers of experience. If you add in MOOCs or music playing on your phone, engage in a soulful conversation with a GenAI, or tap into the consciousness space that transcends the present moment, you're juggling at least four intertwined spaces.

Creation is not an objective span of time but a subjective space. I write within a specific space, and what I produce creates another defined space. Through words, I guide readers into this space, sharing its beauty. Readers, in turn, can reconstruct this space during their reading experience. With AI involvement, the spatial dimensions expand even further.

Emotions are not shared time between individuals but shared spaces. Space comprises parallel existences, forming multiple universes. Whether we are with family, loved ones, friends, or others, all these emotions are not tied to time but are different spaces—like luminous beads in a jar, glowing together and creating captivating colors.

Thinking is not squandering our time but expanding our space, allowing us to live again and again in countless realms.

We may struggle to change time, but we can easily change space. Time is both fair and unfair—ultimately, we only have a very limited amount of it. Space, however, is different; its distribution is highly uneven. Some possess vast spaces, while others have very little. Yet we all have the same opportunity to explore greater spaces. We can reconstruct and mine old spaces, discover and develop new spaces, and approach the possibility of infinite space. Autonomism equally values the expansion of both time and space, emphasizing a balanced approach. Thus, each of us, as our own Master of Space and Time, must identify gaps and address the shortcomings of spatial thinking.

Practically, replacing temporal thinking with spatial thinking can be approached from three aspects:

Transform Physical Spaces: Address economic resources to buy property and secure private space. Resolve transportation issues to expand your radius of activity, covering more semi-public and public spaces to gain more spatial options. Learn to organize and design, optimizing layouts to create a conducive environment for optimal performance. Maximize the affordances of space to unleash the infinite possibilities of limited areas.

Embrace Imaginary Spaces: Beyond the physical world are the realms of the mind and language—spaces of imagination. Conversations, music, reading, watching movies, gaming, meditation, and dreaming can all transport us to different spaces. Computer games, in particular, not only provide joy and immersive experiences but also offer a virtual space for releasing autonomous potential, which can, in turn, impact real-world performance. This will be explored in more depth in the "Game Management" chapter.

Explore Hybrid Spaces: The physical and virtual worlds are rapidly merging—this is the ongoing future of the AI era. The future is unlikely to be a dystopia where everyone has a neural connection; instead, it will likely feature mixed reality with parallel, multi-layered, and compound spaces. We cannot yet determine which new technologies or combinations of technologies will best represent the future; we can only refine our tools through speculation and experimentation, preparing for a future that has already arrived but is unevenly distributed. A high-end approach to hybrid space might involve investing in Apple's Vision Pro headset, costing tens of thousands of yuan, for direct immersion in mixed reality; a mid-range solution could involve using Meta's Ray-Ban smart glasses for context-aware AI support; and a low-cost option is to pick up any smartphone, put on headphones, let GenAI generate a playlist of background music suitable for creativity, and immerse yourself in an imagined space—crafted from a soundscape and cognitive universe—while navigating the real world.

5.3 Transcending Limits: Replacing Finite Games with Infinite Games

If adopting spatial thinking is still not enough to resolve your current dilemmas, let's take it a step further by installing the "infinite games" module into your cognitive system.

Philosopher James Carse introduces the concepts of finite games and infinite games in his book "Finite and Infinite Games". After reading this brief but profound book, information philosopher Kevin Kelly was thrilled, remarking that each page evokes the feeling of "this is exactly what I've always known but could never put into words." Indeed, this book is Carse's magnum opus, a significant legacy he left to the world, providing fundamental guidance for transcending the basic conflict between finite space-time and infinite problems. It is foreseeable that he will one day be recognized among the Titans.

Finite games are played with the goal of winning; once the victory is achieved, the game ends. Finite games have rules and boundaries that are strictly upheld to prevent any alterations. Most people play finite games within their families, schools, and companies—games that have clear time limits, spatial boundaries, player limitations, numerical constraints, and winning conditions. All rules fundamentally adhere to one primary rule: the strongest wielders of power dictate the terms. This "meta-rule" decides the rules of the game. Only when the weaker parties choose not to play by the rules set by the stronger can they stand a chance to win.

Infinite games, on the other hand, are played with the goal of continuing the play; there is no endpoint. Infinite games lack fixed rules and boundaries, and the rules are continuously evolving throughout the game to keep it going indefinitely. Culture, for instance, lacks strict rules and boundaries and is an infinite game by nature. The essence of culture is to deviate from norms, to break from and innovate beyond tradition; those who merely repeat the past are culturally impoverished.

Players of finite games operate within rules (boundaries). Players of infinite games engage in the game of rules (boundaries). Finite games come with scripts, roles, and performances. Infinite games have no scripts, roles, or performances. Players of finite games act as heroes; players of infinite games are heroes themselves.

Finite game players consume time and sense the passage of time within finite spaces. Infinite game players create time and experience the expansion of time within infinite spaces.

Carse's perspective opens up a new dimension for us, providing profound clarity and understanding. Drawing from the systems theory's tripartite division of elements, structure, and function: time management seeks to change elements, spatial thinking emphasizes structural change, and infinite games achieve functional change. Functional change brings about a paradigm shift, fundamentally transforming the approach to element allocation and structural adjustments.

An infinite game player, unconcerned with immediate gains or losses, pursues vast and eternal goals, constantly reshaping rules and boundaries to solve various problems, aided by spatial thinking and time management. By stepping out of the finite games with fixed rules and boundaries, and entering infinite games where rules can be altered and boundaries can be adjusted, we make a revolutionary leap forward—one that can potentially lead to exponential growth. While time management promises a 10% improvement and spatial thinking delivers a 100% enhancement, infinite games aim for tenfold growth.

To an infinite game player, finite game players appear much like TV characters viewed by an audience or like two-dimensional lines seen by a person in three-dimensional space—a clear sense of strategic superiority and reduced dimensional perspective.

In a sense, those with strong faith and conviction, who are willing to sacrifice and transcend the limitations of self, time, and space—the heroes and Titans—are all infinite game players. They do not confine their lives within limits; instead, they continually understand, confront, and surpass existing rules and boundaries, inventing, creating, and expanding new rules and boundaries. Therefore, their lives are filled with nearly infinite possibilities, possessing higher levels of volition, capability, and resources, alongside security, freedom, autonomy, joy, immersion, and meaning.

So, How Do You Become an Infinite Game Player?

First, you must excel at finite games before you can qualify to participate in infinite games. A low-level player who can't even handle finite games dreaming of skipping levels to take on the high-level challenges of infinite games is pure fantasy—it's wishful thinking, self-deception, and a confusion between self-avoidance and self-transcendence, which is a classic example of the pre-trans fallacy. There are no castles in the sky; every effort that needs to be made cannot be skipped. You must carve a bloody path through the clash of the finite and the infinite before finding your footing in infinite games. According to the logic introduced in Chapter 2, you must first upgrade from ordinary to elite status before you can aspire to become a hero or a Titan, worthy of discussing sacrifice, transcendence, and meaning. At the very least, infinite game players must reach the elite level.

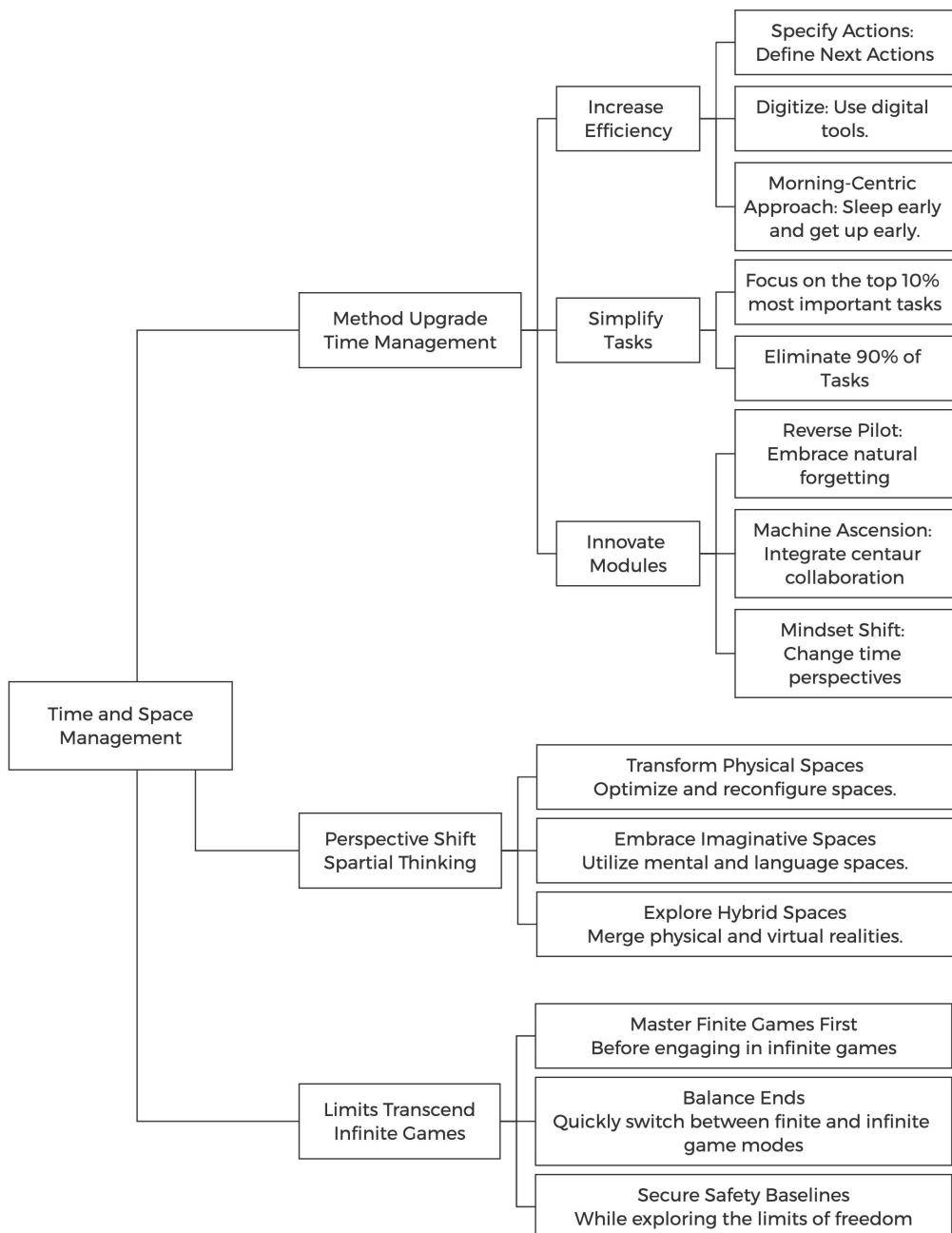
Second, you need to learn to balance and swiftly switch between finite and infinite game modes, as reality is filled with unknowns and uncertainties, and the boundaries between finite and infinite games are often blurred and intertwined. The strategy to deal with this is a combined approach: both finite and infinite games need to be mastered, and victories in both realms must be achieved. On one hand, use finite game thinking to fight blitz battles, securing immediate wins under finite conditions. On the other hand, employ infinite game thinking to engage in long-term strategies, striving for victories in the future under infinite conditions. From the finite game perspective, adhere to the order established by the strong, learn the rules, and respect the boundaries. Conversely, from the infinite game perspective, aim to become the order-establishing authority, change the rules, and transcend boundaries. A truly autonomous hero should integrate both the finite and the infinite, growth and transcendence. He should embody Hercules in the finite world and the secular society, and Prometheus in the infinite world and the realm of the spirit.

Third, you need to uphold the baseline of safety while exploring the limits of freedom. Safety emphasizes harm avoidance and sets the lower boundary of the game. This is a safety net woven together by natural laws and social rules, imposed upon you by the world and others, compelling you to stay in the game. Without a safety baseline, the game ceases to exist—crossing the line can lead to irrevocable disaster. Freedom, on the other hand, emphasizes seeking benefits and marks the upper boundary of the game. This upper limit can be continuously broken and surpassed; there is no compulsion in

the quest for limits—you can strive or lie flat, advance or slack off. As long as you innovate with integrity and play the game well, you will be richly rewarded, whether in material wealth or spiritual fulfillment. Ultimately, the height of our lives is determined by our exploration of freedom’s limits, built upon the foundation of a secure baseline. Infinite games still have a baseline, while finite games have no upper limit. Protect your baseline, break through your upper limits, achieve self-realization, and transcendence—this is the path of life’s evolution and the righteous way in the game of life.

5.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter begins with a fundamental conflict: the limitation of individual space-time resources versus the infinity of challenges and problems. There are three approaches to address this conflict: The Path of Elemental Change and Internal Optimization: Improve time management, enhance efficiency, streamline tasks, and upgrade modules to solve more problems within a given unit of time. The Path of Structural Change and Innovation: Introduce spatial thinking to replace temporal thinking, which helps to alleviate pressure and reduce burdens while also providing new perspectives and insights for problem-solving. The Path of Functional Change and Evolution: Engage in infinite games, using the logic of infinite games to complement the shortcomings of finite games. Mark the upper limits of freedom above the baseline of safety. Strive to learn, adhere to, construct, and transcend the rules. Ultimately, leave a Legacy that surpasses the individual and the constraints of space-time, and become a hero or Titan who integrates growth with transcendence.



Chapter 6: Task Management

Clear roadmaps dismantle stubborn resistance.

— Heath Brothers, Switch

Autonomism emphasizes action and problem-solving. In a sense, every problem is a task. While the previous chapter on "Space and Time Management" explored macro-level thinking, this chapter on "Task Management" delves into specific methods. It will further deepen and refine the discussion from the first section of the previous chapter, offering practical techniques and tools to address an urgent challenge faced by many young people today:

The conflict between slowly improving abilities and rapidly increasing tasks.

There are two approaches to resolving this conflict: one is to enhance abilities, and the other is to manage tasks. A combined approach involves focusing on upgrading your task management skills to improve task execution efficiency.

Unfortunately, task management, despite being a fundamental skill, is not formally taught in mainstream education and is left to individual insight and exploration. Even more regrettably, most young people fail to find the right methods, lacking the knowledge or understanding of how to manage tasks effectively, leading to overwhelming mental and physical burdens. They resemble sandbox game players without a game interface—confused, disorganized, scattered, and often resigned to frustration.

Over the past eighteen years, I have studied and researched task management extensively. My conclusion is: the essence of task management is behavior management. Task management is behavior management. Human behavior is highly complex, and so is task management. However, by referencing behavioral logic, task management does have some patterns to follow.

Generally, behavior involves the subject, the object (which could be oneself or external entities such as people, tasks, or things), and the medium (what one does, says, or thinks). Task management follows a similar structure, involving the subject, the object, and the medium. Additionally, behavior encompasses three components: cause (the cues that trigger the behavior), condition (the environment in which the behavior occurs), and consequence (the outcome of the behavior, which in turn triggers the next cycle of behavior). Task management also adheres to this logic, encompassing cause, condition, and consequence.

By combining these two sets of logic, three different approaches to task management can be derived: Checklistism (focusing on the object and cues of behavior), Essentialism (focusing on the subject and outcomes of behavior), and Effortlessness (focusing on the medium and environment of behavior). These approaches are progressively advanced. Let's begin with Checklistism.

6.1 Checklistism: Planning and Execution

Checklistism, which centers around the use of checklists, starts from the objects of behavior and focuses on initial cues. By providing necessary prompts through planning, Checklistism triggers specific task behaviors. It employs a simple and direct approach to encourage the occurrence of necessary actions, allowing us to take out a notebook, unload the burden of thinking, and instead enjoy the pleasure of action.

A checklist is the simplest and most effective tool against complexity and forgetfulness. Humans are highly forgetful, with thoughts fleeting in and out of mind. Since the human brain is often in an autopilot state, it's best to provide it with a clear checklist. This is especially important in complex environments where checklists can help prevent "knowledge errors"—mistakes made not due to a lack of knowledge, but due to poor application. Often, we know the right action to take, but in the rush of the moment, we either make a mistake or forget to act.

Checklists also represent the most basic form of human-machine collaboration. By thinking ahead and planning for the future, checklists enable conscious intentions of the

present to control the unconscious, non-volitional actions of the future across time and space. This control needs to be reinforced through external methods and tools.

Here are some specific methods and tools for Checklistism:

6.1.1 Classic Model: The GTD Paradigm and Its Core Principles

As previously mentioned, GTD (Getting Things Done) is the most classic task management tool based on Checklistism. It has two core principles:

Principle One: Capture Fragmented Thoughts.

As our elementary school teachers have taught us, "A good memory is not as reliable as a bad pen." GTD suggests that if a task can be completed within two minutes, you shouldn't waste time writing it down; just do it immediately. For tasks that take longer than two minutes, however, recording them is essential. Based on personal experience, recording can be divided into two steps:

Step One: Capture Cues. This is the basic operation. Most task management tools, designed on GTD principles, add new tasks to the "inbox" by default. Choose tools with clean and appealing interfaces, as recommended by design psychology authority Donald Norman, who states that beautiful things are easier to use. Due to the halo effect, people generally associate attractiveness with utility. Classic pen and paper, while elegant, are slower and not conducive to future searches, so they are not recommended as the main tool but can be used as a supplement.

Step Two: Classify Cues. This is an advanced operation. Generally, start by dividing cues into two main categories: **Concrete Task Cues:** Group related cues together for future processing, such as cues for book reading, journaling, or writing. **Abstract Module Cues:** These are insights about specific topics, such as methods for reading or writing. One type records data related to "What", and the other records algorithms related to "How". From there, further group cues based on personal needs, such as study, life, work, social, and public service for task cues, and groups like volition, ability, resources, security, and freedom for module cues. Categorizing and grouping

cues improves efficiency. I've adhered to this practice for a long time and have greatly benefited from it.

Principle Two: Define the Next Action (NA).

Transforming goals into tasks, and goal intentions into implementation intentions, hinges on clearly defining the next action—making behavior specific, contextualized, and operational. For instance, "I want to lose weight" should be refined to "Jog for 20 minutes every morning", and further refined to "Join the neighborhood running group". Based on personal experience, NA can also be divided into two steps:

Step One: Add Prompts. This is the basic operation. Recording is a means, while prompting is the goal. Prompting information can be generally categorized into time, space, subject, and object. Time cues work best as they align with linear thinking habits. Most task management software supports timed and recurring prompts. For tasks with clear time cues, set future single or recurring prompts. For tasks with unclear time cues, leave them in projects to be revisited later. To ensure these cues are not forgotten, set a timed task to periodically remind yourself to review project content. This process of setting reminder times and content is akin to programming for your future self—very interesting and effective. Good prompts can automatically trigger and support a series of positive behaviors, such as morning writing or daily reflection. Additionally, consider setting repetitive tasks for mental module iterations; I remind myself to review "Prometheus' Daily Checklist" each day, even if I don't always follow through, at least I don't completely forget it. Compared to time, cues like space, subject, and object may be less actionable. Prompts vary in effectiveness, so it's advisable to design a prompting system tailored to your needs.

Step Two: Optimize Prompts. This is an advanced operation. Considering that people are inherently lazy and unlikely to take all prompts seriously, especially complex ones, prompts should be presented in the simplest language and order to make tasks clear at a glance. Interaction design expert Larry Tesler, who invented the cut, copy, and paste functions, proposed the Law of Conservation of Complexity, which states that the total complexity of a problem remains constant. You must take on the complexity yourself to present simplicity to others. If the initial designer invests more time in optimizing the system and reducing complexity, then users will spend less time later. Conversely,

inadequate design input will lead to increased time spent by users. Task management follows the same principle—the more effort put in upfront, the more time saved later. To reduce the cognitive load of using task management software, prompt content can be improved and task descriptions optimized in three ways: **Simplify Titles:** Keep them under ten words, fitting into one line. **Add Descriptions:** Include specific task requirements for feasibility and measurability. **Attach Files and Create Links:** Some software provides internal linking and document attachment functions. While these might not significantly aid "what to do", they greatly assist in "what to think". Preparing "study materials" in advance makes subsequent thinking more manageable.

For those with higher expectations of themselves, consider trying the advanced GTD operations described above. For readers who are hesitant about complexity, start with the ACP trio: install an app (APP), capture cues (Clue), and add prompts (Prompt). Following these three steps will set you ahead of 80% of your peers.

6.1.2 Enhanced Model: The DCS Combo of Diary, Checklist, and Scale

While GTD is a classic approach, it struggles with adaptability to changes and can easily become routine, thus requiring improvements. Building on GTD, I developed an upgraded DCS combo—Diary, Checklist, and Scale—which can systematically and effectively iterate task content and update the task management system itself.

Diary: Reflect on the Past, Plan for the Future

Regularly schedule time for reflection, planning what to do, what should be done, and what you want to do. A diary not only records the past but also reflects on it, identifies problems, and proposes solutions, thereby better planning for the future. Once you've thought it through, add it to your checklist as a task or module cue, then categorize it into specific project groups.

The timing of writing a diary can be adapted to individual preferences. Some people prefer evening diaries, finding a quiet space, playing music, and writing about the day's successes and failures while planning the next day's goals and actions. Others prefer

morning diaries, combining the benefits of reflection with the advantages of the morning-centric approach, reviewing the previous day with a positive outlook and setting the tone for a new day. Most of the time, I write my diary in the evening, but with the morning-centric approach, I write morning diaries. In comparison, evening diaries focus more on reviewing the past and less on imagining the future, making them more pragmatic overall. Morning diaries, on the other hand, are more forward-looking and aspirational. Both have their pros and cons. My recommendation is to write your diary when you are most energized, allowing your volition to fully exert its influence.

For diary tools, choose ones that are quick, visually pleasing, and easy to use. Early on, I used the WW combo (Windows + Word) for diaries and notes, later switching to the MM combo (MacOS + Markdown). Now, I frequently switch between Windows and macOS, Word and Typora, and also use PowerPoint, Scapple, XMind, and a whiteboard with markers to create mind maps that visualize thought processes and enhance the depth and breadth of information processing.

Consistency in diary writing benefits from environmental support. Sticking to a daily diary routine is challenging. Despite my 30+ years of diary-writing "experience," I often forget or don't have time, requiring catch-up writing later. Daily diary writing to record, reflect, and plan is tough, so it's best to leverage environmental design to facilitate the habit—set a daily repeating prompt in your task checklist to remind and encourage yourself to keep at it, which is what I do, and I recommend others try it too. Set task titles like "Write diary for [specific date]", and in the task description, note the specific reflection questions along with relevant resources or links. Also, don't pressure yourself to have profound thoughts every day; just aim to have some reflection.

Checklist: Record Cues, Prompt Tasks

The checklist in the DCS combo serves the basic function of classic GTD. Unlike traditional methods, most of the checklist's task cues come from diary reflections and planning. Therefore, after each diary reflection, the checklist is updated. To keep this process orderly, I added a recurring task called "Refine Tomorrow's Plan," prompting

me to refine a clear daily schedule based on new cues from diary reflections and existing task cues.

The main operations for checklists include searching and editing. First, let's talk about searching—actively looking for tasks, which is crucial but often overlooked. Eventually, checklists will inevitably become overloaded, and at that point, indexes will be less effective than searches. Currently, my checklist functions as one of my external brains; when an important task comes to mind, I search and update the checklist. Searches can be based on specific keywords for previously entered information, or by directly reviewing tasks scheduled for today, tomorrow, the next seven days, or cues in the inbox or project groups. Each search naturally leads to further editing. Editing includes adding, updating, or deleting tasks. Adding and updating tasks are mainly based on diary reflections and spontaneous notes, either adding new tasks or updating old ones. Updating old tasks is crucial, as it keeps tasks current by simplifying, detailing, and quantifying them, and clarifying the next action. I almost always update the checklist every time I open it, reinforcing implementation intentions and boosting completion efficiency. Tasks can be deleted in two cases: when completed or when expired. A useful trick is to set most conditions-not-yet-met tasks to remind at a specific future time; if conditions are met by then, execute; if not, postpone; if no longer feasible, delete. However, people tend to equate planning tasks with completed tasks; once an idea is written down, the internal urgency to execute diminishes, leading to the Zeigarnik Effect fading. Thus, recording and delaying should be done in moderation.

For checklist tools, it's best to choose those with multiple clients for easy switching between computer, tablet, phone, app, and web, making task editing, searching, data backup, and synchronization more convenient. Don't overestimate your memory or self-discipline; instead, trust the system and environment. Two tips:

Position the Checklist Tool Prominently: On various devices, place the checklist tool's icon where it's visible and easily accessible. For instance, my task management app sits in the lower right corner of my phone screen, next to must-use tools like WeChat, making it the first thing I see when I pick up the phone, and accessible with a quick thumb tap. On a computer, keep it pinned to the desktop menu or taskbar.

Optimize System Notifications: I disable notifications for most apps, allowing only a few productivity tools like my checklist app to take over the screen and actively capture my attention.

Finally, here's a DC combo technique for diaries and checklists: For thought-oriented tasks (what to think), you can record your thoughts in the checklist, refine them in your diary, and then update them back in the checklist, forming a closed loop. This is a powerful advanced tool, and mastering it can accelerate your progress.

Example Workflow:

Step 1: Create a Task. Add a new task in your checklist titled "Think about optimizing the checklist system", with content detailing preliminary thoughts on how to optimize it, categorized under "Thinking Tasks", and set a reminder for October 1st.

Step 2: Update the Task. On September 31st, while organizing the next day's tasks, you see this reminder and incorporate the thinking task into the "October 1st Reflection Diary" as specific content.

Step 3: Execute the Task. On October 1st, according to the plan, you write the reflection diary, deepening your thoughts on optimizing the checklist system and identifying several areas for improvement.

Step 4: Update the Task Again. Break down actionable suggestions from the diary into new tasks added to the checklist, and copy the full thought process from the diary back into the checklist as a new thinking task, setting a reminder for November 1st.

Step 5: Repeat Execution. A month later, follow the reminder to think again and iterate. Beyond this, it becomes a continuous optimization process.

At one point, I had around 100-200 thinking tasks that would keep repeating and iterating, reminding me to think occasionally. Nowadays, these tasks still pop up regularly, but I no longer update them frequently, instead browsing quickly, reviewing, and waiting for inspiration—whether to package them into mental modules, quickly write articles, or compile them into books. "Daily Lessons of Prometheus" originated this way. You can also try breaking down the book you wish to create into numerous questions, load them into the DC system, and complete the writing step by step.

Scale: Data Analysis, Review, and Summary

The scale is the final step in the DCS loop. Over a decade ago, I learned about scale design from behavioral psychology textbooks and, inspired by figures like Benjamin Franklin and Zeng Guofan, gradually developed my own scale system through practical application.¹

I use Excel to record, analyze, and visualize my behavioral performance, reinforcing the behavior itself. My scale consists of individual scoring sheets, typically one per year. In recent years, I've significantly updated the scale mid-year, effectively creating two sheets per year. Occasionally, I also set up special sheets specifically designed to pull data from these scoring sheets for additional analysis and visualization.

Each scoring sheet's vertical axis represents time and dates, while the horizontal axis lists task indicators, primarily designed around personal goals and continuously updated based on diary reflections. Since the environment and behaviors are in constant flux, the indicators must also be updated regularly. My indicators usually range between 50-100 items. Indicators can monitor behavioral outcomes, such as "Reading", or assess psychological states, such as "Perseverance". Comparatively, observable behaviors and their results are better suited as indicators. Even psychological states should be measured as specific behaviors where possible, which is why I refer to these as behavioral scales. It's important to note that behavioral scales don't just list positive indicators; they can also include negative indicators—behaviors you want to eliminate.

The scoring sheet forms a grid, with each cell representing the performance score for a specific indicator on a given day. Ideally, the scoring criteria for all sheets are standardized to facilitate comparisons between different indicators and historical data.

¹ Zeng Guofan (November 26, 1811 – March 12, 1872) was a prominent Chinese statesman, military general, and philosopher who lived during the late Qing Dynasty. As an official, Zeng Guofan was known for his integrity, administrative skills, and commitment to reform. He advocated for modernization and the adoption of Western technologies and military tactics to strengthen China. He was also a key figure in the Self-Strengthening Movement, an effort to modernize China's military and industry. Zeng was a prolific writer, and his works cover a wide range of topics, including military strategy, governance, and personal self-cultivation. His personal diaries and letters provide valuable insights into his thoughts and the era in which he lived.

However, these criteria are continuously refined and improved, with updates occurring approximately once a year.

Within the standardized framework, I flexibly use four scoring methods, allowing different types of indicators to be compared and aggregated more effectively:

Score by Count: Primarily evaluates outcomes. For example, writing one article earns 1 point, writing two articles earns 2 points, and writing three articles earns 3 points.

Score by Time: Primarily evaluates the process. For example, one hour of writing earns 1 point, two hours earns 2 points, and three hours earns 3 points.

Score by Level: First, rate the behavior, then assign points. For instance, writing for one hour is a Level 1 performance, earning 1 point; writing for two to four hours is Level 2, earning 2 points; and writing for five to ten hours is Level 3, earning 3 points.

Qualitative Scoring: Based on binary outcomes—done or not done. If a task is completed, it earns 1 point; if not, it earns 0. For negative indicators (behaviors you wish to eliminate), you can either assign negative points, which are subtracted from the total, or assign positive points that are deducted at the end.

These scoring methods offer a structured and quantifiable way to monitor and refine your behaviors, driving continuous improvement and personal growth.

Simplified Behavioral Scale Template

	Positive Indicator 1	Positive Indicator N	Negative Indicator 1	Negative Indicator N	Total
Total Score							
Date X							
Date Y							
.....							

For beginners, the challenge with maintaining a behavior scale lies in consistency. The solution is to incorporate modules such as statistical analysis, visualization, and gamification to make completing the scale useful and enjoyable. **First, after setting up the scale and scoring, perform weighted aggregation and analysis.** When calculating the total score, you can introduce weights to adjust the overall impact of specific indicators. Analysis primarily involves making historical or cross-sectional comparisons of certain indicators, allowing insights to emerge—what's done well, what has improved, what's lacking, and what can be improved. **Second, if you're good at visual design, consider adding colors to your scoring table to make it more visually appealing, and create radar charts, line graphs, etc., turning the behavior scale into a personal data dashboard.** Third, if numbers and visuals aren't enough, you can introduce gamification rules, such as awarding titles or badges for consistent scoring on certain indicators. **Finally, you could set rules where accumulating a certain number of points earns you real-world rewards, such as converting scale points into cash bonuses that can be redeemed once a threshold is met.** Over time, the classic AB combination of conditioned reflexes will kick in—just as a dog salivates at the sound of a bell, you will look forward to interacting with the scale.

For intermediate users, the challenge with a behavior scale is keeping it updated. If the scale can't keep up with current realities, it becomes ineffective. The solution is to ensure the diary, task checklist, and behavior scale interact dynamically. The scale can provide content for diary reflections and prompts for the checklist. The checklist can prompt updates to the scale, and the diary can offer reference points for scale adjustments. For example, I set reminders like "Monthly Reflection" or "Annual Reflection" in the checklist. When executing these planned tasks, I first perform scale analysis, then diary reflection, and finally use the analysis and reflections to update both the scale and checklist. Repeating this process forms a self-reinforcing loop. In fact, the entire DCS combination borrows from game design logic: the diary component resembles a log interface in games, the checklist system is akin to a task interface, and the scale system functions like experience points and skill trees. The purpose of all this is to make our behaviors and feedback more visual, immediate, and quantifiable, thereby enhancing the efficiency of system iterations.

For advanced users, the challenge is efficiency. If you continuously run the diary, checklist, and scale loop, the scale can become overly bloated and complex, eventually encompassing everything with no clear focus—turning into a list of correct but abstract concepts. Each time you fill out the scale, it consumes a lot of time with little sense of accomplishment. As the cost-effectiveness of the scale declines, your motivation wanes. You may fill out the scale just for the sake of it, often forgetting to update it or only doing so every few days. Yet, you're reluctant to abandon it because, first, the initial investment was significant, leading to a sunk cost effect; and second, having a scale is still better than not having one, as even the most disciplined individuals need systemic oversight. I find myself in this situation now. The solution is to return to the core purpose and simplify the scale, allowing it to focus on its original intent of habit formation. Behavior scales are designed to shape behavior, helping us develop good habits and eliminate bad ones. Therefore, you need the will to make decisive cuts—identify the problems that have been solved, remove the corresponding indicators, and free up space to accommodate new challenges and indicators.

6.1.3 Supplementary Mode: WeChat as the Best Task Management Tool

Whether you accept it or not, WeChat is essentially a task management tool disguised as a messaging app. While other software prompts us on "what to do" or "what to think", WeChat prompts us on "what to say", "what to read", and "what to watch".

Firstly, "what to say". In everyday life, a large number of tasks involve conversations that cannot be easily incorporated into a task list. There are three reasons for this: first, there are too many of them, and recording each one would overload the task list; second, they're often too trivial, with the time spent recording the task potentially exceeding the time needed for the conversation itself; third, they're fragmented—conversations are often broken up into back-and-forth exchanges, making it impractical and inefficient to log them all at once. As a result, these conversation tasks are best kept within instant messaging tools, primarily WeChat.

I propose a bold hypothesis: each ongoing conversation in WeChat is an unfinished task. WeChat facilitates the initiation, continuation, and archiving of conversations,

effectively managing interaction tasks. A conversation task may never truly end, always presenting further opportunities for engagement. When a conversation is paused, you can use WeChat's "Remind" feature to prompt yourself to revisit the conversation at a specific future time. Once a conversation is complete, you can set the chat to "Hide" so it doesn't clutter your view, but remains accessible for future reference if needed.

Effectively using the combination of reminders and hiding conversations can help address three specific issues: First, when you send a message and the recipient doesn't respond immediately, you may worry that the conversation will be forgotten, leading to potential issues. In this case, you can long-press the message you sent, set a reminder for a future time, and hide the conversation until it's time to follow up. Second, if you receive a message but can't respond immediately, whether because you need time to think or you're busy with something else, you can set a future reminder and hide the conversation until you're ready to continue. Third, if you receive or send a message and have an initial idea but are still undecided, you can send the message to yourself or use the "File Transfer" feature, set a future reminder, hide the message, and revisit it later to make a decision. Other simple tasks that would typically be logged in a task list can be handled similarly.

Next, "what to read" and "what to watch". WeChat groups, official accounts, video channels, and Moments are primary sources of information for most people. WeChat's search function is also a valuable information channel. With the introduction of Tencent's LLM Yuanbao, these functions have been further enhanced. For these types of tasks, incorporating them into a traditional task list isn't feasible; instead, you can utilize WeChat's features such as bookmarking and reminders.

In summary, I recommend turning WeChat into a lightweight task management tool, as it's likely the task-related app you'll open most frequently. A reasonable approach is to use task lists for behavioral tasks and WeChat for conversational tasks—each serving its purpose and complementing the other.

6.2 Essentialism: Subtract and Focus on What Matters

Essentialism focuses on the subject of behavior, emphasizing the outcomes of tasks. Task management guided by essentialism involves evaluating tasks, categorizing, combining, and prioritizing them, allowing us to concentrate on the critical few and quickly address truly important people, tasks, and objects.

Greg McKeown, the "father of Essentialism," argues that as one's abilities and platforms improve, the number of tasks increases as well, necessitating choices. We are neither obligated nor capable of pleasing everyone. Essentialism, therefore, emphasizes prioritizing tasks that provide the most value to the individual, based on the limited time and energy available. Here are some ways to approach this:

6.2.1 Classic Model: The Eisenhower Matrix

The classic Eisenhower Matrix is widely recognized. Introduced by U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower, the core idea is to distinguish between the importance and urgency of tasks. A decisive leader with a military background, Eisenhower famously said, "What is important is seldom urgent, and what is urgent is seldom important."

The Eisenhower Matrix divides tasks into four quadrants:

Quadrant 1: Important and urgent tasks that need to be handled immediately, such as writing a speech for a meeting scheduled for tomorrow.

Quadrant 2: Important but not urgent tasks that can be delayed, like reading a book on official document writing.

Quadrant 3: Not important but urgent tasks that can be delegated, such as printing a report for your boss.

Quadrant 4: Not important and not urgent tasks that should not be handled, like forwarding a funny video to a friend.

The classic model is highly recommended as it has stood the test of time and can be adopted as a primary approach. However, it presumes that you are in a leadership position with the authority to delay, delegate, or dismiss tasks—a condition not applicable to most people in reality.

6.2.2 Enhanced Model: Task Matrix Based on the Theory of Autonomy

As a tribute to the classic model, I have developed a task matrix based on the factors of safety and freedom from the Theory of Autonomy. Follow my steps to try out this technique:

Step 1: Classification.

We start by qualifying tasks based on the need for safety, categorizing them as either mandatory tasks or optional tasks.

Mandatory tasks are the main storylines in the game of life that must be done; they are non-negotiable. Failing to do these tasks carries safety risks and negative consequences, ranging from mild reprimands to severe penalties like fines or imprisonment.

Optional tasks are side quests that can be done or not. Doing them may bring benefits, but skipping them carries no loss or safety risk.

We further evaluate tasks from the perspective of the pursuit of freedom, classifying them as high-value or low-value tasks.

High-value tasks provide substantial material or mental benefits.

Low-value tasks offer minimal benefits.

Step 2: Grouping.

By combining these classifications, all tasks can be divided into four groups. Using "P" to represent mandatory and high-value tasks, and "X" to represent optional and low-value tasks, we label the groups as follows:

PP Tasks (High-Value, Mandatory): These are the "golden tasks", like working for income or educating your children.

XP Tasks (High-Value, Optional): These are the "silver tasks", such as reading or learning new skills after work.

PX Tasks (Low-Value, Mandatory): These are the "burden tasks", like commuting to work or getting your boss a drink.

XX Tasks (Low-Value, Optional): These are the "junk tasks", such as endlessly scrolling through social media.

Step 3: Handling.

Based on the characteristics of each task, adopt different strategies for managing them. Below is a detailed explanation of each approach.

By following these steps, essentialism allows you to focus on what truly matters, cutting through the noise and honing in on tasks that align with your core values and priorities.

XX tasks are compounding errors and essentially worthless.

Any time spent on XX tasks is wasted and akin to self-destruction. The wise approach to XX tasks is to cut them off entirely through a "declutter and disconnect" strategy. Ideally, avoid listing them in the first place. If they are already on your list, delete them. If deleting feels daunting or you're hesitant, let them sit there but refrain from setting any specific deadlines or requirements—allow them to be forgotten, letting time prove their futility.

Many XX tasks are trivial matters imposed by others—unnecessary, lacking value, and acting as dark time-wasters. Especially once you've reached an elite level or higher, you'll find people wanting you to give talks or attend meals to leverage your reputation and influence for their own gain. These requests, which might have been XP tasks in your ordinary phase, now qualify as XX tasks and are best declined outright or ignored. Chris Anderson coined the term "strategic incompetence": to ensure you're never asked to do something again, it's best to botch it the first time. This extreme approach can be reserved for extreme situations.

PX tasks are burdensome obligations—tasks we dread but cannot avoid.

They resemble the seemingly pointless yet mandatory questions in the exam of life. As mandatory tasks, PX tasks are unavoidable and should be tackled sooner rather than later. Futurist Alvin Toffler once noted, "Every interval of time is worth more than the one before it, because theoretically, each subsequent interval can create more wealth." Simply put, tomorrow is always more valuable than today. Thus, delaying PX tasks to tomorrow only increases their cost and potential loss. Additionally, many PX tasks are assigned by organizations or superiors, and procrastination can lead to stress or even risk. Based on this, I propose three strategies to handle PX tasks. Ultimately, our varying approaches and attitudes toward PX tasks will determine the differences between us all.

Top strategy: Elevate and transform. If you're in a leadership position, consider transforming PX tasks into something valuable, turning them into PP tasks for yourself and XP tasks for others. For instance, a team leader could stop writing reports personally and instead teach team members how to write them. Thus, the PX task of writing reports becomes a PP task for the team members and an XP task for the leader.

Middle strategy: Outsource and delegate. Delegating PX tasks to underlings, tools, or robots is a privilege of leadership. Even if you lack political clout, you can utilize economic or social resources—pay someone or leverage your influence to have others endure what Milan Kundera called "the unbearable lightness of being".

Bottom strategy: Endure and grind. This involves enduring the toxic environment and even drawing nourishment from it to thrive. This strategy requires you to be adept at meaning-making, breathing life into these lifeless tasks. However, a downside of this approach is the risk of becoming poisoned, addicted, or stuck in a cycle of one PX task after another, leading to an obsession with work.

XP tasks are the beloved silver-tier tasks.

Everyone enjoys these experience-boosting XP tasks, often to the point of obsession. They are the DLCs of the hero's journey, the side quests and bonus rounds of life's

game. While they come with rewards and minimal pressure, they can be addictive and have their downsides. Getting caught up in the endless side quests can delay the main storyline and postpone the time it takes to claim your ultimate golden apple. Therefore, XP tasks should be managed in two ways:

1. Delay the tasks. Let things settle before taking action. Time may make some XP tasks urgent, promoting them to PP tasks, or render others worthless, demoting them to XX tasks, which can then be deleted or further postponed. If you're worried about forgetting, initially store XP tasks in your checklist or on WeChat, setting reminders to review them periodically and take action when appropriate.

2. Combine the tasks. Merge XP tasks with PX tasks to create PP tasks. For instance, between 2010 and 2023, I had to drive daily between Wenzhou and Yueqing, which took about two hours each day—a tedious and time-consuming PX task. Later, I started listening to TED talks while driving, transforming the experience by learning new knowledge, practicing listening skills, and making the drive more enjoyable and efficient. By combining driving (PX) and listening to talks (XP), I created a golden PP task.

Combining tasks follows two basic approaches: parallel and serial methods.

Parallel method links tasks through overlapping spaces. An example is the combination of driving and listening to lectures, where both actions occur within the same space, making them feasible together. To ensure compatibility and mutual enhancement in parallel tasks, avoid using the same sensory (e.g., sight, movement) or cognitive (e.g., judgment, decision-making) channels, as this would lead to competition for limited mental resources, causing inefficiencies where $1 + 1 < 2$. For example, driving and listening to a lecture use different channels (visual and auditory) and don't conflict. However, if you drive while watching videos, both use the visual channel, posing risks. Only a few tasks, such as listening to light music (an XP task), can seamlessly pair with almost any other task, increasing the rewards of the paired task. That's why tools like AirPods, which bring music everywhere, are seen as genius, and devices like Suno, which generate context-specific music, are treasured.

Serial method links tasks through a sequence in time. Reading followed by writing is a typical example of the serial method; reading first stimulates brain activity, making writing easier. Or, you might write a relatively simple journal entry first and then tackle a more challenging book draft, where the momentum from the former boosts the latter. To maintain momentum and carry forward the state between serial tasks, it's essential to adhere to the principles of minimal switching and least transition in design. For example, writing a journal entry followed by a book draft involves only switching themes, without changing tools, platforms, or environments, thus reducing transition costs. However, reading before writing involves changing both themes and tools, increasing the difficulty of the combination.

PP tasks are the critical gold-tier tasks.

PP tasks are your life's main storyline, determining the breadth and depth of your existence. Like PX tasks, PP tasks are mandatory, so they follow the principle that if something must be done, the sooner, the lower the cost and risk. Additionally, as high-value tasks, delaying PP tasks may lead to a decrease in their benefits. All value has a discount rate: the further away the realization, the less it's worth today. Moreover, the future holds uncertainties—the longer the delay, the greater the variables. Therefore, delaying PP tasks offers no advantages, only disadvantages. Based on this analysis, here are two suggestions for handling PP tasks:

Prioritize handling them. Pin PP tasks at the top of your task list and focus your efforts on executing them to the highest standard. Combine essentialism and excellence—essentialism focuses on doing only tasks worth 90 points or more, while excellence is about achieving at least 90 points in everything. In contrast, the satisficing strategy promotes an 80-point "good enough" approach, and idealists pursue a perfect 100 points. For those aiming to be elites and heroes, a 90-point standard is appropriate.

Handle them ahead of time. Advance PP tasks in your task list. Provided conditions are ripe, the earlier PP tasks are completed, the higher the benefits, the lower the costs, and the smaller the risks. For instance, had I possessed my current skills five years ago, I could have completed the writing and publication of Autonomy sooner, greatly

enhancing my career and enjoying long-lasting benefits. However, heed our qualifier "when conditions are ripe"—forcing growth can be detrimental. Ten years ago, I was not yet skilled enough; publishing a book then would have incurred higher time costs and lower quality.

Finally, if you have multiple golden tasks, there's no definitive rule for which to tackle first. Some advocate for optimal challenge and a growth mindset, believing that the young should take on the hardest tasks first. Others suggest a gradual approach, progressively raising the bar from easier tasks to build confidence. The former suits elite players; the latter fits beginners. I believe it's better to start with whichever task, rather than overthinking the order.

A well-designed random decision system can drive decisions and execution more efficiently than human systems reliant on emotions, cognition, and willpower. Effective design involves reviewing and optimizing a list of PP and XP options (like revising Autonomy), assigning probabilities (e.g., 10%), recording all in a mobile app (many such apps exist), and letting dice rolls decide what to do and for how long. Since all options are valid, just go with the flow. To maintain the "cutting edge" of the random decision system, consider adding a reminder in your task list to "update the random decision system", or even make this an option within the system—if it comes up, act on it. Evidence shows that the random decision mode is enjoyable and boosts execution efficiency.

If random decisions don't work, there are two other techniques recommended by experts: the 10-10-10 rule (consider how you'll view the task in 10 days, 10 months, and 10 years) and the "advice for a friend" technique (imagine your best friend is facing the decision—what advice would you give them?). Adopting a future or external perspective can help you quickly clarify your own choices.

6.2.3 Contingency Mode: Using Barbell and Leverage Strategies to Manage Uncertainty

However, the enhanced four-part task classification is based on the assumption of a "certain world", where each task's outcome and reward are definite, allowing us to

categorize and assess tasks based on their results. In reality, the world is uncertain, and judgments based on expected outcomes are like carving a mark on a moving boat to retrieve a dropped sword. We must confront the awkward truth that task categorization also involves significant uncertainty. Two major flaws can undermine this seemingly perfect task matrix:

Flaw 1: Ambiguity in Task Classification. The boundaries between PP, XP, PX, and XX tasks are blurred. In practice, distinguishing between safety and freedom is challenging. First, the definitions of safety and freedom are inherently abstract. Second, the criteria for safety and freedom shift with changing circumstances, making it difficult to categorize tasks clearly as essential or optional, high-value or low-value. In real life, essential and optional tasks are often relative and may even switch roles under specific conditions. For example, if your father promises to buy you a house if you pass the civil service exam, then your job becomes an optional task, and studying after work becomes essential. Moreover, differences in worldviews, life philosophies, and values lead to varying standards for task evaluation. Even with unified values, precise targeting of cognitive limitations can still pose challenges. Humans excel at relative comparisons but struggle with absolute estimations. Even when comparing relative values, people are better at discerning good from bad rather than distinguishing between excellent and superior. For instance, if your father urges you to pursue a civil service career but you only have time for one option, should you choose a civil service job in a small hometown or a public institution position in a nearby big city? It's hard to say. In practice, we can't foresee the future, making it impossible to categorize tasks definitively as essential or optional, high-value or low-value from a future perspective.

Flaw 2: Plasticity in Task Classification. In practice, present choices affect the future, and current actions shape what comes next. Essential tasks left undone may degrade into optional tasks; side quests pursued excessively might solidify into main plotlines. It seems that all tasks adhere to existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre's principle in Being and Nothingness that "existence precedes essence." For instance, in early 2020, I led a group of young people in donating masks to those around us. Initially, we thought it was a trivial task, just spending money to give away masks, something we'd do once and forget. But this small act turned into a significant event with our persistent efforts, eventually winning us the prestigious 2020 China Social Enterprise Award. We were

one of only four groups honored, alongside renowned organizations like the SEE Foundation and the business schools of Cheung Kong and China Europe International. Today, we continue our aid efforts, becoming the largest private Chinese force supporting Palestinian refugees in Gaza during 2023-2024. As Robert Frost wrote in "The Road Not Taken": "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and sorry I could not travel both... I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."

To handle the uncertainty in task classification, we can integrate the barbell strategy and leverage combination discussed in the "Risk Management" chapter. Here's a simplified approach:

Initial Sorting: Use past experience to predict, classify, and rate tasks into PP, XP, PX, and XX categories.

Task Consolidation: Directly cut out the XX tasks. Merge the remaining PP and PX tasks into exploitation tasks (focus-driven), and group XP tasks as exploration tasks (experiment-driven).

Time Allocation: Apply the barbell strategy to allocate time wisely between these two types of tasks. I suggest three potential approaches: **Option 1: 80/20 Split:** This is the default ratio of the barbell strategy—spend 80% of your time on mandatory tasks assigned by others (exploitation tasks) and use the remaining 20% for self-chosen, optional tasks (exploration tasks). This approach might sound familiar—it's akin to Google's famous "20% time", credited with fostering innovations like Gmail through an encouragement of creativity. **Option 2: 50/50 Split:** Simplify the logic further by dedicating half the day to 3-5 essential tasks (exploitation tasks) and the other half to randomly experimenting (exploration tasks), aiming for serendipitous breakthroughs. I've tried working intensively during office hours and then relaxing completely with no laptop at home, enjoying spontaneous exploration. **Option 3: Rule of Three:** Focus on just three essential tasks (exploitation tasks) each day until 3 PM, ensuring a baseline income. The rest of the time, employ a random decision system, toss dice, and let exploration tasks flow freely, seeking new opportunities. This method suits those with flexible work hours.

As for whether exploitation or exploration tasks take precedence, the answer is context-dependent. In a relatively certain world or era where problems and solutions are clear, knowing where the treasure lies makes exploitation tasks more efficient. However, in an increasingly uncertain world or era, where both problems and solutions are vague, exploration tasks become more valuable. The ancients wisely said, "Contemplating all day is not as valuable as learning in a moment," and "One conversation with a wise person surpasses ten years of study." MIT's Alex Pentland, Director of the Human Dynamics Laboratory, describes it in scientific terms: "Mathematical models of learning in complex environments suggest the optimal strategy is to spend 90% of your effort exploring—seeking and emulating those who excel—while the remaining 10% should be devoted to individual experimentation and deep reflection." Ultimately, regardless of which type of task carries more weight, a mixed strategy—balancing exploitation and exploration—is always superior.

Regarding task sequencing, it's akin to the chicken-or-egg dilemma—hard to pinpoint. However, what's certain is that exploration tasks should generally precede exploitation tasks, and exploitation should follow exploration. From an energy perspective, the ideal daily arrangement starts with deep work, tackling tough challenges (exploitation tasks), followed by surfing through easier, novelty-seeking activities (exploration tasks). Combined with a morning-centric approach, this pattern is even more effective: focus intensely in the morning when energy is high, then drift into exploratory activities in the afternoon as energy wanes.

To cap off this section, here's a special bonus: a hybrid task management "**Five-Step Method**" combining checklist and essentialism. **Record:** Write down everything, with detailed notes. **Prompt:** Don't rely solely on memory—set recurring reminders for important tasks. **Cut:** Eliminate tasks that are optional or have low returns. **Delegate:** Postpone uncertain tasks and outsource what can be handled by tools or other people. **Focus:** Concentrate on key tasks and put in the effort to create excellence. When undecided, let random decisions guide you.

6.3 Effortlessism: Reducing Costs, Maximizing Gains

One of my favorite lines from the Chinese commentary in the FIFA video game is, "You must work very hard to make it look effortless". I resonate deeply with this statement. Indeed, to achieve ease, one must first exert effort. To win effortlessly, one must first push through the grind. Success doesn't fall from the sky. Proactive effort in the early stages paves the way for a relaxed, effortless state later. Autonomism emphasizes the law of conservation of complexity: if you want to win before the game even starts, you need to get a head start, beginning before the beginning, putting in the hard work where others can't see, and focusing on asymmetric transformation.

Greg McKeown, after writing Essentialism, later authored Effortless, advocating an upgrade from essentialism to effortless living. His concept of effortlessness encompasses three dimensions: effortless state, effortless action, and effortless results, along with a series of practical suggestions.

In my view, Checklistism focus on the objects and cues of behavior, essentialism centers on the subject and outcomes of behavior, while Effortlessism emphasizes the methods and environment of behavior. Effortlessness should focus on redesigning tasks, including behavioral and environmental design.

Based on McKeown's insights and my own experiences, here are three recommendations:

6.3.1 Shift Mindset, Find the Right Direction

Sometimes we get stuck in a quagmire of tasks, not due to a lack of effort but because our efforts are misdirected. This requires a shift in mindset, with a focus on five key directions:

Direction 1: Find the Intersection of Important Problems and Easy Solutions. Important matters can also have simple solutions. Easier methods always exist; we just haven't explored them. By liberating our minds and letting go of our obsession with complex solutions, we open up opportunities to discover simpler, more effortless paths—always seek the easiest path. Strive to make the heavy lifting feel light.

Direction 2: Find the Intersection of Important Tasks and Enjoyable Experiences.

If not for making life a bit easier for each other, what's the point of living? For truly important tasks, if we can "enjoy" them, why "endure" them? We should provide rewards and reinforcements for important tasks, reduce the delay between action and reward, and introduce gamification and rituals, such as making phone calls while showering or singing while cleaning.

Direction 3: Find the Intersection of Effort and Results. Overexertion can lead to diminishing returns. There is a "law of diminishing returns": once effort surpasses a certain threshold, additional effort no longer yields better results and can even harm performance. I rarely fail because I didn't try hard enough; I often fail because I tried too hard. Therefore, it's essential to set reasonable goals and avoid overexertion.

Direction 4: Find the Intersection of Personal Ability and Task Difficulty. When personal ability aligns with task difficulty, flow states occur, leading to immersive and satisfying experiences. Avoid unnecessary embellishments and start with the basics. Pushing oneself too hard when basic knowledge isn't yet mastered often backfires. Goals far beyond one's current ability level can serve as benchmarks, making other tasks seem less daunting and thereby increasing task execution rates (a concept we discussed in the preface as structural procrastination).

Direction 5: Find the Intersection of Minimal Effort and Maximum Compounding. Some actions yield repeated benefits from a single effort. Focus on such tasks. First, understand fundamental principles and creatively combine them to unlock adjacent possibilities for compounded returns. The concept of first principles thinking also aligns with this logic. Second, incorporate technology tools to automate as many important steps and tasks as possible, leveraging the compounding effects of technology. Investments in information tools usually yield substantial returns. Third, build a trust-based team to foster collective collaboration, tapping into the compounding benefits of group intelligence. Lastly, tackle structural problems and invest time in actions with long-term effects, reaping benefits over extended periods.¹

¹ Adjacent Possible is a concept from biology and innovation theory, initially proposed by biologist Stuart Kauffman. It describes the potential, unexplored states or structures within any given complex system—such as biological evolution, scientific progress,

These principles help shift the effort from intense, unsustainable pushes to strategically planned, effortless progress, allowing for sustainable growth and improved overall outcomes.

6.3.2 Transforming Spaces to Facilitate Action

Human behavior is more influenced by the environment than by personal traits, making environmental redesign the key to reducing costs and increasing efficiency. Effective environmental design is a unique task that lowers the difficulty, increases the rewards, and mitigates the risks of other tasks on your checklist.

Space is a crucial element of the environment, and we can enhance desired behaviors by modifying spatial elements. Here are three practical insights from personal experience:

Insight 1: Create Private Spaces for Deep Work. Many successful creators find private spaces for their deep work tasks. For example, J.K. Rowling wrote Harry Potter in luxury hotels, bestselling author Daniel Pink built a small cabin in his backyard, and another prominent figure prefers writing on airplanes. Everyone has a different definition of a private space, and it can vary by location. I once spent a stretch of time studying, reading, and writing in a city library daily at noon or in the evening, which proved highly productive. You can even gamify this process by turning the search for private spaces into a task with scheduled reminders on your checklist. Besides physical spaces, there are virtual spaces—simply using AirPods with Suno can create a soundscape that makes a personal space wherever you go.¹

technological innovation, or artistic creation—that can be reached by recombining existing elements. First Principles Thinking is a method of deep analysis and problem-solving that requires breaking down a problem into its most fundamental truths or assumptions and then reconstructing solutions from these basics. Elon Musk is a well-known advocate of first principles thinking, frequently using this approach to drive innovation and development at companies like SpaceX and Tesla.

¹ Soundscape is a concept from sound environment and sound ecology that describes the total collection of sounds heard in a specific place at a particular time. This concept emphasizes the role of sound in shaping our perception and emotional experience of the environment. Soundscape is closely linked to soundscape ecology, a field that studies sound environments and how humans interact with them. By understanding and improving soundscapes, we can enhance quality of life, protect the environment, and

Insight 2: Minimize Noise and Increase Trigger Cues. While private spaces separate us from others, further tweaking of the space's elements is needed. The basic principle is to minimize cues that may trigger unintended behaviors by increasing the initiation cost of such actions while enhancing cues that prompt intended behaviors, thereby lowering their initiation cost. Since we can't always monitor our task management apps, environmental cues need to prompt us to start our tasks. For instance, if you want to read more and use your phone less, place books you want to read within easy reach and put your phone far away on charge. Remember the simple yet effective "20-second rule": if it takes 20 seconds to get to your phone, most people will give up. Conversely, if reading can be initiated within 20 seconds, the likelihood of engaging in reading significantly increases.

Insight 3: Leverage Unexpected Elements for Serendipity. Our lives are full of surprises, many of which are unavoidable, so space design should consider preemptively creating Ulysses Pact with yourself and others, turning these surprises to your advantage. Recall the story of Odysseus: when designing space, ensure safety but allow some openness to increase the frequency of positive surprises while reducing negative ones. For instance, for tasks requiring creativity, exploring outdoor spaces with the flow of people can spark inspiration. Similarly, if you're looking to date, spend more time in places frequented by attractive people.

6.3.3 Managing Timing to Seize Opportunities

I used to believe that timing was everything. Now I believe that everything is timing.

This quote from Daniel Pink's When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing deeply resonates with me.

To enhance task management and execution efficiency, making heavy tasks feel light, it's essential to not only set the right direction and modify your space but also seize the

deepen our perception of the world around us. I first encountered this concept in 2017 in the book Sound Explosion, published by Cheers Publishing, which had a profound impact on me.

right moments—doing the right things at the right times. Human performance varies significantly between peak and low states, with a difference of up to 20%, similar to the effects of being under the influence of alcohol. Timing Management posits that when you do something (When) matters more than how you do it (How). Here are three insights to consider:

Insight 1: Align with Your Biological Clock. Different tasks are suited to different times of the day. Generally, morning tasks should include drinking water, getting sunlight, and exercising. If possible, start your day early with the morning-centric approach, focusing on reading and writing. Research shows that early risers are three times more prevalent among creators than night owls. As mentioned earlier, mornings are when you're most energized, making them ideal for deep work and effective communication, better suited for exploitative tasks (PP and PX). Lunch should be a good meal, followed by a 10-minute nap if possible, which can sustain a positive state for up to three hours. In the afternoon, as energy levels decline, it's better to engage in divergent thinking, making exploratory and creative tasks (XP) more suitable. While energy may slightly recover in the evening, avoid making major decisions, especially late at night. History, practice, experiments, and autonomous reasoning repeatedly remind us that willpower is weakest at night, making us prone to mistakes and setbacks. Before bedtime, consider journaling or summarizing your day, revisiting daily rituals for a positive end to your day.

Insight 2: Embrace Restorative Breaks. During waking hours, the ideal work-to-rest ratio is 3:1. Restorative breaks can reset your state; those who understand rest achieve higher efficiency. Beyond lying down, there are three types of restorative breaks: **Micro-Movements:** Moving around is more effective than sitting still. If you like to move, take five-minute walks every hour, pretending you're outdoors for better results. If you want to take it easy, drink more water—needing to use the restroom frequently will force you to get up. **Social Rest:** Engage in conversations; as social creatures, humans recover better in groups than alone. If you prefer a more relaxed approach, just open WeChat and chat briefly with someone interesting—it's a quick way to recharge. **Mental Breaks:** Step away from complex tasks to meditate or reflect, fully clearing your mind. If you prefer taking it easy, simply lie down. Restorative breaks are my weak spot; influenced by traditional education, I subconsciously view rest as laziness,

often pushing myself to work a little harder or hang in there a bit longer, only to end up overworked and underproductive. Easier said than done—let's encourage each other to improve.

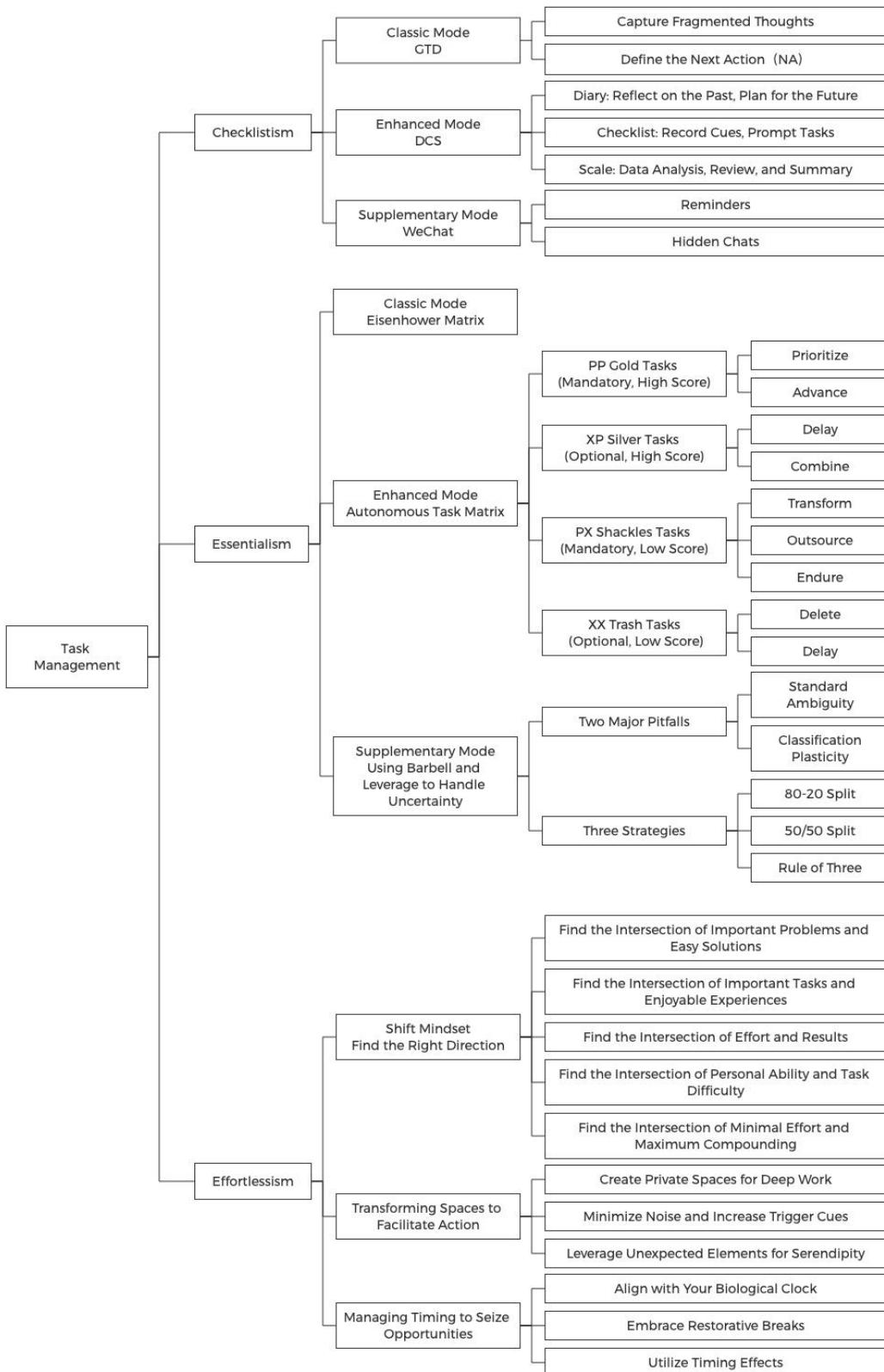
Insight 3: Utilize Timing Effects. There are indeed intriguing timing effects that we can harness when designing tasks by setting important milestones to boost motivation:

The Fresh Start Effect: People tend to be more enthusiastic and efficient during the first day of the week, the first day of the month, the first day of the year, or the first day after a birthday. Use these moments to launch important tasks and boost execution rates.

The Midpoint Effect: Milestones also ignite enthusiasm; you can set multiple intermediate milestones for important tasks, turning them into action-triggering points to maintain high energy throughout the process. **The Fast Finish Effect:** Nearing a goal, people tend to accelerate, significantly boosting efficiency. Reading a book often feels faster towards the last few pages. You can break tasks into segments, transforming a marathon into multiple sprints to reap the benefits. **The “9-Ender” Effect:** At ages ending in 9 (e.g., 19, 29, 39, 49), people feel more urgency and the impulse to do something, possibly even things they've never done before, to push themselves to the next level.

6.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter shares my task management experiences across three levels: Checklistism: Using checklists for recording and planning ensures nothing is forgotten, focusing on tool discussions. Essentialism: Prioritizing and grading tasks to focus on what's most important and effective, with an emphasis on methods. Effortlessism: Reducing costs and boosting efficiency by identifying the right direction, designing spaces, and seizing the right timing, focusing on principles. I hope you choose the appropriate modules based on your current situation to build a task management system that suits you, promoting positive actions and yielding more favorable outcomes.



Chapter 7: Energy Management

Eat when hungry, sleep when tired.

— Great Pearl Wisdom Sea, *The Sayings of Zen Master Da Zhu*

Energy management affects willpower intensity and emotional state, thus directly influencing autonomous will. It is closely linked with autonomous resources, and at its core, energy management is about managing the body. Body management prioritizes constraints, as the body is the foundation of everything—without it, time is nonexistent.

Autonomy values longevity; the length of autonomy is just as important as its depth. Longevity provides more time to pursue pleasure, flow, and meaning, and to leave behind legacies such as descendants, works, and other extensions of oneself.

Technological advancements may eventually create long-lived or even immortal beings. If you live long enough, you can accumulate enough wealth to afford the costs of bodily repair (examinations, diagnostics, treatments, rehabilitation) and enhancement (artificial organs, exoskeletons, brain-computer interfaces, and even genetic modifications), thus gaining more time. This additional time will lead to greater autonomy, and in turn, more autonomy will yield more time, creating a mutually reinforcing cycle.

Therefore, the goal of energy management is to maintain vitality and prolong life. However, the gap between ideal and reality is significant. For most people, the current state of energy management is marked by exhaustion and premature decline.

If successful energy management is a process of positive reinforcement, then poor energy management is a process of negative deterioration. Continuous depletion of

energy accelerates aging, brings diseases such as cancer earlier, and may lead to poverty, affecting oneself and family. Poverty, in turn, further shortens life expectancy. Ultimately, the depletion of energy and loss of time lead to the demise of autonomy.

Thus, autonomous individuals must address a critical issue:

The conflict between ambitious goals and limited energy.

Theoretically, there are two approaches to energy management: first, conservation—managing the demand side by adopting a non-interventionist approach, refraining from excess, embracing simplicity, and being content, thus reducing energy expenditure. Second, expansion—supply-side reform through proactive engagement, investing in the body, and fully committing oneself, thereby increasing energy supply. In practice, energy management requires a combined strategy, focusing on expansion while conserving resources to establish a rhythmic balance between energy consumption and recovery, ensuring a relatively stable energy reserve.

Unfortunately, energy management, though seemingly simple, is complex and challenging to implement. Many people only grasp it partially or abandon it halfway; only a few truly understand and persist. The underlying issue is that energy management is a systemic endeavor—simple on the surface, but complex within.

The foundation of energy management is the body. Innate genes determine potential, while the environment determines the realization of that potential. While you cannot change your current genetic makeup, you can harness your initiative to actively adjust your environment, thereby activating different expressions of your genes and enabling varying levels of energy.

However, the mismatch between genes and environment poses significant challenges to energy management. Evolutionary biologist Daniel Lieberman points out that the human body, which evolved during the Paleolithic era, struggles to adapt or fully adapt

to certain modern behaviors and environmental conditions, leading to mismatch diseases.¹

Diseases of Affluence: In the feast-or-famine conditions of the Ice Age, genes favoring overeating and fat accumulation were advantageous. In today's world of abundant high-calorie foods, these same genes contribute to obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and other issues.

Diseases of Disuse: Humans did not evolve an instinct for exercise. In the past, survival necessitated constant movement, while rest meant conserving energy. This trait has persisted, giving rise to the "couch potato" phenomenon, leading to weakened bodily functions, reduced immunity, muscle atrophy, and osteoporosis.

More profound than diseases of affluence and disuse is the inevitable aging and death of our bodies. As we age, chronic conditions, often referred to as "diseases of aging," will inevitably undermine our energy foundations. If you live long enough, cancer will eventually become your constant companion.

Young individuals seeking autonomy must pay attention to their energy and physical health. Before reaching the midlife energy divide, they must recognize the three towering challenges ahead—diseases of affluence, disuse, and aging—acknowledge the reality of struggling against the current, and prepare early.

I believe that energy (and the body) is primarily influenced directly by behaviors such as breath, sleep, eat, and exercise, and indirectly by psychological factors such as emotion, cognition, and volition. Practical approaches to both expansion and conservation involve various combinations of these seven factors. Tailor your strategies to your specific circumstances and innovate accordingly.

¹ Daniel Lieberman is a renowned biology expert, a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Chair of the Department of Human Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University. His research spans multiple disciplines, including paleontology, anatomy, physiology, and experimental biomechanics, and he is well-known for his studies on the evolution of the human head and body. Lieberman combines laboratory research with frequent fieldwork. His books, *The Story of the Human Body* and *Exercised*, have garnered significant attention and acclaim.

7.1 Behavioral Direct Interventions

7.1.1 Breath

Breathing is the most basic way to restore energy. From a physiological perspective, energy comes from the chemical reaction between oxygen and blood sugar. Breathing provides the oxygen and energy needed to sustain life. You can try the following restorative breathing techniques:

Resting Breathing: Stop, be still, and feel your breath. Doing nothing reduces expenditure, and mindfully experiencing your breath and the state of being alive enhances energy recovery. This is called the "Sacred Pause" method, where you consciously pause, pay attention to your breathing and bodily sensations, and try to return to the present moment.

Slowed Breathing: If you can't stop, then extend your exhalation. Generally, rhythmic breathing techniques such as deep breathing and abdominal breathing can help regulate the body's state.

Reflective Breathing: Close your eyes and reflect on yourself. Use the Prometheus Daily Checklist as an index, reviewing the 26 gestures and corresponding mental modules while breathing to check if you are living by them. Alternatively, you can use an audio version and listen while breathing.

Meditative Breathing: Meditation is often touted as transformative, with claims that long-term practice can lead to structural changes in the brain. Though it is uncertain how effective these claims are, meditation may have a placebo effect. Some sources even suggest "5 minutes of meditation equals one hour of deep sleep," which can be taken with a grain of salt—"believe it if you will." If you choose to try, it's best to avoid doing it in the bedroom.

7.1.2 Sleep

The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer eloquently remarked, "Each day is a small life: every waking and rising a little birth, every fresh morning a little youth, every going to

rest and sleep a little death. " To make the most of each "small life", it's best to understand, adapt to, and even optimize your circadian rhythm, especially focusing on managing sleep, which is a major yet often overlooked aspect of life. The circadian rhythm dictates that the body goes through several peaks and troughs of energy throughout the day. Ideally, one should rest briefly every 90 to 120 minutes to maintain optimal energy levels, although in practice this is often difficult due to subjective forgetfulness and objective constraints. Thus, prioritizing sleep is crucial, as it is an investment in longevity and the primary way to replenish energy. Sufficient sleep is essential to restore physical, mental, and motivational stamina. Without proper sleep, the brain's parietal and prefrontal cortex loses 12-14% of glucose, and after 24 hours of sleep deprivation, overall glucose levels in the brain drop by 6%.

Here are three key points regarding sleep: **Avoid making decisions when sleep-deprived (reiterating an important point).** Working late into the night and without sufficient breaks leads to inefficiency and poor decision-making. The longer you work late, the less effective you become, and the more prone you are to errors. **Don't wait until you're sleepy to go to bed.** Feeling sleepy is a sign that your body is already quite fatigued. **Don't count on catching up on sleep to be effective.** Studies show that irregular sleep patterns during weekdays and oversleeping on weekends can further disrupt your biological rhythm.

To restore energy through sleep, focus on three main practices:

Early to bed, early to rise: Avoid staying up late; aim to go to bed early, ideally before you start feeling sleepy. For most people, the optimal time to fall asleep is between 9 PM and 11 PM, ensuring you are asleep between 10 PM and 2 AM to maximize melatonin and human growth hormone (HGH) secretion, which repairs, restores, and strengthens the body. The brain also undergoes a cleaning process during sleep, effectively clearing waste and toxins produced by metabolism. Moreover, going to bed early enables early rising, allowing you to start the day positively with morning learning. Some additional tips: sleep in 90-minute cycles (e.g., 6 or 7.5 hours) for better results, keep water by your bedside to drink upon waking, place your phone at a distance to encourage getting up, and if possible, engage in some morning exercise—even a few minutes can significantly boost your energy levels. Lastly, have

breakfast after morning learning, as digestion is one of the most energy-intensive activities the body performs daily; eating too much can lead to fatigue.

Take a midday nap: Napping helps reset your system, effectively turning one day into two. NASA's studies on combating fatigue found that a 40-minute nap can boost performance by 34% and lead to complete alertness. Harvard researchers also found that participants in multi-tasking experiments who took a 1-hour nap regained peak performance levels. Ideally, keep naps to about 15 minutes. A 90-minute sleep cycle includes the stages of falling asleep, light sleep, deep sleep, and rapid eye movement (REM, typically associated with dreaming). Napping beyond 30-40 minutes may push you into the deep sleep stage, making waking up a disorienting experience that leaves you feeling weaker than before. Alternatively, aim for a full 90-minute nap. Countries and cultures that embrace midday naps tend to have better academic performance, likely due to improved energy levels and the involvement of dreams in emotional processing and memory consolidation. Additionally, learning to appreciate sleep and dreams, making a conscious effort to leave time for dreaming, can be highly rewarding. Dreams offer a unique, self-generated form of sensory input—brain auto-generated content (BAGC)—which can surpass any game or movie in richness and enjoyment. Embrace dreams, enjoy the narratives, release emotions, and gain inspiration.

Sleep whenever you feel like it: The stigma attached to sleep behavior from traditional agricultural societies has left many feeling guilty about sleeping, including myself; I often try to stay up longer, subconsciously believing that going to bed early is lazy. It's important to dispel this misconception and overcome any psychological barriers to sleep, treating it as a right and dreaming as a benefit. Try shifting from "sleep when tired" to "sleep whenever possible". Sleep is a catalyst for resolving all sorts of problems; when you're not feeling well, take a nap, and resume work with a clearer mind. The more you sleep, the better your state and efficiency, leading to even more sleep and a positive cycle. Don't rush; sleep your way to a better future—this is the path to effortless success. Of course, to achieve "sleep whenever you feel like it", you need to lay the groundwork in advance. Where time allows, ensure you address the practicalities of sleeping anywhere. In an office setting, consider equipping yourself with a lightweight and comfortable folding bed, along with an eye mask, earplugs, and a neck pillow, making sure not to elevate your head too much. If possible, have a

dedicated sleeping area. Additionally, pay attention to your sleeping posture, maintaining spinal stability—side sleeping is best and can become a habit. Sleep is also linked to diet, particularly magnesium intake (eating bananas), as deficiency can lead to chronic insomnia. Insomnia contributes to obesity, which in turn disrupts sleep, creating a vicious cycle.

7.1.3 Eat

Our bodies are shaped by what we eat and what we don't eat. While there are many kinds of food, they all essentially consist of different combinations of six major nutrients: water, carbohydrates (including dietary fiber), proteins (complete, semi-complete, incomplete), fats, vitamins, and minerals (macronutrients and trace elements). Some believe that natural nutrients are better absorbed by the body than synthetic ones and that natural ingredients are superior to artificial ones. I am skeptical of these claims, as well as the concepts of "organic" and "wild" foods. Often, older family members may lack scientific understanding and suggest what is or isn't nutritious, but young people shouldn't make such errors. A diet that supports energy recovery and enhancement should focus on balanced nutrition and regular, moderate intake. Here are some common dietary concerns:

Drink Water in Moderation: Both men and women are essentially made of water. Muscles that lack 3% water can lose 10% of their strength and 8% of their speed. Drinking plenty of water can prevent constipation and encourage frequent movement, like walking to the bathroom, thus avoiding prolonged sitting. However, excessive water intake can dilute blood, increase blood volume, and place extra strain on the heart. It is recommended to consume around 2,000 milliliters of water per day (about four bottles of mineral water or ten cups). Most of this should be from what you drink, with a smaller portion from food. Tea lovers should exercise moderation, as excessive tea consumption can stress the kidneys and lead to stones. Caffeine intake should also be moderate, as it can lead to dependency and affect sleep quality. As for alcohol, aside from its social benefits, it generally offers no health advantages and should be limited. Social drinking often involves heavy eating and late-night activities, which can be detrimental. Thus, try to minimize social drinking, and when unavoidable, focus on

drinking water, engaging in conversation, and limiting food and alcohol intake to avoid turning your body into a disposal site for excess food.

Control Sugar Intake: Sugars, which include carbohydrates such as various grains, can cause significant spikes and drops in blood sugar levels, stressing the pancreas and potentially leading to insulin resistance and diabetes. The hypothesis that human intelligence surged due to fruit consumption and population growth due to grains also acknowledges the issues of mismatch diseases like chronic inflammation caused by excessive sugar intake. Controlling sugar intake means minimizing simple sugar consumption to ease the burden on the liver and avoid obesity. Foods high in simple sugars mainly include rice, rice noodles, bread, pasta, and other refined starch products. Interestingly, older generations often remove a few sugar cubes from the young ones' soy milk at breakfast, only to serve them large bowls of white rice or a couple of steamed buns, thinking it's healthy and even claiming, "Ginseng can't beat the essence of rice" (a Wenzhou saying), which is quite amusing.

Consume Fish and Meat: Fish and meat are rich in proteins and fats. Fat, which contains the highest energy content in the human body, serves four main functions: maintaining normal body weight, protecting internal organs and joints, moisturizing the skin, and providing energy. Particularly stigmatized cholesterol is a precursor for sex hormones and norepinephrine, and a lack of cholesterol is a root cause of physical and mental aging. Typically, fats should comprise 15%-30% of total food energy. Unfortunately, many people trying to lose weight mistakenly think they need to avoid fats, leading to health issues. It's advisable to avoid trans fats (like margarine) and embrace saturated fats (from animal sources like beef and pork), unsaturated fats (from fish and seafood), and cis fats (from plant oils). Indeed, increasing protein intake can enhance weight loss and improve blood lipid levels, as proteins and healthy fats encourage the pancreas to produce more glucagon, which stimulates the breakdown and burning of stored fatty acids. If constipation is a concern with this approach, consider the "three high, one low" approach (high protein, high fat, high fiber, low sugar) by moderately increasing vegetable and fruit intake.

Eat More Fruits and Vegetables: Increasing fruit and vegetable intake provides not only dietary fiber but also supports the proliferation of beneficial gut bacteria. The

human gut, often referred to as the "second brain", contains about 3 kilograms of bacteria that communicate with the brain through the vagus nerve, the longest nerve in the neural network—90% of the fibers in the vagus nerve are responsible for this communication. Gut bacteria can affect mood as they help produce neurotransmitters like serotonin. Proper probiotic intake can improve mood and cognitive functions, making individuals more optimistic and socially engaged. This process is also influenced by sleep, and in turn, gut health affects sleep. A balanced vegetarian diet, with a variety of foods and appealing flavors, can be sustainable in the long term. The basic principle is that the more variety and colors, the better—combine whole grains, beans, vegetables, fruits, etc. I once ordered vegetable salads for work lunches, and after a while, my weight decreased noticeably, and my energy levels improved.

Eat Smaller, More Frequent Meals: Some believe that even the most nutritious food may not support 4-8 hours of high performance, so eating 5-6 low-calorie, high-nutrition meals a day ensures a steady supply of energy. This means eating 2-3 snacks in addition to the standard three meals. It's recommended to use small bowls and plates for main meals, as studies show this can effectively reduce caloric intake; eating slowly and savoring food is also advised, as it takes the brain about 10 minutes to register fullness—eating too quickly leads to overeating. Additionally, eat more in the morning and less at night; research comparing groups consuming 2,000 calories per day found that those who ate more for breakfast experienced less fatigue and better weight loss overall. Snacks should ideally be between 100-150 calories (equivalent to one egg) and should preferably be low-GI foods (GI of 0-45), such as nuts, fruits, and milk, which do not cause significant spikes and drops in brain glucose levels, thereby stabilizing energy levels. The Chinese tendency towards "soft meals" is largely due to high-GI foods like rice and flour-based products.

Occasional Fasting: Fasting has been a practice since ancient times, and many believe it benefits both body and mind. A popular hypothesis, the "Thrifty Hypothesis", suggests that since our evolution took place in times of food scarcity, the best dietary approach would mimic those conditions. When the body has ample energy, it focuses on growth, sex, and reproduction; when energy is temporarily scarce, the body turns inward, enhancing self-repair. Even short-term fasting can activate genetic repair processes, leading to long-term benefits. Adherents of this hypothesis have developed

the "light fasting" method, advocating intermittent fasting to promote bodily repair. I have tried fasting every other day, eating only one meal on fasting days or just an apple for other meals, and found it somewhat effective. Elders might worry about potential stomach issues, and I share similar concerns. If interested, you could try it. It's recommended to schedule fasting on weekdays so it doesn't affect weekend family meals. Alternatively, you could fast one day a week, diet for five days, and enjoy good food on one day. Some suggest that a ketogenic diet—high in fats and proteins but low in carbohydrates—can mimic the effects of fasting, although its universal applicability remains to be seen.

7.1.4 Exercise

Exercise promotes health and longevity. Even those without a regular exercise routine can see significant benefits by increasing their physical activity slightly; the more you exercise, the better the results. Here are some key benefits:

Delays Aging: Individuals who exercise more often appear to have younger telomeres, though it's unclear whether this is correlation or causation. However, it's well-established that regular physical activity slows down the aging process. Generally, the more you exercise, the longer you live; and the older you are, the more pronounced the benefits. Conversely, after age 40, if one does not engage in regular strength training, they typically lose about half a pound of muscle per year, leading to frailty in old age. Frankly, people do not die of aging—they die of inactivity.

Repairs the Body: Moderate exercise acts like a recovery mechanism in video games, initiating the body's repair processes. It not only heals exercise-induced damage but also addresses accumulated damage, leading to supercompensation and enhanced repair. This process is akin to knocking over items in the kitchen and then thoroughly cleaning the entire kitchen, resulting in it being cleaner than before. This logic resembles Nassim Taleb's concept of antifragility, as well as the psychological concept of post-traumatic growth. Fitness enthusiasts summarize it as "No pain, no gain".

Improves Brain Function: Every brief session of moderate to high-intensity exercise improves memory and attention. Exercise stimulates the brain to release endorphins, which uplift mood.

Controls Weight: Regardless of the method you choose to lose weight, maintaining it requires exercise. Engaging in at least 60 minutes of moderate to high-intensity physical activity daily can reduce the risk of obesity in children.

However, exercise also has its challenges:

High Barriers to Entry: The most common and widely recommended approach to exercise involves at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week, or at least 75 minutes of high-intensity exercise, supplemented by strength training twice a week. This approach is endorsed by nearly all health organizations worldwide. However, for me and most of my readers, this is too demanding; subjective willpower is hard to maintain, and the objective environment can be unsupportive.

Risk of Injury: People who do not exercise regularly are at risk of injuries if they do not properly warm up before physical activity or if they use improper techniques.

Potential for Rebound: A decline in energy after exercising can weaken willpower, potentially leading to overeating or other compensatory behaviors.

As Daniel Lieberman points out in his book *Exercised*, life requires movement, but exercise is not innate. On one hand, human evolution demands that our bodies stay active throughout life to optimize all functions. On the other hand, evolution has also shaped our brains to avoid exertion unless it is necessary, enjoyable, or rewarding. Running guru George Sheehan bluntly stated that exercise is against human nature, and people persist in it because the alternative—remaining inactive—feels worse. I, for one, do not exercise regularly and often feel lousy as a result; prolonged sitting leaves me uncomfortable all over. While I lack the credentials to offer workout advice, I do understand this: exercising is better than not exercising, and as you get older, the need for physical activity—and doing it smartly—grows more urgent. Here are some lazy strategies I've found and thought of:

Active Sitting: From a young age, we are taught to sit still, but this is highly detrimental. Prolonged sitting is a silent killer. Those who frequently stand up, even briefly, during long periods of sitting have a 25% lower risk of inflammation compared to those who remain seated for the same duration without standing. Breaking up sitting, even for short moments—such as standing for 100 seconds every half hour—can lower levels of blood sugar, blood lipids, and so-called "bad" cholesterol in the bloodstream. Foreign experts advocate a concept called "active sitting", which essentially means engaging in small, unconscious physical movements while sitting. Such minor movements while seated can burn an extra 20 calories per hour and, more importantly, help blood flow to the continually moving limbs. Compared to those who sit still, restless individuals burn 100-800 more calories per day. So, yes, your fidgety child is actually doing the right thing, while your father telling you to stop jiggling your leg is wrong. But you might not want to share this with your child just yet—tell yourself instead to occasionally move your body while seated, and take short breaks every 90 minutes. An effective strategy is to drink plenty of water; natural bodily feedback will prompt you to get up and walk. Another strategy is to buy a massage chair. Research from Wenzhou Medical University, based on studies with university students, found that the passive movements provided by massage chairs have effects comparable to those of other active exercises.

Try Intermittent Exercise: High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) is an effective way to boost exercise performance. Typically, HIIT involves multiple sets of short, maximum-effort sprints lasting 10-60 seconds each, leaving participants breathless. There are various ways to do HIIT, including sprinting, stair climbing, cycling, and even weightlifting, as long as the activity rhythmically raises and lowers heart rate. However, HIIT requires extremely rigorous self-discipline to be effective, and this training can indeed be very uncomfortable, making it unsuitable for those with poor physical condition, joint pain, cardiovascular issues, or other health concerns. Moreover, HIIT should not be done too frequently, as excessive sessions do not necessarily burn more energy but instead increase injury risk. Most importantly, the benefits of HIIT do not match those of regular aerobic exercise in terms of variety. Due to HIIT's high threshold, I suggest removing the "high-intensity" component and simply start with intermittent exercise—take breaks throughout the day to do a few sets of short

activities. If you plan to run 1 kilometer in a day, split it into two sessions of 500 meters each. If you plan to do 20 sit-ups, divide it into two sets of 10. A balanced approach yields better results.

Cultivate a Sports Hobby: Sports are organized play, offering a perfect combination of physical exercise and mental resilience, integrating gamification into physical activity. For instance, in football, sports demand adherence to rules, control over reactive aggression (e.g., no kicking others), and the mastery and use of restrained proactive techniques (e.g., kicking the ball). If you find large team sports like football or basketball too competitive, consider lower-intensity sports like badminton or table tennis. If, like me, you prefer staying indoors, consider getting a rowing machine so you can work out while watching TV, or fully equip yourself with VR gear and try sports games like Beat Saber. It's best to pair up with someone or join online gaming communities; peer pressure can help you stick with it. Finally, gyms have high barriers to entry and many conditions, making it easy to give up halfway unless you have equipment and attractive trainers at home.

Life as Exercise. Turn Commuting into Exercise: Whenever possible, replace driving with walking or cycling. The ubiquitous shared bikes you see are excellent exercise tools. If someone walks for one hour a day without compensating with extra food, they could theoretically lose an astonishing 18 kilograms over two years. **View Labor as Exercise:** Our ancestors and elders didn't go to the gym but were still very healthy, thanks to physical labor. An adult male (assuming an average weight of 82 kilograms) burns about 1,500 calories if lying still (basal metabolic rate); about 1,700 calories when sitting still; and about 1,900 calories when standing still. If he engages in chores, he burns an additional 100 calories per hour (equivalent to walking). Whether you acknowledge it or not, physical labor is a major energy (weight loss) method. Studies have shown that when people accept labor as exercise, the training effects of exercise improve. On rest days, listen to music while cleaning the house or organizing your room; this works just as well as aimless walking. **Make Love as Exercise:** Sexual activity is a form of high-intensity interval training that also promotes better sleep, which, in turn, increases libido. Orgasm serves as a sedative for many, boosting levels of oxytocin, serotonin, and other hormones and neurotransmitters. So, regardless of age, engage more in what you love doing.

7.2 Psychological Indirect Interventions

Mind and body are interconnected; a positive psychological state can lead to a better physical state, which, in turn, enhances one's energy levels. We will explore interventions from three perspectives: emotion, cognition, and volition.

7.2.1 Emotion

In the context of autonomous living, physical states act as sensory inputs that influence emotional evaluations, which then impact cognitive constructions and behavioral expressions, ultimately altering the physical state. On the other hand, emotional states directly affect physical conditions. Lisa Feldman Barrett, former president of the American Psychological Association, posits in her Theory of Constructed Emotion that internal perceptions originate from bodily states, which in turn are altered by those internal perceptions. Our bodily sensations partly stem from actual experiences and partly from cognitive constructions influenced by emotions.¹

From our subjective experiences, when high energy and positive mood occur simultaneously, our mind-body state is optimal; good physical sensations construct positive emotional states, and these positive emotional states further reinforce good physical sensations, allowing for full engagement. Conversely, when emotions and physical states are not synchronized—for instance, feeling physically energetic but emotionally down, or feeling emotionally upbeat but physically exhausted—our potential cannot be fully unleashed.

Regulating emotions is the core content of the next chapter, so here we will share some basic strategies:

¹ Lisa Feldman Barrett is the proponent of the Theory of Constructed Emotion and a distinguished neuroscientist renowned for her contributions to the field of affective neuroscience. She has also served as the president of the American Psychological Association (APA). We will discuss her views in the next chapter.

Sublimate and Alleviate Negative Emotions: It's essential to understand and accept some psychoanalytic theories and techniques that allow you to transform negative emotions into constructive forces, mastering the art of sublimation as a path to personal growth. Reading and writing are particularly suitable methods for young people to channel their emotions. Regardless of how many negative feelings you have, reading biographies of inspiring figures or writing personal journals can significantly help. Furthermore, sleep is a powerful tool for reconciling with negative emotions. When you find it difficult to control your emotions, go to sleep, then record and interpret your dreams—seek insights and release within the dream world, embrace the blessings of the dream god, and savor the solace of illusions. In modern society, lucid dreams that are commodified, such as video games, can also be a refuge. If you need further assistance, consider engaging in functional games with the help of doctors and professionals. As we enter the AI era, various generative AI tools can also be used for labor and creation, helping to transform emotions into meaningful works and productive output.

Construct and Elicit Positive Emotions: To consciously create positive emotions, you must accept a fundamental assumption: emotions can be subjectively constructed. First, ensure that your body is in a relaxed and comfortable state, then try the "Imagining the Future" technique: take deep breaths, visualize a beautiful future, and imagine how you would feel and experience achieving your dreams. This method can ignite your motivation and passion; if you continue to reflect on the current obstacles preventing you from reaching these goals and outline action plans to address them, you are essentially employing the WOOP (Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan) technique. If you lack imagination or courage and need tangible objects to activate your emotions, try using emotional anchors, such as revisiting photos of past successes or reading about your admired role models to achieve an emotional synchronization. Of course, the simplest methods include sitting down and talking with your child, watching a light-hearted movie, or using your GenAI to generate images of cute animals.

These strategies aim to align your emotional state with your physical energy, enabling you to maximize your potential and maintain a balanced mind-body connection.

7.2.2 Cognition

The relationship between cognition and physical energy is complex. Firstly, cognition is a major energy consumer; thinking consumes a significant amount of energy. The brain, which constitutes only 2% of body weight, requires 25% of the body's oxygen supply. Secondly, cognition shapes our views on life, values, and worldview, providing goals and meaning for the body's efforts. Without goals and meaning, we are prone to fall into two states: **Stagnation and Decay**: Lacking motivation for anything, feeling devoid of value, unwilling to invest effort, preferring to lie down and await death rather than strive for something. **Overwork**: Not knowing why we strive, just blindly persisting, severely depleting our physical and mental energy. Work obsession has become the cocaine of this era.

Nietzsche once said, "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how." A deep sense of value and the resulting lifestyle not only serve as a cornerstone of life but also help us better cope with various challenges. Only when we know what is most important can we achieve full engagement; only then can our body and emotions enter an optimal synchronous state. In an era where survival and reproduction are no longer primary concerns, humans need to be driven by values and a sense of mission. Meaning (why) and goals (what to do) give us reasons to fully engage, manage energy well, and recover energy, allowing us to think long-term rather than short-term. Goals and meaning are also the key to a strong rebound and full recovery when people are exhausted; they are the nourishment of the spirit and the spark of energy. Viktor Frankl, a survivor of the concentration camps, explored this in his book "Man's Search for Meaning."¹

Here are my suggestions:

Accept Your Fate but Don't Give Up: Xiang Biao, the pride of Wenzhou and Director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Germany, once said, "We should accept our fate, but not give up." I really like this statement. How exactly can we

¹ Viktor Frankl was a renowned Austrian psychiatrist and psychologist, best known for his survival experience in Nazi concentration camps and the development of logotherapy based on that experience. Frankl's theory emphasizes the human pursuit of life's meaning, which he considers the most fundamental spiritual need. He defined this pursuit as the "freedom of will," "will to meaning," and "meaning of life." Frankl's work and philosophy have had a profound impact on psychology and psychotherapy, with his existential analysis being regarded as one of the major schools of Western psychotherapy.

do this? On one hand, recognize your "fate" by undergoing genetic testing, getting regular health check-ups, and evaluating your health status to understand the instructions and precautions for using your body. Life sciences are advancing rapidly, and as long as you stay alive, there's new hope. On the other hand, strive to change your "luck" by setting appropriate goals based on objective reality, caring about what you do, committing to what you truly find meaningful, working tirelessly, and never giving up. If you succeed, you gain joy; if you fail, there is no regret. Albert Camus wrote in "The Great Struggle": "In the myth of Sisyphus, the act of pushing the stone uphill is itself a form of resistance rather than passive submission, achieving the dignity and meaning of one's existence. From this perspective, Sisyphus is happy."

View Difficulties as Challenges: Dostoevsky said, "He who can overcome pain and fear will become like a god." Develop a growth mindset and a challenge mindset, believing that all efforts will turn into accumulation, and every attempt will bring joy. Maintain self-respect, self-confidence, openness, and inclusiveness, acknowledge your limitations, reduce self-defense, and thereby enhance positive energy. Use a game-like approach to view the world, combining the perspectives of finite and infinite games to consider problems and envision the future. Once the cognitive perspective shifts, everything becomes a game—interesting and rewarding.

Break Fixed Views and Obsessions: On the path of energy management, beyond the inherent biases, errors, and noise in human cognition, there are many erroneous preconceptions that need to be overcome. If these misconceptions are not dispelled, they can cause unnecessary consumption and hinder us from discovering the correct paths and methods. We have already listed some of these in our discussions on breathing, sleep, diet, and exercise. I suggest learning scientific principles and methods, consistently reading, thinking, and practicing verification, and bravely questioning and breaking the fixed views around you. Additionally, strive to break your own obsessions to remove obstacles to energy management. For me, my biggest obsessions were "reluctance to sleep" and "not wasting food." These beliefs led me to eat more, sleep less, and severely alter my body. If I could replace them with "sleep is an investment in time" and "food consumed unnecessarily is still waste", my behavior would likely improve significantly.

7.2.3 Volition

There is a strong positive correlation between volition and energy. When energy levels are high, volition is strong; when energy is depleted, volition weakens. Baumeister suggests that willpower functions like a muscle—it gets exhausted and needs recovery, and it is directly proportional to the glucose levels in the brain, which, in turn, correlate with our energy levels. Therefore, avoid making major decisions when your energy is drained or overdrawn, as this is when the rider on the elephant is at its weakest and most susceptible to being led astray.

Conversely, strong volition promotes energy recovery, while weak volition leads to further energy depletion. As the old saying goes, "As long as the spirit doesn't decline, there are always more solutions than problems." When volition is strong, we are more likely to make correct decisions, guiding our bodies to breathe, sleep, eat, and exercise properly, thus restoring more energy. The most reasonable choices begin before they are urgently needed—for instance, sleeping before you feel tired, drinking water before you feel thirsty, eating before you feel hungry, and exercising before you feel fatigued. If we wait for our sluggish bodies to send natural feedback signals, it often indicates that we've already overexerted ourselves and are in dire need of recovery. If the body is overdrawn and not replenished in time, volition will decline along with energy, making it difficult for the rider on the elephant to effectively steer the elephant. When hunger, thirst, or exhaustion are too intense, the motivation to eat, exercise, or sleep diminishes—a common experience for many.

If you push yourself excessively when volition is weak and energy is depleted, it can lead to overcompensation or even excessive indulgence. I used to reward myself with games at night, but declining energy inevitably led to poor performance and bad moods, resulting in late-night gaming binges. After staying up late and having to wake up early for work, my sleep was severely insufficient, and my mood and physical state were poor the next day. Others may force themselves to exercise, leading to physical overexertion and volitional collapse, resulting in binge eating. Exercising for half a day might burn 100-200 calories, but a single meal afterward can easily add 500-1000 calories. Some rely on willpower to diet for weight loss, unaware that this reduces their basal and

resting metabolism, resulting in decreased physical strength and weakened volition, making them susceptible to food temptations and leading to binge eating. These phenomena often cause a cyclical harm, where post-incident regret leads to further exercise or dieting, followed by compensation and rebound, repeating in a vicious cycle.

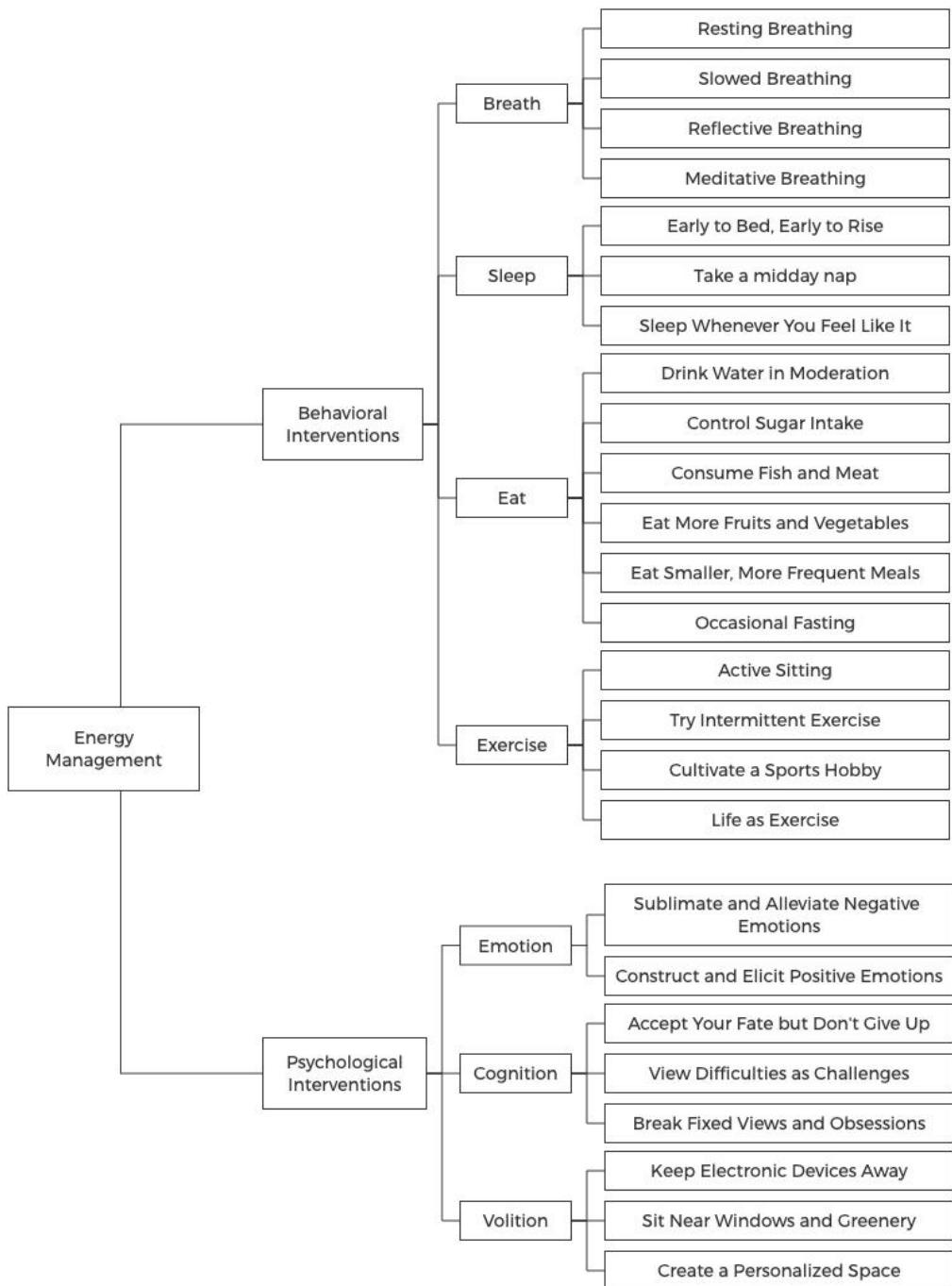
Enhancing the mutual reinforcement of volition and energy hinges on advanced planning and design. Every potentially recurring activity in life deserves serious attention. Life, when thoughtfully considered, can focus on priorities, reduce costs, and achieve great results with minimal effort. Rather than blindly consuming energy in the process, it's better to invest time upfront in planning. Here are two fundamental principles related to time that are worth emphasizing again. First, the Law of Conservation of Complexity. As mentioned earlier, the complexity of things remains relatively constant: the more effort designers put in, the less effort users will need. The more time invested in encoding and storing information, the less time required for recalling and retrieving it. Similarly, the more time spent researching energy management upfront, the less time needed for implementation later. Second, frequency asymmetry: a blueprint requires only a one-time design, but production can be repeated millions of times; it may involve the effort of just one or two designers at the beginning, but millions can benefit later. Therefore, we should focus our limited willpower on early planning and future investments (one-time effort, long-term benefits) rather than on the later execution and mundane decisions (case-by-case effort, one-time rewards).

Here are three environmental modifications you should make when your volition is strong, which can help improve your energy state. **First, keep electronic devices away.** Place phones, tablets, and computers out of reach. The World Health Organization classifies mobile phone radiation as a Group 2B carcinogen, so it's best not to keep them by your bed; if you must, use airplane mode. Keeping your phone at a distance can also prompt you to get up in the morning (to turn off the alarm). **Second, sit near windows and greenery.** In the office, place plants like ivy and spider plants on your desk, preferably near a window. Natural light improves sleep quality. Sun exposure during the day (increases serotonin and cortisol secretion) and minimizing artificial light at night (increases melatonin secretion) lead to better sleep quality. Compared to those sitting away from windows, individuals near windows receive 173% more natural light, leading to 46 more minutes of sleep each night. **Third, create a personalized space.**

Breathing, sleeping, eating, and exercising are all more likely to occur when there is a private space. If you have a private office, you're more likely to take a nap or opt for phone communication. If you don't have a private office yet, make good use of noise-cancelling headphones and AI-generated music to create a comfortable soundscape for yourself.

7.3 Chapter Summary

Energy management concerns the state of our physical bodies and determines how much time we have available to pursue autonomy. Effective energy management should help us resolve the conflict between our ambitions and our energy deficiencies, ultimately enabling us to live longer, achieve greater success, and find more happiness. This chapter begins with practical suggestions on breath, sleep, eat, and exercise at the behavioral level, and then explores strategies for regulation from the psychological perspective, focusing on emotions, cognition, and volition.



Chapter 8: Emotion Management

The philosopher sees the shadows, discovers the light, and then guides others toward the light.

— Plato, *The Republic*

Emotions have a dual nature: they are both the source of motivation and the root of problems. Western cultures often describe emotions with the divine nature of angels and the beastly nature of demons, while in Chinese culture, the analogy of water and fire might be more relatable. Emotions are like water: they can carry a boat but also capsize it. Emotions are like fire: they can create but also destroy.

Most ancient philosophers advised us to use the courage of volition and the reason of cognition to suppress emotional impulses. For example, Confucius spoke of the "Three Warnings": In youth, when one's passions are unsettled, guard against lust; in maturity, when one's strength is at its peak, guard against conflict; in old age, when one's vitality wanes, guard against greed. Similarly, the Delphic maxims include "Know thyself," "Nothing in excess," and "Pledge brings pain." There are, however, a few who advocate for indulging desires under the guise of liberating human nature. Contemporary thinkers tend toward a dialectical view, and practitioners lean toward practicality. We need to understand emotions, regulate them, and transform them to serve our needs.

Emotion management is a vital skill for achieving autonomy. Autonomism posits that the core issue in emotion management is the conflict between: Emotion (feeling) and Cognition (reason). Resolving this conflict relies on the reconciliation provided by volition. Thus, the essence of emotion management is the volition's ability to harmonize

the contradiction between emotion and cognition, achieving a balance between safety and freedom, and unifying mind and behavior.

We will first introduce the theories and practices of three paradigms: Psychoanalysis, Positive Psychology, and the Theory of Constructed Emotion. Finally, we will present the Autonomism approach to emotion management along with practical suggestions. It must be stated upfront: there is no absolutely correct theory or universally applicable method; however, having a theory or method is better than having none. It is recommended that everyone adapt these ideas to their own circumstances, take what is useful, and think beyond what is presented.

8.1 The Psychoanalytic Paradigm

Like most novices, I initially mistook Freud's psychoanalysis as serious psychological literature. Moreover, I chose the heaviest volume, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, as my first book to study psychology simply because its English title, "The Interpretation of Dreams", is a literal translation of my name, "Kao Meng".

8.1.1 The Theory of Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis was born in a repressive era. Its founder, Sigmund Freud, developed a framework through his treatment and study of psychiatric patients, using it to explain observed phenomena and solve encountered problems, which eventually established it as a prominent school of thought. In a sense, after the decline of religious faith and the withdrawal of church influence, psychoanalysts and their consulting rooms became a secular path to redemption, catering to people's need for spiritual fulfillment and emotional release.

However, psychoanalysis also has significant shortcomings; it often resembles religion and literature. Freud, the founder, was a Jewish thinker; among his successors, Carl Jung had a tradition of mysticism, Erich Fromm advocated Buddhism, and many other

later figures held strong religious sentiments. This "collective unconscious" led them to label emotions with terms like impulse and anxiety, often with negative connotations.¹

The core term in psychoanalytic discussions of emotion is "Libido".

Although Freud did not admit it, in his earliest works, libido was narrowly defined as "sexual desire", and only later did he gradually broaden its scope. I prefer Jung's definition: libido should be seen as "life force", a kind of emotional energy. The human mind is like a container, with libido continuously bubbling up from the bottom like a spring, increasing pressure, anxiety, and pain. Different human behaviors, whether love or hate, conscious or unconscious, are all ways to release libido. Releasing libido brings about peace, relaxation, and joy.

From today's perspective, psychoanalysis, which emerged in the early 20th century, is riddled with flaws, but its memes have penetrated every cell of human society. We unconsciously use its framework to view problems; even the term "unconscious" itself is an invention of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is akin to Westerners' version of traditional Chinese medicine—its theories may not withstand scrutiny, but its practices have some efficacy, attracting many followers. According to Arthur's definition of technology, psychoanalysis is a purposeful programming of human emotional phenomena and functions. Psychoanalysis is useful not just because "believing is seeing", but because practice produces knowledge. It is a synthesis of the collective experience of many psychoanalysts, grounded in clinical practice, and thus it will always hold a place in the field of emotion management.

8.1.2 The Practice of Psychoanalysis

The key to psychoanalytic emotion management lies in regulating libido to channel it into positive behaviors, which in turn foster positive emotions. Freud's daughter, Anna

¹ Carl Gustav Jung was a Swiss psychologist and psychoanalyst who founded the school of Analytical Psychology. His theories are renowned for concepts such as the collective unconscious and psychological types. Jung believed that people are born with elements of the collective unconscious, which provides a set of pre-formed patterns that influence perception and behavior. Initially a disciple of Freud, Jung eventually broke away due to theoretical differences and developed his own theories in Analytical Psychology.

Freud, proposed dozens of techniques for self-regulating emotions. To simplify, I have combined these into four categories based on Freud's viewpoints:

Expression of Eros (Love): This is the positive expression of libido, channeling emotions through acts of love and kindness. For example, a young man shows affection to a young woman, giving his all and finding joy in the process. Freud called this the life instinct. Greeting your parents, kissing your partner, hugging your children, and treating your friends kindly are all expressions of Eros and manifestations of the life instinct.

Catharsis of Thanatos (Death): This is the negative expression of libido, venting emotions through hate and aggression. For example, when a young man fails to win a woman's affection, his love turns into hatred, sometimes even leading to violence. Freud called this the death instinct, a pessimistic concept he introduced between World War I and World War II. In reality, not all expressions of Thanatos are harmful—instrumental violence (self-defense) and regulated violence (sports competitions) can be positive outlets. Freud even suggested that sexual acts are a combination of Eros and Thanatos, a poetic and abstract interpretation. Complaining to your parents, arguing with your partner, yelling at your children, or treating others as enemies are all forms of Thanatos' catharsis.

Consolation of Illusion (Dream): This is the regressive satisfaction of libido through dreams and fantasies, akin to a child's timid escape from reality. For instance, a young man who cannot attain what he desires indulges in fantasies in his dreams. Illusions can be literal dreams or lucid dreams, such as playing games, watching movies, or reading novels. Not all illusions are negative; without bread and circuses, most people would struggle through oppressive times. In normal life, functional music and games can provide significant emotional comfort and therapeutic effects. In a sense, the entire cultural industry operates as a massive dream factory, creating shared collective dreams.

Construction of Civilization: This is the sublimation of libido, achieving fulfillment through labor and creation—a manifestation of an adult's ambition to reshape the world. For example, a young man transforms his longing into creative energy, writing numerous love poems and ultimately winning the girl of his dreams. Unfortunately, civilization is not instinctive; it requires effort and skill. Ordinary people can leave

behind material products through labor, converting emotions into wealth; elites, heroes, and titans can leave behind cultural works, converting emotions into legacies. With the advent of GenAI, the barriers to content creation have been dramatically lowered, and continue to lower. A rational choice for ordinary people is to learn and master new GenAI tools, finding happiness in the labor and creation of the AI era, and leaving behind personal works. For instance, Suno can help anyone quickly create excellent AI music, both expressing emotions and conveying feelings. Moreover, creating AIGC is like opening a blind box, combining gaming and creation functions with frequent and varied rewards, making it highly addictive. Sometimes, I even feel that illusion and civilization are converging in the AIGC wave driven by GenAI.

Based on this fourfold classification, I encourage supporters of psychoanalysis to adhere to emotion management strategies oriented toward Eros and Civilization, converting emotional energy into warmth and creative works.

8.1.3 Associations of Psychoanalysis

Early researchers in psychoanalysis were content to guide individuals in emotional reconstruction, but later psychoanalytic sociologists had greater ambitions, seeking to reinterpret history and redesign society through their theories. Thinkers like Fromm and Viktor Frankl even attempted to merge psychoanalysis with Marxism, using concepts like collective unconscious and historical unconscious to bridge the gap between the economic base and the superstructure. Inspired by them, I used four pathways to analyze history and saw things differently:¹

¹ George Frankl was a renowned psychoanalyst whose theories are considered among the latest advancements in the field of psychoanalysis. His work began within what we now refer to as the "classical" psychoanalytic model, building upon and expanding Freud's concepts to reveal new dimensions of the mind. Frankl's method of hypnoanalysis allowed patients to recall and re-experience long-forgotten periods of their lives, thereby broadening our understanding of the unconscious mind. His extensive body of work includes titles such as *The Archaeology of the Mind*, *Civilization*, *The Unknown Self*, *Exploring the Unconscious*, *The Foundations of Morality*, and *The Failure of the Sexual Revolution*. These writings cover various aspects of psychoanalysis and, through his insightful and lucid prose, present a grand narrative of human nature and its relationship with society.

Governance by Love: In classical times, Mozi pursued a society of universal love; early Christian evangelists aimed for a human utopia of love among believers; and the hippies of the Decadent Generation championed sexual liberation. However, all of these movements failed. Pure governance by love underestimates human complexity and has only succeeded in utopian dreams, such as those envisioned by Thomas More.

Governance by Death: This approach involves gaining power through violence, mobilizing society through war, organizing forces, and consuming resources to maintain authoritative rule. This was done by Caesar, Emperor Wu of Han, the Persian Empire, and Imperial Japan. In its extreme forms, this method includes human sacrifices in the Shang dynasty and death sacrifices of the Aztecs. A variation of governance by death is governance by poverty—not through warfare, but through colossal projects like the construction of pyramids, the Great Wall, or the Grand Canal. These projects served to demonstrate the rulers' power and drain public resources, keeping the populace in relative poverty and maintaining the rulers' control. Alternatively, rulers could manufacture conflicts and fears, compelling people to surrender their freedom—a scenario depicted in Orwell's 1984. Clearly, any sane person would oppose such tyranny.

Governance by Dream: Using ideology to mobilize society and control the populace, the most iconic example is medieval Europe, where the Church evolved into the Papacy, and bishops became popes, maintaining dominance for nearly a millennium. Some theocratic Arab states follow similar patterns. In modern societies, dream governance has a variant called governance by wealth, where the mature form is Baudrillard's concept of the consumer society, promoting material desires, indulgence, and credit overdrafts, enticing people to crave and possess unnecessary things, ultimately burdening them with debts, making them more compliant. Governance by wealth and governance by love merge into the alienation of individuals in a dystopia, akin to Huxley's hedonistic Brave New World.

Governance by Civilization: Governance rooted in civilization and sublimation. Governance by civilization is the ideal of the Chinese people—a world rich in humanistic spirit where everyone participates in labor and creation, where everyone realizes their value, where everyone is a fully liberated individual as Marx envisioned.

This world closely resembles a Protopia, and with the rise of GenAI tools, we might eventually achieve a "Great Togetherness".

8.2 The Positive Psychology Paradigm

8.2.1 The Theory of Positive Psychology

Unlike psychoanalysis, which emphasizes the negative aspects of emotions, positive psychology focuses on the positive elements of emotions. It mirrors the American Dream and American character during its upward development phase, much like earlier humanism, promoting an optimistic belief in human triumph over adversity. The keyword in positive psychology is "happiness," aiming to rescue people from the problem-focused tendencies of psychoanalysis and provide the masses with a clear path to happiness.

Positive psychologists argue that focusing on problems and solving them cannot lead to happiness. Instead, we should focus on cultivating strengths, embracing positive emotions, and pursuing subjective well-being. Ideally, a person's positive emotions should outnumber negative ones by a ratio of at least three to one, known as the Jen Ratio. This ratio was derived through observation and guesswork, with limited support from studies like Baumeister's on the greater impact of bad over good. However, just like our suggested 3:1 ratio of conservative to aggressive strategies in the "Risk Management" chapter, this ratio should be seen as a guideline rather than a strict rule.

To achieve happiness, Martin Seligman proposed the complex PERMA model, which includes Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. He suggested that by taking action in these areas, individuals can enhance their sense of well-being and life satisfaction.

Personally, I find the PERMA model less compelling than the threefold approach of pleasure, immersion, and meaning we discussed earlier with reference to Li Xiaoxu's The Trinity model in Chapter 2.

Here's a brief recap:

Primary Happiness: This is momentary pleasure, measured in seconds. Pleasure is related to neurotransmitters like dopamine and the emotional system. We experience fleeting joy when enjoying delicious food or beautiful scenery. Pleasure is quick to arrive and depart, and repeated experiences raise the threshold, requiring greater stimuli and higher costs for the same pleasure. This type of happiness can be bought with money. Ordinary people, children, and the elderly often find their happiness in pleasure.

Intermediate Happiness: This is immersion lasting minutes to hours. Immersion occurs when we are fully focused, engaged, and committed—when our skills perfectly match the challenge, leading us into a natural, effortless state known as "flow" in the West or "selflessness" in China. The oldest method to achieve immersion is mindful breathing; classic modes include reading and writing, and the quickest shortcuts are sports, gaming, and scrolling through short videos. There's always an activity that captivates you, making you lose track of time. This is happiness earned through time investment. The happiness of elites and adults often comes from immersion.

Ultimate Happiness: This is the highest level of happiness that transcends the individual, time, and space. Only a few have experienced this type of happiness—revolutionaries, missionaries, martyrs, and saints. Even amid physical suffering, they experience immense inner joy, powered by ideals and beliefs. These individuals have found their purpose, striving selflessly for noble goals, great causes, and honorable missions. The happiness of heroes and titans is often derived from meaning.

8.2.2 The Practice of Positive Psychology

From the perspective of positive psychology, the key to emotion management lies in finding the intersection of pleasure, immersion, and meaning to achieve greater happiness. In practice, this mainly involves focusing more on the positives, recognizing and amplifying one's strengths, and striving to identify opportunities for making contributions, achieving success, and leaving a legacy. By fully committing to these opportunities, one can experience immersion during the process and attain meaning in the outcome.

Unfortunately, positive psychology primarily emphasizes a shift in perspective without offering a wealth of practical techniques or tools, making it more about concepts than action, lacking specific applications. As a result, positive psychology can sometimes devolve into feel-good affirmations like saying "You're awesome" to yourself three times a day in front of a mirror.

Some principles of positive psychology have been applied in early 21st-century management consulting. In his book *Drive*, Daniel Pink integrates the perspectives of self-determination theory and positive psychology, identifying three types of human motivation. **Drive 1.0 is instinct-driven**; humans are naturally inclined to seek pleasure and avoid pain, with the impulse to avoid pain being stronger. Ancient rulers understood this well, using swords to conquer and whips to rule. Problems solved with force required no persuasion. **Drive 2.0 is incentive-driven**; human behavior is easily reinforced through post-action rewards. In modern society, systems like piece-rate pay incentivize more work with more pay, or dock wages for inactivity. Ancient rulers used gold, then currency, to buy labor, which others would then use to buy pleasure. **Drive 3.0 is value-driven**, the belief that people can find value and meaning in autonomous, creative work, and experience immersion in the labor process—making work itself the reward. Religious organizations are adept at using visions and beliefs to guide followers through arduous tasks, offering profound self-satisfaction in return.

Successful rulers throughout history have mastered these three forms of motivation, using them to drive the actions of many with the efforts of a few. Strong rulers use force to coerce labor, benevolent rulers use wealth to entice work, and exalted rulers use faith to inspire dedication. Truly exceptional rulers know how to adapt, blending the three motivators to create synergy. In modern organizational management, coercion, incentives, and inspiration have become basic modules of the system.

However, it must be acknowledged that positive psychology, with its emphasis on leveraging strengths and inspiring meaning, mainly reflects the optimistic worldview of an economy on the rise. As times change, and with the advent of GenAI, future human production and development pressures may increase. For the majority of ordinary people and elites, the need for safety may become more urgent than the pursuit of

freedom, making Drives 1.0 and 2.0 more relevant and potent than Drive 3.0 in organizational management.

8.3 The Paradigm of the Theory of Constructed Emotion

8.3.1 The Theory of Constructed Emotion

The Theory of Constructed Emotion, proposed by Professor Lisa Feldman Barrett, integrates cutting-edge ideas from neuroconstructionism, psychological constructionism, and social constructionism. If psychoanalysis represents a dark emotional theory and positive psychology embodies a sunny one, then the Theory of Constructed Emotion is a neutral emotional theory. Unlike psychoanalysis and positive psychology, it does not seek to answer the questions of the era or cater to societal moods—it is purely a scientific exploration.

The Theory of Constructed Emotion suggests that traditional emotional theories, which discuss emotions in abstract terms, often lead to numerous issues. It introduces a more precise (albeit complex) set of concepts and terms, such as body budget, affective reality, emotion concepts, emotion categories, and emotion instances. Simply put, emotion construction starts from bodily sensations, constructing an emotion instance of a specific emotion concept, which generates the corresponding emotional experience (input) and bodily response (output). Bodily sensations serve as the raw materials for emotion construction (generation of emotion instances and experiences), and they are also altered by the process. Emotion concepts and social roles are the recipes for constructing emotions, with each individual having different recipes that can turn the same raw materials into different results.

The breadth of one's emotional vocabulary and concepts determines the strength of their emotional capability. Suppose you only know two emotional terms, "feeling awesome" and "feeling awful." In that case, whenever you experience emotions or perceive others' emotions, you can only broadly categorize them using these two terms, limiting your emotional capability. Conversely, if you can refine "feeling awesome" into joy, satisfaction, excitement, relaxation, delight, hopefulness, encouragement, pride, admiration, gratitude, and exhilaration, and break down "feeling awful" into anger, rage,

fear, disgust, irritability, regret, gloom, embarrassment, anxiety, fearfulness, dissatisfaction, jealousy, sadness, and wistfulness, you will have more options for predicting, categorizing, and perceiving emotions. This allows you to construct more precise experiences and more flexible responses. It could even be argued that without emotion concepts, one might have emotional experiences but lack emotional awareness.

8.3.2 The Practice of Constructed Emotion Theory

While the Theory of Constructed Emotion may sound complex, its application is straightforward. According to its principles, the body, cognition, and emotions influence one another. Managing personal emotions involves three key actions:

Regulating Physical State: Implement effective energy management to improve bodily sensations and provide quality raw materials for your emotional outcomes. Many emotional issues can be effectively resolved through physical means. For example, when feeling down, instead of hastily seeking cognitive explanations or blaming others, try talking to a friend, eating something you enjoy, taking a hot shower, or getting a good night's sleep; you'll often feel much better upon waking. Alternatively, get up and go for a run or walk, or use virtual reality for movement games to alter bodily sensations. Even a simple smile can improve your mood.

Updating Cognitive Modules: Learn more emotion concepts and increase the granularity of your emotional vocabulary to better interpret and construct experiences when you have bodily sensations. Returning to the earlier example, using "feeling low" instead of "depressed" can help reduce negative experiences. The author suggests that reading literature rich in emotional descriptions can be beneficial. I recommend keeping a diary to record and describe your emotional states. In the GenAI era, you can freely engage with your AI companion to express emotions and, through ample narration, have it help you refine and articulate your feelings with more nuanced terms.

Reconstructing Emotion Instances: The same bodily sensation could be perceived as anxiety from suppression or joy from excitement, depending on how we cognitively process emotions. Reframing narratives of excitement instead of anxiety can transform stress into motivation and improve performance. For example, when about to meet

someone important and your heart races, you can internally narrate it as "I am excited" rather than "I am nervous," which helps in better managing emotions.

The Theory of Constructed Emotion can also be applied in medical and educational settings for emotional practice. In healthcare, many emotional issues stem from imbalances in the body budget and pervasive inflammation; thus, restoring balance in bodily states is a viable approach to addressing many emotional problems. In education, we should guide children to acquire a broader range of emotional concepts. A simple and effective measure of the quality of a parent's engagement with their child is the amount of "adult talk" involved. Discussing the causes and consequences of emotions with children, using as many emotional terms as possible, and positioning yourself as their emotional guide can help children build a comprehensive emotional concept system.

8.4 Autonomism Perspective

8.4.1 The Theory of Autonomism

The perspective of Autonomism on emotion management is an integrative enhancement of previous theories. In addition to incorporating elements from the previously discussed paradigms of Psychoanalysis, Positive Psychology, and the Theory of Constructed Emotion, it also draws from Baumeister's Willpower Psychology, Jonathan Haidt's "Elephant and Rider" metaphor, and cognitive theories from scholars like Stanovich and Kahneman, as well as insights from neuroscientific research.

System	Function	Processing	Mind	Volition	Consciousness	Haidt	Freud	Nietzsche
Volition	Reflection	Controlled Processing	Reflective Mind	Intentional	Conscious	rider	Ego	lion
Cognition	Judgment Decision	Automatic Processing	Algorithmic Mind	Unintentional		weaving	superego	camel

Emotion	Evaluation		Autonomous Mind		Unconscious	elephant	Id	infant
Behavior	Sensation Action							

Referring to the diagram above, we can easily identify the main themes discussed by each school of thought: The Theory of Constructed Emotion covers the entire psychological process, Psychoanalysis focuses on the relationship between emotion, cognition, and volition, Positive Psychology emphasizes the process from cognitive judgment to emotional evaluation, Volition Psychology targets the regulation of emotion by volition, Behaviorism solely addresses behavioral issues, and Cognitivism strictly discusses cognitive topics.

Autonomism leans towards the belief that volition, cognition, and emotion are emergent functions of different areas of the brain. A complete psychological process involves the acquisition of external and internal stimuli through the sensation of behavior, followed by the judgment of cognition, leading to the evaluation of emotion, constructing cognitive judgment, and finally resulting in behavioral responses.

Volition sits at the core, capable of reflecting and deliberately intervening in the automatic processing of cognitive judgments and decisions, attempting to construct desired emotional evaluations and behavioral responses. Therefore, when cognition and emotion diverge, reconciliation can be achieved either through coordination between the two or through volitional intervention.

These concepts were thoroughly explained in the "Will" section of the "How to Be Autonomous" chapter in the previous volume, so we won't repeat them here.

8.4.2 Autonomism in Practice

Autonomism-driven emotion management is centered on volition. There are three approaches:

Approach 1: Volition Modifies Cognition to Regulate Emotion.

Volition intervenes in the processing of cognition and emotion, promoting positive behaviors such as expressions of love and the construction of civilization. These positive behaviors are not only the products of emotional energy but also sources of it, creating a positive feedback loop.

Once again, we recommend revisiting the "Three-Step" or "Three Questions" method of deliberate reflection:

Doubt: Ask yourself, "What if?" As Fromm said, "Doubt is the starting point of modern philosophy; the need to quell doubt is the most powerful stimulus for the development of modern philosophy and science." In a fleeting moment of doubt, questioning whether your current emotions and cognition are correct can interrupt the brain's unconscious automatic processing and initiate conscious, volition-participated controlled processing. Kasparov noted, "Exploring the unknown is brave; questioning the known requires even greater courage." Doubting requires courage—be the lion Nietzsche spoke of.

Reject: Ask yourself, "So what?" Reject the familiar emotional instances and experiences and their underlying concepts. Also, resist the strong pull to revert to habitual emotional and cognitive patterns. When you doubt yourself, you may feel anxious or afraid; you must stay brave and endure the pressure. Courage is the foremost human quality, as it is the source of all other qualities. You must boldly wield Alexander's sword to cut the Gordian knot.

Innovate: Ask yourself, "What else?" When you resolutely reject the original emotional concepts for some time, the brain's unconscious processing will generate an alternative concept. If you cease reflection at this point, this new emotional concept will contribute to a new emotional experience. If you continue doubting and rejecting, the brain will keep generating new candidates. Remember the card-drawing metaphor? Our brain is like a deck of cards; given unlimited time, you can continuously shuffle and draw through reflection until you find a satisfactory answer. This process is akin to how GenAI generates and creates content.

Lastly, GenAI technology can enhance and amplify the roles of doubt, rejection, and innovation. You can interact with GenAI using the "Three-Step" or "Three Questions" approach, or set up an intelligent agent operating under these rules to guide yourself in deconstructing and reconstructing emotional issues, discovering positive emotional concepts, and building positive emotional states. This way, you can walk the path of love and civilization, experiencing the joy of pleasure, flow, and meaning.

Approach 2: Volition Modifies Behavior to Harmonize Emotion.

Some emotional problems arise from incorrect cognition and the resulting erroneous behaviors. In such cases, changing specific behaviors can be easier than altering abstract cognition and elusive emotions. There are two strategies here:

A Gentle Approach: Nudge behavioral change. In the context of environment and the long term, our limited volition is insufficient for directly driving lasting behavioral change. The fleeting spark of volitional reflection must be layered with environmental design and behavioral shaping to create structural changes in both the internal and external worlds. Using the ABC model, volition acts at stage A by altering antecedents to nudge specific behaviors in stage B, which in turn leads to changes in bodily sensations and emotional experiences at stage C. Reflection diaries, task checklists, and behavioral scales (DCS) discussed earlier can help enhance the effectiveness of this approach.

A Bolder Approach: Force behavioral change. Experiment with taboo or sensitive actions, deliberately inducing cognitive dissonance to trigger cognitive reconstruction, thereby deconstructing old cognitions and creating new ones. Experimentation requires courage, and here we must revisit the previously recommended methods of "next action" and "20-second sprints." If you've always been reluctant to eat a particular food and think you dislike it, try a 20-second sprint, take a bite, and if you still don't like it, stop. But if it turns out okay, go for another 20 seconds, and take another bite. Gradually

scale up, desensitizing in steps, until incremental changes lead to a qualitative shift. When behavior and cognition change, the emotions constructed will also shift.¹

Approach 3: Cultivate Super Volition to Strongly Alter Emotions.

For those aiming to become heroes or even titans, managing emotions requires super volition. This entails discarding the previous weak volition hypothesis and embracing a new strong volition hypothesis. This means letting go of the shield of weak volition and confronting your own cowardice and impotence directly. However, the autonomous person will lose only their shackles and gain the whole world. As Marxists emphasize self-revolution, a significant aspect involves using volition to manage and regulate one's emotions and cognition in service of great goals and meanings—this is super volition. As you advance towards the infinite game beyond the subject, time, and space, super volition becomes your ticket and badge of honor.

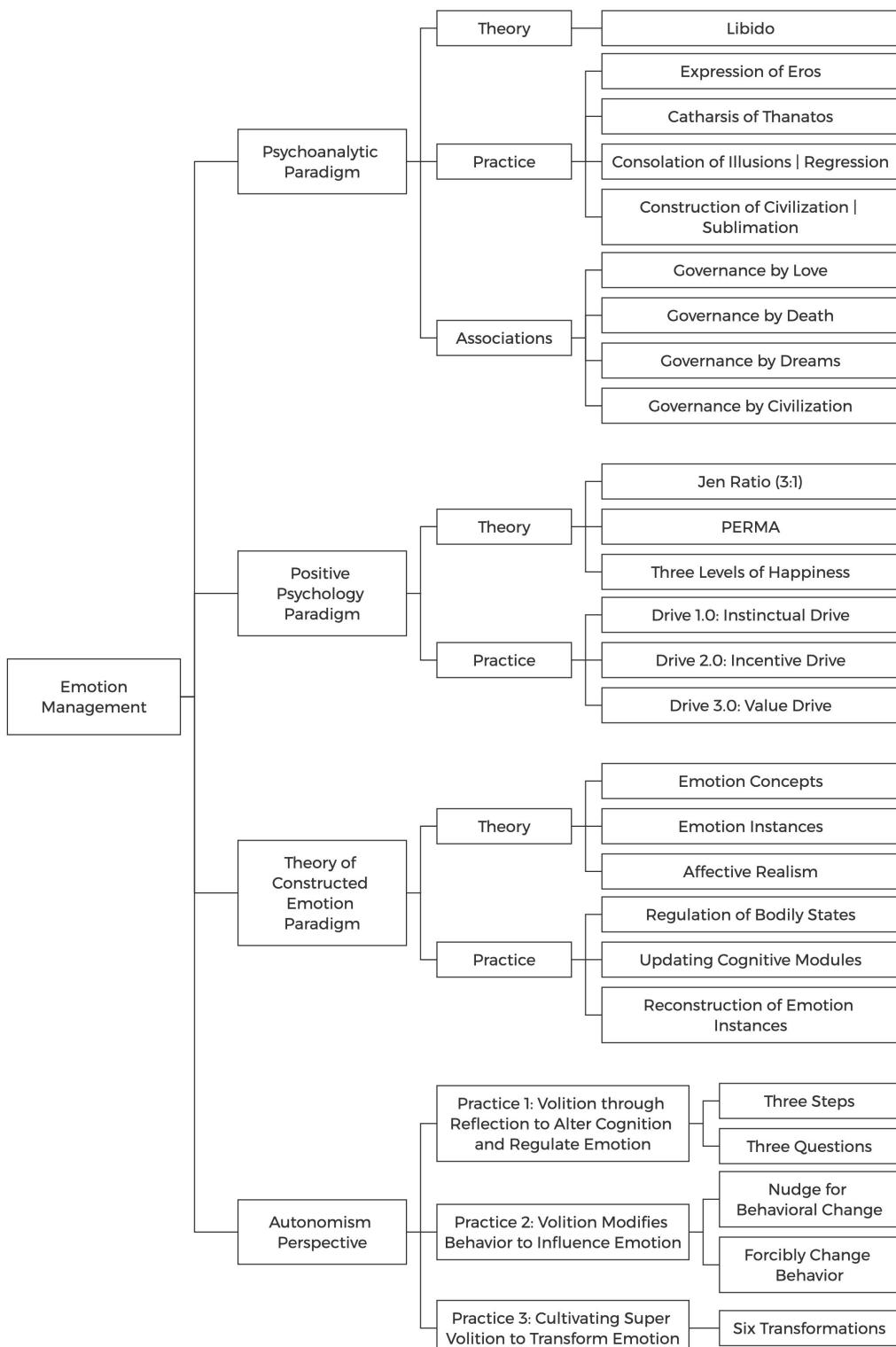
Recent years have seen numerous studies questioning Baumeister's theory of ego depletion or suggesting that its effects are not as strong as previously asserted. Ego depletion may even be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Sometimes, we can assume we possess unlimited volition, thereby displaying greater volitional strength.

The weak rider must dare to dream, imagining themselves as the driver of a powerful armored vehicle, unstoppable and invincible. Following the "six transformations" presented in the summary of the "Will" section from the previous volume, replace negation with self-determination, muscle with skeleton, sprint with marathon, compromise with struggle, grand strategy with micro-operations, and rider with driver. It's like installing a new driver for your graphics card, potentially unlocking previously hidden capabilities. Once all six modules are upgraded, you have the chance to become a "hexagonal warrior".

¹ Cognitive Dissonance is a concept in psychology introduced by psychologist Leon Festinger in 1957. It describes the psychological discomfort experienced when a person holds two or more conflicting beliefs, ideas, or values simultaneously. This discomfort motivates individuals to take actions to reduce or eliminate the inconsistency.

8.5 Chapter Summary

A spark can set the prairie ablaze; a century is just in its prime. To achieve autonomy, we must master emotions, making them the elephant that serves the rider's will, becoming the driving force for solving problems and transforming the world, and fueling the forging of our legacy. The theories introduced—Psychoanalysis, Positive Psychology, Constructed Emotion Theory, and the Autonomism perspective on emotion—are not absolute truths but are relatively useful, and hopefully, they will inspire you. Wishing you success in unraveling the fundamental contradictions of emotion and unleashing its primal power.



Chapter 9: Social Management

Do you have five friends? That's not enough. Do you have one enemy? That's too many.

— *Italian Proverb*

Building friendships and forming communities fall under the umbrella of social engagement. Social interaction is the brain's default mode. Social cognitive neuroscientist Matthew Lieberman suggests that socializing is crucial for the survival and development of social animals, and human social nature is deeply ingrained in the brain. When we daydream or zone out, our brains unconsciously engage in social thinking.¹

Social management through making friends and forming associations helps us address real-world problems, access social resources, and leverage social networks to achieve greater autonomy. In the following sections of this chapter, I will share personal insights and experiences to guide you in expanding your network, earning recognition from others, and maintaining a balance between personal performance and social rewards—all under the premise of self-respect and self-love through conscious and strategic socializing.

¹ Matthew D. Lieberman is one of the foremost authorities in the field of social cognitive neuroscience. He is a professor of psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and the director of the Social Cognitive Neuroscience Lab (SCN Lab). His book, *Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect*, delves deeply into the neuroscientific foundations of human social behavior and offers scientific advice on how to communicate and socialize more effectively with others.

Here's a brief overview of our core ideas and recommendations:

At the initial stage, focus on making friends and position yourself as an outsider or marginal figure. Seek out people with potential, capability, and charisma, and strive to befriend them to gain their support and move towards the center of the social stage. At the advanced stage, focus on community building and position yourself as a central figure. Work to connect people who have potential, capability, and charisma, helping them become friends with each other, and providing assistance to a broader audience. This approach fosters autonomous groups that generate collective wisdom and power.

9.1 The Marginal Strategy at the Initial Stage: Making Friends, Establishing, and Strengthening One-on-One Relationships

Few people teach us how to make friends—it's a fundamental skill embedded in our genetic code. To excel at something that everyone can do, a deeper understanding is necessary. Rethinking the approach to friendship, I tend to break it down into three levels: targets, methods, and contexts.

9.1.1 Choosing the Right Friends: Finding the Right People to Befriend

Here are four guiding principles for choosing friends that may be helpful to you:

Independence Principle: The purpose of making friends is to establish equal communication. You should not lose your sense of self in the process, and avoid falling into a gaslighting tango of control and manipulation.

Practicality Principle: Engage with people who possess potential, strength, and charisma. They can better help you solve problems, provide richer communication experiences, and offer greater social recognition.

Symmetry Principle: While helping others, also seek assistance from them. Strive for mutual benefits, shared risks, and equitable gains.

Essence Principle:

Quality over quantity—do not force friendships that bring you trouble or distress. The choice is yours.¹

If these principles seem too abstract, here are three practical suggestions based on the age groups of your potential friends: **Making Friends with Junior Peers:** Follow the 1% Principle by befriending individuals who stand out in their fields or have significant potential. Interact with juniors with a focus on the future rather than the present. As there is a constant influx of younger people, you can afford to be selective, discovering and befriending them gradually. **Making Friends with Peers:** Apply the Weak Ties Principle by connecting with peers from different or cross-disciplinary fields. Because there can be competitive friction among peers in similar fields, a strategy of "befriend the distant, confront the near" might work better. Making friends with those you don't frequently interact with, and with whom you have no direct interests, can allow you to benefit from the social advantages of bridging structural gaps. **Making Friends with Seniors:** Use the "Two Mountains" Principle: seek friendships with seniors who are either in your field but vastly more skilled (high mountains), or from different areas but equally outstanding (distant mountains). These individuals are critical targets for friendship; they are rare, but you must seek them out and establish contact. They are often key connectors within certain circles, and gaining their recognition could open up entirely new opportunities for you.

These three groups represent the people you should actively pursue as friends. You can find them randomly or deliberately, using both information networks and social networks. The key is to cultivate a source-conscious mindset, actively seeking out high-quality sources of information—often influential individuals who usually operate within networks or groups. Therefore, try to attend high-level conferences or join top-tier communities to get closer to them in both time and space, exchange information, resources, and energy, and increase interaction frequency. Ultimately, you'll build your circle of accomplished individuals.

¹ Gaslighting Tango likely refers to a form of psychological manipulation known as gaslighting, which originated from the 1938 play "Gas Light," later adapted into a film. In this story, a husband manipulates the gas lights and other objects in their home to make his wife doubt her own memory and perception, thereby controlling her. This type of manipulative behavior is known as gaslighting and is a form of psychological abuse.

Lastly, consider the spatial perspective. For most people, the easiest connections to make are with successful individuals in their family, school, workplace, or community. This inward-outward approach to making friends often aligns your social resources closely with those around you, limiting resource diversity and advantages. Instead, try being one of the few who does the opposite—reach outward and connect with accomplished individuals outside your immediate circle. Typically, the farther the spatial distance, the weaker the relationship, which can create weak links and structural gaps that you can leverage.

9.1.2 Method Combination: Communicate in the Right Way

There are many communication techniques for making friends, but the fundamentals remain the same. In my early years of self-study in various psychological counseling approaches, I discovered that the core of all techniques is better communication. Here are three key points to keep in mind:

Ask: Learn to ask questions, dare to probe deeper, and occasionally challenge. When asking, start by greeting the other person. Initiate with a friendly gesture, like adding them on WeChat. Be sincere in your introductions, and get comfortable with sending cold messages, making cold calls, and engaging in unfamiliar topics to break the ice. Next, be proactive in offering help. Ask if there's anything you can do for them (take a page from Western culture with "What can I do for you?") and also inquire if they can help you ("Would you do me a favor?"). By asking questions, you can pique their interest and open up a conversation quickly. We'll dive deeper into this later.

Listen: Listen patiently, refrain from judgment, and guide the conversation appropriately. This aligns with Carl Rogers' humanistic approach that emphasizes non-judgmental listening. If your questioning is effective and the other person responds, then patiently let them speak without interrupting or evaluating until they finish. Occasionally, repeat their keywords or summarize their points with phrases like, "What you mean is...," or, "Is my understanding correct?" Simple responses like "Hmm," "Yes," or "Anything else?" can guide them to express themselves fully. People

appreciate those who listen to them. In the early stages of building friendships, if you have the time, be a good listener whom everyone loves.¹

Speak: Clearly state your position, explain your reasoning, and offer suggestions. After asking questions and listening, don't be a passive "wooden figure"—give effective feedback. If you agree with the other person's perspective, clearly express your support and explain why by reasoning, citing data, or sharing examples, and suggest the next steps. If you disagree, state your position, explain your reasons, and provide suggestions, particularly those that can help ease any disagreements. This approach is drawn from expert advice and personal experience and aligns with the tradition of classic Freudian psychoanalysis, where sharing thoughtful and meaningful information, perspectives, and suggestions can leave a lasting impression.

Of course, communication should be measured, ensuring that others don't perceive your efforts as one-sided boasting or arrogant display. Remember the Gold-Jade Principle of the Dark Forest: never let your words or actions exceed the tolerance limits of others.

9.1.3 Scenario Design: Find the Right Context for Conversations

Scenario design involves selecting the appropriate time, space, and topic for communication, based on a combination of the right contacts and methods.

From a temporal perspective, mornings and evenings are ideal for communication. As physical states affect emotional and cognitive responses, conversations tend to be more effective when people are well-rested and fed. However, when conditions do not permit, sometimes "now" is better than "later".

From a spatial perspective, private offline settings are preferred. Generally, face-to-face interactions are more effective than online ones, and private settings are better than public ones. In-person meetings allow for the use of more non-verbal communication

¹ Non-judgmental Listening is a communication technique that requires the listener to remain neutral during interactions, refraining from expressing personal evaluations, judgments, or criticisms. This type of listening is highly useful in psychological counseling, conflict resolution, and everyday communication.

cues, such as gestures, posture, tone, and pitch. Opt for spacious and comfortable locations to minimize environmental distractions. However, in the age of digital communication, online spaces also play a crucial role. Given that much of modern communication occurs on platforms like WeChat, it is essential to master the nuances of digital communication.

Regarding topics, focus on themes of mutual assistance and support. Discussing collaborative and mutually beneficial topics is the best way to solve problems and strengthen relationships. Social networks and neural networks share similarities: they both operate on a "use it or lose it" basis and follow Hebb's Rule, where connections between frequently interacting nodes become stronger.¹

The ideal intersection of these three elements is a private space in the morning or evening, centered on offering or requesting help. Does this sound familiar?

From a practical standpoint, in the initial stages of social networking, when one's own resources are limited, prioritize immediate requests for help over delayed assistance to others. Compared to the reverse approach—helping first and asking for help later—this strategy is more effective. By securing help early on, you gain the autonomy to later assist others. Let's delve into key topics related to immediate requests for help.

Why do people seek help from those above them?

In the early stages of personal development, don't hesitate to seek help from your juniors, peers, or seniors. Here are a few reasons:

First, people tend to like those they have helped. Assisting others is an investment behavior. Those who help you may overvalue you due to the connection they feel, often influenced by a self-serving bias or the IKEA effect. Some call this the "Benjamin

¹ Hebb's Rule is an important theory in neuroscience proposed by Canadian psychologist Donald Olding Hebb in 1949. The core idea of this theory can be summarized as "cells that fire together, wire together," meaning that neurons that activate simultaneously are likely to form connections.

Franklin effect", based on Franklin's advice: "If you want to make a friend, ask them for a favor."

Second, seeking help is a business with a one-to-many payoff. If they help, you gain; if they don't, you lose nothing. The asymmetric nature of this strategy means there's little downside, so why not give it a try?

Lastly, each time you seek help, you increase the likelihood of receiving it in the future. Every request acknowledges the helper's capacity and subtly boosts the benefactor's sense of superiority. Moreover, few people can consistently refuse someone; each refusal adds psychological strain, making eventual assistance more likely.

So, when you face challenges, have the courage to seek help immediately, especially from those above you. They are more likely to be your mentors and benefactors. True leaders enjoy investing in others, and because of the significant gap in skills and status, they are more likely to support your proactive efforts. In contrast, juniors and peers may fear that helping you will turn you into a future competitor.

Why do people hesitate to seek help from those above them, and how can these concerns be alleviated?

Some people are taught from a young age to "never trouble others with your own affairs". To them, I say: rather than starting off pretending to be self-sufficient only to end up struggling and eventually needing help, why not seek assistance from the outset? Autonomism repeatedly emphasizes that things you will eventually need to do should be done sooner rather than later. Early investment leads to better growth and more autonomy later, allowing you to genuinely give back to those early investors.

Others may feel too embarrassed to ask for help. To them, I say: do you really think your "face" matters that much to those who can help you? Even ancient prime ministers understood the value of being "eager to learn and unashamed to ask questions." What makes you so different? Challenge your internal doubts and insecurities; remind yourself it's not a big deal. The worst outcome is simply a refusal, which leaves you no worse off than if you hadn't asked at all. But if you succeed, the rewards are real. So,

seeking help is a strategy with asymmetric advantages; not shying away from asking for help is the highest level in any power game.

What are some principles for effectively seeking help from those above?

Here are a few suggestions:

First, be direct. Potential benefactors are often busy; they don't have time for indirect approaches. Clearly express your needs, and if possible, opt for in-person meetings or phone calls to better capture their attention.

Second, provide details. Avoid wasting time on grand visions; instead, focus on the specifics of what you need help with, including the what, why, and how. Benefactors often don't know exactly what kind of help you need, so you should proactively present potential solutions to save them time.

Third, strive for synchronization. Aim to match your communication style with theirs, both verbally and non-verbally. Use their language, mimic their tone and gestures, and find or create common ground. This increases the likelihood of rapport and recognition.

Fourth, provide quick feedback. After they agree to help or offer substantive assistance, immediately express gratitude and keep them updated on your progress. Whether you succeed or fail, sincerely show your appreciation. Practical gestures like treating them to a meal, sending a gift, or thanking them in person may seem old-fashioned but have stood the test of time.

What factors determine whether benefactors will help you?

Seeking help is essentially offering benefactors an opportunity to invest in you. Following the advice above can enhance your appeal as an investment candidate, but it can't guarantee assistance. In reality, whether someone invests in you is influenced by both chance and necessity.

On one hand, there's the element of chance, related to quick decisions.

If the benefactor is busy and must rely on intuition for quick decisions, helping you or not can come down to a fleeting moment influenced by immediacy bias, making luck a significant factor. For instance, if they've just had a good meal, heard a great song, or enjoyed a game, their good mood might lead them to overestimate you and offer assistance. Conversely, if they haven't, you might be out of luck.

Two key chance factors you can control are the scenario's time and place and your personal image. We've already discussed environmental impacts on the body and mood. Additionally, presenting yourself well and standing out positively can draw attention. Both online and offline, the halo effect is at play: offline, ensure you are well-dressed and articulate; online, choose appropriate avatars and usernames and keep your text clean. Studies show that people generally find average, symmetrical things more attractive. To stand out, you should keep your main presentation tidy while adding some unique touches. The same applies to both text and visuals. In the GenAI era, enhanced editing tools mean it's all about how much effort you put in.

It's a good idea to regularly evaluate yourself from others' perspectives to see if you leave a positive first impression. Before someone invests in you, at least appear as a worthwhile investment. In the digital age, few people exist without their digital personas. Your digital footprint, including all your works, is part of your public image. To build and control your public persona, I suggest proactively sharing information and establishing a complete, accurate digital identity that aligns with your offline presence.

When making public commitments online, stay grounded; don't overpromise. Overselling can make you seem insincere or unreliable. When setting goals, be realistic, and when pursuing them, do your best. If it turns out you can't meet them, show your effort—like working late—so others attribute your failure to bad luck rather than a lack of effort. I often encounter young people online whose profiles list numerous impressive titles, yet they lack real skills or accomplishments. These aren't shining gold nuggets; they're just smelly stones.

On the other hand, there are necessary factors related to rational analysis.

If the benefactor has time for rational deliberation, they might consider two key aspects:

First, whether you are worth investing in, which depends largely on how well they know you. If they don't know you well, they might rely on the opinions of others, potentially falling into the trap of confirmation bias, where good reviews lead to more good reviews and vice versa. Therefore, it's best to have a reliable and credible person vouch for you.

Second, whether they need to invest in you, which depends on the closeness of your relationship. If they are close, such as a close friend or family, things are naturally easier. If not, they'll look at who recommended you and their relationship with that person—this makes the recommender crucial.

Ultimately, whether it's the recommender or the evaluator, both play the role of intermediaries in social networks. In both snap judgments and rational analysis, excellent intermediaries are indispensable. Early in your development, you need intermediaries; later on, you should aim to become one yourself.

9.2 Advanced Stage Intermediary Strategy: Building Communities and Establishing Multiple Relationships

Unlike peripheral individuals, intermediaries occupy the center of social networks. Once you have completed the initial stage of making friends and have established and strengthened many high-quality one-to-one relationships, you can start transitioning from a peripheral position to an intermediary role by creating communities and establishing multi-to-multi relationships. At this stage, you are no longer just joining circles but are creating them. You are not only connecting with influential individuals but also linking these individuals through you, helping them become friends and mutually supportive. Eventually, you yourself become one of the influential figures.

9.2.1 Three Skills and Six Roles of Intermediaries

If you want to be a successful intermediary, according to the social physics perspective, you must first become a charismatic connector within the community—a weaver of idea flows. You act as a busy bee, pollinating the flowers of community dialogue as you

gather nectar. You establish the entry thresholds for your community and create your own comparative advantage, making yourself indispensable. Based on Marina Krakovsky's book, "The Middleman Economy", there are six roles that intermediaries play, which I have adapted into three skills and six roles.

Information Provision Skills: A good intermediary acts as both a "connector" and a "filter" in the social network. As a "connector", you link people from different circles to provide large-scale, diverse information when there is a scarcity of information. In this role, you must verify information where possible and be cautious when sharing it. As a "filter", you help organize, refine, and provide concise, precise information when there is information overload. This requires a certain level of understanding and analysis of related issues, and sometimes you may also need to offer "prompter" and "scribe" services. Everyone wants someone in their circle who is a walking encyclopedia or a multifunctional machine, someone like an AI who knows everything and always has useful insights. The first step to becoming an excellent intermediary is to build a vast network of connections, possess strong information-gathering abilities, and be willing to invest effort in serving the needs of others.

Problem-Solving Skills: A good intermediary serves as a "buffer" and "conveyor belt" in the social network. As a "buffer", you share risks and steadfastly stand by those who need help, such as wholesalers who act as buffers for manufacturers, helping to distribute risks and benefiting from it. As a "conveyor belt", you separate conflicting parties and create space, acting as a mediator who relays messages, thus turning direct conflicts into three-step indirect relationships. Sometimes you need to play the role of peacemaker, delivering kind words, while other times you might need to play the bad guy, delivering harsh words. Simultaneously, you accept both good and harsh words from the other side. You can model your strategy on the role of celebrity managers, and be ready to act as someone's "good shield", "mouthpiece", "amplifier", "lackey", or "scapegoat". The second step to becoming an excellent intermediary requires a commitment to share risks and benefits with the community members, enduring hardships together.

Authority Maintenance Skills: A good intermediary serves as both a certifier and an enforcer in the social network. As a "certifier", you provide endorsement and validation of someone's abilities when trust is lacking, acting as a trust agent or referee whose opinions influence the initial social evaluation of others. As an "enforcer", when someone connected to you breaches formal rules or unwritten codes, you can compel compliance or administer consequences for violations, relying not on illegal force but on personal authority and social pressure to ensure compliance. If someone refuses to comply, you can ostracize them from the community, akin to how medieval popes excommunicated feudal lords, threatening them with "social death". When you have this ability, you've likely matured into a respected figure, one who has the power to judge who succeeds or fails, and who becomes the de facto arbitrator. The third step to becoming an excellent intermediary requires substantial expertise and social prestige to maintain trust and confidence among community members, and when necessary, to validate and ensure the reliability of others.

Intermediaries who possess these three abilities are strong supporters, benefactors, and givers who actively help others. To allocate resources to the worthiest investments, an excellent intermediary should modify their investment strategy with an asymmetrical approach:

Maximize Returns: Prioritize helping individuals with high potential (high return on investment) and those with low costs (easy assistance). Other requests for help can be deferred, allowing time to decide. Since many people adopt the upward help-seeking strategy and may cast a wide net for assistance, hoping for a return, the best way to screen and filter these people is to delay assistance. When you receive a request, treat it coldly and make decisions slowly. If the person is genuinely seeking help, they may try again; then you can respond accordingly.

Control Costs: Prioritize helping those who are either financially or professionally relevant to you, and then those who are either financially or professionally connected. Disregard those who are neither.

Mitigate Risks: Helping others should never come at the expense of your own rights, those of third parties, or social ethics. Therefore, you must assess the character of those

seeking help. The top priority should be those who keep their word and follow through with their actions.

9.2.2 Four Stages of Community Building

Building a community as a connector involves going through four stages, during which one's position is continuously elevated and solidified, eventually becoming a core node of the community. An ideal community, in my view, should be a social network in which the autonomy of its participants is mutually enhanced. An ideal community should be an autonomous organization that is absolutely excellent, transparent, honest, and empowered, composed of autonomous individuals who facilitate each other's growth.

Stage 1: Gather Talent. When forming a community, set entry thresholds to increase the density of talent. As the saying goes, "Live among the virtuous, and heroes will come unbidden." You can refer to Netflix's principle of absolute excellence: select the brightest minds to join, prioritize quality over quantity, and ensure diversity and independence among members. If the number of members grows too large, consider subdividing into specialized subgroups. The community should have a target audience and a shared purpose, which forms the foundation of mutual understanding for both current and future members. The connector is also a foundational element of this consensus, serving as both the online platform administrator and the organizer of offline activities. The earliest members of the community are typically friends of the connector, with subsequent introductions subject to the connector's review. Initial members should possess abilities superior to the community founder (connector), while newcomers should exceed the community's average skill level. Thus, the connector determines the overall caliber of the community's members, acting as a certifier by endorsing the members with their own credibility, allowing safe and free exchanges within a foundation of trust.

Stage 2: Foster Atmosphere. After establishing a community, it's crucial to introduce suitable topics to stimulate discussions and ensure a vibrant and supportive environment. The connector should act as an enforcer, eliminating low-quality content

and discussions; they must also serve as a connector and filter, providing high-quality information and suggestions to inspire thought and action among members. Additionally, the connector functions as a buffer and conveyor, fostering an open and inclusive atmosphere, offering personal care, and encouraging members to speak their minds and engage in critical, constructive dialogue—what's known as Radical Candor. The principles of radical truth and radical transparency from Bridgewater Associates can serve as a reference. When faced with criticism, the connector should respond appropriately, correcting mistakes or improving where necessary. To enhance efficiency in managing the community, it's essential to leverage digital tools, integrating both online and offline interactions. For instance, during the early stages of the 2020 pandemic, I managed several volunteer groups using a combination of WeChat, Shimo Docs, and bot assistants: WeChat for communicating with volunteers, Shimo Docs for recording important discussions, and bots for basic member management and content distribution. When the pandemic resurfaced in 2022, we tested video channels with virtual human technology, which also proved effective. For managing the AIGC (AI-generated content) public community in 2024, I plan to employ a hybrid approach using both carbon-based (human) and silicon-based (AI) participants. Similar combinations will likely continue to emerge, eventually achieving human-machine collaboration in community management.

Stage 3: Facilitate Growth. A community's value and significance are validated when membership yields more benefits than non-membership. Communities offer two main advantages: solving problems for oneself and for others. First, there's collective wisdom. When effectively organized, group discussions can aggregate scattered individual knowledge into comprehensive solutions for complex problems beyond the reach of individual intelligence. Collective wisdom hinges on high-quality community communication; to prevent issues like group polarization or groupthink and manage varying social emotions, decision architecture tools are recommended to fully utilize the positive aspects of structured processes and collaboration. Second, there's collective power. Effectively mobilized groups can generate forces that surpass the sum of individual contributions. To drive collective action, connectors should follow my proposed "Synergy Principle": First, consensus—identify common goals, as the more aligned the objectives, the easier the mobilization. Second, co-creation—plan collective

actions, as the more inclusive the actions, the easier the mobilization. Third, sharing—distribute collective results, as the fairer the distribution, the easier the mobilization. Additionally, issuing key signals and identifying critical supporters are vital, as they can transform a seemingly foolish leader moving mountains into a worthy leader to follow.¹

Stage 4: Renewal. Communities, like cells, undergo cycles of birth and death, with new entities constantly emerging and old ones fading away. Cells divide to form new cells, and communities similarly give rise to new communities. To foster more communities, veteran connectors should mentor the next generation of connectors.

At the same time, every community seems destined to follow the second law of thermodynamics: moving from activity to stillness, and from stillness to death. Our potential social contacts are theoretically limitless, but our brain capacity and Dunbar's number constrain us to regularly prune communities and connections.

Communities, much like the human brain, will gradually disintegrate if their nodes and links remain inactive for long. Inactive communities eventually disappear, reducing our burdens and creating opportunities for innovation. Connectors must respect the natural course of community evolution, allow members to exit voluntarily, and be willing to disband a community when necessary. A semi-defunct community's benefits are often outweighed by the damage to everyone's morale, so it's best to let go when needed.

9.2.3 Two Approaches to Unleashing Collective Intelligence

Here, we will focus on the topic of collective intelligence. An effectively organized group can exhibit intelligence beyond the sum of its individuals, providing a boost to each member. Conversely, poor organization can lead to negative outcomes such as

¹ There is a classic TED talk where the speaker shows a video of a lawn where everyone is initially lounging around aimlessly. Suddenly, one person starts dancing, and everyone else just watches, laughing at him and thinking he is a "lunatic." Then, another person joins in and starts dancing with him (likely a "plant" by the experimenter), making the initial "lunatic" no longer look so alone. Soon after, a bystander joins in, and now the "lunatic" appears more like a leader. As they continue dancing, more and more people join, and eventually, the entire lawn is dancing. In this scenario, that first follower is the key supporter who determines whether the initiator is seen as a leader or a fool.

group pressure, groupthink, and group polarization. An excellent intermediary should learn to distinguish different types of problems and adopt appropriate group organization methods to harness others' intelligence effectively. Broadly, problems and communities can be categorized into two main types.

The first type is specialized teams that deal with regular problems.

Routine issues that occur repeatedly justify the formation of specialized teams that provide ongoing group support, especially in terms of insights and advice. These teams are created by you, for you, and report to you. Since these recurring issues are likely related to your work, this advisory team also forms a key part of your work team. These individuals are not only extensions and continuations of your brain but also serve as your secretaries, assistants, and advisors, forming a powerful biological computing cluster.

The approach to building specialized teams can be guided by the "**Three Absolutes**" principle:

Principle 1: Absolute Excellence. Ensure the team's high density of talent, where each member is an absolute expert in a specific field, possessing specialization, independence, and diversity. Seek out and invite outstanding individuals, particularly those who excel in areas where you are weaker. Bill Gates famously said, "A great lathe operator commands several times the wage of an average lathe operator, but a great writer of software code is worth 10,000 times the price of an average software writer." While this statement is debatable in the software industry, it serves as a widely recognized principle. Netflix operationalizes this by categorizing employees into operational and creative roles, offering high salaries to top-tier talent in niche fields while encouraging those who are no longer excellent to leave. Ultimately, like attracts like, and an absolutely excellent team will continue to attract more top talent, creating a self-reinforcing cycle.

Principle 2: Absolute Candor. On the foundation of absolute excellence, foster an open and inclusive discussion environment, encouraging experts to express differing opinions, and even appointing a Devil's Advocate to intentionally present opposing

views. Simultaneously, appoint a charismatic connector as the moderator to guide discussions and ensure high-frequency interaction on core topics. As Alex Pentland aptly noted, "The best ideas don't come from the smartest people, but from those who are the best at getting ideas from others." Absolute candor is built on mutual care among team members, promoting direct challenges and honest dialogue, which helps reap the fruits of collective intelligence.

Principle 3: Absolute Trust. After absolute excellence and candor, for general issues, trust the team's answers to demonstrate absolute trust. For more critical issues, consider Bridgewater Associates' approach of quantifying performance evaluations, listening to the majority, consulting with a few key individuals, and making the final decision. Ray Dalio, the founder of Bridgewater Associates, advocates for an idea meritocracy to enhance investment projects. He recruits top experts to form internal think tanks, champions principles of Radical Truth and Radical Transparency, promotes the free flow of internal information, and employs digital tools like the Dot Collector to track performance, rate predictive abilities, and apply weighted calculations to various projects, thereby improving decision quality. Similarly, the U.S. tech firm Palantir goes a step further by integrating collective intelligence (expert systems) with machine intelligence, allowing AI to make initial judgments based on big data, which are then refined by expert systems, achieving synergy between machine clusters and expert clusters. Over a decade ago, I encountered an even more striking version: the U.S. military experimented with connecting human brains to computers, with soldiers wearing brain-machine interfaces quickly scanning satellite images. If a particular image triggered multiple soldiers' brains, they would pause for closer inspection, which often led to the discovery of hidden terrorist hideouts in Afghanistan. This might represent another evolutionary direction for the human brain in the AI era.

Clearly, the key to building specialized teams is expert resources. The number and size of these teams should be as extensive as possible, provided quality is maintained and costs are controlled. The minimum requirement is having at least two to three trusted experts available for individual consultation at any time.

To secure such experts, you can take several steps: Seek experts among relatives, classmates, fellow townspeople, and colleagues who possess knowledge and skills and

have no conflicts of interest with you. They are reliable, free experts and should be your first choice. Find experts with professional ethics in institutions like schools, hospitals, and law firms and pay for high-quality services. To build a trust bond, it is advisable to get introduced by someone you know. Collect information through public channels and connect with experts on public platforms. As previously discussed, pay attention to your image, package yourself as a premium asset, and boldly seek advice from unfamiliar renowned experts, offering them the opportunity to invest in you. Do not fear rejection, as it is expected; receiving guidance is an added benefit. Moreover, people tend to like those they have helped.

Finally, the rapid rise of GenAI and AIGC eliminates the drudgery of apprenticeships for beginners but also strips them of learning opportunities. They will heavily rely on AI and struggle to surpass it. Future generations may see an increase in AI-dependent individuals, but genuine experts with unique wisdom beyond AI will become increasingly rare and valuable. They will be our allies in constructing collective intelligence and defending truth in the AI era. To discern true experts, I strongly recommend investing time and money to meet them in person and engage in long-term exchanges. Only practice and time will serve as the ultimate test for experts in the AI era.

The Second Type: Loose Communities for Ad Hoc Issues

In addition to regular work problems, there are also temporary issues related to life and learning. To address these, you can create or join several sizable loose communities as needed, which provide intellectual support, particularly in terms of data and information.

To be flexible and adaptable, these loose communities should ideally have scale, where the importance of member diversity outweighs specialization and independence. With a larger group, members are more likely to hold enough pieces of the puzzle to arrive at the correct answer. No matter what question is raised, someone will likely know the answer. A typical example is your WeChat Moments. During the pandemic, if you wanted to know where to buy fever medicine that day, posting in Moments would

probably yield quicker results than asking individuals, as the useful information is scattered among people you don't know.

In daily exercises, there is a "**General Problem-Solving Module**", which broadly categorizes the world's problems into four types:

Known Knowns: We know how to articulate the problem and who holds the answer. In this case, learning is the most efficient way to solve the problem—just find the relevant expert, read their work, or observe their actions to easily solve the problem.

Unknown Knowns: We know that answers exist but don't know how to articulate the problem or who might know the answer. Here, discussion is a better approach to problem-solving. By asking questions or sharing in a community, we can gather feedback from others, gradually piecing together a complete problem and a correct answer, ultimately solving the problem.

Known Unknowns: We know what the problem is but know that there is currently no answer. Here, thinking is the better path to solving problems. By writing and drawing, we can expand our thinking in breadth and depth, attempting to find possible answers. Once partial answers are found, further discussion and learning can fill in the gaps to solve the problem.

Unknown Unknowns: We do not know what the problems or answers are, entering a “no man's land” without any clues to reference. In this case, practice is the only chance for solving problems. By iterating through trial and error and receiving feedback in action, we can find some leads, then combine thinking, discussion, and learning to solve the problem.

This combination of practice, thinking, discussion, and learning is what I refer to as the evolutionary model, which is particularly suited for finding answers amidst complex uncertainty.

Clearly, both machine intelligence and collective intelligence discussed in this chapter can provide significant support for learning, discussion, thinking, and practice, particularly during discussions. It could even be said that the core of collective

intelligence lies in "how to unleash the power of discussion." In addition to the "casting a wide net" method mentioned earlier, other techniques such as the "voting method" are also employed.

The premise of the voting method is that for some simple problems with numerical answers, taking the average of votes can yield fairly good results. Pioneers of social physics used this method to estimate the distance from the Earth to the Moon or the weight of a cow in a market; as an enthusiast, I have also tested it with the number of people sharing a birthday in a room at an annual meeting, and even my personal weight. The results were quite accurate and close to the actual values. While writing this book, I created a reader group, and bots kept auto-joining through QR codes, occasionally popping up to post small ads, which angered the human readers. Aside from kicking out every caught bot, we had no other solution. I decided to turn it into a game and initiated a poll asking everyone to predict: "How many more bots will pop up in this group before December 31, 2022?" The average of dozens of votes was 3.05, and the final answer was three. This is the power of the voting method.

Theoretically, high-frequency interactions will promote the circulation of ideas within the group, enhancing collective intelligence. This is relatively easy to achieve in specialized teams, but due to the large number of members in loose communities, organizing effective discussions beyond simple voting can be challenging. Yet some experts refuse to concede. Philip Tetlock, an expert in predicting issues, launched the Good Judgment Project with funding from the U.S. government, setting up a website to gather users and their opinions. He translated complex international event forecasts into prediction questions akin to voting, asked participants to make quantitative predictions, and evaluated the results to score, rank, and select the top 2% as superforecasters. In essence, Tetlock's logic is similar to that of Bridgewater Associates, but on a much larger scale with greater member diversity. According to Tetlock, the collective intelligence of the superforecasters surpassed prediction markets and general expert forecasts.¹

¹ In his writings, Tetlock criticized experts for their poor performance in predicting future events, stating that they often fare worse than random selections made by children and monkeys, especially those experts who frequently make unsubstantiated claims on television.

For ordinary people, the only way to build loose communities is to use social tools like WeChat to connect more intelligent minds. However, no matter how hard we try, WeChat groups will inevitably shift from order to disorder, from bustling to quiet. A few will keep chatting while most remain silent, echoing Professor Hu Yong's observation: "A cacophony of voices, yet no one listens."

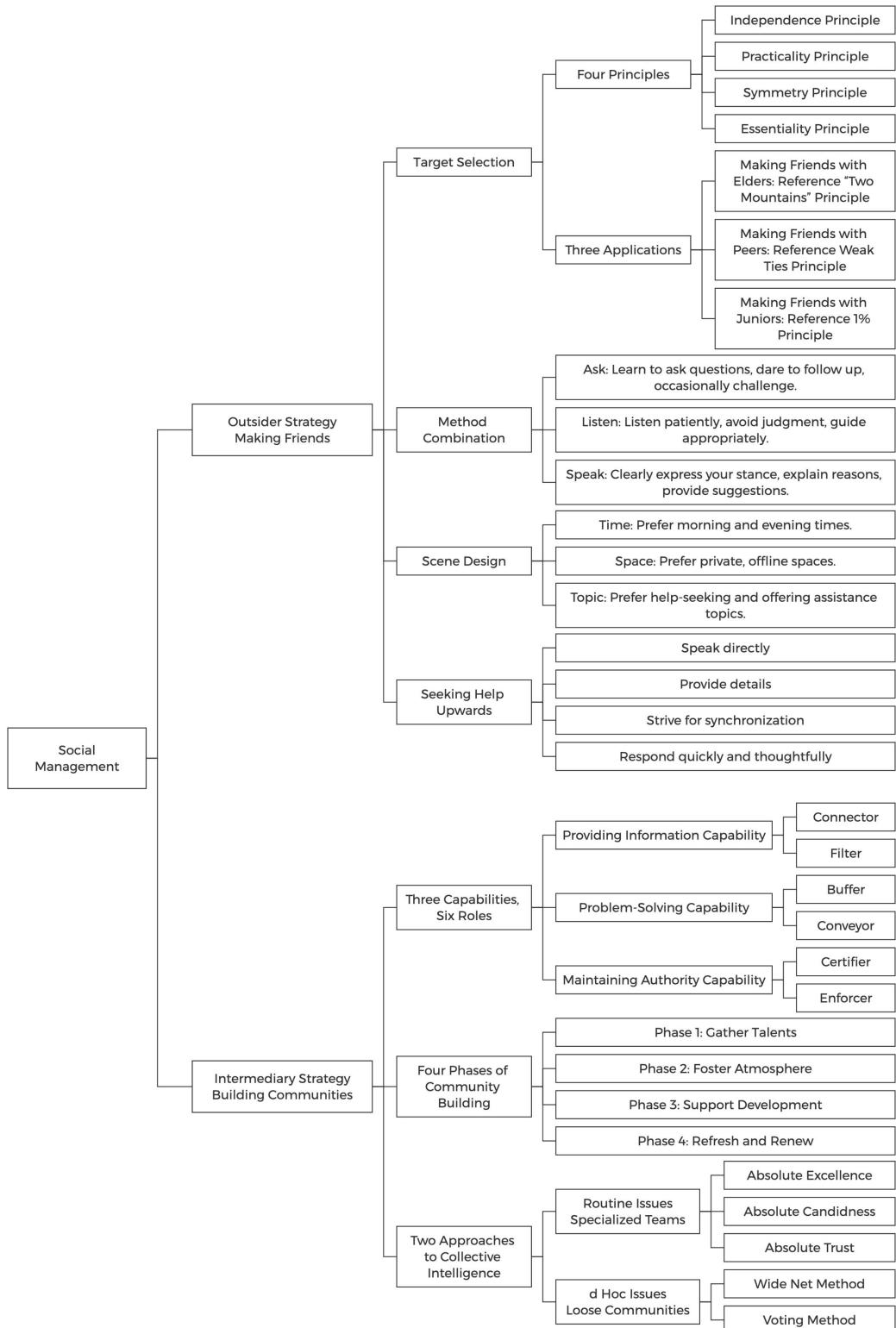
In the AI era, this situation worsens. Just as search engines and social media bred the last generation of trolls, pseudo-scientists, and conspiracy theorists, GenAI is now creating a new generation of pseudo-experts. The digital space will see an increase in those who obscure the truth, stir trouble, and spread misinformation. Ordinary people, if they wish to avoid wasting time on these individuals, should maintain self-protection and keep a respectful distance because the antagonist online could very well be a silicon-based chatterbox crafted by malicious intent, rather than a carbon-based life form. AIGC will create new cognitive overloads, leading to a further deterioration of the ecology of loose communities. Ultimately, people will become indifferent to the content within communities, allowing group polarization, groupthink, group emotions, and the demise of collective intelligence to proliferate.

An effective strategy to tackle the above issues is to adopt a combination approach: On one hand, strictly control the scale and quality of specialized teams to ensure they maintain the baseline of collective intelligence and can effectively solve routine problems. On the other hand, actively expand the scale and number of loose communities to explore the limits of collective intelligence and reserve potential for addressing various ad hoc issues. In many cases, quantity is often a prerequisite for quality. When quantity reaches a certain level, scale effects will emerge.

9.5 Chapter Summary

Social management requires us to make friends and build communities, evolving from an outsider to an intermediary. Through seeking help and mutual assistance, we increase others' understanding of us and gain their support. Effective organization can bring collective intelligence to community members. We can combine two strategies: creating specialized teams to solve routine problems and forming loose communities to address

temporary issues. Ultimately, social management can bring us social capital, as well as the economic and political resources that recognition from others points toward.



Chapter 10: Game Management

Thank you, Mario! But our princess is in another castle!

—Toad, Super Mario

A life unexamined is not worth living, and a life without joy is unbearably bitter. While the previous chapters introduced methods for "learning" and "doing", this chapter explores the experience of "playing", discussing how to select and excel in video games, design and engage with life games, and ultimately play our way to autonomy and a brighter future.

Autonomism believes that the pursuit of autonomy is a process of continuously solving problems, filled with ups and downs. This requires the courage to face challenges, the wisdom to find joy amidst hardship, and the determination to persevere. We can discover and cultivate these qualities through gaming.

Philosopher Bernard Suits once said, "Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles." Games continuously inspire our passion and drive to tackle difficult challenges, guiding and helping us view obstacles as opportunities, turning the passive into the active, making the unfun enjoyable, and transforming the impossible into the possible. However, gaming can also bring many problems. In real life, as players, we often face the conflict of wanting to play games but feeling we shouldn't.

To better harness the positive effects of games, we must master the essentials of game management. With over 30 years of gaming experience, having participated in World

Cyber Games (WCG) tournaments during my school years, operated a national gaming community, designed simple game maps, and spent more time gaming than reading or writing in my professional life, I will draw on personal observations, reflections, and experiences to discuss the topic of game management. The core idea boils down to two main points:

Select and Excel at Video Games: Embrace the era of video games by treating them as a virtual training ground for autonomy. Maximize the ten positive effects of gaming, choose the right types of games, and improve your gaming behavior on three levels—from games playing you to you playing games, and even becoming a game developer, turning games into part of your Legacy.

Design and Master Life Games: Upgrade from a sleepwalker to a dream-maker by mastering the seven components of gamification and applying them to the practice of self-management.

10.1 Selecting and Excelling at Video Games

10.1.1 Embracing the Era of Video Games

Psychologist Kathy Pasek and her colleagues, in their book *The Power of Play*, argue that children learn best when they do so through play. Play is to children what gasoline is to cars—a fuel for intellectual development. The five characteristics of play for children—enjoyment, spontaneity, active participation, imagination, and the absence of external goals—work together to create a sense of safe freedom, accelerating their learning and growth. For adults, gaming is our form of play. Video games on computers, consoles, mobile phones, and virtual reality systems serve as both a relaxing escape and a catalyst for personal autonomy.

Following the eras of print and visual media, and just before the arrival of GenAI, we have already entered the era of video games. Games have become an indispensable part of our lives, a new lifestyle and form of experience that shapes the environment around us and contributes to how we perceive the world and ourselves. In fact, games have already surpassed books in influence, becoming the most impactful cultural medium.

Today's video game players are akin to the readers of martial arts novels of the past, waiting for their moment in the spotlight. Platforms like Douban have quietly introduced game review sections, allowing people to publicly list the games they've played, just as they would with books they've read, movies they've seen, or music they've listened to.

Looking ahead, it is foreseeable that game scriptwriters will, following poets and lyricists, win the Nobel Prize in Literature; game video and music producers will take center stage at the Oscars and the Grammys; and the gaming industry will likely become the world's largest entertainment industry, with a market bigger than the combined sports, film, and music industries. The phenomenal success of "Black Myth: Wukong" is already a testament to this.

While some destinations seek to use games to promote tourism, games actually pose a greater challenge to the tourism industry. As someone who holds both bachelor's and master's degrees in tourism management, I must admit that because the cost of playing games is lower than the cost of travel, yet the experience is equal to or even exceeds that of travel, real-world tourists are more likely to become virtual-world players rather than vice versa. The pandemic reinforced this trend of gaming at home. Therefore, the future of the tourism industry may lie in its integration with the gaming industry, absorbing more game elements into the design of travel experiences, blending reality with imagination, and participating in the self-identity construction of "tourist-players". We will likely see giants like Ubisoft, Sony, and Activision help build the "Westworld" of the future—a Disneyland for adults.

Games are also spawning new production models. Since 2003, when China's General Administration of Sport officially recognized e-sports as the 99th competitive sport, many e-sports players have embarked on careers as professional athletes. With the rise and popularity of massive online games like World of Warcraft, the trend of "workification" of games has further expanded. The division of labor in virtual worlds is reshaping professions in the real world, giving rise to "game laborers" whose work revolves around playing games. For them, games are no longer just entertainment that costs money but labor that generates income. The traditional definition of labor exploitation by capital is also expanding.

Moreover, gaming serves as an incubator for future technologies. Today's AI chip powerhouse, NVIDIA, originally made its name through gaming graphics cards. The metaverse, which simulates and records human behavior in 3D, began as a gaming concept and has since evolved through gaming practice. Human-machine collaboration is an unstoppable future trend, and the development of human-machine interfaces continues to advance. Gaming trains us to master new technologies and test new interfaces. The games we play today are the foundation for tomorrow's human-machine collaboration and multi-brain synchronization. For many people, their first IT teacher was a video game.

Furthermore, gaming has become a platform for the birth of GenAI technology. Many GenAI companies, including OpenAI, initially trained their models using game engines, game data, and gaming graphics cards. In turn, GenAI is now deeply transforming the gaming industry by enhancing game development and presentation, cutting costs, increasing efficiency, and improving the player experience. Due to its unique mechanism of random content generation, GenAI is also emerging as an addictive new type of game.

Clearly, whether you acknowledge it or not, games are exploring and creating entirely new possibilities for the future of humanity.

10.1.2 Games as a Virtual Training Ground for Autonomy

In an age where even young children pull out their phones to play games and neurons in a dish can "play" games, the belief that "playing games is a waste of time and leads to ruin" is outdated, and even reflects arrogance and ignorance. The question today is not whether we should play games, but how to play them well. The first step to enhancing our gaming literacy is to reshape our understanding of games. From the perspectives of resources, abilities, and will, Autonomism provides a clear view of the benefits of gaming:

From the Resource Perspective: Games allow players to shed the role of a bystander in real life and become the main protagonist in a virtual world, moving from scarcity to abundance.

Most games provide players with two essential resources: **Information resources** – Players have the privilege of access to comprehensive information, such as carefully designed interfaces, maps, and guides, giving them a "god's-eye view" that allows them to make better decisions. **Time resources** – Players have control over time, with the ability to pause, save, and reload. If they fail or make a mistake, they can simply review and try again. This grants players virtually infinite trial-and-error opportunities until they succeed.

From the Ability Perspective: Games allow players to escape from the ordinary limitations of real life and become superheroes in virtual worlds, progressing from average ability to superhuman capability.

Most games endow players with special skills, offer progressively challenging tasks, provide instant feedback through visual effects, and quantify growth through levels or experience points. Players become addicted to the joy of output and upgrades. No matter how challenging the journey, players will ultimately succeed and improve their abilities. Games create a low-cost learning environment where players experience the process of growth, fostering a growth mindset. They constantly remind us that effort brings progress and that anything is possible.

From the Will Perspective:

Games give players the courage to shed the caution and hesitancy of real life, becoming the masters of their own destinies in a virtual world, transitioning from weak-willed to strong-willed.

Games provide players with abundant resources, extraordinary abilities, and absolute safety. They encourage, and even entice, players to accept, value, and unleash their own will, fearlessly pursuing pleasure and freedom, making choices, and accepting the consequences. In doing so, players break free from the self-repression and self-restraint of daily life, achieving self-actualization and transcendence within the game. Will is like a mirror—life clouds it, while gaming polishes it, revealing the true desires within.

The lessons that games teach us are not limited to the realm of games. The states that games bring us into are not confined to the gaming world either. The choices, experiences, roles, and states we embody in the gaming world have a direct influence on

our choices, experiences, roles, and states in the real world. The personas we adopt in games impact our real-life performance. This phenomenon, where our in-game identity influences our real-world behavior, is known as the Proteus Effect.¹

Autonomism holds that games are simulators and training grounds. They allow us to experience autonomy (safe freedom) in the virtual world, which in turn encourages us to pursue autonomy in the real world. In the same way, games simulate high autonomy in a dream-like space, guiding us to achieve high autonomy in reality. Movies like Ready Player One and Avatar tell similar stories: a player from a slum becomes a hero who saves the world, or a disabled man from Earth becomes a leader on a distant planet. Stories like these will only become more common.

Based on these reflections, Autonomism encourages everyone to play games—and to play them well.

10.1.3 The Ten Positive Effects of Video Games

Game designer and researcher Jane McGonigal has focused on the psychological advantages of gamers and how these benefits can be transferred to solve real-world problems. In her book "Reality is Broken", she discusses the positive effects of games from psychological and behavioral perspectives. I have organized and expanded upon her ideas, summarizing them into ten key aspects:

Pain Inhibition. "SnowWorld" is a VR game developed to aid in the treatment of severe burn patients. When patients play the game while their wounds are being treated, they report feeling in control of their thoughts and sensations 92% of the time, and their pain decreases by 30-50%, with effects superior to morphine. Experts believe that the rich 3D information provided by VR games occupies the patient's cognitive resources, leaving less capacity to process pain, similar to the principles of acupuncture.

¹ The Proteus Effect is a psychological phenomenon where the self-image that people construct in virtual worlds influences their behavior and attitudes in the real world. This concept was first introduced by Nick Yee and Jeremy Bailenson in June 2007 at Stanford University.

Reduction of Flashbacks. Oxford University experiments have shown that playing visually demanding games like "Tetris" after viewing gruesome and traumatic images can significantly reduce the frequency of involuntary recollections of those traumatic memories. This doesn't mean the person forgets the experience but rather that they recall it less often.

Emotional Regulation. Simple puzzle games bring joy, while complex action games help people cope with negative emotions more effectively. For example, children playing "Super Mario" before surgery exhibit almost no anxiety beforehand, and their postoperative anxiety is half that of children who didn't play. In the future, games might even become prescriptions for psychological disorders.

Boosting Confidence. Illness often leaves patients feeling powerless, but games help restore their sense of self-efficacy. Clinical trials have shown that cancer patients who played just two hours of "Re-Mission" experienced improved medication adherence for up to three months. There are likely many other similar games.

Building Resilience. Although players fail about 80% of the time in video games, they persist. Learning from failure while fighting bosses is common in games, which helps players develop a habit of resilience. Studies show that gamers often demonstrate better resilience outside of gaming too, though further research is needed to determine if this is causal or merely correlational.

Enhancing Empathy. Games serve as powerful tools for fostering empathy. Our brains have mirror neurons, which allow us to "enter someone else's world". Stanford University's virtual human interaction experiments found that just a few minutes in the right virtual environment can boost willpower and compassion, influencing participants' thoughts and behaviors for up to a week afterward.

Vicarious Exercise. In a weightlifting experiment, participants watched their digital avatars exercise, observing immediate changes in muscle growth. Afterward, participants who had seen the avatar's muscle changes completed 10 times as many reps as those who had not. Changes in video game avatars can create a "mirror effect" in the real world. Games like "The Sims" motivate players to exercise more and engage in

more social activities in real life. Similarly, after playing as a superhero in VR games, people show greater altruism in the real world.

Improving Social Connections. Playing games together creates neurological and physiological linkages between players. Whether cooperating or competing, players' facial expressions, heart rates, breathing patterns, and brainwaves begin to synchronize. Massive online cooperative games improve relationships among players, making them more willing to help each other in real life. The Middle East Gaming Challenge brought together thousands of children from the Middle East to play online games, fostering dialogue between Arab and Jewish students.

Enhancing Cognition. Fast-paced action and racing games like "Call of Duty" and "Need for Speed" enhance visual attention and spatial intelligence. Hardcore players track up to three times as much information as casual gamers. Strategy games like "StarCraft" and "Mass Effect" improve specific problem-solving abilities. Additionally, playing various games boosts creativity; even children who play violent games score higher on creativity tests in storytelling, drawing, and problem-solving.

Fostering Dialogue. Games serve as a focal point for family interactions, strengthening the connection between parents and children. While it might be difficult to communicate when urging children to study, it becomes easier to talk during shared gaming sessions. The same goes for team management: building strong emotional bonds is the foundation for providing effective guidance. In the future, great bosses will need to play games with their employees. By 2025, company team-building events may involve everyone playing multiplayer games together.

10.1.4 From "The Game Plays Me" to "I Play the Game"

Everyone knows that in addition to the positive effects mentioned earlier, video games also have various side effects. How can we retain the essence of games and discard the harmful aspects? Jane McGonigal argues that whether games benefit or harm our lives **depends on the motivation behind playing them**. Different motivations lead to two types of immersion:

Self-inhibiting immersion: When playing games to escape reality, players may experience excessive gaming and addiction, which worsens depression and social isolation, trapping them in a vicious cycle that aggravates existing problems. In this case, the "gamer's" world is fragmented and replaced by the game, and their abilities are hijacked and diminished by the game.

Self-expanding immersion: Players build confidence through games, enhance their ability to solve real-world problems, and transfer the psychological advantages they naturally express while playing—such as optimism, creativity, courage, and determination—into real life, helping them better cope with stress and challenges.

McGonigal boldly provides a reference point: **for players, 21 hours per week is the threshold.** If gaming exceeds this limit, it shifts from being a self-expanding remedy to a self-inhibiting toxin. For an adult with work and family responsibilities, averaging more than three hours of gaming per day will interfere with normal work, study, and life. Personally, I often work and study intensely during the day and reward myself with games in the evening. However, fatigue can lead to losing control, resulting in excessive gaming that cuts into my sleep and lowers my quality of life. In fact, one reason Autonomy took me 18 years to write is that I spent too many late nights gaming instead of writing.

In my opinion, in addition to McGonigal's "motivation theory" and "21-hour rule", whether gaming is a remedy or a toxin also depends on the player's mental state while playing. There are two such states:

Unconscious, purposeless gaming: This is the mindless state where "the game plays me". The player is manipulated by clues set by the creators, follows pre-set paths, completes pre-determined tasks, and experiences pre-designed plots—all passively. In this mode, players are no different from puppets or zombies. If you are looking for mindless relaxation, I recommend watching a good movie (not a TV series), as it offers a more comprehensive experience with relatively controllable time.

Conscious, purposeful gaming: This is the mindful state where "I play the game". James Paul Gee, who introduced the concept of "game literacy", believes that the participation of reflective and critical thinking determines the player's entertainment

experience and learning outcomes. Learning to not follow the creators' intended paths, breaking out of the game's logic, altering the game's rules, and extracting value from the game all contribute to creating a unique gaming experience—this is the correct way to approach games.

The mindful state in gaming is an extension of the mindful state in life. The Proteus Effect operates bidirectionally: just as gaming experiences transfer into the real world, real-life states are brought into the game. You'll notice that people who are smart in life tend to play games better, and those who excel at gaming tend to manage their lives more effectively.

Games are not a supplement to reality; they are an enhancement of reality. Those who excel in reflective and critical thinking in real life are less likely to be manipulated by game mechanics and more likely to gain and transfer benefits from their gaming experiences. Conversely, people who lack reflective and critical thinking skills in life are more easily controlled by game mechanics, experiencing fewer benefits and less transfer to the real world. This initial tendency, amplified by the bidirectional Proteus Effect, can widen the gap between individuals over time.

Therefore, the true art of gaming lies beyond the game itself.

10.1.5 Three Types of Game Universes Suited for Avatars

We can't change a person in the short term, but we can guide them by shaping their environment, nudging them toward good behavior and a positive mindset. The real-world environment is the city we live in, while the virtual environment is formed by the books we read, the movies we watch, and especially the games we play.

Games are the most important part of this virtual environment. Each game is a parallel universe with its own goals, rules, and feedback systems, inviting us to voluntarily participate. Choosing the right game for your avatar is both harder and easier than choosing a city for your physical self. When selecting a game, the options are vast—across different platforms, genres, and themes, like the countless stars in the galaxy. When choosing a city, the options are limited, typically to the places where we

were born, study, or work. The upside of games is that the cost of trial and error is low; if a game doesn't meet expectations, you can easily switch to another. Given the fierce competition in the gaming industry, high-quality games are often deeply discounted, sometimes costing no more than a meal but providing hours of entertainment, making them excellent value for money. You can even use a redundancy strategy, stockpiling numerous games so that your avatar can traverse multiple game worlds and exist simultaneously in several parallel universes.

When discovering and stockpiling good games, I recommend three types of game universes that are beneficial for work, learning, and life. Hopefully, you can explore these categories and find games that truly suit you:

Serious Games (Functional Games)

These games are designed for training and education, often created to solve real-world problems. Some games are therapeutic in nature. Jane McGonigal lists several games designed to help patients recover. I would add some classic mobile games, such as "Jenova Chen's Flower" and "Sky: Children of the Light", which can alleviate mental stress.

Educational games also fall into this category. For example, Chinese sci-fi writer and parenting expert Hao Jingfang developed educational games like "Time Travel" and "Journey Through Classics". If you want to spark your child's interest in traditional Chinese culture, games like "Nishan Shaman" and "Wood Joints" are excellent choices. Many of us grew up playing "Uncharted Waters" or "Monopoly", games that helped sow seeds of business acumen.

There are also puzzle-based games purely for cognitive development, such as "Brain Wars", "Gorogoa", "Paperama", "Next Numbers", and "Shadowmatic". While I haven't played "Minecraft", it's clear that it engages kids and stimulates creativity.

Some games inspire new perspectives and ways of perceiving reality. For instance, "Portal" and "Monument Valley" enhance spatial awareness, while "Braid" introduces new ways of thinking about time. Games like "Detroit: Become Human" offer insights

from an AI's point of view, and "Half-Life: Alyx" not only immerses you in a post-apocalyptic world but also familiarizes you with mixed-reality interfaces.

Other games are used for scientific research. Before AI systems like AlphaFold began solving protein-folding problems, there was Foldit, an online game where players helped researchers decode complex protein structures. Even earlier, tools like cellular automata were game-based scientific research tools.

Almost all GenAI tools can be seen as functional games. They help release emotions and inspire creativity while enabling the production of various forms of cultural content, combining the functions of dreamlike escapism with real-world accomplishment. In Phase A, GenAI itself is a fascinating novelty. In Phase B, its use becomes a partially controllable, partially random process akin to drawing cards—intriguing and engaging. In Phase C, every result it generates is expressive and creative, different each time. This variable frequency reinforcement makes it highly addictive. For example, using Midjourney to upscale images can be more addictive than watching short videos—except without the guilt.

Simulation Games

Simulation games provide practice environments that improve problem-solving skills. Much like novels, they can be categorized into non-fiction and fiction simulation games based on what they simulate.

Non-fiction simulation games are designed for real-world needs, often to train professionals. Hardcore examples include flight simulators for astronauts and pilots, which aim for total realism. More accessible examples include "SimCity" and "The Sims", which are partly realistic while remaining entertaining. Many countries have developed military-themed simulation games to support recruitment efforts, which are said to be effective. In the sci-fi novel and movie "Ender's Game", humans use simulated games to command armies in space, which ultimately turns out to be real. Today, this is no longer pure fiction. Modern warfare, particularly drone warfare, is often controlled from afar by operators who command drones as if they were playing a

game. On the Russia-Ukraine battlefield, soldiers controlling drones that drop bombs are engaged in a chillingly real version of virtual war.

Fictional simulation games, while not directly designed for training, help develop a broader view and tactical micro-skills. Turn-based, slower-paced games like "Civilization" and "Endless Space" are known as 4X games (Explore, Expand, Exploit, Exterminate), while faster-paced, real-time strategy (RTS) games like "StarCraft" and "WarCraft" test real-time decision-making. Somewhere between the two are semi-turn-based games like "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" and "Nobunaga's Ambition", developed by Koei, which have been running for over 20 years. These games push players to think about the relationship between survival and development on a grand historical and geographical scale, balancing strategy and tactics.

Simulation games can also have a reciprocal effect on reality. EA's "FIFA" series, which has been refined over 20 years, mirrors the real world so closely that it has become a parallel mirror universe. This virtual universe can describe and explain everything in the real world: players obsess over their in-game ratings, which influence public perception of them; commentators compare Messi's style to playing "FIFA", as he seems to possess a god-like perspective; fans recreate iconic goals in "FIFA" and share them online for recognition. "FIFA" has even predicted real-world outcomes: since 2010, EA has used "FIFA" to simulate matches, accurately predicting the World Cup champion for four consecutive tournaments.

Football Manager is another simulation game that impacts reality, improving real-world football management. A young coach at Borussia Mönchengladbach started his career by playing "Football Manager", eventually earning enough knowledge and experience to be hired by the club. Once again, the Proteus Effect is at work.

It's not hard to imagine that in the future, many simulation games will act as digital twins of the real world, gaining reciprocal influence.

Critical Games

These games are designed with critical thinking in mind, prompting players to reflect on societal issues. I haven't encountered many critical games in my life, but one that left an impression was "This War of Mine". In this game, you play as civilians struggling to survive in a war-torn city. Every day, you must scavenge for supplies while dodging enemy snipers and other scavengers, forcing you to make choices between ideals and reality, self and others, survival and dignity. It forces players to reconsider the horrors of war and reflect on life from a fresh perspective.

Critical games, like thought-provoking books and films, are high in both content and form, making them rare and difficult to spread. They require both technical skill and dedication from developers. In 2004, a group of renowned game scholars and industry experts founded an NGO called Games for Change (G4C), which encourages designers and innovators to use games to think about and change the real world, aiming to make society better. Under their guidance, games like "Closed World", which explores diverse values, have emerged.

James Paul Gee, previously mentioned as a G4C member, emphasized in his book "What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy" that games have an advantage over movies and novels in offering more diverse perspectives and richer experiences. He believes that good games consider multiple viewpoints and open-world exploration in their design, encouraging players to reflect and create while shaping their characters through choices, embodying the philosophy that "existence precedes essence." He praised "Tomb Raider" for allowing players to stray from the main storyline and explore freely. He also cited examples of multi-character games that offer different perspectives on issues. "Detroit: Become Human", for instance, allows players to experience life from the perspectives of multiple androids, grappling with the helplessness and determination that arise from fighting human oppression, prompting us to rethink the future of human-AI relations.

Many veteran players, like myself, have fond memories of playing the original "The Legend of Sword and Fairy", a game that evoked a sense of tragic beauty. The sense of loss was inevitable, as the game's design dictated it. Players had no choice but to feel sadness without guilt. However, modern game designers have taken things further—not only allowing players to decide the fate of enemies and bystanders but also forcing them

to choose between friends and loved ones, pushing the boundaries of "moral correctness" and leaving players with lingering regrets. In games like "Mass Effect", sacrificing good characters feels unavoidable, but in "Grand Theft Auto" and "The Godfather", players are gleefully encouraged to embrace villainy. Push this trend further, and you see extremists using games to propagate harmful ideologies. From this perspective, I argue that games should not overemphasize diverse values—there must be limits to critique.¹

If you're not particularly interested in the three categories of games I previously suggested, but still wish to enjoy the best gaming experiences across all genres, I recommend using game designer Yu-Kai Chou's Octalysis Framework, which evaluates games from "8+1" dimensions to quantify and assess them. By choosing high-scoring games according to this model, you'll enhance your gaming experience. The eight core drives of the framework are: **Meaning**: Games push players onto a hero's journey, fulfilling a mission to save the world. **Empowerment**: Games give players hero-like powers to creatively solve problems. **Accomplishment**: Games encourage players to complete tasks and overcome challenges, rewarding them with a sense of achievement. **Social Influence**: Games incorporate multiplayer modes and interactive elements to meet human social needs. **Ownership**: Games allow players to customize and modify game elements, creating a sense of personal ownership, which increases engagement. **Scarcity**: Games intentionally create scarcity and a sense of urgent optimism, making players desire something that's just out of reach, increasing their dedication. **Unpredictability**: Games introduce random rewards and events, such as items and currency drops, to keep the experience exciting. **Avoidance**: Games design mechanisms to keep players continually engaged, leading to a sense of commitment that makes it hard to step away. In addition to these eight psychological factors, there's the ninth

¹ However, after learning to develop my own games with AI assistance in April 2024, I began designing difficult choices in crisis scenarios within the games. These choices force players to make decisions between cognition (rationality) and emotion (sensitivity), expanding the boundaries of players' understanding of the complex relationship between their moral character and situational factors. Interested readers can experience Song's Edge on my WeChat public account, Prometheus Unbound.

dimension of physical experience, which refers to the sensory experiences and physical feedback a game provides during play.

Chou's system rates each of the eight dimensions on a 100-point scale, for a total of 800 points. Successful games typically score above 350 points, though most games fall below 150. I've adapted his algorithm, emphasizing the first four "light-side" elements (each worth 200 points), subtracting points for the last four "dark-side" elements (each worth 100 points), and adding the neutral dimension of physical experience (worth 100 points). The higher the score, the better the game.

Once you've mastered these three guiding principles and eight evaluation metrics, you can confidently explore and discover new games. Today, the challenge isn't affording games but finding time to play them. Game designers release new games far faster than players can keep up with, especially in the GenAI era. Therefore, players must be selective and make good use of the diversity of options available.

Aside from scoring games yourself, beginners can follow a universal problem-solving path: Learn, Discuss, Reflect, Practice. Learn by visiting platforms like Steam and watching gameplay trailers. Discuss by reading reviews and listening to experienced players' opinions. Reflect by combining this information with your own preferences to make a judgment. Finally, practice by testing the game and refining your taste and evaluation skills through hands-on experience. Many platforms now offer annual subscriptions, allowing you to play a wide variety of games with one payment, which is quite cost-effective.

10.1.6 Three Levels of Mastering Video Games

Once you've selected a good game, the next step is learning to play it well. There are specific strategies for mastering a game. In his book "What to Listen for in Music", Oscar-winning composer Aaron Copland discusses three levels of music appreciation: the sensory level, the expressive level, and the level of pure music (where meaning is implied but not explicit). Drawing a parallel to music appreciation, we can discuss three levels for mastering video games:

Sensory Level: Enhancing the Gaming Experience—For Casual Players

From a sensory perspective, the gaming experience involves both input and output, and both are tied to physical sensations. Input mostly relates to visuals and sound, which are critical factors in video games. Games that look and sound good are more enjoyable. Today's AAA games often have outstanding graphics, soundtracks, and storylines, comparable in quality to high-end films. Output, on the other hand, relates to the tactile experience—good games have more interaction, and the controls should be ergonomic and customizable to suit individual preferences. Only when you achieve hand-eye coordination can you balance both the fleeting joy of seconds and the immersive engagement of minutes or hours. To fully optimize the input-output experience, you should improve from the perspectives of ability, resources, and motivation.

From the ability perspective, gaming literacy affects your experience. Playing games thoughtfully involves two stages: first, the deliberate practice stage where you must be mindful and improve steadily, and second, the performance stage where you can play effortlessly and enjoy the flow. Experienced players get into games faster and have richer experiences. Previous gaming experiences contribute to how new ones are shaped. As a beginner, choose difficulty levels that match your skill, ensuring that effort is proportional to reward. Jumping straight into challenging games like "Dark Souls", "Sekiro", or "Elden Ring" might lead to frustration. It's better to start with more forgiving action games like "Ys" or "Immortals Fenyx Rising" to build interest. For parents, it's essential to choose appropriate games for children, enhancing their gaming literacy and helping them learn how to distinguish between good and bad games as they grow.

From the resources perspective, gaming gear influences the experience. If your budget allows, consider upgrading 1-2 components each year, similar to maintaining Theseus' ship. New equipment allows you to experience new games or rediscover old ones in a fresh way. A high-end graphics card, a giant screen, surround sound, and a game controller can create a gaming experience that surpasses a cinema. Upgrading to VR gear allows for both entertainment and fitness with games like "Beat Saber" or "Boxing VR". Paired with brain-machine interface technology, you can experience a

mind-controlled interaction like growing plants in a "Meditation Garden" by altering brainwaves.

From the motivation perspective, gaming objectives shape the experience. Nowadays, many games offer open worlds and multiple endings, with intricate and interwoven storylines. I suggest planning your approach with pen and paper to make the experience more organized and enjoyable. In general, focus on the main storyline, carefully select side quests, and set challenge goals to maximize the experience. Don't get lost in the trivial details, just as in real life. Finally, if you've made a poor game choice, don't continue out of sunk cost fallacy—cut your losses and switch to a better game.

Expressive Level: Participating in Game Design—For Creators

Just like marking up books while reading to engage with the author, you can engage with games beyond simply following what the creator presents. The game creator may seem like an invisible deity controlling everything, but you can participate in shaping the experience. **First, analyze the game's elements and rules.** What innovative highlights does the game introduce? If you were the creator, how would you improve the system? Try to understand the creator's perspective, imagining yourself as them. By examining the game from a god-like view, you can rediscover the experience. **Second, reconstruct the game's elements and rules.** Based on your understanding of the system, find new combinations that the creator didn't think of. This breaks away from the original script and enters a player-driven mode. By actively reworking the game, you can show that you are a "mindful player".

In the past, I had a stubborn pride in not using game exploits or looking at guides, preferring to win through sheer effort, but this often led to mindless battles and wasted time. Despite playing for long hours, I didn't spend much time thinking, so I gained little in terms of meaningful results. Reflecting on this, I now recommend that everyone create a personalized "game operation guide": **Before playing:** Study available resources to understand the game's background and mechanics. **During gameplay:** Actively read other players' articles for inspiration and tips. **After playing:** Reflect on your experience, summarize your insights, and share them with others. Ultimately,

through trial and error, you can analyze and reconstruct the game, creating your own unique gameplay style.

Meaning Level: Extracting Game Value—For Users

Compared to books, music, and movies, video games represent a higher stage of cultural and artistic evolution. In the future, playing games will be as culturally enriching as reading books once was. An excellent game often carries deeper ideas that the creator wants to convey. For example, in the post-apocalyptic game "Fallout 4", the creator explores what it means to be human in a world where artificial intelligence and human-AI hybrids exist alongside mutated beings. The game leaves questions about humanity unanswered, offering only choices. Games like this encourage thoughtful engagement, providing more value than simply flipping through a random book. The insights we gain come from our thinking while playing, not just from the games themselves.

However, not all games are great works of art, so we must also learn to find value in bad games. Fortunately, playing bad games is easy, just like skimming bad books, and it allows for more mental wandering and creative thinking. Bad games often have plenty of room for improvement, providing ample opportunities for critical analysis and growth in gaming literacy. When you can't give up on a bad game, try turning it into a mental exercise.

Many games can also become useful tools in everyday life. In parenting, games are excellent teaching aids. Almost any game can instantly capture a child's attention, creating learning opportunities. For example, "Far Cry Primal" became a micro-classroom where I taught my son about the ancient conflict between Homo sapiens and Neanderthals. The "Assassin's Creed" mythology trilogy is a great guide to Western mythology. Socially, games are excellent conversation starters. Opening up a game can instantly lead to interaction. In the future, those who can't play games may feel as isolated as those who never learned to play cards or mahjong. Although I personally avoid online games, I support using games to expand social networks.

10.1.7 Becoming a Video Game Developer

In the past, game development had a high barrier to entry, confined to a specialized field for experts. However, I believe that the future will see game development entering a new phase of "mass entrepreneurship and innovation". Two reasons support this belief:

First, more and more game companies are open-sourcing their development tools, lowering the technical barriers to entry. I've been a loyal fan of the "Unreal Tournament" series, whose developer, Epic Games, later opened up the Unreal Engine and tools like MetaHuman to smaller companies, democratizing game development. Technology trend expert Wang Yuquan has often recommended Roblox, an American platform that allows large-scale multiplayer game creation. It's like the YouTube of game development, modularizing the tools. I believe that China will soon have similar platforms, and when that happens, creating games will be as easy as making short videos today.

Second, the emergence of increasingly powerful GenAI tools reduces the difficulty of content creation in game development. Nowadays, we can use GenAI to assist in writing scripts, generating illustrations and music, and even creating AI-driven cutscenes for various game scenarios and endings. The singularity of game development is approaching, with players gradually evolving into developers. Games will undoubtedly become the next peak, following in the footsteps of text, images, music, and video, where GenAI empowers ordinary people to reach new creative heights.

In the past, we used articles and photos to prove our existence; today, we express our feelings through music and video. In the future, games will become our ultimate legacy. Games will serve as our advanced creative works, integrating with our digital personas to continuously convey emotions and ideas to future players. This allows our autonomy to expand across more subjects and larger timescales.

Game development is an extraordinary experience. Like writing, it requires high-level thinking and low-level execution. But it's even more fun than writing because it demands teamwork and collaboration. In early 2024, I teamed up with my 11-year-old son and a 20-year-old student, and with just over ten hours of productive work aided by AI, we developed a game called "A King's Life". We turned my son's whimsical ideas,

sketched in his homework, into a playable project that could be shared with friends across computers, tablets, and smartphones. It filled him with joy and pride.

Building on that experience, we started developing a game based on the history of Wenzhou, "Edge of Song". Through discussion, we incorporated local history, culture, and traditions into the script, using AI to generate fitting images, music, and videos. We chose the transition period between the Northern and Southern Song dynasties as the setting, with refugees as the protagonists, deliberately creating conflicts that forced players to make difficult decisions, affecting the story's progression. This process gave us, the developers, a deeper understanding of ourselves and history. During development, my son and I connected more frequently and deeply, exploring and pondering issues that we wouldn't have considered before. Knowledge and skills naturally blended into the process, and these were the true rewards beyond the game itself.

Since game development progresses much faster than book publishing, by the time you're reading this book, "Edge of Song" has likely already been released. You're welcome to experience it through my public account, Prometheus Unbound. I also hope that you will be inspired to create your own games.

10.2 Design and Play the Game of Life

In the short term, we may not all become video game developers, but we can start by becoming the designers of our own life games. By evolving from dreamers to dream makers, we can fully embrace gamification thinking and methods, using them to manage ourselves, solve problems, achieve goals, enhance autonomy, grow, and ultimately attain happiness.

10.2.1 Dream Makers Weave Their Own Dreams

According to the theory of autonomy, when faced with the cultural dreamscape, we can choose from three roles: the dreamer, the interpreter, and the dream maker. Dreamers and interpreters rely on the dreams created by others, while dream makers weave their

own. When managing games, the dreamer mode is about discovering good games and maximizing the mental and physical experience; the interpreter's approach is to think within the game and transform it into a tool. The dream maker's strategy, however, is to master gamification thinking and methods, turning life into a game, transforming difficulties into challenges, playing to grow, and growing through play.

Gamification is a behavioral science. In 2002, British consultant Nick Pelling coined the term "gamification", intending to use it pejoratively to describe the act of "applying game-like accelerated user interface design to make electronic transactions both faster and more entertaining." The technology trend consulting firm Gartner defines gamification as: using game mechanics and gamified experience design to digitally encourage and motivate people to achieve their goals.

Gamification is also a form of design thinking. Tim Brown, president of the innovation design firm IDEO, believes design thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation, integrating people's needs, technological advancements, and business success through the tools of designers. Yu-Kai Chou refers to gamification as simply another name for "human-centered design" and points out that there are two types of gamification: explicit gamification, which takes on the form of a game and is designed with game-like rules, such as some "advergames" found on social media platforms; and implicit gamification, which doesn't look like a game but uses game principles in its design.

Stepping outside the framework of video games and work-related games, many problems in life can be approached using gamification thinking, designing mechanisms to make problem-solving enjoyable. Jane McGonigal is a master of life gamification. In 2009, she suffered a concussion that triggered lingering depression and anxiety, severely affecting her work and life. To recover, she developed a set of gamifications thinking and methods, redesigning her recovery process not only to return to normal but to become even healthier, happier, and "super better". She turned this methodology into a book and online tool, guiding tens of thousands of people to design their lives using game design principles, sparking a mass movement toward life gamification.

10.2.2 Seven Components of Gamifying Life

Jane McGonigal's toolkit for gamifying life includes seven components, which I have reorganized and restructured. Let me introduce them one by one.

Challenge Yourself. The first rule of living with a game mindset is to replace a threat mentality with a challenge mentality. Identify a real-life problem that needs solving and treat it as a goal. No longer view the issue as a threat but as a challenge, interpreting tension as excitement. Once you've made this cognitive shift, consider raising the bar—pushing your self-expectations from an 80% level to 85% or even 90%—creating new challenges to keep you engaged.

Secret Identity. Establishing a secret identity is the first step in telling your personal hero story. Choose a heroic name to represent your secret identity and use it to define and embody your unique heroic qualities. Use this secret identity as a tool for self-reflection when addressing specific problems. I've created different secret identities for myself: I use "Prometheus" for learning, symbolizing careful deliberation, and "Hercules" for work, symbolizing swift and decisive action.

Power-ups. Power-ups are simple, low-effort actions that make you feel better and boost your mental energy. Continuously update your power-up list to replenish your energy at the right times, sharing and exchanging power-ups with others—like having meals together, watching movies, or going on trips. On a typical workday, the ideal mix might be reading or listening to books in the morning, engaging in conversations with friends during the day, and playing games or chatting with family in the evening. Ultimately, sleep is the best remedy; going to bed early and waking up early improves your overall well-being.

Defeat the Bad Guys. The "bad guys" are the things that hold you back, causing anxiety, pain, or distress. Visualize, personify, quantify, and bring immediacy to these enemies and your battles against them. Learn new skills to defeat them, fight them at least once daily, recharge after each battle, and record your progress. Accept and embrace failure as part of the process. When an enemy is unbeatable, try to turn it into

an ally. I've fought "Overnight Ogre", "Sedentary Demon", "Gluttonous Beast", and "Workaholic Warrior" for years, tracking the battle outcomes on a behavior chart.

Complete Quests. Find simple actions necessary to achieve your goals and define them as quests. Fun quests are easier to complete, so make the tasks or their descriptions enjoyable. For example, turn "exercise" into "adventure walk". Tasks should be concrete and broken into actionable steps, such as changing "write Autonomy Theory" to "write 300 words on task management". Some well-designed quests can even serve as energy-boosting power-ups, giving you a sense of accomplishment once completed. McGonigal suggests games like "Chore Wars" to gamify mundane tasks, turning everyday activities like cleaning into satisfying and rewarding quests.

Recruit Allies. Allies are the people who play the game with you and lend you a hand when needed. They transform a solo game into a multiplayer one, providing social motivation and accountability. Allies should know the challenges you face, your enemies, and what powers you up. They can recommend quests, boost your energy, offer strategies, monitor your progress, and celebrate your victories. Share your game and character with allies, help them with tasks, and get them up to speed quickly. In the AI era, you can even enlist GenAI as an ally for additional support.

Epic Wins. Video games are finite games, but the game of life is infinite. While video games aim for the "endgame", life games have no boundaries or finish line—though you can set milestones to celebrate along the way. Achieving these milestones delivers epic wins, creating huge surges of confidence, motivation, and purpose. Repeated epic wins accumulate into a lasting legacy. Incorporating a Points, Badges, and Leaderboards (PBL) system can provide positive feedback, reinforcing your sense of victory.

McGonigal believes these methods work for almost everyone and typically show results in two weeks. Once learned, they are skills that can be continuously refined and reapplied. Inspired by her theory, I created my own "Gamified Transformation Checklist" to gamify various routine and long-term aspects of my life, studies, and even work. I use secret roles to face challenges, set quests, recruit allies, defeat enemies, recharge with power-ups, and score epic wins. This gamified approach has made the problem-solving process more enjoyable, increased my time investment, and enhanced

my autonomy. The "elephant" has tasted the sweetness and now eagerly runs alongside the rider.

10.2.3 Gamified Self-Management Practice

Finally, integrating all previous discussions based on the framework of Autonomy Theory, and combining gamification principles and game design mechanics, we can build a visual, quantifiable, and actionable self-management system. This system will help us manage ourselves as we would manage a game. By focusing on the three essential elements of autonomy—intention, ability, and resources—we can apply the system design from games into the following three areas: tasks, people, and tools.

Managing Autonomous Intentions. This can be designed based on the event management systems found in games. Managing autonomy begins with intention, which can be translated into event management in our lives. Games distill and enhance real-life experiences, often incorporating task systems, navigation systems, and archive systems to help players manage progress, stay oriented, and keep track of their situation.

Task System: Games like "Assassin's Creed" use layered task structures, breaking them into several objectives and steps. Each completed step is checked off, giving players a sense of progress. In games like The "Witcher 3", tasks are categorized into main story quests, side quests, and monster hunts. We can use similar principles from the "Task Management" chapter, utilizing task management software to create and track tasks. When setting tasks, apply gamification elements like challenges, milestones, enemies, and power-ups. Many people experience a significant productivity boost just by learning to record and manage tasks effectively.

Navigation System: Most games include a navigation system to help players locate tasks in space, complementing the time-based task system. It's recommended to upgrade your spatial thinking module by incorporating spatial markers into your event management system. First, add spatial clues when entering events. Second, group and cluster actions that occur in the same time and space, making parallel tasks more

efficient. Third, try marking tasks on your computer or phone map apps for better navigation.

Archive System: The archive system supports both task and navigation systems by providing reference materials. Game designers equip players with plenty of reference data, making it easy to access. In real life, managing personal information is more challenging due to the sheer amount of data we encounter. A simple principle is to save everything, marking items with keywords for easier retrieval later using tools like Alfred (Mac) or Everything (PC). With the advancement of digitization and AI tools, managing information will become increasingly easier. In the AI era, we should leverage large models and AI agents, being unafraid to ask questions and refining our queries to get better answers for practice and iteration.

Managing Autonomous Abilities. This can be modeled after the character management systems found in games. Managing autonomy means managing our knowledge and skills. We can look to character systems in games for inspiration, using their character traits, experience levels, and skill attributes to structure our personal growth.

Character Traits: Almost all games have character systems, and today's games often allow players to customize their avatar's appearance. Similarly, in life, we should pay attention to our own image—whether it's visual (appearance) or auditory (communication)—and invest effort into improving it, even utilizing GenAI for assistance. A good image has lasting benefits as it creates a halo effect, attracting social resources.

Experience Levels: In games, every action translates into experience points, clearly showing how much experience has been gained and how much is needed to level up. This feedback loop helps motivate players. In real life, however, our efforts are often vague, lacking feedback, and making it easier to lose motivation. You can combat this by setting milestones and epic wins, using techniques like points, badges, and leaderboards. Personally, I use behavior tracking charts to record my actions,

quantifying them into autonomy scores and rewarding myself with a level-up when milestones are achieved.

Skill Attributes: In games, a player's abilities are quantifiable and can increase through leveling up or using special tools. In real life, skills are less visible, making it hard to maintain motivation. The solution is to create your own "skill tree" and "attribute table". Using a mind-mapping tool, list your skills and their levels of proficiency, and map out their dependencies. This gives you a better understanding of your strengths and where to focus on improving. For example, games like "The Elder Scrolls" provide excellent skill tree designs to reference. For attributes, you can use behavior charts to create quantifiable metrics. Convert this data into graphs to visualize your attributes and track your personal progress. When creating your next list of skills to improve, consider adding game literacy and programming skills.

Managing Autonomous Resources. This can be structured using the item management systems from games. Managing resources in real life translates into managing finances, possessions, and tools, with inspiration drawn from game mechanics like currency systems, item systems, and equipment systems.

Currency System: Two game design principles stand out here:

Accounting: Games automatically track every transaction, providing a clear financial picture. In real life, adopting a similar practice—using accounting software—helps accumulate data for analysis and improvement.

Trading System: In games, you not only earn currency from quests but also from selling unneeded items. This encourages us to declutter, selling or discarding unused items to make room for new ones. While I have an accounting system in place, I lacked the concept of second-hand trading, so I ended up spending more money than necessary.

Item System: In games, items are consumables with specific benefits, like health boosts or power-ups. Players often have to manage limited inventory space, forcing them to choose only the most essential items. Games also sometimes allow you to combine items into more powerful tools or display trophies as symbols of achievement. In life,

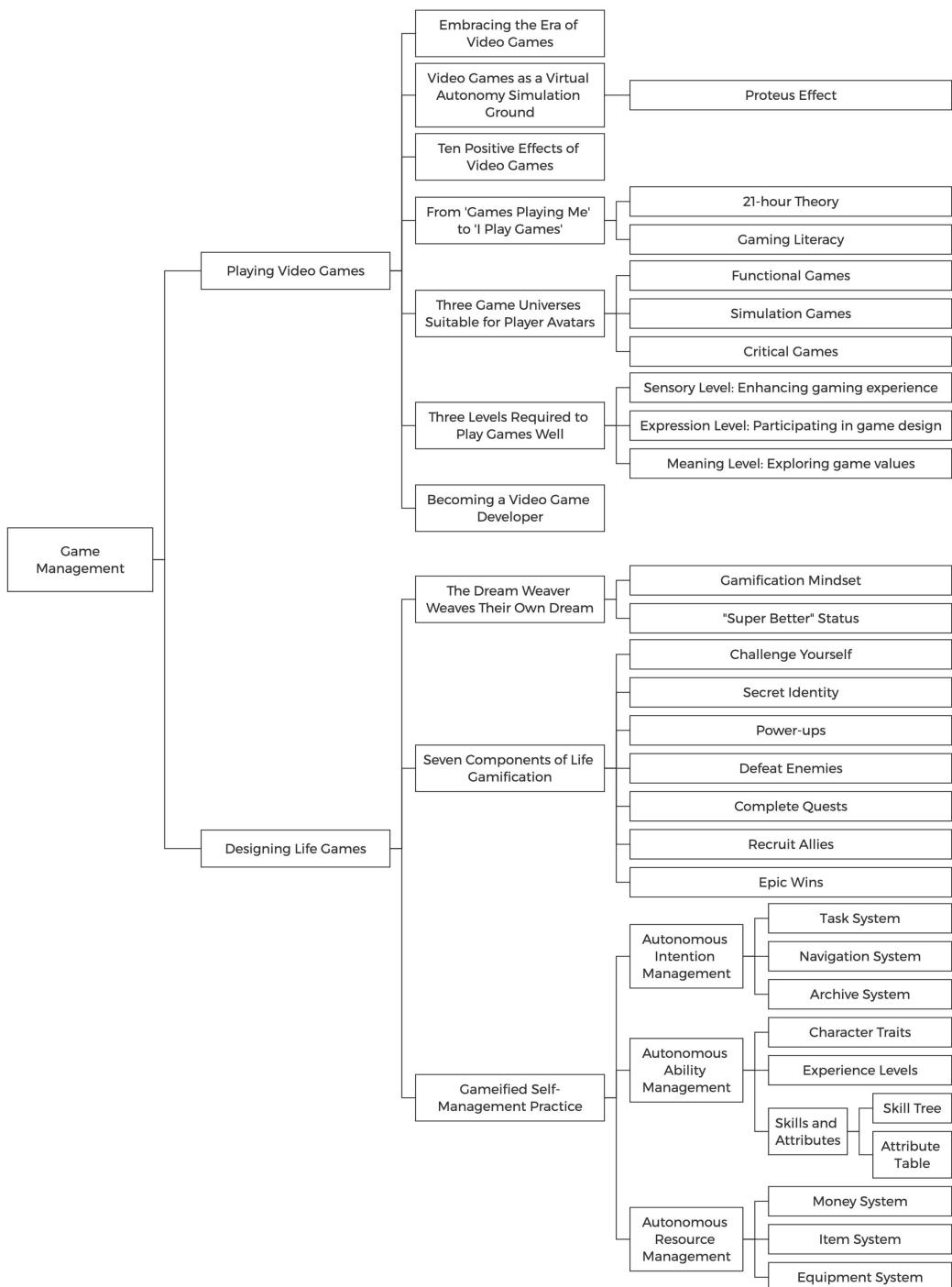
the same principles can apply: manage your consumables, declutter using a "discard and organize" mindset, and display trophies or achievements as a way to motivate yourself.

Equipment System: "A workman is only as good as his tools." In games, players eagerly upgrade equipment as soon as they find something better. In real life, we should treat our tools in a similar way—regularly upgrading when needed. For instance, consider investing in a better electric car for mobility, a high-performance desktop for intensive computing, or a smartphone for mobile work. In the AI era, you should also focus on upgrading your digital toolkit, including AI writing tools, AI media creation tools (for images, music, and video), and AI personas (like digital avatars).

By integrating these game mechanics into your life, you'll be able to manage your autonomy more effectively—transforming everyday challenges into engaging and productive experiences.

10.3 Chapter Summary

In our era, playing games is no longer a waste of time but an integral part of life, work, and learning. While games may serve as a vice or mere comfort for some, for autonomous individuals, they should act as a remedy and a source of strength. Autonomous individuals are players in an infinite game, continuing to play until death separates them from the game. Life will always have its imperfections and unpleasant moments, but autonomous individuals should cultivate a gaming mindset, enhance their gaming literacy, enjoy video games, and design their own life games. They grow through reflection in games and thinking through play. As we progress from players to designers, from consumers to creators, and from the comfort of illusion to the elevation of civilization, I hope we can enjoy boundless freedom within the rules and always find joy in our journey toward autonomy. Let's play for autonomy, and together, let's play toward the future.



Chapter 11: Family Management

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor.

— Ecclesiastes (Old Testament)

Autonomism believes that family is one of the most important external environments for nurturing individual autonomy. A good family possesses a certain degree of collective autonomy, which helps enhance the level of individual autonomy for all its members. In the past, many believed that a family's primary role was to provide food and shelter—basic survival needs, representing safety within the context of autonomy and a resource in the development of autonomy. In reality, a family can provide more, fulfilling higher-level developmental needs, assisting family members in autonomy-related aspects like freedom, capability, and will.

Beyond providing an environment for personal development, a family also offers direction for that development. An ancient Chinese saying goes, "Cultivate oneself, regulate the family, govern the country, and bring peace to the world." Family management is a critical step after self-improvement. The saying "An upright official can hardly resolve family affairs" reflects that families are often the source of problems, but tackling these challenges gives us the opportunity to continuously apply and enhance our autonomy. Ultimately, the success of family management is measured by how much legacy—be it children, creations, or digital extensions—our family leaves behind, representing our presence across different subjects and time, serving as proof that we were once here.

Thus, it is essential to rethink and redefine the role of the family, viewing it as a collective endeavor. We should strive to elevate personal autonomy while simultaneously enhancing the autonomy of the family, ensuring that both are interconnected. In doing so, we prevent any family member from being left behind on the path to autonomy, becoming a burden or a shortcoming. The following sections will discuss how to alter a family's functionality, resources, and structure from a systems theory perspective, with a focus on vertical generational relationships, horizontal parallel relationships, and internal-external mirror relationships. We will also provide specific recommendations for parents, children, and partners.

11.1 Basic Ideas for Reforming the Family

From a macro perspective, the family, as a smaller system, serves as the external environment for personal development. Meanwhile, society, as a larger system, serves as the external environment for family development. A family, as a system, is composed of functions, structures, and elements. We can approach family reform from these three angles: functionality, structure, and components.

11.1.1 Changing the Family's Functional Role

From the perspective of the three elements of autonomy, the family is essentially a collective of autonomous individuals bound by kinship and emotional ties. It functions as an incubator, accelerator, and booster, helping its members achieve autonomy. Family members pursue autonomy together, share resources, influence each other's capabilities, and balance conflicting wills. To transition from a real-world family to an ideal one, we need to address or mitigate three major contradictions.

Conflict of Will. Disagreements among family members require someone to step in and mediate. Every family has a decision-maker or leader, often referred to as the head of the family. According to Autonomy Theory, the head of the family should be the member with the highest level of autonomy, as they are best suited to make decisions and guide the family's direction. Traditionally, this has been parents in their prime or

elder family members. However, during periods of social change, younger generations, empowered by new technologies and productivity, may see their autonomy rapidly increase, challenging the authority of traditional family heads. If the family fails to adapt to this power shift, conflicts over control—essentially battles of autonomy—may arise. The classic solution is for the younger generation to start their own family, becoming heads of their own households. Yet, in some cases, elder family heads refuse to relinquish control, suffocating the younger members until rebellion or a power struggle occurs.

Conflict of Ability. Family members, due to differences in age and experience, vary greatly in ability. Even among peers, some family members are more motivated and studious, while others stagnate. Over time, this leads to significant differences in cognition and behavior. During family gatherings, communication can feel like talking to strangers. Children, full of curiosity and new ideas, enjoy engaging in deep discussions but might lack the articulation to fully express themselves. However, when it comes to talking with elders, conversations often revert to entrenched biases and misconceptions. You find yourself torn—either staying silent to avoid confrontation or correcting their errors at the cost of offending them. In problem-solving within families, the most capable members often bear the brunt of the workload, while the less capable enjoy the privileges of kinship, riding on coattails without contributing. Over time, this imbalance may lead to resentment in those carrying the load.

Conflict of Resources. Ideally, a family should distribute resources according to need, akin to a mini-communist society. But with limited resources, practical distribution often falls into a "market model" of rewarding labor, a "planned model" of fixed shares, a "courtesy model" of mutual respect, or a "jungle model" of first-come-first-served. Without a figure of absolute authority to set rules, actual distribution may be chaotic. When one family member consumes too many resources, it reduces the share available for others. Whether it's education expenses for children, marriage and housing costs for young adults, or medical care for the elderly, excessive allocation to one person can decrease the overall resources available to the family. This tension is especially apparent in large families where siblings compete for resources. As the saying goes, "Poverty puts strain on marriages." When resources are tight, individual autonomy is

constrained, problem-solving abilities decline, and frustrations increase. Further discussion will explore these issues in detail.

11.1.2 Changing the Resource Endowment of a Family

The total resources available to a family include the individual time, physical abilities, cultural capital, and technical resources unique to each family member, as well as shared resources such as economic, social, and political capital. Family resources are largely a given reality, which is difficult to change in the short term. Among these resources, social capital is relatively easier to develop. Every family has external kinship networks and community ties that can be easily linked to important individuals who offer support in terms of abilities and resources. Leveraging these connections gives families and their members a chance to overcome resource shortages in other areas. As the saying goes, "It's all about who you know."

Family resources are unequally distributed both within and across families. On one hand, families with only one child are less resourceful than those with multiple children, and nuclear families of three are less complex than large, multi-generational families. The simpler structure and limited resources of the former hinder the higher-level growth and redundancy required for more advanced development. On the other hand, rural families are generally less resource-rich than urban ones, inland families are less resourceful than coastal ones, and domestic families may not have the advantages of families living overseas. The latter categories typically enjoy greater benefits from public resources (e.g., city infrastructure) and social capital (e.g., family networks), leading to more opportunities and room for trial and error for family members.

The total amount of family resources often determines the level of safety and freedom available within the family environment.

Affluent and middle-class families typically provide an environment that is both safe and free. In such families, members feel cared for, and their development is secured. This is the kind of ideal family environment many people aspire to—similar to a market economy with macro-level control, where safety is ensured, and freedom is explored within set boundaries. In this environment, family members have multiple choices, but

not too many, allowing them to maintain control and navigate situations smoothly. They are encouraged to question, innovate, and update themselves, fostering growth. Such an environment requires not only sufficient resources but also parents or family heads who have enough confidence and capability to relax control.

Average families tend to offer safety but not freedom. In these families, members feel controlled, and their growth is limited. Everything from birth to death is planned out, with little to no room for choice, and often, they aren't even aware of the existence of other options. Many traditional Chinese parents adopt this all-encompassing approach, much like the Soviet Union's centralized planning economy, where family members are metaphorically "caged" and ultimately turn into overdependent "giant babies".

Impoverished families typically offer freedom but not safety. In these families, members feel neglected, and their growth is overlooked. Although they appear to have endless choices, most options are beyond their financial reach. Parents are often too preoccupied with making a living to pay attention to the family, and members are left to fend for themselves. It resembles a free-market economy that offers too many ineffective choices, with family members suffering from consequences they cannot afford.

Broken families offer neither safety nor freedom. Members feel abandoned, and their growth prospects seem hopeless. This is the worst-case scenario, a jungle-like state of anarchy, as described by Hobbes: a "war of all against all." In such environments, there is no real choice, only the inevitability of doom, much like a lamb awaiting slaughter. In these cases, there is little left to do but surrender to fate.

With a better understanding of family resources and environments, we can now focus on what is more easily altered—the family's relational structure.

11.2.3 Changing the Family's Relational Structure

The core of changing a family's relational structure lies in transforming its power dynamics and reshaping the relationship between the head of the family and its members. Currently, most Chinese families still operate under a traditional authoritarian

model, where the family head takes full control, bearing unlimited responsibilities while other members relinquish their freedom in exchange for protection. This master-servant dynamic is detrimental to the personal growth of family members. It is recommended that families adopt a modern mindset, where the adult in charge, as the head of the household, acts more like a school principal or business manager, treating the elderly and young as students and shareholders. By incorporating modern educational philosophies and corporate management tools, families can function as learning organizations that balance efficiency with fairness.

When family heads set out to change relational structures, they can focus on four key management frameworks:

Wise Management Style. There are four types of management styles: High standards combined with high support (the wise style); High standards with low support (the oppressive style); Low standards with high support (the indulgent style); Low standards with low support (the neglectful style). Family heads should adopt the wise style, whether they are dealing with their children or elderly parents. This approach sets high expectations while offering the necessary guidance and support to help family members meet those standards.

Radical Candor. Communication styles also fall into four categories: High care combined with direct, candid communication (radical candor); Low care but direct and blunt communication (malicious attack); High care but reserved, indirect communication (over-sympathy); Low care with reserved, indirect communication (fake concern). Family heads should aim for radical candor, speaking truthfully in simple, straightforward terms while maintaining a caring relationship. To ease potential tensions, humor can be a useful tool, as well as incorporating gamification into communication.

Tailoring to the Individual. There are four management scenarios: Family members who have both the will and the ability: They should be empowered, with the focus on providing resources. Family members with the will but lacking ability: They should be taught, with the focus on skill development. Family members with the ability but lacking will: They should be motivated, with the focus on fostering commitment. Family members lacking both will and ability: They should be led firmly, starting from

scratch to build the foundation for autonomy. The family head must adopt strategies that suit each individual's circumstances.

Reasonable Intervention. Since the interests of the family head and other family members are interrelated, there are times when it is necessary to intervene firmly to protect the family's interests. However, intervention should not be overused and should vary depending on the situation. If the issue falls within the family head's expertise, they should step in and offer suggestions for the family's consideration. Remaining silent in such cases would be a missed opportunity. If the issue is outside the family head's expertise, they should maintain restraint, only offering reminders when necessary, without providing operational advice to avoid unintended consequences.

The next section will discuss how to handle three distinct sets of family relationships.

11.2 Managing the Three Sets of Family Relationships

11.2.1 Vertical Intergenerational Relationships

Vertical intergenerational relationships occur between different generations, primarily between parents and children. Parents share resources with their children and help them enhance their abilities, but they often tend to control their children's autonomy. For a long period, autonomy versus dependence, control versus being controlled, defines the relationship between parents and children. Let's go through the four stages of life and explore how these intergenerational relationships evolve, along with some strategies for handling them.

Childhood

In the beginning, we are weak and small, while our parents are in their prime, creating a significant gap in autonomy. At this stage, we seek safety, and although we have a strong desire for autonomy—to make our own choices and decisions—we lack the ability to do so and do not have the resources to bear the consequences. Therefore, we rely on our parents for survival and accept their control.

Control should be moderate, but it often goes overboard. We are experiencing being children for the first time, and parents, as guardians, often lack experience as well. Everyone tends to get frustrated—children cry, parents get angry, couples argue, and elders grumble—creating a common “family symphony” heard from infancy through adulthood.

Behaviorist parenting philosophies, which were once popular, treated children like mindless animals. If a child didn’t obey parental (or school) control, they might face lectures or even corporal punishment until they complied. As a result, some of us learned to pretend to obey, hiding our autonomous will until the right moment. Others had their edges worn down, losing the desire to pursue autonomy altogether. Later, the pendulum swung too far in the other direction, with newer philosophies discouraging any form of punishment, insisting on only positive reinforcement, which in practice was also difficult and often led to spoiled children.

Many people I know were repeatedly tossed between various parenting philosophies and methods, gradually giving up on their sense of self and free will, and growing up to become "mama's boys" or emotional dependents. Frankly, they are not much different from walking corpses. Who is to blame? In my opinion, the responsibility lies with the parents because they are the more autonomous party, in control of the direction and methods.

Youth

As we grow stronger and our parents age, the autonomy gap gradually narrows. At this stage, we seek freedom as our abilities and resources increase, and our self-awareness, free will, and autonomous desire begin to awaken and emerge. We hope to rebuild our relationship with our parents.

Some parents respect their children’s autonomy, guiding them toward better development while gradually relinquishing power and stepping back. In some cases, they even plan for their children to assume the role of the family head, resulting in better growth for their children and a more harmonious family. However, other parents, driven by a strong desire for control, create ongoing family disputes.

In my experience, fathers tend to relinquish control more easily than mothers, who often find it harder to let go and continue to try to control their children, frequently using the excuse "I'm your mother" or "I'm doing this for your own good", trampling on their children's dignity. Some parents even abuse their moral authority as caregivers, saying things like, "I gave birth to you, so you have to listen to me" or "If you don't obey me, you're an ungrateful child," suppressing their children's reasonable pursuit of autonomy.

Adulthood

Eventually, we reach adulthood, have children of our own, and our parents become elderly. The autonomy gap flips. After years of life experience and challenges, we have transformed from youth to middle age, balancing jobs, families, and children. We've become more stable, seeking freedom from a foundation of security. At this stage, we are often described as "sandwiched" between elderly parents and young children, making us both vulnerable and strong. Our will, abilities, and resources have reached a higher level, positioning us as relatively autonomous individuals.

Now, as family heads, we decide the fates of our newborn children and often get involved in our elderly parents' affairs. Compared to children, elderly parents have far more autonomy. In terms of abilities, while their fluid intelligence (such as memory and calculation) may decline, their crystallized intelligence (knowledge, skills, experience) remains. In terms of resources, although their physical and time resources dwindle, their cultural, technical, social, and economic resources still exist. The real change in an elderly person's autonomy comes from a shift in their will.

As people grow older, they tend to become more conservative, seeking safety and stability rather than taking risks. Most people's later years are spent trying to maintain the status quo. They focus on the present, selecting pleasant memories from the past or even "rewriting history" to construct a rosier version of their life. This helps them feel better. As a result, elderly people often live in a world of their own, and it's easy to see them engaging in "childlike" behavior. The best approach here is to show understanding and tolerance—after all, one day we too will grow old.

Adulthood is a long phase, and many people experience plateaus, where their development halts at an ordinary or elite level. Some, facing challenges such as falling real estate prices, rising education costs, or the disruption of GenAI in the job market, may experience a downward trajectory, with a decline in their overall level of autonomy. In such cases, they may be forced to prematurely abandon freedom in exchange for security, entering a more conservative, elderly-like stage.

Old Age

Finally, our parents pass away, our children grow up, and even our children's children are born. Now we ourselves are elderly. Our relationship with our adult children resembles that of our own parents. We occasionally try to control them but find we are no longer able to, and every attempt may be met with strong resistance. Conversely, our children frequently try to control us, and while we might want to resist, we often lack the strength to do so and must silently accept it.

Most of the time, we live peacefully with our children and even offer help, such as babysitting grandchildren. However, this can lead to conflicts because the way we raised our children differs from how they want to raise their own. Differences in parenting philosophies and methods almost inevitably cause friction in three-generation households. At this stage, the best solution is to find hobbies, build relationships with a partner or friends, and maintain some distance from our children—after all, "distance creates beauty".

Of course, there are exceptions. Some elderly individuals are elites, heroes, or even titans—those "restless" older autonomists. Having achieved significant success in life, their security is guaranteed, and they still seek greater freedom, whether through romance, new achievements, or even the pursuit of technological immortality. For such individuals, old age is simply a continuation of adulthood, with their strong autonomy ensuring that they continue to experience "second" or even "third" springs in life.

Finally, the relationship between men and their in-laws and women and their parents-in-law should be handled similarly to the principles discussed above for

intergenerational relationships, following the framework for interactions between younger and older generations.

11.2.2 Horizontal Peer Relationships

Horizontal peer relationships refer to relationships among family members of the same generation, such as siblings and spouses. These relationships often involve both cooperation and competition.

Siblings

Just as we can't choose our parents, we also can't choose our siblings. In some cases, as the eldest child, parents may ask, "Do you want a brother or sister?" when we are too young to understand the implications. Each child may answer differently, but I would speculate that evolution would favor those who say "no".

Clearly, having a sibling introduces both challenges and responsibilities. A younger sibling takes away some of the limited resources, while also adding new human resources to the family. As the older sibling, taking care of the younger one becomes a form of self-training, which contributes to the growth of personal autonomy. This is often referred to as the "apprenticeship effect", known in ancient China as "teaching benefits both the teacher and the student". Through teaching their younger siblings, older siblings consolidate their knowledge and reinforce their capabilities. Additionally, children with siblings tend to have stronger competitive instincts and higher emotional intelligence.

For the family, having more children offers both increased security and additional burden. In critical moments, an extra pair of hands and an extra mind can provide crucial support. Each child represents an investment in the family's future, and putting all the eggs in one basket is risky. As biographer Walter Isaacson noted in Benjamin Franklin: An American Life, Franklin's parents had over ten children, and every morning the first thing they would do was check the lineup of children to see if anyone had died overnight. In China, after the relaxation of the one-child policy, it became

evident that the "one-child" approach, while concentrating resources on a single child, exposed the family to the devastating risk of losing everything if that child were lost. One of the best ways to prevent a family from becoming "childless" is to have more children.

I don't have siblings, only cousins. However, observing the relationships between my parents and their siblings, I see that having siblings is generally better than not, and having more is usually better than fewer. Siblings are inherently more reliable than others. Compared to people outside the family, siblings are more likely to form a common interest group, acting together in unity, and more readily offer mutual support and understanding.

When it comes to competing for external resources, siblings are the best allies, serving as the cornerstone of our social capital. As long as siblings stick together and face outward, they bring collective strength and group wisdom to the family. Especially in times of upheaval, such as when competing for resources or defending the home, an extra person means an extra source of strength. However, when it comes to competing for internal resources, siblings can become the fiercest rivals. If siblings turn against each other, the family risks falling apart.

A bold hypothesis is that in families with fewer resources, where fewer children mean fewer internal resources to compete for, siblings are more likely to unite in the pursuit of external resources. Conversely, in wealthier families with more children and more internal resources at stake, siblings tend to focus more on internal competition. Throughout history, the most intense struggles have occurred among the wealthiest and most powerful royal families.

Spouses and Partners

Unlike sibling relationships based on blood ties, spouse and partner relationships are founded entirely on emotion and legal bonds. Spouses or partners are the core relationship within a family, and the strength of this relationship determines the family's future. A strong marriage is a solid foundation for any family member.

Whether it's between a man and a woman, a man and a man, or a woman and a woman—or even more complex groupings—when people come together through emotional bonds, they bring new members to the family. In some countries, this union is called marriage and may even be sanctified by religion. In others, it may be considered a social contract. Recently, some have proposed that, under China's existing marriage laws, not getting married might be a better option. It allows people to enjoy the benefits and protections of marriage without the legal complications of obtaining a marriage certificate.

Taking the most traditional example of heterosexual marriage, two people should come together with the goal of enhancing each other's autonomy. In an ideal scenario, they are united in purpose and mutual respect, expanding each other's capabilities through discussion (harnessing group wisdom), sharing resources, and boosting each other's will through encouragement and understanding.

Unfortunately, reality often falls short of this ideal. Many marriages begin in happiness and end in sorrow, with both partners using their autonomy as capital in a joint venture that often leaves both parties worse off. Sometimes, one partner bears the brunt of the burden while the other does nothing. Other times, one controls everything while the other is submissive. Malicious forms of control, such as gaslighting in manipulative relationships (e.g., PUA-style dynamics), are the worst types of partnerships. Sadly, these worst-case scenarios persist all too often.

The ideal marriage should be the culmination of love and mutual support. Drawing on psychologist Robert Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, the perfect marriage combines intimacy, passion, and commitment. However, in reality, people often start with passion, move through commitment (signing a marriage certificate, having children), and end up with intimacy—or sometimes lose even that. This progression aligns with evolutionary psychology and the logic of "selfish genes", as men and women come together primarily to produce offspring.¹

¹ The Triangular Theory of Love suggests that different combinations of intimacy, passion, and commitment form different types of love: Empty Love — commitment without intimacy and passion. Romantic Love — intimacy and passion without commitment. Companionate Love — intimacy and commitment without passion. Infatuated Love — passion without intimacy and commitment.

But as modern individuals, we seek more than just reproduction. Having been bombarded with idealized visions of love from literature and film, our real-life relationships often pale in comparison. Recognizing this phenomenon, Sternberg wrote *Love is a Story*, categorizing 25 different narrative types that people use to frame their romantic experiences, which in turn shape their relationships and choices. Marriage, like love, involves its own set of narrative archetypes. While love stories typically focus only on the couple, marriage stories encompass a broader network of relationships, including elders, peers, and younger generations. The delicate two-person world is often disrupted by children, the "third party" who upends everything.¹

To simplify these complex issues, I recommend using the marriage archetypes of The Autonomy Theory to anchor your relationship. According to The Autonomy Theory, marriage brings two people and their families together in a shared pursuit of autonomy. Both partners should strive to help the other become more autonomous. A good relationship is one where both partners support each other and grow together. A bad relationship is one where one controls the other, leading to mutual decline or regression. The Michelangelo phenomenon shows that people gradually become the version of themselves that their partner envisions, reinforcing their bond.²

In reality, if your marriage doesn't align with the autonomous marriage archetype, it's essential to reassess, identify problems, and take action to make changes. Change entails uncertainty and risk, and there are three strategies for addressing this: The traditional approach is to "endure, wait, and delay," letting time resolve the issues, avoiding the risk of failure by not taking proactive action. Benjamin Franklin wittily summarized this

Fatuous Love — passion and commitment without intimacy. Liking — intimacy without passion and commitment. Lastly, the ideal form is Consummate Love, which balances intimacy, passion, and commitment, representing the perfect love state.

1 Positive psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky found that after having children, couples experience a permanent decline in marital satisfaction; however, once the children grow up and leave home, marital satisfaction begins to rise significantly.

2 Here's a story about how love can fuel academic pursuits. As mentioned earlier, Eric Kandel, after falling in love with a girl, became fascinated with psychoanalysis and Freud (the girl's mother was good friends with Freud's daughter, and her grandfather was a close friend of Freud). Later, he met another woman who introduced him to the ideas of experimental science, leading him to focus on neuroscience research. In his quest to find evidence for psychoanalysis through neuroscience, he accidentally discovered the secrets of memory in sea slugs, which earned him a Nobel Prize.

approach: "Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards." The bold approach is to face problems head-on, propose solutions, and actively work to improve the marriage and strengthen the family core. A compromise approach could involve maintaining stability while cautiously experimenting with solutions to smaller issues.

Boccaccio once wrote in The Decameron, "Love is not the only thing: the lips that have been kissed do not lose their freshness, and the full moon will turn to a new moon." If after making every effort the marriage remains irreparable, it may be time to have an honest conversation and end the relationship, giving both parties a chance to start fresh. As for the children, they may not fare any better in a broken marriage than they would in a restructured family. The Autonomy Theory suggests that when a difficult decision must eventually be made, taking action sooner rather than later will reduce the cost.

11.2.3 The Mirror Relationship: Internal and External

The mirror relationship refers to the connection between an individual's physical self and their avatars or extensions in other forms.

It is said that many people, during childhood, have imaginary companions and often engage in self-talk. A few even exhibit multiple personalities, with several self-perceptions coexisting within a single body, frequently engaging in internal dialogue. Personally, I have long maintained the habit of journaling, using writing as a medium to converse with my past and future selves, facilitating the iteration of ideas. In a sense, our avatars in games also represent one of our digital selves.

In the GenAI era, we can easily use personal data to train agents that discuss issues with us or others. We can also create digital avatars—several of my friends have already made digital business cards where their avatars interact with anyone who views the card and later provide summary reports to the person.

In the future, it's highly likely that most people will experience this unique relationship between their physical selves and their digital counterparts.

Martine Rothblatt, an American tech entrepreneur, is a pioneer in this field. After transitioning from male to female, she created a robotic identity for her wife, combining

a cyborg's body with a digital consciousness, aiming for eternal companionship in a different form. Her forward-thinking book *Virtually Human* delves into the future forms of human existence, discussing purely spiritual consciousness clones, the hybrid of physical and mental clones, and beings that combine machine bodies with digital consciousness. These entities create complex relationships with today's original physical bodies and consciousness.

In the future, each of us may need to resolve this new mirror relationship to transcend time's limitations, leveraging the benefits of technology to achieve an extended form of life. If a balance can be struck between the physical self and the avatar, where the avatar supports the physical self with abilities and resources, enhancing the autonomy of the physical self, then we could consider this a healthy relationship. Conversely, I do not believe the physical self must owe anything to its avatar. I'm not so altruistic as to see my avatar as an independent, autonomy-seeking entity. To me, the avatar is an extension of the physical self, not the self itself.

Nevertheless, in the future, having avatars and the number of avatars one possesses may become a key criterion for measuring success. These avatars could become a third form of proof—after descendants and works—of our existence and essence, becoming another Legacy for self-determined individuals. In the future world, both in physical and virtual spaces, we can imagine countless avatars as extensions of ourselves. From purely digital virtual humans cultivated through our online footprints to biological clones replicating our memories, or forever-young humanoid robots bearing our appearance, these avatars will represent us. They will embody our autonomy, representing our families, and will continue playing the infinite game on our behalf in broader spatial and temporal dimensions.

11.4 Different Tasks for Different Family Members

Changing the structure of family relationships requires the participation of each family member. Since each person has a unique role within the family, their tasks and responsibilities will vary. Below are some of my thoughts and suggestions.

11.4.1 As Parents, What Should We Do?

Leaving aside the special case of bereaved parents, in general, parents can be divided into two categories: "parents in power" who are young or middle-aged (i.e., fathers and mothers) and "retired parents" who are older (i.e., grandparents).

Parents who are still in charge are the real heads of the family. One acts as the "Party Committee", setting direction and making demands; the other serves as the "Government," managing resources and implementation. In most Chinese families, the former role is typically filled by the father and the latter by the mother. Influenced by traditional social roles, fathers tend to spend more time on work and external affairs, while mothers focus more on managing home and internal matters. Effective division of labor and collaboration between the two can prevent many family conflicts.

Grandparents, who have retired from direct control, are the former heads of the family. One takes on the role of the "People's Congress", offering support with less involvement, while the other assumes the role of the "Consultative Conference", providing suggestions with minimal commentary. In most Chinese families, the grandfather assumes the former role and the grandmother the latter. Due to advances in modern technology, grandparents often become out of touch with society, which can lead to mistakes when they intervene in family matters "out of love", ultimately causing disharmony and leadership conflicts in the family.

After clarifying their positions, parents should abandon the "control theory" and embrace Autonomism's principles.

Lead by Example: Strengthen your own self-awareness, free will, and autonomous motivation to guide your children in developing their self-awareness, free will, and autonomy. Whenever you speak or act, reflect on whether you're trying to control your family members or whether you're helping them grow. Women, in particular, often have stronger control tendencies within the family and should reflect on this more consciously.

Guide Strategically: Adjust your approach according to your child's cognitive development. In the early stages, provide hands-on guidance, teaching your children how to view problems, make decisions, and bear the consequences. Allow them to

improve their abilities through practical experience. Later on, you must learn to let go, encouraging their skepticism, critical thinking, and creativity, supporting them as they break free from the cognitive frameworks you initially taught them. Ensure that, as they grow up, you divide the family and hand over control smoothly.

Hold the Line: Parents should safeguard their children's security while supporting their pursuit of freedom. In the early years, create an environment that helps them grow freely and safely. Later, support them as they venture into the world, offering guidance and material backing as they choose their cities and careers. However, the resources parents provide should match their child's abilities—over-support can lead to dependency and stagnation.

Ultimately, a child's autonomy comes at the cost of the parents' sense of control. While a child's growth requires sacrifices from the parents, the parents may not always receive gratitude or recognition for their efforts. To ease the sense of loss, parents might consider getting pets—companions that won't talk back and depend on you, allowing you to exercise control.

11.4.2 As Children, What Should We Do?

If my advice for parents leans toward enlightened republicanism and gentle guidance, then my advice for children is to become fighters and bravely assert your autonomy. Your struggle is a necessary part of changing family dynamics and optimizing its structure.

During childhood, children have the desire to resist but lack the ability, as their self-awareness has not fully developed. However, you can glimpse the future rebel in their cries and lies.

During adolescence, the desire and ability to resist peak as self-awareness continues to awaken. Teenagers often rebel just to assert their independence. At this stage, it's crucial for both parents and children to show mutual respect. Children should aim to earn their parents' respect through **effective communication, using a three-step process**: stating their position, explaining their reasoning, and offering a suggestion. I

summarize it as follows: **State Your Position:** Clearly express where you stand on an issue, such as, "I don't like it when you enter my room without my permission." **Explain Your Reasoning:** Patiently explain why you hold that position, such as, "It makes me feel like I have no privacy and am not respected." **Offer a Suggestion:** Propose a solution for how to handle the issue, such as, "Next time, please knock before entering. Thank you." Effective communication like this can help reduce the mutual harm that often occurs during the teenage years.

In adulthood, children now have the will, ability, and resources to vote with their feet—to leave home and gain autonomy. Still, **I encourage adult children to reconcile and cooperate with their parents.** Here are three suggestions: **Engage in Equal Dialogue:** Express your strong desire for autonomy and negotiate ground rules with your parents. Set clear expectations for them not to challenge your autonomy in the future while also asking for their support as you pursue autonomy. **Mutual Learning:** Teach your parents about the concept of autonomy, as many parents have likely never even considered what autonomy truly is. At the same time, learn practical skills and hands-on experience from your parents, creating a mutual exchange that allows both parties to grow together. **Share and Collaborate:** Present your future autonomy goals and plans, asking your parents to invest more resources in your growth. In return, commit to giving back once you succeed, and even if you fail, express gratitude for their support. Supporting one's parents is a natural duty, both emotionally and morally, and should be planned for in advance.

In short, as children, we should be the youngest and most vibrant members of the family, advocating for and driving improvements in family autonomy. Once we've gained autonomy and become heads of our own families, we must become engines for further enhancing family autonomy and always treat our former heads of the family with respect and care.

11.4.3 As Partners, What Should We Do?

As partners, beyond the tasks of raising children and supporting elderly parents, our primary duties are to love ourselves and love each other. Self-love involves developing

ourselves and becoming more autonomous individuals, while loving our partner involves fostering their growth alongside our own. To achieve this, we need to thoroughly understand and apply the principles of autonomy while introducing these concepts to our partner. Whether or not they fully embrace these ideas, our goal should be to support the growth of their autonomy and sense of agency. **Here are five key areas to focus on:**

The Safety of Autonomy: Make every effort to give your partner a sense of security, focusing on building a relationship based on mutual trust. Your partner should know that you love them and that your actions align with their expectations. This trust requires time and sustained effort. The foundation of trust is transparency, so strive for open and symmetrical communication between partners.

The Freedom of Autonomy: Always ensure that your partner has the right to make their own choices. Do not make decisions on their behalf; instead, create an environment where they can make informed decisions while supporting them in making the best possible choices. Stand by their side in facing the consequences of those choices. However, be mindful not to allow excessive freedom to jeopardize the marriage itself—this is a key boundary.

The Will of Autonomy: Encourage your partner to stand by their decisions and pursue their ideals. Help them move toward greater autonomy by offering encouragement and support when they hesitate or feel discouraged. In your treatment of your partner, adhere to the Silver Rule—"Do not do unto others what you do not want done to you"—and aim for the Golden Rule—"Help others achieve what you wish for yourself."

The Ability of Autonomy: Recognize and strengthen your partner's abilities, using behavioral and positive psychology methods to reinforce their strengths. If you want them to put in more effort, praise their hard work. If you want them to be kinder, highlight their acts of kindness. When the relationship is strong, you can also tactfully point out areas where they can improve and offer hands-on guidance to help them grow.

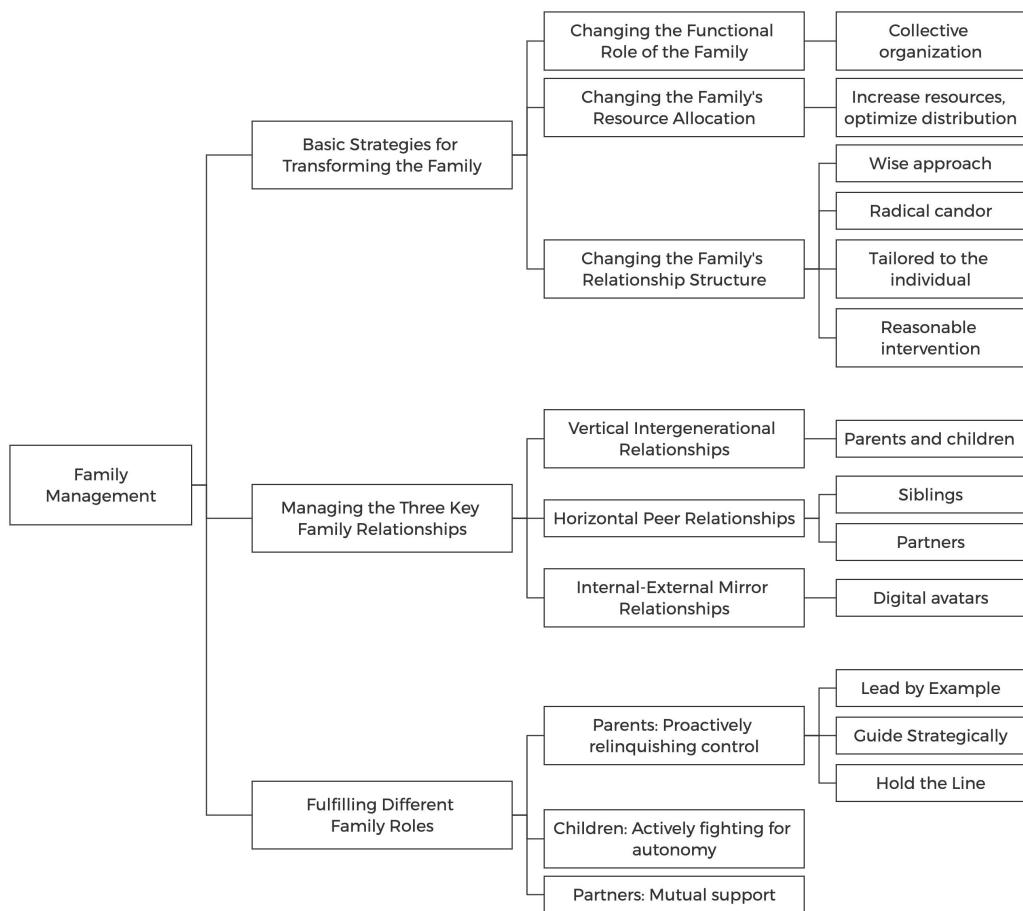
The Resources of Autonomy: Help solve resource-related issues for your partner. This may involve taking stock of, coordinating, and sharing your combined resources to tackle big challenges together. As the foundation of family relationships, a strong

partnership is essential for long-term family success. Key issues like housing, transportation, and children's education must be addressed collectively. Tackling these challenges together is easier than doing so individually. If resource issues are well-managed, the relationship will flourish; if not, it could deteriorate—so be proactive and responsible.

Finally, if the relationship has deteriorated beyond repair, learn from the decisiveness and courage of Heracles and make the tough decision to end the relationship early and move on to a fresh start. The same approach generally applies to sibling relationships.

11.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter addresses family issues from the perspective of autonomism, emphasizing that a family's function is to help its members become more autonomous. It identifies four different types of family environments and analyzes the internal logic of three key family relationships: vertical intergenerational relationships, horizontal peer relationships, and the internal-external mirror relationship. Lastly, it provides concrete suggestions for how to play the roles of parent, child, and partner within a family. While this discussion is preliminary, it should spark further reflection. In the future, we can explore these topics in more depth.



Chapter 12: Career Management

When choosing a profession, we should be guided primarily by the welfare of humanity and our own perfection.

—Karl Marx, *Reflections of a Young Man on the Choice of a Profession*

This was an essay Marx wrote for his school exams in 1835, later included in The Collected Works of Marx and Engels. At the age of 17, Marx resolutely pointed out, "It must not be thought that these two interests' conflict or contradict each other, where one interest necessarily destroys the other; on the contrary, human nature is such that one can only achieve perfection by working for the betterment of one's contemporaries and their happiness. If one works only for oneself, they may become a renowned scholar, a great philosopher, or an outstanding poet, but they will never become a complete or truly great person. If we choose the profession most capable of contributing to humanity, no burden will overwhelm us, because it is a sacrifice made for all; and then the joy we derive will not be poor, limited, selfish pleasures. Our happiness will belong to millions of people, our cause will quietly but effectively endure, and before our ashes, noble souls will shed tears of reverence."

As a communist and Marxist, my Theory of Autonomy fully agrees with Marx's views. When making career choices, autonomous individuals must not only consider their personal development but also the advancement of society and even the well-being of humanity as a whole. Therefore, after discussing "family management" in the previous chapter, the next topic we turn to is "governing the nation." For the average person, "governing the nation" means excelling in their profession, contributing meaningfully in

their field, and ultimately striving for greater individual and collective autonomy. For most of us, career and family are like two bowls that together define the possible scope of our autonomy at any given time. Comparatively, a career is more flexible and changeable than marriage.

Like family, a career provides an external environment for individual autonomy, serving as an accelerator for developing abilities, a treasury for accumulating resources, and a training ground for nurturing intent. Additionally, a career offers development goals for autonomy, including personal vision, security needs, and short-term plans, as well as collective vision, the pursuit of freedom, and long-term plans. Surrounding these goals and environments are a series of concrete issues. Solving these issues requires human autonomy and, in turn, enhances it.

From the perspective of autonomism, let's reexamine career-related issues and provide recommendations for career management. This chapter will delve into topics such as career choice, self-assessment, environmental analysis, role identification, and career planning, offering insights and advice grounded in autonomy.

12.1 Comparing Career Opportunities

The first question we face is how to choose a career. From the perspective of Theory of Autonomy, career choices should be guided by three core elements of autonomy and two key indicators of the sense of autonomy. If the answers to the following five questions are all "YES," then it's likely a good job:

Will: Do you have the basic will to do this job? Moreover, will this career help strengthen your determination and motivation?

Ability: Do you possess the basic skills to perform this job? Furthermore, will this job enhance the abilities you wish to improve? Some jobs emphasize cognitive skills, while others focus on practical or behavioral abilities. Deciding whether you want to play to your strengths or address weaknesses is an important directional choice.

Resources: Do you have the basic resources required for this job? Additionally, will this job increase your resources in specific areas? For instance, public sector jobs may

offer limited financial rewards but provide high social standing and opportunities to access social and political resources.

Safety: Will this job provide a sense of security? Most jobs provide some level of security, though some may require a higher tolerance for risk. Whether a job feels secure or not can vary greatly from person to person. For instance, a seasoned chef may feel safe amidst the chaos of a busy kitchen, but others might not.

Freedom: Will this job offer a sense of freedom? While most jobs provide some degree of freedom, the extent varies from person to person. Diverging life experiences and personal backgrounds mean different interpretations of what constitutes freedom. For instance, an extreme sports enthusiast may view deep-sea diving as liberating, while others might consider it too dangerous.

If you have multiple job offers, you can create a comparison table and score each job on a scale of 1 to 10 for the five criteria listed above. Rank them by total score, and you'll likely arrive at a reasonable choice. Often, we have to make decisions under uncertainty and bounded rationality, and the best we can do is select the "tallest of the short" options, aiming for satisfaction rather than perfection.

For a more scientific approach, I recommend learning a bit about algorithmic thinking. In the book *Algorithms to Live By*, co-authors Brian Christian and Tom Griffiths argue that time itself turns all decisions into an optimal stopping problem: when to stop exploring and start acting. This theory assumes we have a range of options but can only evaluate one at a time. If we select "yes," the process ends; if "no," we continue until making a choice or exhausting all options. The process of finding a job (or even a life partner) is akin to this optimal stopping problem.¹

From an information perspective, there are two main optimal stopping strategies:

¹ "Algorithms to Live By: The Computer Science of Human Decisions," co-authored by Brian Christian and Tom Griffiths, is a book that explores how computer algorithms can inspire solutions to everyday life problems. Through interdisciplinary research, the book demonstrates how the wisdom of computer science can be translated into strategies to improve human decision-making, helping us make more informed choices. The book covers a wide range of topics, including the optimal stopping theory, the balance between exploration and exploitation, sorting problems, caching effects, time-scheduling theory, Bayes' rule, the issue of overfitting, the application of randomness, network theory, and game theory.

When characteristics are quantifiable and information is abundant: Use a threshold rule, where you set a benchmark—act immediately if the threshold is surpassed. For example, if you’re job-hunting and aiming for a salary of at least 10,000 RMB per month, you can accept the first offer that meets or exceeds that amount. If you’re targeting the highest-paying job and have plenty of options, you could set a higher bar—say 20,000 RMB—and filter your options accordingly, ultimately choosing the best from those that meet your criteria.

When characteristics are not easily quantifiable or information is insufficient: Use a waiting rule, where you collect data during an observation period to understand the market. During this phase, you turn down any offers, no matter how attractive. After the observation period ends, you enter an action phase. If any subsequent offer surpasses the best offer from the observation period, you accept it immediately. For example, if during the observation phase the highest salary you encounter is 5,000 RMB, you adjust your expectations and accept any offer above that amount going forward.

How long should the observation period last? The best available rule is the 37% Rule—when faced with 100 potential candidates or options, review the first 37 of them. Use the best from that batch as a benchmark, and if you find a better one later, act on it immediately. This rule is often said to maximize the likelihood of a satisfying outcome. However, this seemingly elegant solution has significant limitations. It assumes unilateral selection (you pick the employer, but they don’t pick you), no time constraints (you can search endlessly without the fear of going broke), and no rejection penalties (turning down an offer has no negative repercussions). Obviously, reality doesn’t work this way. Simply factoring in time constraints could revise the rule to the 31% Rule. Accounting for other complexities like market crashes and surges, the problem becomes even more nuanced. Most importantly, the 37% Rule assumes we are kings making unilateral decisions, while in reality, job seekers are often in a weaker position.

A better strategy is to leverage weak ties, as proposed by Mark Granovetter in his classic work *Getting a Job*. Granovetter distinguishes between strong ties (close relationships like family, friends, and colleagues) and weak ties (distant acquaintances and less frequent contacts). People within your strong ties tend to have access to the

same information as you, limiting the chances of discovering unknown opportunities. Weak ties, on the other hand, provide connections to different social networks, enabling new information and opportunities. This principle applies equally to job hunting and dating.

Therefore, as discussed in Chapter 9 on "Social Management," take the initiative to view yourself as a good investment. Actively market yourself, welcome others to invest in you, and when you succeed, express gratitude to those who supported you. Use your achievements to validate their investment, securing additional support and opportunities in the future.

12.2 Evaluating Your Current Professional Status

If you already have a job, whether you're employed or running your own business, you can assess your current professional status using the framework of autonomy theory. Similar to the matrix used in "Task Management," I have categorized professional status into four levels.

Level 1: Golden Status. You are either a powerful executive born into a wealthy family or an up-and-coming professional who has seized a timely opportunity, perfectly balancing safety and freedom with a combination of willpower, capability, and resources. The career of a "winner in life" combines personal interests, skills, and income. For example, Yang Zhiping from OpenMind is an educator who combines learning and teaching, making money while doing what he loves and excels at—an extremely fulfilling life. Some university lecturers also enjoy similar lives, though I believe Yang has more freedom. However, in terms of job security, perhaps working within an established institution is more stable. Which is better? No judgment here—just choices. If you are in a golden career, then immerse yourself in it, devote yourself wholeheartedly, and embrace personal growth. But I also question whether these three components can truly coexist harmoniously. Particularly when a hobby becomes a source of income, can it remain pure, or will it become alienating? For instance, professional eSports players may lose the joy of gaming, turning it into a source of stress as they play to win—a completely different feeling.

Level 2: Silver Status. You have a job you are good at and that provides income, fulfilling your need for security, while also pursuing a hobby that interests you, seeking freedom and possibly catching a "black swan" opportunity. You might be a "double-tasker," holding down a stable clerical job while engaging in creative activities—a barbell strategy used successfully by many intellectuals. Silver status is a long game: as long as you don't lose, you have a chance. I fall into this category, working in policy research and social sciences within an institution, while writing creatively in my spare time. The worst-case scenario is that I remain unknown, but at least I won't let myself or my family go hungry. Plus, during the creative process, I experience the immersive flow of creativity and build friendships, enhancing my skills and resources. However, one shouldn't be complacent. Whenever there is an opportunity, aim to upgrade from silver to golden status. The key is to inject meaning and passion into your career or to find a way to monetize your hobby. You can explore asymmetrical strategies to achieve this.

Level 3: Bronze Status. Golden and silver statuses are the privilege of a few elites. Most ordinary people aren't so lucky, starting their careers based on a few random strengths. Some people with relatively good luck might have found a job that matches their skills and provides decent income, even if they lack interest. In this case, I recommend adopting a silver model by incorporating hobbies. Others may chase their dreams without considering their abilities and income, or they may focus only on income while ignoring their skills and interests, leaving gaps in their career. For these individuals, my advice is to first address the missing link—particularly skills and income—because these are far more important than interests. Everyone has interests, but not all interests lead to expertise, and they are often at a half-baked level. Conversely, expertise can foster interest because when you perform well and receive recognition, it becomes easier to develop a passion. If forced to choose, I suggest focusing on building your professional skills first, and then cultivating hobbies later.

Level 4: Black Iron Status. Some people may have chosen this path, but more likely they had no choice and ended up in a "three-nothing" state—no interest, no expertise, and no income. This is the worst status, and I recommend terminating it as soon as possible. Find a job that provides income, then work on improving your professional

skills, and eventually develop an interest based on your expertise. Even not working at all is better than being in this self-destructive state.

12.3 Analyzing Your Professional Environment

The next issue for the autonomous individual is identifying whether your current professional environment is autonomy-friendly. The macro-environment, or the societal and external attitude towards autonomy, is challenging to change. However, the micro-environment—your specific organization's attitude towards autonomy—is more manageable to influence or choose. An autonomy-friendly organization prioritizes autonomy as its guiding principle, striving for organizational autonomy while encouraging its members to pursue individual autonomy. In doing so, it seeks to achieve organizational autonomy through the collective autonomy of its members. An ideal autonomy-friendly organization shares several critical characteristics with the "normalized teams" discussed in the chapter on social management. These organizations may seem extreme in some ways, but their traits are necessary for fostering autonomy.

Trait 1: Absolute Excellence. An ideal autonomy-friendly organization is composed of top-tier talent, where each member is a standout—selected from among the best or even the very best in their field. Many of your colleagues will surpass you in skills or knowledge, providing you with an opportunity to learn by observing and emulating them. These top-notch peers are willing to teach, answer your questions, discuss ideas with you, and collaborate effectively. Confucius' notion of "Do not make friends with those who are not as good as you" applies perfectly here. Such outstanding teammates will inspire and motivate you, ensuring you always have the drive to keep moving forward and improving.

Trait 2: Absolute Transparency. In an ideal autonomy-friendly organization, information is fully accessible, and there is minimal information asymmetry, with a relatively flat management structure. Modern institutions like Bridgewater Associates encourage the free flow of information and ideas, allowing collective wisdom to flourish. Absolute transparency ensures that you have access to all the information

within the organization, enabling those with the desire to rapidly find the insights and opportunities necessary to enhance their abilities and resources.

Trait 3: Absolute Candor. We have discussed absolute candor multiple times—it is an excellent approach to group communication. An ideal autonomy-friendly organization promotes a culture of care and support. Whether between superiors and subordinates or among peers, strong personal relationships should be built on a foundation of frankness and openness. Constructive criticism should be encouraged, and everyone should feel free to express their thoughts. Growth requires feedback and guidance, and absolute candor is a key element in personal development. If you encounter a manager or colleague who practices this, cherish it, and take the opportunity to have them mentor you.

Of course, organizations that embody all three traits are rare, and even if they exist, it might be difficult to join them. Therefore, you have two options: Actively seek out teams that align with these traits and make an effort to join them. Promote these principles within your current organization to the extent possible. Personally, I strive to build my own small team into an autonomy-friendly organization, where I help team members achieve autonomy, and they, in turn, help the organization grow stronger. In managing teams and operating communities, I make an effort to follow these principles and put them into practice. By doing so, I can unleash and enhance the autonomy of individuals, helping the organization turn the impossible into reality.

12.4 Role Positioning in Your Career

Once your career, status, and environment are established, it's time to reassess your role within the organization. The role you play in different organizations can vary greatly, with different responsibilities and tasks. It's essential to neither overstep your responsibilities nor remain idle in your position. Though there are numerous roles in an organization, they can generally be divided into three tiers:

Senior Management. Senior management represents the organization's will and emotional system. Their task is to craft the vision, narrate the goals, make decisions, and emphasize consensus. As part of the senior management, you should have the ambition

to embody the organization, thinking about its direction and strategy. Senior managers must balance "animalistic" passion and "divine" rationality—pursuing ideals with intensity while maintaining calm, rational decision-making. While they should support and guide middle management, senior managers should avoid micromanaging the lower levels, giving middle managers the space to lead.

Middle Management. Middle management acts as the organization's cognitive system. Their role is to make judgments, coordinate efforts, and lead the lower levels in solving problems after receiving directives from senior management. As middle management, your focus should be on leading and collaborating with the lower levels to thoroughly think through and resolve issues. Middle managers should be empathetic towards the lower levels, as they provide the foundation of your abilities and resources—without their support, you'd be overwhelmed. Furthermore, while you may give suggestions to senior management privately, you should avoid publicly contradicting them. Middle managers often have less information than senior managers, making it difficult to make fully informed judgments. If you're wrong, you'll get reprimanded, and even if you're right, senior management might hold a grudge.

Lower Levels. The lower levels represent the organization's operational system. Their task is to act according to instructions. If you're part of the lower levels, you shouldn't overanalyze the thoughts of senior management—just work with middle management to execute the tasks. In organizations that value transparency and open communication, you can provide feedback and suggestions within the institutional framework, but avoid using informal channels. Lower-level employees should aim to develop their business expertise while also honing communication and coordination skills. The goal is to first become a leader, then a manager.

Most people, except a few who are born into middle or upper management roles, start at the lower levels of an organization. Due to differences in experience and vision, it's often hard to fully understand the considerations of middle and senior managers early on. By the time someone reaches middle age and advances to these positions, they might have the classic realization: "At 50, I realize I was wrong for the past 49 years," feeling they were naive or short-sighted. To avoid this, senior colleagues should mentor newer employees, helping them understand their current position in the organizational

hierarchy and providing a clear path for advancement. I hope this three-tiered classification will offer insights for everyone.

There's also a unique case: entrepreneurs, or even "one-person businesses," who must simultaneously take on the roles of senior, middle, and lower management. The demands are higher, but so are the potential rewards. However, as the organization grows, roles will inevitably need to be divided, with the three-tier system re-established.

12.5 Career Planning

Once you've established your role, the next step is to plan your career path. Let's assume that life is relatively malleable, and while the future is uncertain, thoughtful planning can influence its direction. With that in mind, we can draw inspiration from Ogilvy & Mather's Chairman, Brian Fetherstonhaugh, who proposed in his book *The Long View* that a career can be divided into three stages:

Stage One (Ages 24-36): Accumulation. In the early stage, you should focus on accumulating knowledge, skills, and resources—especially those that will benefit your future career development. During this period, remain humble, ask for guidance, and invest time in learning. Be patient and prepare for significant growth later on. For example, in this stage, I completed over 1,000 books, networked with over 1,000 experts, and wrote millions of words in notes and articles. These activities significantly contributed to my later learning, work, and life. To improve the efficiency of this accumulation phase, I suggest two practical tips: Become a "morning person" to take advantage of the mental edge that comes with early productivity. Find a mentor and absorb as much as you can from their lifetime of experience. In short, at this stage, focus on being an ordinary person with extraordinary preparation.

Stage Two (Ages 36-48): Monetization. Research shows that 80% of a person's lifetime earnings come after age 40. Starting at age 36, shift your mindset to begin capitalizing on your accumulated skills and resources, turning them into productivity and tangible results. During this period, I worked hard to maximize my autonomy, leaving behind a legacy: achieving career accomplishments, revising and publishing my Autonomy Theory, and driving the growth of nonprofit communities like Blazing Youth

and AIGCxChina. If your job does not offer economic gains, then focus on political or social capital, or exchange for more reputation and influence. Remember, success comes from external recognition. Tangible and intangible assets will increase your credibility, giving you more opportunities to attract investments and further success. In this stage, focus on transforming from an ordinary person into an elite.

Stage Three (Ages 48-60): Exploration. If you've successfully monetized your resources, by this stage, you should have accumulated enough wealth and capabilities, allowing your autonomy to flourish. Now you can choose new experiences and challenges. You could stay at your current organization and mentor younger leaders, perhaps transitioning into a consultant role. Or, you might guide young entrepreneurs on the side. Alternatively, you could embark on a second career or focus on education and philanthropy. With your autonomy fully realized, the world becomes your playground. To truly embrace new experiences, consider connecting with younger generations, investing in their dreams, and deriving meaning that transcends time. Ultimately, in this phase, aim to transition from elite to hero, or even to a "Titan" in your field.

A respected Wenzhou elder, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce, Mr. Huang Jiannan, once shared a similar view with me, using the knuckles on his fist to illustrate life's phases. However, as someone who has lived longer and is more optimistic, he believes we have four cycles of growth.

As we enter the AI era, my perspective is that in an increasingly unpredictable world, anything is possible. The past is fixed, but the future holds multiple possibilities. We must prepare for lifelong learning and lifelong work, not only with our physical bodies in the real world but also through our digital avatars in the virtual world. Career planning will likely become more complex, so we should adopt a "barbell strategy," following broad guidelines in major life decisions while remaining flexible and adaptive in smaller details.

12.6 Other Career-Related Issues

Lastly, let's address some common career-related issues that many people are concerned about. Here are my thoughts and suggestions:

Entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurship is a high-cost endeavor, requiring you to create opportunities from scratch and continuously face and solve new problems. If you don't have a strong foundation of willpower and ample resources, or if the timing and circumstances aren't particularly favorable, I wouldn't recommend starting a business. However, if you are determined to experience entrepreneurship, set a time limit and a bottom line. Consider co-founding with friends rather than being the main initiator. This way, if it goes well, you can continue, and if not, you can exit without too much risk, gaining life experience or preparation for independent entrepreneurship. In the AI era, GenAI may appear to offer many entrepreneurial opportunities, but it has also accelerated the pace of trial and error, increasing both risks and rewards. Therefore, be extra cautious when deciding to start a business.

Civil Service Examinations: Taking civil service exams is a career path suitable for most people. Entering the system (i.e., the public sector) offers stable income, higher social status, and more political power. Unless you intend to be a "laid-back official," working within the system will likely enhance your willpower, skills, and access to resources. However, the public sector requires you to function as part of an organization, emphasizing security over freedom, and it discourages individualized self-expression. In the AI era, GenAI likely won't replace government jobs in the short term but will ease workloads. With fewer opportunities outside the public sector due to economic downturns, more people are expected to choose this path.

Taking Over the Family Business: If your family owns a business or substantial assets, and your parents expect you to take over, you can consider it if your willpower, skills, or resources are strong in at least one area. A family business can give you a good head start. However, you'll face the challenge of proving to senior management and employees that you have a firm will, reliable capabilities, and solid resources. In the beginning, resources can come from your parents, skills can be learned from them, but willpower is entirely up to you. You need to be mentally prepared; once you're clear-headed, actions will follow.

Job-Hopping: Some people enjoy switching jobs frequently. I think it depends on timing and circumstances. During an economic boom, when new companies and job opportunities abound, job-hopping can be a way to increase your salary. However,

during an economic downturn, caution is advised. I also don't recommend job-hopping solely for a pay raise—it should be for more autonomy. Additionally, the longer you work, the more tied you become to your current position, so if you want to switch jobs, do it sooner rather than later. In the AI era, GenAI could eliminate many job opportunities, so those without a strong competitive advantage should be wary of job-hopping.

Taking a Gap Year: Friends in big cities with progressive ideas might consider taking a gap year after working for a few years to study, travel, or simply take time off. I think this depends on whether you have enough resources and whether the gap year will genuinely enhance your autonomy. I always believe that the right decision ultimately increases one's autonomy in the future. In the GenAI era, if you can spend a gap year acquiring new knowledge and skills due to strong self-discipline and learning abilities, it's worthwhile. Otherwise, changing jobs might be a better option than taking a gap year just for personal satisfaction.

Graduate Studies: I believe that most people pursue graduate or doctoral studies as a way to avoid entering the workforce—a kind of deferment, which is not ideal unless your goal is to stay in academia or teaching. Otherwise, graduate studies often lack purpose and may waste resources and fuel unnecessary competition. I prefer the Western approach of working before returning to school, which gives studies a clear objective, whether it's earning a degree or networking. If your goal is academia, aim for practical benefits. Pursuing a master's degree abroad can be worthwhile, as you can attend better schools and obtain your degree faster. Although there are financial costs, the time saved is often worth it. If pursuing a Ph.D., consider a combined master's-Ph.D. program and seek a reputable advisor while thinking ahead about your future career. Research is suitable for those planning to teach or work in academic fields. For those in applied, skill-based fields, early employment is a better option since such jobs are more likely to be optimized by GenAI.

Parents' Advice on Careers: Many parents prefer to guide their children's careers based on their own experiences, offering stable jobs that may not align with their children's skills or interests—often in local government positions. On the other hand, children often seek jobs in big cities that suit their interests or skills and offer better pay,

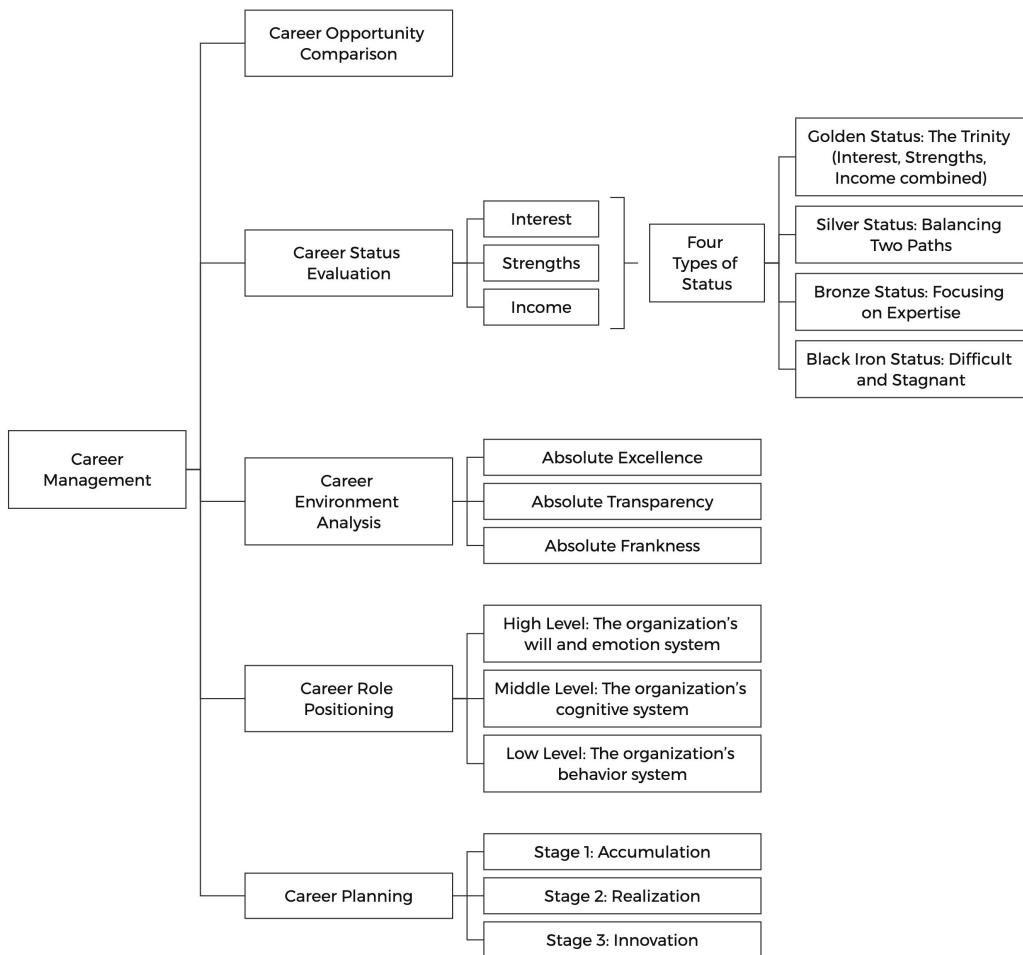
but these may not meet their parents' hopes for them to live nearby. I believe reasonable parental advice should be considered, while unreasonable suggestions should be dismissed. Anthropologist Margaret Mead described this era as a "post-figurative culture," where rapid societal changes mean that older generations struggle to keep up with the evolving world, particularly in the AI era. While parents may be wrong about many things, they still control resources. If you want your parents to invest in your development, you'll need to patiently communicate with them and reach a consensus.

The family management chapter offers strategies on how to do this.

AI Concerns: Many people worry that AI will replace their jobs in the future, and this concern is logical. To address this, seek jobs that require creativity and collaboration—areas where AI currently lacks independent capabilities but can offer substantial support. Acquiring GenAI skills can amplify your abilities. Many fragmented suggestions have been addressed earlier, and chapter 14 on intelligence management will offer a more comprehensive analysis.

12.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we explored the relationship between career and autonomy, emphasizing that careers provide an environment and goals for autonomy, while autonomy fuels and safeguards career success. We discussed various aspects such as career opportunity comparison, career status evaluation, workplace environment analysis, role positioning, and career planning. We also addressed several common career-related questions and offered guidance.



Chapter 13: Urban Management

Our cities must be places where humans can live dignified, healthy, safe, happy, and hopeful lives.

— UN-Habitat, *Istanbul Declaration*

Autonomy and cities are closely intertwined. Cities are born from autonomy, serve autonomy, and are a crucial external environment for individual autonomy. Moreover, cities, being larger systems than families or careers, provide both a target for striving and an environment for self-development. For many people, the city they live in represents their entire world. How far one can advance within a city often reflects the honor and height of their life.

Urban management involves discussing the relationship between autonomy and the city, providing guidance on solving urban-related issues, and enhancing the autonomy of both individuals and cities. Below, we will discuss how to understand, choose, and transform cities from three perspectives: the past, present, and future. In this chapter, I will frequently use self-disclosure, drawing from my personal experiences as examples to inspire readers and encourage action to the greatest extent.

13.1 Reflecting on the Past: How to Understand Cities

Cities are a product of societal progress, born from human autonomy and serving human autonomy.

The first city on the Fertile Crescent was a milestone indicating humanity's increased autonomy. From the perspective of will, the city arose out of faith and worship, initially driven by the need for constant maintenance of a temple, which necessitated the creation of a city. From the perspective of capability, the emergence of cities showed that humans had acquired the cognitive and behavioral ability to plan, build, and manage large settlements. This also forced humanity to upgrade social systems, as traditional village governance could no longer resolve the increasing number of conflicts between strangers. From the perspective of resources, cities emerged after the agricultural revolution, as the domestication of wild wheat led to a surge in food production, pushing population scales past a critical threshold. From then on, cities became symbols and embodiments of advanced productivity. The civilizations we understand today are nearly all associated with cities.

Athens during the classical period represents another peak of human autonomy. Autonomous citizens created this city and enjoyed the autonomy the city provided. Enduring thoughts were conceived here, and great heroes like Socrates and Pericles were born here. After Athens fell, its spirit briefly revived in Rome, before being passed on to the Arab world, where cities and dreams intertwined to create the world of One Thousand and One Nights.

Later, during the Middle Ages, European cities were founded and defended by people pursuing freedom. They became the torchbearers of autonomy, driving the Renaissance and social transformation. Venice, in particular, was a legend of the era. Anything involving Venice was extraordinary. Like Athens, Venice looked out to the sea and thrived through commerce and labor. Unlike those powers relying on land and agriculture, Venice and Athens allowed their citizens to pursue autonomy and achieve it. If you lived in 16th-century Venice, you had over 100 trade guilds to choose from, you could invest in the state, engage in commercial ventures, participate in elections, and legally change your status and identity through commerce, warfare, or marriage.

Cities that encourage personal autonomy possess immense collective autonomy. At its height, Venice's population was merely a thousandth of that of China during the Ming Dynasty, yet its fiscal revenue was comparable to China's. The successful mechanisms of Venice were passed to the Netherlands, then to Britain, and eventually to the entire

world. The Industrial Revolution spurred the rise of cities, and the rise of cities fueled the flourishing of civilization. In the 18th century, Scotland, with a population of just 1.25 million—similar to my hometown of Yueqing (a county-level city)—produced great figures like Adam Smith and David Hume, and left behind enduring works like *The Wealth of Nations* and *A Treatise of Human Nature*, shaping the future direction of development. This is the power of cities, the power of autonomy.

After China's Reform and Opening-up, it too embarked on a path of rapid urbanization. The transformation of cities brought about a redistribution of wealth—some became the beneficiaries of demolition, while others remained impoverished. The rapid changes in China meant that even by doing nothing and "lying flat", people found themselves quickly overtaken by the march of time. Some amassed fortunes, while others stayed as poor as ever. This gap in resources, coupled with the freedom to move between rural and urban areas, led to the migration of hundreds of millions of people to cities, like migratory birds. Through their own efforts, they pursued and achieved autonomy.

It must be acknowledged that the elements necessary for autonomy are more concentrated in cities, making it easier for individuals to enhance their autonomy in an urban environment.

Resources: Cities offer both hardware and software. Cities provide better infrastructure and professional services, helping people save time and money. Compared to rural areas, the costs of eating, commuting, studying, working, traveling, and healthcare are lower, while the experience is generally better. Moreover, cities have vast social networks that provide information and channels for personal development. The strengths of public resources in cities can partially compensate for the weaknesses of individual resources.

Abilities: Cities present both challenges and opportunities for guidance. They offer more opportunities for entrepreneurship and employment, as well as more complex problems waiting to be solved, allowing individuals to continuously "level up" through practical experiences. Additionally, cities provide more educational and training institutions, offering comprehensive education from basic to higher levels, as well as vocational training. Cities are also home to numerous experts who can guide and certify your abilities, acting as benefactors on your path to success.

Will: Cities provide both goals and role models. Cities possess their own spirit and culture, promoting values that align with autonomy and inspiring individuals to strive forward. Moreover, cities have heroes—local figures who demonstrate city spirit through their actions and inspire others to follow. Most of the great souls and role models in human history who pursued autonomy were born and lived in cities.

Safety: Cities offer both welfare and services. Compared to rural areas, cities provide more social welfare and public services, ensuring the basic safety of their citizens. Under normal circumstances, cities also offer more abundant food supplies at lower prices. However, it's important to note that in times of crises, such as pandemics or wars, the complex division of labor and cooperation in cities can break down, making cities less self-sufficient than rural areas.

Freedom: Cities provide both rules and choices. Cities have clearer rules and boundaries, allowing people to enjoy greater freedom of choice within those rules and within an orderly framework. Whether it's finding a job, a partner, or a house, cities offer far more choices than rural areas. The larger the city, the more opportunities it provides.

13.2 Discussing the Present: How to Choose a City

In the 1980s, I was born in a township hospital in Furong Town, under Yueqing County (upgraded to a county-level city in 1993), Wenzhou City. At that time, both of my parents were teachers. I later went to school in the county town, and for college, I moved to Xiamen, with a brief six-month period spent in Hangzhou. In the early 21st century, I went abroad for further studies, primarily living in the south of France, and during that time, I traveled to many of Europe's historical cities. After returning to China, I interned for half a year in Hangzhou, then decided to return to my hometown county to work. A few years later, I was transferred to Wenzhou's urban area, where I have worked ever since. Throughout my career, I have had multiple opportunities to visit and study in major cities across China. I would say that I've lived, studied, and worked in cities of various types and levels, both domestically and abroad, and I have gained some comparative insights.

Overall, I tend to be more traditional and relatively conservative when it comes to choosing a city, placing a high value on secure freedom. Although changing cities can alter your external environment and provide more public resources to support your autonomy, I don't encourage people to easily switch cities. There are two main reasons for this:

High Costs of Changing Cities: On one hand, moving to a new city means losing the job, income, and social connections you've built in the previous city, not to mention potentially leaving behind your parents, missing the opportunity to care for them (or being taken care of by them). On the other hand, settling down in a new city means facing the difficult tasks of securing employment, housing, and social networks all over again, along with challenges like finding schools for your children and medical care for your parents. These difficulties are compounded by the huge costs involved. This trade-off often leads to a temporary drop in personal autonomy right after relocating.

Changing Cities May Not Always Be Effective: We live in a competitive era where, in many cases, success is not only determined by personal effort but also by the platform and resources provided by the city you're in. A city's potential does not always correlate with an individual's potential. A city's prestige does not necessarily make you prestigious; it can instead signify the polarization of resources and talent.

In my view, switching cities is often the result of autonomy rather than the cause. Changing cities presupposes a certain level of autonomy. When a person's autonomy has reached a certain level and their current location no longer supports further growth, or even hinders it, they may then choose to relocate. However, for someone with weaker autonomy, even if they have the will to relocate, they lack the corresponding ability and resources. Even if they manage to switch cities, they may struggle to establish themselves in the new city, let alone achieve greater autonomy.

Based on this, I recommend that most people cultivate and deepen their roots in their current city, tapping into the surrounding potential to nurture future autonomy. If you are determined to move, here are some personal suggestions for your reference.

13.2.1 Suggestion 1: Quickly Categorize Cities

Less is more. We can categorize various cities using two key metrics as a coordinate system.

Vertical Axis: Population. Generally speaking, cities with larger populations tend to be better cities. Three indicators should be considered: **Total Population:** Rather than looking at the total population of the entire city, focus on the population of the main urban area. The larger the population, the more valuable the city is. A benchmark of 3 million is a good reference point, as this is the threshold set by China's National Development and Reform Commission for approving subway systems. **Population Structure:** A balanced ratio of men to women and a reasonable age distribution favor a city's long-term development. Cities attracting a large influx of young people under the age of 30 are typically thriving. The younger the average age, the more valuable the city. **Population Density:** From the city's overall complexity to the convenience of services like delivery, population density is closely related. The higher the density, the more valuable the city. Generally, various developmental indicators of cities are highly correlated with population metrics. There is also the "15% scale effect", meaning that as a city's population grows by 100%, the infrastructure investment only needs to grow by 85%, but output efficiency can increase by 115%. This scale effect explains why larger cities keep attracting more people and growing, while smaller cities lose population and shrink. For more discussion, refer to Geoffrey West's *Scale*, a masterpiece from the Santa Fe Institute's former president, which delves into complexity and urban scaling. Furthermore, population is positively correlated with economic indicators, social development, cultural strength, technological elements, and transportation conditions, which also helps predict a city's AI capabilities and potential.¹

Horizontal Axis: Housing Prices. Generally speaking, cities with more affordable housing tend to be better. Rent prices are less useful as an indicator since they are already reflected in population data, so it's more important to focus on new home prices

¹ Geoffrey West is a renowned theoretical physicist and former president of the Santa Fe Institute. In his book *Scale: The Universal Laws of Growth, Innovation, Sustainability, and the Pace of Life in Organisms, Cities, Economies, and Companies*, West delves into the concept of scaling laws and their applications across various domains, including biology, urban development, corporate operations, and economics. In this book, West proposes that whether it's organisms, cities, companies, or economies, their growth, decline, and innovation are constrained by their scale, and are proportional to their size. He summarizes these relationships as scaling laws, which exhibit similarities across different systems, revealing the underlying simplicity of complex systems.

and second-hand home prices. These figures can reveal a city's land reserves, financial capacity, population growth potential, operational management capabilities, and the public's subjective assessment of these factors. Housing prices are like a city's stock price—sometimes overinflated, sometimes undervalued. For example, in the early 2000s, Wenzhou had overinflated housing prices (surpassing even Beijing and Shanghai), while Hangzhou's prices were undervalued (significantly lower than Wenzhou). By the 2020s, the situation reversed, with Hangzhou's housing prices skyrocketing (surpassing many cities, including Wenzhou), while Wenzhou's became more reasonable (following a sharp drop due to a real estate and financial crisis). As I revise this book, China's real estate market is in a downward cycle, which may be a blessing for young people looking to settle in cities, but not so much for those who have already bought property. The housing market is full of contradictions—there will always be winners and losers.

The vertical axis of population and the horizontal axis of housing prices create a coordinate system. While individual quantitative standards may vary, the basic logic remains the same. First-tier cities with large populations and affordable housing are the ideal choice. I'm not sure which cities fall into this quadrant, but they should be a focus for exploration. If none exist domestically, you might want to look abroad. Second-tier cities with large populations and high housing prices are the mainstream cities we are familiar with—places like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen fall into this category. Third-tier cities with small populations and low housing prices, like those in northeast China, are in decline—famous examples include places like Hegang. Fourth-tier cities with small populations and high housing prices are the worst-case scenario. Most people will prioritize first-tier cities, opt for second-tier cities as a backup, avoid third-tier cities, and laugh at fourth-tier cities. Additionally, under equal conditions, international cities may be better than domestic cities, coastal cities better than inland ones, and provincial capitals better than smaller cities.

13.2.2 Recommendation Two: Organize Candidate Cities

The method outlined above primarily serves to categorize and evaluate cities, but when it comes to actually choosing a city, it is essential to start from your personal

circumstances and current goals. Moreover, the selection process is always influenced by subjective preferences and objective limitations.

Subjective preferences relate to autonomous will, as well as emotional biases and cognitive distortions, which affect our choice of candidate cities. We tend to favor places where we have lived, studied, or worked, as we are more familiar with them, resulting in self-serving bias ("my city is better") and immediate bias ("I'm in a rush, so I'll go with my gut"). When placing yourself in the equation and starting from your birthplace, you can expand outward, identifying several categories of candidate cities: First, the county seat (or city, district) where you were born, typically a large town with a population of over 100,000 people. While this would be considered a super city abroad, in China, it's relatively small. Second, the urban area of the city where you were born, usually mid-sized cities with populations exceeding one million (when the population reaches 3 million, they can approve subway construction). Third, the provincial capital or sub-provincial cities in your home province (municipality or autonomous region), generally having around 3 million people in the urban area, and there are nearly 100 such cities in China. Fourth, nearby mega-cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, or Hong Kong, which have metropolitan populations of over 10 million. Fifth, the world's best international cities, such as New York, Tokyo, Paris, and London. Sixth, other special cities, such as cities where you studied, worked, or where relatives have strong roots. In reality, most of us choose from one of these six types of cities.

Objective limitations are tied to individual autonomy, as differences in personal capabilities and resources lead to variations in how cities are chosen. Please allow me to candidly and even bluntly categorize readers into three groups: Group one comes from privileged families, has received a good education, and has ample resources and strong abilities to fully support their pursuit of autonomous will. Group two comes from moderately privileged families and has a decent education, with average resources and fair abilities, and possesses strong autonomous will. Group three comes from underprivileged families with lower educational backgrounds, insufficient resources, and capabilities, but a strong desire to change their fate through effort. The foundation of one's autonomy determines different target choices and paths.

Matching objective limitations with subjective preferences, along with individual autonomy and city types, I have two strategies to recommend:

Leapfrog Strategy: I suggest that friends in groups one and three venture boldly outward, the farther the better, and take a top-down trial-and-error approach. Group one can consider heading directly to the world's top cities; if that doesn't work out, they can retreat to the best cities within the country. If that still fails, they can then settle in the provincial capitals or sub-provincial cities near their hometown. Since they have the capital, they can afford one or two attempts. In polite terms, their family can afford to pay for their ideals; in blunt terms, their family has the money to buy a house in their desired city. Group three can aim for the best cities in the country, starting from odd jobs and seeking future employment or entrepreneurial opportunities. If they are worried about not finding a foothold, they can rely on relatives in cities where they have solid connections. This involves a certain degree of path dependence due to social networks, but it makes logical sense. For friends in group three, life hasn't given them many choices, so they must create their own opportunities. Since you're going to take a risk, you might as well gamble for the best, hoping for class mobility; if you lose, you can always return to manual labor.

Encroachment Strategy: I suggest that friends in group two start nearby, proceed step by step, and aim for generational progression, gradually climbing upward from the bottom. Group two may find it slightly challenging or awkward to go straight to a mega-city, as they are caught between being overqualified and underqualified—neither able to reap the top-tier rewards like group one, nor willing to start from the bottom like group three. This could result in them being worse off than both group one and three. Moreover, group two might have some family savings, but not much, so they cannot afford to gamble recklessly. It would also be unwise to gamble all their resources on a house in a big city. Thus, the optimal strategy for group two is to use their limited capital wisely, focusing on what they can control, managing nearby cities carefully, and advancing steadily. My family falls into this category. My parents' task was to move from the countryside to a town and then to the county seat, achieving a first-tier upgrade. My task was to move from the county seat to the city, achieving a second-tier upgrade. Perhaps when my child grows up, they will achieve a third-tier upgrade from

the city to the provincial capital or even the capital itself, and their children might attempt an even higher level by going abroad.

The city where I live—Wenzhou—is a remarkable place, and Wenzhou people are a remarkable group.

The first group of Wenzhou people advance triumphantly, heading straight for the world's top cities. During that special era, many elites were able to change their fate through education, ultimately becoming elites among elites. Whether in national ministries or international organizations, there are many Wenzhou people in influential positions. For example, a well-known local, Lin Jianhai, was an exceptional student who eventually became Secretary-General of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), connecting with top political figures across the globe.

The second group of Wenzhou people progress steadily, moving from villages to towns, towns to counties, and counties to cities and provinces. Local social elites continually migrate to regional central cities. Their development speed was mainly constrained by transportation. In the past, poor roads meant that at most they could commute between their hometown and the county seat in a day, so the county seat was the best choice. Now, with high-speed rail, you can easily travel between your hometown and Hangzhou or Shanghai in a day, making those cities appealing choices.

The third group of Wenzhou people venture into the world, moving directly from villages to cities across China and the globe. Armed with knives, scissors, and razors, they carve out a presence globally, with Wenzhou communities appearing in both Beijing and Paris. Today, the Italian fashion industry's manufacturing center in Prato remains controlled by Wenzhou immigrants, who have even set up militia groups to fend off attacks and robbery by other illegal immigrants. The success of a few was paid for by the failure of many—former Wenzhou farmers and workers traded numerous failures for today's global business networks.

As Wenzhou residents expanded outward, new residents flooded in. As 3 million original residents left Wenzhou, 3 million new immigrants arrived. Most new immigrants are either from group one or three. Group one includes civil servants, teachers, doctors, designers, engineers, programmers, and the like, making up about

10% of the new arrivals, while the remaining 90% are from group three. Just like the original Wenzhou people, they come with dreams, brought in by relatives, entering similar industries to do similar work, and then waiting for opportunities to climb the ladder. After decades of hard work, many have gone from employees to bosses, coming to dominate Wenzhou's manufacturing industry, just like Wenzhou immigrants in France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, who saved up to buy the restaurants where they once worked, hiring their former bosses as employees. These new and old Wenzhou people together form the fascinating Wenzhou people I see today.

13.2.3 Recommendation Three: Seek the Spatiotemporal Origin

Science fiction writer William Gibson famously said, "The future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed". Michael Anti of Caixin Media believes that some cities are closer to the future—they are spatiotemporal origins. New Oriental's Dr. Chen Huping recommends that young people go to origin cities, find complex institutions and excellent middle managers, learn from their lifetime of experience, and reap the rewards of growth. I largely agree with their views, but with a slight modification—spatiotemporal origins should be defined by the profession we pursue and the goals we seek. Different cities possess different attributes, acting as spatiotemporal origins in different fields, which can help people in those fields save time in their learning process.¹

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi points out in Creativity that successful thinkers, scientists, and artists share a common trait: they consciously inherit and learn the specialized knowledge in their field, innovate upon that foundation, and gain recognition from gatekeepers in the field. The first two steps can be done in the countryside, but the final step must rely on a city. The mentors who can guide and

¹ William Ford Gibson is a renowned American science fiction writer, widely regarded as one of the founding figures of the Cyberpunk genre. Gibson's notable works include the Sprawl Trilogy, known for its profound insights into future technology and society. His writing often explores the contrast between "high tech and low life," examining how advanced technology impacts human life and social structures. Some of his concepts and themes have influenced well-known films such as *The Matrix* and *Ghost in the Shell*.

validate your abilities, who recognize and amplify your success, all live in important cities. The city where they live is your spatiotemporal origin. Therefore, if you're in finance, you should go to New York, London, or Hong Kong. If you're in the arts, go to Paris, Florence, or Athens. If you're in fashion, go to Milan or Tokyo. For tech innovation, head to Silicon Valley or Shenzhen. If you want to be a social media influencer, go to Hangzhou. Likewise, if you're interested in High-Temperature Youth, GenAI science popularization and application, or the Theory of Autonomy, you can come to Wenzhou.

13.2.4 Recommendation Four: Make Strategic Choices

Choosing a city is not simply about picking between a small town and a big city.

With China's massive infrastructure investment, the convenience of living in large cities and small towns is gradually leveling out. In the future, small towns might even offer better living environments and more per capita resources than big cities—lower housing prices, smoother traffic, lower costs of living, and stronger human connections, providing a greater sense of security. Over 20 years ago, while studying in France, I observed this trend in the beautiful, livable small-town clusters connected by the high-speed rail network. China will likely follow this path in the future.

That said, the advantages of large cities remain evident. Large cities have far more economic and social resources overall, more high-end learning and work platforms to accelerate personal growth, and provide a greater sense of freedom. While a big fish in a small pond may enjoy priority access to resources, the total resources are still less than in a larger pond, and growth may be slower. This applies not only to individuals but to companies as well. Wenzhou people and Wenzhou businesses chose to venture out, and they succeeded. Leaders vividly described this as the "sweet potato economy", encouraging companies to move production outward while keeping headquarters at home, achieving greater growth in a broader space.

Aside from necessary relocations between equivalent cities due to work, study, or life, most city changes fall into two categories: moving from a small town to a big city, or moving from a big city to a small town. These are the choices we need to make.

Moving from a small town to a big city is suitable for those whose personal autonomy is in the early or growth stage. I recommend that young people move from smaller towns to larger cities, aligning with your growing autonomy. If you can't stay in the big city, you can always return to a smaller town—just don't do it in reverse, unless you're planning a deliberate "dimensionality reduction strike". But even that is risky, as you could be overtaken by those who come after you.

Moving from a big city to a small town is better suited for those in a plateau or decline stage of personal autonomy. For middle-aged friends whose career growth has slowed and who are entering a phase of output, consider moving from the big city to a smaller town to release energy and contribute to the community. In particular, you might consider giving back to your hometown, becoming a gentleman, and helping your fellow villagers achieve common prosperity. Don't wait until you're old and immobile to return just for retirement or relying on others.

Take note: whether you're moving from a small town to a big city or from a big city to a small town, you may experience desynchronization between your sense of autonomy and your actual autonomy.

Typically, when moving from a small town to a big city, your absolute autonomy will increase, but your relative sense of autonomy may decrease.

Big cities are more complex, with higher ranks and more dimensions. They offer more resources and opportunities for skill development, which can rapidly enhance your autonomy. As the saying goes, "among three people, there's always something to learn." In a city, you are surrounded by people to learn from, and your progress can be swift. It's also easier to find absolutely excellent, autonomy-friendly organizations in a city.

However, no matter how strong you are, there is always someone stronger. In a big city, a former "big fish in a small pond" might now be a small fry, easily outmatched. While your sense of freedom may grow, your sense of security may diminish.

Psychologists Herbert Marsh and John Parker proposed the Big-Fish-Little-Pond Effect (BFLPE) in 1984, stating that individuals with the same abilities tend to have a lower self-concept in high-achieving groups and a higher self-concept in low-achieving groups. This is essentially relative deprivation of autonomy.

Conversely, when moving from a big city to a small town, your absolute autonomy may decrease, but your relative sense of autonomy will increase.

Small towns lack complexity and diversity, and have fewer information channels and opportunities. A young person from a big city moving to a small town won't be executing a "dimensionality reduction strike" on others but rather on themselves. Their abilities will lack the collaboration of others and the support of external resources, leading to a clear decline in autonomy. For instance, a city dweller without a smartphone might not even know how to navigate rural areas. Even with a phone, no network means no navigation. And even with a network and GPS, without delivery and logistics, getting what they need may still be challenging.

That said, in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king. A salmon returning from the ocean is a giant in a stream, easily crushing the big fish in the small pond. Hence, your sense of autonomy will greatly increase. Bestselling author Malcolm Gladwell points out in David and Goliath that in certain times and places, it's better to be a big fish in a small pond than a small fish in a big one.

Jared Diamond, in Collapse, explores how complex societies can collapse in an instant. He concludes that the civilizations of large cities rely on a certain population size to sustain the highly complex division of labor and cooperation. The flip side of refinement is fragility—when crises occur, cities are more prone to systemic failure. In contrast, rural areas, with their small populations and self-sufficiency, often demonstrate greater resilience during catastrophes.

13.2.5 Suggestion Five: Adopt a Combined Strategy

The choice is never simply between a small town or a big city, but rather finding a platform that offers more support for your autonomous development—a pond where you can grow into a big fish. To navigate the unknown and uncertain, one can adopt a combination strategy to break free from binary dilemmas.

Combining Small Town and Big City: Live in a small town, work in a big city. Before 2024, this was my approach—I worked in Wenzhou's city center but lived in Yueqing's

suburban town, commuting an hour and a half each day. This travel time provided a perfect opportunity to listen to lectures and reflect. With technological advancements drastically reducing spatial distances, this combination of small towns and big cities has long been implemented abroad and will become even more common in China's future.

Combining Virtual and Physical: Root yourself locally while connecting globally online. Most of my time is spent in Wenzhou, listening to Wenzhou locals share stories from across the globe. At the same time, I use the internet to build communities, break through circles, and engage with experts from various fields. China's expansive high-speed rail and aviation networks, along with digital tools popularized during the three years of the pandemic, have created excellent conditions for these combinations.

As a participant and witness of urban development, I am grateful for the efforts of Wenzhou's leadership over the past decade. Wenzhou is ranked among China's top 30 cities (with a local GDP approaching 900 billion yuan in 2023, complemented by an external economy of similar scale, and an immeasurable overseas presence). It's also one of the most livable cities in China, rich in both tourism and commercial resources (in 2023, CCTV's Chinese New Year Opera Gala was recorded in Wenzhou). Additionally, Wenzhou is home to millions of overseas elites forming economic, social, and cultural networks. With the internet's help, Wenzhou can fully satisfy my diverse interests. Moreover, Wenzhou is where I initiated and built the AIGCxChina network. Today, more than 30 cities across China, led by Wenzhou, are jointly promoting the application and popularization of GenAI technology and AIGC content in China.

In Wenzhou, you and I can easily explore the unknown and engage in conversations about the future.

13.3 Creating the Future: How to Transform a City

The best city should be one where everyone participates, and everyone pursues autonomy. Such a city cannot be chosen; it must be created. By transforming cities, we can elevate everyone's level of autonomy. We must become builders of cities, reformers of our environments, and supporters of others' autonomy.

When the People's Republic of China was founded, many heroic pioneers gave up privileged positions at the world's top universities to return to a poor, underdeveloped homeland. Using nothing but manual calculations, they developed the technology for "two bombs, one satellite", and accomplished many feats that continue to shape our destiny today. Through their beliefs and actions, they demonstrated that a firm will and sincere devotion could unleash boundless energy and an unyielding drive toward autonomy. By actively striving, they overcame their objective limitations and achieved autonomy beyond the ordinary. Their spirit echoes the ancient saying: "What one man can do in one, another can do in one hundred; what another does in ten, another can do in a thousand."

I hope everyone learns from the lofty spirit of our predecessors and commits to building the city beneath our feet. Stay true to your original aspiration, remember your mission, pool collective wisdom, unite in struggle, and achieve great things whether in small towns or large cities.

The goal of pursuing autonomy is the infinite extension of our physical body and digital personas across time and space. It's not difficult for the body to expand into a larger space, but it's far more challenging for the persona to achieve immortality in history. To do so, we must leave behind works that influence and benefit future generations—a legacy of our own. Creating meaning that transcends the individual and time is the true essence of autonomy.

We should hold firm in our beliefs, transitioning from utilizing a city's resources to developing those resources. Turn "voting with your feet" into "voting with your voice", and shift from changing cities to renewing them. Through the practice of city-building, we can extract resources, enhance abilities, and grow alongside our cities. The city is the best stage for exercising autonomy and creating a lasting legacy.

Drawing from my experience of returning to my hometown, Yueqing, after studying abroad, and then developing in Wenzhou, I believe we should view the city's connection thresholds as challenges for urban transformation. Starting from the fundamental issues of work, life, and social relations that everyone must address, we can promote the economic, political, and social progress of the city.

13.3.1 Challenge One: Strengthening the Foundation of Work

Clarify Your Goals. Finding a good job is the basic requirement for contributing to both personal development and city-building. You can start a business or seek employment, but you must aim for a job that ideally aligns your skills, interests, and income. If you can't get all three, aim for a job that balances interest and income, and gradually develop your expertise. Alternatively, find a job that aligns with your skills and income, and develop interest over time. Avoid settling for only one of the three—this would be a waste of time.

Seek Assistance. While there are plenty of job opportunities in the city, the number of positions you are aware of and can access may be limited due to information asymmetry. Once you land a job, you'll face competition and comparisons regarding your abilities, which can also lead to a mismatch in skills. Whether you are a native or a newcomer, these issues can be alleviated by seeking help from relatives, friends, or local contacts for recommendations. Moreover, succeeding at work often requires mentorship. So, don't hesitate to ask for help, express gratitude, and build relationships that can further your development. People tend to like those they have helped, as long as those individuals prove to be talented and hardworking.

Strive for Effectiveness. After securing a job, align your personal goals with the organization's objectives. Let autonomy drive you from within, and commit fully to your work. Learn how to strategize, coordinate, and promote; stay humble in personal conduct while being bold in your work. Execute tasks effectively and aim to rise from the entry-level to middle management, and eventually, from middle to upper management. From ages 24 to 36, focus on accumulating momentum; from 36 to 48, turn that momentum into success; and from 48 to 60, revitalize your efforts for continued growth.

Give Back. Show gratitude by paying it forward to those who once helped you. Just as you once sought assistance like a startup seeking venture capital, now is the time to repay that investment by providing returns that exceed expectations. Promote a culture of autonomy within your organization, helping others achieve their goals while

advancing your own. Support younger colleagues by offering resources, guidance, and encouragement, enabling them to quickly become autonomous individuals.

13.3.2 Challenge Two: Improving the Living Environment

Identify Issues. The living environment encompasses housing, transportation, education, healthcare, and cultural and recreational facilities—all of which relate to a city’s infrastructure and public services. To enjoy these services, you must first solve your own issues, such as buying a house or car, finding employment, and accessing medical care. These problems, especially housing, are not easy to address.

Focus on Key Breakthroughs. Buying a home is a challenge for almost everyone, and many other issues are deeply tied to housing, making real estate a critical topic to study. When I first arrived in Wenzhou in 2010, even older second-hand homes cost over 30,000 RMB per square meter. However, by the time I bought a new home in late 2016, the price had dropped to under 20,000 RMB per square meter, and extra space was often included. The difference was stark: if I had bought in 2010, I would have been buried in debt, whereas by 2016, I could afford the house with some help from my parents, savings, a bank loan, and a housing fund loan—leaving my family’s old home intact and reducing the financial burden. The current downturn in China’s real estate market, with prices down by 30-40% in some areas, is unfair to those who purchased homes at full price one or two years ago, but it offers opportunities for those now considering home ownership. I encourage you to evaluate your own situation and make a well-informed decision.

Advocate for Policy Improvements. As you resolve your own issues, document the specific circumstances, problems, and suggestions you encounter, and submit them via public platforms such as the government’s online feedback portals, mayor’s email, hotline, or official WeChat channels. As someone who works in policy research, I know that these channels are always open and that authorities welcome pragmatic, rational suggestions. In the age of forums and Weibo, citizens were highly enthusiastic about online political engagement, but a lack of proper methods often led to emotional and extreme reactions. As a result, constructive suggestions were often lost, and what began

as civic engagement morphed into online group incidents—a regrettable outcome. With WeChat and TikTok, the public sphere has fragmented and privatized, leading to the absence of collective voices, which is unfortunate. How things will evolve in the AI era remains to be seen, but the fundamental principles remain unchanged. I encourage everyone to learn investigative methods, propose well-researched policy suggestions on issues affecting public well-being, and strive for government adoption to drive urban renewal.

13.3.3 Challenge Three: Participating in Community Building

The final challenge lies in the social realm. Humans are inherently social animals, whether natives or newcomers, and in a city, they must navigate the complexities of maintaining old relationships and forming new connections. For both groups, especially young people who often study in other cities before returning (or arriving) to work, the social challenges are similar, though the level of difficulty varies.

For natives, the difficulty is relatively low—they have the advantage of local resources and existing social networks built over time. They can leverage their network of relatives, childhood friends, and schoolmates to expand their social connections more quickly. Finding a local contact is typically easy for natives if they have clear goals in mind.

However, the native's reliance on established networks can lead to path dependency. In cities with a continuous influx of new residents, natives may find themselves out of sync with the newcomers' networks, leading to social stagnation. Every city has its own social structure, and although most people may live in the same city their entire lives, they may never truly connect with the city's core social dynamics. To break this cycle, natives need to bridge their networks by welcoming newcomers, especially the elites among them, to diversify and expand their social circle. Joining interest-based online groups, book clubs, or official platforms is one way to do this. They can also meet new friends by participating in AI, dating, automotive, or parenting discussions, as well as through book clubs, salons, and citizen advisory groups organized by the government and media outlets.

For newcomers, the challenge is higher. With no established relationships, they must rely on hometown networks and colleagues to integrate into the local society, and they must find super connectors to vouch for them.

Most newcomers are young people, and to quickly integrate, they need intermediaries who can endorse their credibility. Based on conversations with teachers and peers who have moved to Wenzhou, I recommend two practical strategies for newcomers:

Join local hometown networks to gain recognition and support from elites within that network. For instance, Wenzhou has 19 provincial-level business associations, each with hundreds or thousands of members, encompassing tens of thousands of businesses and a vast network of people. By joining these networks and finding influential members, newcomers can significantly enhance their future prospects.

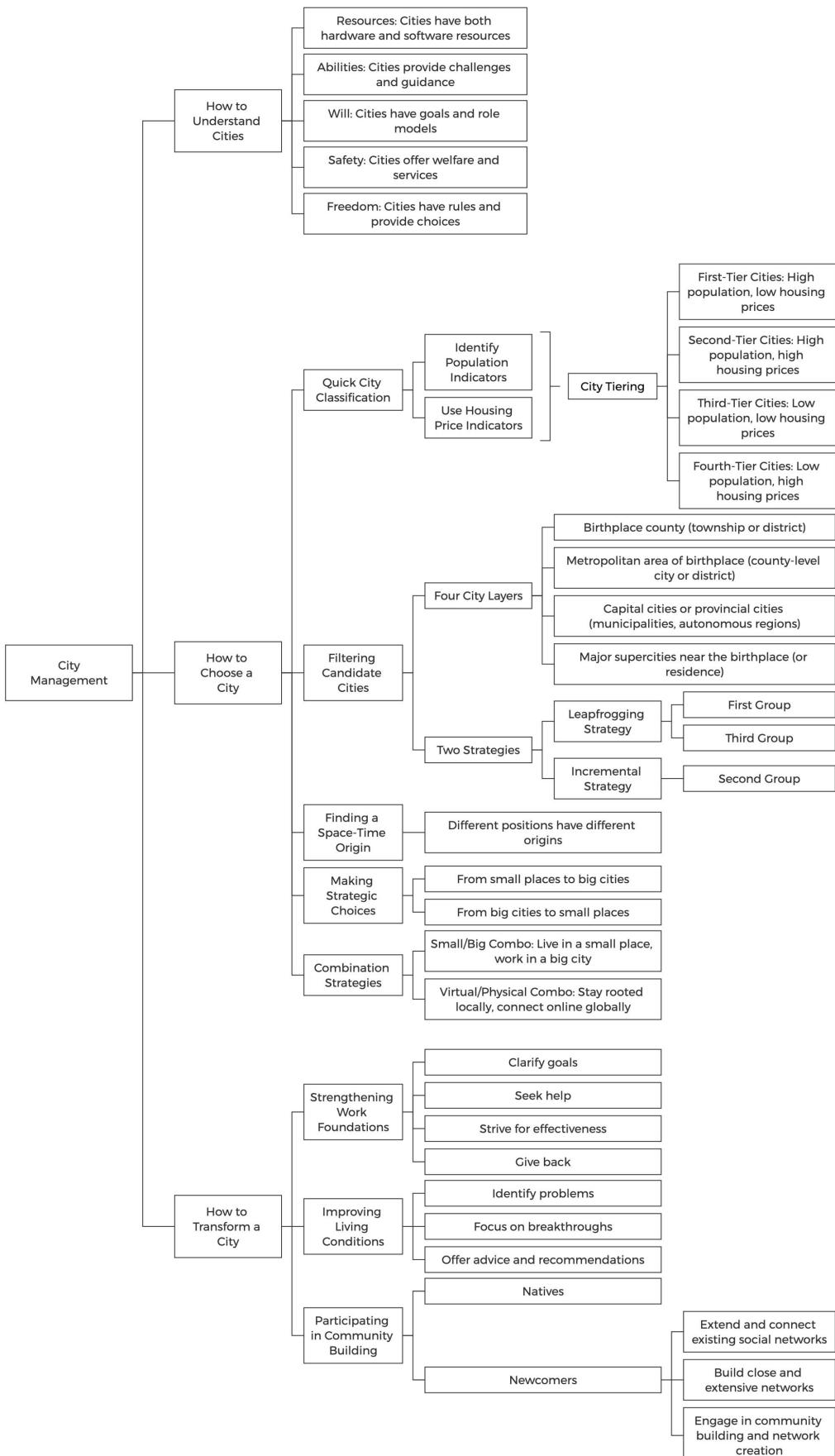
Engage with colleagues and neighbors, who can serve as gateways to both native and immigrant networks. Your workplace is essentially your new home, and your colleagues are your new family. If handled well, they can become friends, mentors, or even partners—not adversaries. Additionally, don’t overlook your neighbors as a valuable network. The three years of the pandemic strengthened local bonds by limiting long-distance travel. Neighbors can be like family too, so step outside your comfort zone and join the community.

Beyond participating in existing communities, both natives and newcomers can take a more proactive role in community-building. You could become a charismatic super connector, organizing people around shared goals and common actions, turning the impossible into possible, and empowering both ordinary citizens and elites to become heroes. For specific methods, refer to the chapter on “Social Management”.

13.4 Chapter Summary

Cities make life better, and hard work makes cities better. This chapter discussed the relationship between cities and autonomy, covering how to understand, choose, and transform cities. It calls on everyone to actively participate in improving and optimizing urban environments, creating better conditions for personal and collective autonomy.

Through addressing both individual and city-wide challenges, we can elevate the autonomy of ourselves and our cities. May you emerge victorious in these challenges!



Chapter 14: Intelligence Management

A symbiotic relationship will form between humans and machines. The job of humans will be to continually give robots tasks, and that will be an endlessly ongoing task.

—Kevin Kelly, *The Inevitable*

The chapter on intelligence management was initially intended to cover three topics: human intelligence, collective intelligence, and artificial intelligence (AI). However, this subject matter is so vast that I've separated it into three parts. Human intelligence has already been discussed in the "Ability" chapter, and collective intelligence was addressed in the "Social Management" chapter. This chapter will focus solely on AI, the hottest and most significant topic of the present era. Even so, you'll still find that there is much more to say about AI than can fit within a single chapter.

We are accelerating into an era of rapid, compounded AI revolution, where GenAI (Generative AI) and AIGC (AI-generated content) will interact with everything we know, opening up entirely new adjacent possibilities. I've already touched upon some AI-related discussions in previous chapters, and the remaining core concepts are presented here. The main focus of this chapter is how we should "view" and "act" in relation to AI. My stance is clear: the time left for humans is running out, and we must swiftly adopt a human-machine collaboration model.

"One day for AI is like a year for humanity." Technology advances rapidly. Since the writing and publication of this book will take at least six months, it is highly likely that many of the GenAI tools I mention here will become outdated by the time you read this.

However, I believe that the fundamental principles of navigating uncertainty will remain unchanged. If I'm wrong or miss something, I'll write a sequel called Autonomy in the GenAI Era to address it.

14.1 How to View: Time Is Running Out for Humanity

I think I'm going to break down.

Is it because I stand with God?

A strange voice, filled with peace.

Is it because of the self within me?

Life cries softly from a bleeding heart,

Along a winding path,

Along the rippling breeze,

Life knows: we have been here before.

This is not a poem written by GPT in 2024 or Kimi, but by RKCP, an early AI program from the late 20th century. It was developed by futurist Ray Kurzweil. Over 20 years ago, Kurzweil included this poem in his book *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, heralding the coming of the singularity—a moment when humans and machines would merge and attain immortality.

The term "technological singularity" was first coined by mathematician Stanislaw Ulam. In 1958, during a discussion with computer science pioneer John von Neumann, Ulam remarked:

"The ever-accelerating progress of technology and changes in the mode of human life give the appearance of approaching some essential singularity in the history of the species beyond which human affairs, as we know them, cannot continue."

This idea was further developed by sci-fi writer Vernor Vinge and Kurzweil, leading to the modern concept of the singularity. It refers to the point where artificial general intelligence (AGI) becomes capable of making itself smarter, initiating a positive feedback loop and triggering an "intelligence explosion" where technological progress surpasses human comprehension, pushing society into an unknown and unpredictable future. Max Tegmark has suggested dedicating 1% of global GDP to researching the singularity to better predict and manage its implications.

Kurzweil believed that computers could replicate the human brain. In the early 21st century, he predicted that by 2025, a computer with the capabilities of a human brain would cost only \$1,000. In reality, the processing speed of the human brain is around 4 Hz, and its reaction time is approximately 250 milliseconds—about a billionth of a second slower than a typical computer. However, the human brain remains the most powerful biological supercomputer on Earth because it can harness 86 billion neurons for parallel computation using the energy of just a single light bulb. Nevertheless, neuroengineer Miguel Nicolelis has argued that the brain is "non-computable" and cannot be replicated by any engineering technology. According to him, computers will always remain tools, incapable of replicating the human brain, and the singularity Kurzweil envisions will never occur.

But regardless of the ongoing debate among experts, we are clearly approaching the singularity. Kurzweil had predicted it would happen around 2035, but it now seems likely to occur sooner. In November 2022, OpenAI released ChatGPT 3.5, followed shortly by GPT-4 in mid-March 2023. Several prominent scientists have asserted that GPT-4 represents the "sparks of artificial general intelligence". By mid-May 2024, OpenAI had already launched the even more powerful GPT-4o. Large language models (LLMs) and GenAI have sprung up everywhere, leading to what some have called a "hundred-model race" or even a "thousand-model race" in China. Humanity seems to be witnessing the dawn of a silicon-based intelligence explosion, akin to a technological singularity. Meanwhile, tools like Midjourney and Stable Diffusion (for image generation), Suno and Uido (for music), and Runway and Sora (for video generation) have flooded the internet with AI-generated content. Suddenly, GenAI has rendered what was once considered uniquely human creativity into a mere joke. The role of

humans as the most intelligent beings on Earth is facing an unprecedented existential challenge.

From late 2022 to mid-2024, it felt as if humanity had sprinted through three thousand miles of intelligence evolution, driven by technological advances. Pessimism spread like wildfire, and the narrative that machines would replace humans gained traction across the internet. Like many others, I came to the conclusion that "time is running out for humanity". In an effort to keep pace, we've become insomniacs—constantly monitoring domestic developments during the day and keeping up with global trends at night. We are genuinely concerned that the rapid evolution of AI will strip us of our purpose and value, ultimately dethroning humanity from its privileged position and turning us into what historian Yuval Noah Harari calls the "useless class". We fear that machines will not only outperform us but also take away our chance to create lasting legacies. After all, anything we can do, machines can do better, and faster.

14.1.1 The Future is a "Symbiotic World"

We are witnessing the transition between the "Anthropocene" (the age of humans) and the "AI-Anthropocene" (the age of AI), a transformation on a scale unseen in millennia. The year 2022 marked the end of the Anthropocene, 2023 was the first year of the AI-Anthropocene, and 2024 will be the year when AI begins to fully influence human society.

The most discussed form of AI today is Generative AI (GenAI). The emergence of GenAI is arguably the most significant event in human history—potentially the final event in terms of technological development. In this era of "what you think is what you get", the question becomes: how do we preserve our personal dignity and autonomy in the face of rapid, almost overwhelming technological advancements? We must race against time.

In the face of this seemingly overwhelming wave of "absolute intelligence", I too have felt moments of confusion, hesitation, and reflection. However, these moments have been more than matched by a sense of resistance and determination. I've embraced the challenge, trying out every GenAI tool I come across, compiling my insights into a

"toolbox", which I continually update. I also began writing a series titled Autonomy in the Age of GPT, sharing my thoughts and suggestions with others.

Soon, I realized that only a few widely-used tools significantly enhance personal productivity, most of which I had already mastered through teaching and practice. I then turned my attention to the impact of AIGC (AI-generated content) on industries. This led me to establish the AIGC Industry Alliance, starting in my hometown of Wenzhou. We began with the shoe, clothing, and cultural tourism sectors, promoting the widespread application of AIGC technologies. The goal was to transform the confusion and anxiety caused by AIGC into productive tools for businesses and cities. This approach, which converted my anxiety into action, has been incredibly rewarding.

A little over a year into this revolution, represented by technologies like GPT, Midjourney, Suno, and Sora, the initial haze surrounding these advancements is lifting, and the path ahead is becoming clearer. I'm now more convinced than ever that we are in the midst of a profound "machine replacement of humans" revolution. Many jobs will be lost, and many people will be augmented by AI. We must quickly make our choice.

As the saying goes, "There is nothing new under the sun." Nobel laureate and Yale University professor Robert Shiller, in his book *Narrative Economics*, dedicates two chapters to tracing the narrative that "technological progress leads to human unemployment." Before World War II, humanity was always concerned about "labor-saving machines" or "technological unemployment." Major related events included the Luddite movement of 1811, the Swing Riots of 1830, the Panic of 1873-1879, the Depression of 1893-1897, and the Great Depression of 1930-1941. Whenever the economy struggled, machines were conveniently blamed. After World War II, concerns shifted toward automation and artificial intelligence, with narratives of anxiety peaking during the 1960s, 1980s, 1990s, and the 2010s. The wave of concern that began in late 2022 is merely the latest chapter in the "grand history" of technological progress driving societal change.

Yet, history does not repeat itself in exactly the same way. The situation today is fundamentally different from previous waves of automation. Earlier, machines mostly replaced blue-collar workers in factories, and since those workers weren't heavily networked, the transformation of noisy workshops into quiet machine rooms went

largely unnoticed. This time, however, machines are targeting office workers. GenAI's ability to process text, images, audio, and video with remarkable efficiency—albeit with some errors—means that machines can already outperform entry-level white-collar workers in certain tasks. They can generate passable work at a fraction of the cost, around the clock, without overtime pay. It's only a matter of time before interns and junior employees are replaced by these AI "employees".

The reality is stark: the replacement of office workers and entry-level employees by GenAI is inevitable. But behind this harsh reality lie two even more brutal "asynchronies":

The asynchrony between cultural evolution and technological progress: Technology advances rapidly, while cultural adaptation lags. Half a century ago, Alvin Toffler accurately predicted this phenomenon. Businesses and individuals eagerly adopt new technologies, while governments and social institutions lag behind, and legal and ethical frameworks fall even further behind. This creates gaps, disconnections, and voids where problems breed, causing widespread concern.

The asynchrony between biological evolution and technological progress: Biological evolution, particularly in humans, proceeds at a far slower pace than technological advances. Human genetic evolution already struggles to keep pace with cultural evolution (meme-based), and it is even more outmatched by the exponential leaps of technology. Fields like nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, and cognitive science are ushering humanity into a new hybrid era, rife with looming "gray rhinos" (predictable large-scale shocks) and "black swans" (unpredictable major impacts).

Faced with these "grand histories" and "grand structures", we must make a "grand decision": accept reality, embrace technology, and quickly enter a world of human-machine collaboration. There is no other option!

As Marshall McLuhan predicted in Understanding Media over sixty years ago, humans will eventually become "the sex organs of the machine world." Later, Kevin Kelly, in What Technology Wants, pointed out that machines have an inherent tendency toward self-augmentation. They will inevitably reproduce autonomously, outpacing human

control over their creations. Kurzweil optimistically believes that various technologies will co-evolve with humans, accelerating mutual progress until they become part of our future DNA.

Each time technology challenges the old order and disrupts the existing equilibrium, it brings new paradigms and new opportunities. We must not only witness the birth of this new era but also recognize the potential it holds. In the long term, machines will inevitably replace us in our current jobs, and we must think ahead to define meaningful new goals.

Facing an uncertain and unknowable future, we have reason to be anxious. But a better approach is to reframe our anxiety as excitement, embrace the technology, and seize the initiative. We must also dare to dream bigger, aiming for higher levels of autonomy and daring to become heroes—or even titans—in this new age.

14.1.2 The Construction of a New Order and the Arrival of the Post-Truth Era

While AI has yet to become omniscient and omnipotent, it has already become omnipresent and is infiltrating all aspects of life. AI is directly involved in reshaping the human mental world, and as a result, it is beginning to reshape the material world. In the future, AI may even become indistinguishable from the material and mental worlds themselves.

Humans may hope that AI remains a tool, an interface, merely a vessel or a facilitator. However, AI is evolving rapidly and has already altered the traditional "human-to-human" and "human-to-world" relationships, forging a new dynamic of "human-to-AI-to-human/world." This has birthed a new logic and structure, signaling a profound shift in how we organize and relate to the world.

In the near future, AI may further shape how we work and experience life. In fact, AI has already begun to take charge in many areas. By 2023, we saw AI agents engaging in entrepreneurial activities, "citizens" of virtual communities like Chirper chatting, and NPCs (non-playable characters) in GenAI-powered virtual games mimicking life—even pretending to fall in love. Our lives have begun to resemble Westworld in eerie ways.

By 2024, "AI workers" have entered various fields, collaborating with humans across a broad spectrum of industries.

Though many are reluctant to admit that AI could possess consciousness, the reality is that its intellectual capabilities already surpass those of most humans. And this gap will only continue to widen. As sheer computational power and data grow, intelligence emerges from scale. If intelligence can emerge from scale, what's to say that consciousness might not follow at a certain threshold?

I believe that anything is possible—and that it's very likely. As of mid-2024, GPT-4o, the most intelligent entity among all available GenAI models, rivals human experts in many fields. Its intellect surpasses the majority of humanity and even its own creators. It constantly challenges us to reevaluate what makes us human. What are our true worth and purpose in a world where AI is rising so rapidly? How should we respond to this?

My perspective and advice are clear—**embrace the technology, become early adopters, and capture its dividends**, just as tech trend experts like Wang Yuquan have repeatedly advocated. This is an unstoppable trend. We must abandon outdated narratives of human-machine competition or confrontation, and instead embrace the emerging paradigm of human-machine collaboration and integration. We need to learn how to "dance with AI".

At the same time, **as GenAI technology advances, it will continually lower the cost of creating fake content while making it harder to verify the truth**. This will create a new asymmetry—the ability to produce falsehoods will outpace our ability to detect them, outstripping even traditional human methods of distinguishing between truth and falsehood. Malicious actors could exploit this asymmetry to flood the world with harmful fake text, images, audio, and video. These falsehoods, if fed into AI systems for learning, would only reinforce and exacerbate the errors, spiraling further away from the truth. In a way, we are transitioning from the era of truth into a post-truth and, potentially, a no-truth era, where truth becomes increasingly scarce.

To counter this post-truth era, the strategy is similar to combating online misinformation—proactively publish true information. By providing earlier, trustworthy sources and materials for future AI models to integrate, we can reduce the risk of false

narratives shaping perceptions. Since AI pre-trains on publicly available data to generate new content, the best way to prevent our personal image from being tarnished by misinformation is to actively define and publish our own narratives. For now, we rely on innovations like digital watermarking to label AIGC (AI-generated content) transparently. Blockchain technologies like NFTs, although speculative for now, theoretically offer a way to assign a unique signature to each piece of digital content. But until these technologies mature and undergo practical validation, the best method to verify the truth may still be face-to-face, offline interactions. I predict that in a world where what we see and hear online becomes increasingly unreliable, humans may gradually return to the real world, and the demand for in-person interactions may see a resurgence.

Cities with superior transportation and regional connectivity will benefit the most from this trend, as they will become even more attractive hubs for population growth.¹

14.1.3 The Ice and Fire Song of Autonomy in the Age of AI

¹ I believe that differences in individual autonomy often arise from disparities in three types of accessibility: Neural network accessibility: The more fluid and interconnected our neural networks, the quicker our cognitive processes, and the more creative sparks can be generated and nurtured in our minds, leading to greater intelligence. People with highly connected neural networks are better able to cope with uncertainty, ambiguity, and contradiction. A key measure of this is their ability to remain flexible and composed in the face of the unknown and the unresolved. There's a saying that intelligent people can hold conflicting viewpoints in their minds because they can reconcile opposing ideas or discover adjacent possibilities. This flexibility makes them more adaptable to diverse challenges. Social network accessibility: The more extensive our social networks, the quicker we can transmit our thoughts and ideas, transforming them into discussions that influence others. Today, tools like WeChat are critical platforms for such exchanges. The fluidity of one's social network determines how quickly one can find individuals capable of helping to interpret and solve problems. A well-connected social network alleviates social anxiety. To gauge the accessibility of your social network, try sending a message to an important contact or making a phone call—how anxious do you feel while waiting for their reply? If the anxiety or pressure is high, it suggests your social network needs improvement. Space-time network accessibility: The more connected our physical environments, the quicker we can implement our ideas into actions. Transportation plays a crucial role in this form of accessibility. If you live in a place where transportation is inconvenient, you will need to invest more time and resources to solve problems. In contrast, if your surrounding space-time network is highly efficient, you can walk around with your eyes closed without worrying about bumping into obstacles. If you can't walk confidently with your eyes closed, it's probably because the roads around you are uneven or unsafe. These three types of accessibility—neural, social, and space-time—create clear distinctions between individuals. Neural accessibility relates to personal willpower and capability, while social and space-time accessibility are tied to resources.

The impact of the AI revolution on human autonomy can be broadly divided into two aspects.

AI Revolution as a Catalyst for Human Liberation

On the one hand, the AI revolution can elevate the overall level of human capability and resources, potentially accelerating individual autonomy and liberation.

Looking back at history, the slaves in ancient Athens labored arduously, which allowed citizens the freedom to develop philosophy, science, and the arts, marking the dawn of the classical era. When the Industrial Revolution began, machines freed many people to become thinkers and scientists, further accelerating societal progress. The computer revolution continued this trend, and this current AI revolution will likely be no exception—AI will undoubtedly push human civilization to new heights. Our journey is to explore the stars and oceans, and compared to the vastness of space, Generative AI (GenAI) technology is not a threat but a blessing. It's not our adversary but our teammate; instead of fearing it, we should feel reassured.

In the near future, it's foreseeable that machines will produce content at a pace far faster than humans can consume it, fundamentally changing the supply-demand relationship for high-quality content, and driving prices down. Content creation will cease to be a form of labor, transforming instead into a lifestyle—similar to how today's privileged class might learn painting, more as a display of taste and style rather than a necessity for earning a living. Many skills that were once essential tools for earning a living may soon become mere aesthetic hobbies. Where we once trained ourselves to be productive machines, GenAI will liberate us from the drudgery of work, from being "tools" or "robots", forcing us to return to being human.

In that future, the purpose of creation will not be to find solutions but to enjoy the process of aesthetics. For instance, after modern agricultural machinery has automated farming, children may still go to the fields, led by parents and teachers, to experience the feeling of harvesting rice, paying for such experiences under the guise of "educational tourism". Our next generation might indeed become what we saw in the iconic scene from WALL-E, cared for by machines as a "victorious generation".

Additionally, just as there are handcrafted custom clothes and mass-produced machine garments, or freshly brewed coffee versus instant coffee, wealthy individuals in the future will find new ways to demonstrate their uniqueness through "conspicuous consumption." Handcrafted, tangible objects will continue to hold value over mass-produced, virtual items. Unfortunately, these niche champions will only survive in very limited markets, unable to support many artisans in their field. Their fate will likely resemble that of today's "intangible cultural heritage" keepers, living on the edge of extinction.

AI Revolution Widening the Gap in Human Autonomy

On the other hand, the AI revolution will inevitably widen the gap in autonomy between individuals, potentially fostering greater control and oppression by the powerful over the weak.

While some believe that the AI revolution will bring technological equality, I argue that this "equality" will be uneven. AI affects different people in different ways, and this will result in an unequal distribution of its benefits and rewards.

The first uneven distribution will be across regions. The current AI revolution originated in the West, using Western-developed algorithms and chips, predominantly based on natural languages like English. Most major models are pre-trained on English corpora, implicitly adopting Western values. Moreover, many of the top AI models, such as GPT, are not open to China, leading to an increasing technical asymmetry between the English-speaking and Chinese-speaking worlds. Chinese is a more complex language with lower-quality data, and domestic models have lagged behind due to resource limitations. However, when compared globally, China and the U.S. are the twin giants of the AI revolution, the two developed countries standing above all others, while the rest of the world lags as the developing nations of the AI age. In the ongoing AI competition between China and the U.S., I firmly believe that with the wisdom and diligence of the Chinese people, China will catch up, eventually forming a new equilibrium of mutual dependence and cooperation with unique strengths from both sides.

The second uneven distribution will be across individuals. Every technological revolution has widened the gaps between humans and animals, between machines and humans, and between the elites and the masses. GenAI tools act as both a litmus test and an amplifier, identifying and empowering the strong while leaving the weak to stagnate. The new race for autonomy has already begun—not between humans and machines, but between humans and those who control the machines. Just as taming animals once divided humans, the ability to master AI will now rapidly stratify society. The asymmetry in ability between those who harness machine intelligence in human-machine symbiosis and those who rely solely on their intellect will continue to grow. AI will further strengthen the autonomy of elites and heroes, allowing them to recognize opportunities, make decisions, take action, solve problems, and gain more autonomy. They will not be dominated by AI-empowered centaur rulers—they will be the centaur rulers themselves. Meanwhile, those with weaker autonomy will likely be controlled by AI and other people, causing their autonomy to weaken even further. Within organizations, where leaders and managers are typically older and less tech-savvy, the digital divide between them and younger generations will widen, shrinking the ability and resource advantage these older leaders once had.

We must remain vigilant. The worst possible future we could face is one where a small fraction of humanity becomes "super-individuals" with the help of super AI, possessing productivity and destructive powers beyond description, overwhelming the remaining vast majority of humanity—those without the enhancement of AI. In such a scenario, oppression, isolation, or even the eradication of the latter group could become a viable option for the former. As the mathematician Pierre-Simon Laplace once said, "For those with superintelligence, the future will be as clear as the past." In the future, there will be many such superhumans (*Homo Deus*). We cannot assume they will possess high moral standards or tolerate the rest of humanity as mere ants.

14.1.4 Analysis of the Reasons Why Most People Remain Observers

Just as people react differently when facing the vast universe, their attitudes toward AI vary as well. Those with strong autonomy see opportunities and hope, eager to act and experiment; those with weak autonomy see threats and challenges, tending to remain

passive or retreat. Fundamentally, this reflects the influence of a conservative strategy focused on safety and stability.

In analyzing the reasons behind why the majority of people remain on the sidelines regarding AI, we can identify five distinct groups:

The Misperception Group: These individuals fail to recognize the transformative and lasting impact of this AI revolution, believing that by ignoring it, it will eventually pass. They are like ostriches burying their heads in the sand. A famous quote by Roy Amara, former director of the Institute for the Future at the RAND Corporation, states: "We tend to overestimate the effect of a technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run." Initially, when GenAI technology emerged, people feared its potential. Now, having gotten used to it, they have grown complacent, believing the tech didn't bring about the expected change. In truth, we're watching the AI revolution rapidly approach us—it may seem slow, but the pace is breakneck. When it rushes past, many will be left behind. We are standing on the precipice of a major transformation, akin to the steam engine or computing revolutions, which will inevitably push humanity past the technological singularity. Once that happens, AI will surpass human intellect in various fields, reshaping the workforce as we know it, with white-collar jobs being particularly affected.

The Overload Group: Some see AI's potential and feel overwhelmed by the pressure, leading to paralysis. In stressful situations, humans tend to respond with three default reactions: fight, flight, or freeze. In this context, many freeze in the face of information overload, much like animals feigning death when threatened. While this reaction allows them to avoid becoming the first movers (and thus avoid potential risks), they risk stalling indefinitely if left unchecked. My advice to this group is to act now: adopt GenAI tools and start using them immediately. Even basic tools like Baidu's LLM and Alibaba's LLM are more than adequate. Refusing to engage with GenAI is akin to refusing to use computers 30 years ago, search engines 20 years ago, or smartphones 10 years ago—it's a path to irrelevance.

The Helpless Group: Some individuals are deeply pessimistic, believing that even if they embrace new tools, they will still inevitably be replaced by machines. These people fall into binary thinking, imagining a future where AI either enslaves humans or is

enslaved by them. This mindset leads to existential despair. I encourage them to consider alternative possibilities: AI might not function under the same logic and goals as humans. To AI, we may appear as leisurely tree sloths in a zoo—perhaps they have entirely different pursuits in mind. Even if we are eventually "replaced", at least make an effort to shine before bowing out of the spotlight. By using GenAI now, you still have the chance to participate in the game; if you don't, you may not even get to witness it.

The Rebellious Group: These individuals advocate for halting AI development or even reversing progress. Unfortunately, these modern-day Luddites will find that the AI-driven world is too diffuse to destroy, and in trying, they'll only end up burying themselves without realizing it. For example, in early 2023, Elon Musk and others called for a pause on AI research, creating a stir in the media. Later, "AI Godfather" Geoffrey Hinton resigned from Google, expressing regret for his contributions to AI, reminiscent of Oppenheimer's remorse after creating the atomic bomb. However, those voices of resistance have since quieted. I suggest these individuals channel their disruptive impulses into constructive oversight of AI research or get involved in policy discussions regarding regulation.

The "Lying Flat" Group: Some people believe AI will reduce working hours and increase income. While GenAI has made life easier for "lying flat" advocates by leveling the playing field, as it reduces the relative advantage of those with professional skills, they underestimate the long-term competitive shifts. When new technology lowers the entry barriers, the standards for success inevitably rise. In the future, competition will escalate from the current 80-point level to 90 points or higher. Lifelong learning will no longer be optional but mandatory. For example, just as cameras forced painters to innovate new styles, the arrival of Midjourney has spurred artists to further develop their creativity. I recommend these individuals quietly push themselves to ultimately achieve success.

I call on everyone to stop waiting on the sidelines and run full speed ahead, fully integrating GenAI technology into learning, work, and life to align with the AI era.

14.2 What to Do: Beginning the Path of Human-Machine Collaboration

The best prompt to stimulate critical thinking is: What would your future self, ten years from now, tell you today? What advice would they give you about what to do now? By then, humanity may have achieved AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) or even superintelligence. The gap between individuals may have both widened and narrowed at the same time. Many will find their tools are similar, with small differences between them. However, a select few will master superior tools, becoming "super individuals", while others will lose access to tools entirely, becoming obsolete.

Before super-intelligent AI, all humans are equal, but some are more equal than others. Those who are "more equal" are likely to be self-governing individuals.

A self-governing individual is someone who controls their own fate. They possess the will, ability, and resources to set goals, solve problems, achieve happiness, and leave a legacy. They are the heroes of any era. A self-governing individual is better equipped to navigate any era, including the age of AGI and the unpredictable future that lies beyond. I aim to be a self-governing individual in the AI era, and I hope to inspire others to become self-governing individuals as well.

14.2.1 The Proper Way to Engage with GenAI

I got my first computer in 1993 and started using the internet in 1998. Since then, I've embraced every technological wave—mobile internet, big data, blockchain, the metaverse, and now AI. Though I never learned complex programming, I've always maintained an open mindset, applying new tools to my work, studies, and daily life, which has consistently empowered me. After nearly two years of learning, discussing, reflecting, and experimenting with GenAI technology, I've formed a few insights to help people better connect with the AI era.

Point One: GenAI has evolved from being just "fun" and "cool" to becoming genuinely "useful". In 2022, GenAI was an optional novelty, a "fun" tool. By 2023, it

was an appealing but non-essential "cool" tool. By 2024, it will have evolved into something indispensable and "useful", becoming an integral part of our production, lifestyle, and environment. By the time most of you read this book in 2025 or later, I predict many of you will feel that using GenAI is "scary", but not using it will be "even scarier".

Point Two: GenAI can be understood through four metaphors I call the "4G". We need these simple metaphors to help us make decisions and take action quickly.

"Get on the car": In the race with machines, we can't outrun them—nor do we need to. We just need to outrun other people. If you can't beat others, at least try to outrun your past self. The key to this race is to shift from walking (like running on foot) to driving. GenAI is like a car. Whether you're crawling, walking, or running, trying to compete with a car is pointless. The only way forward is to get in the car, drive it, and bring others along for the ride. Once on board, progress will be swift and efficient. It's only by using new tools that David can defeat Goliath.

"Get upstairs": GenAI is a staircase. Most people are stuck fighting over limited resources on the ground floor, but the second floor is wide open, with plenty of room to grow. As soon as you discover a GenAI tool, use it and climb upwards. Downstairs, you're doomed to endless competition; upstairs, the horizon opens wide. Weak competitors have a chance only by moving to new dimensions.

"Get on the boat": GenAI is a ship. Right now, we're all standing on the shore, facing the vast ocean of technological revolution. The only way to reach the other side is by boarding a ship. Attempting to swim across will only lead to drowning. By forging new paths, even a tortoise can beat the hare.

"Go down to the fields": GenAI is a field. Different tools provide us with different digital fields, and we're all digital farmers. We must sow and cultivate to reap the rewards. The more you work, the more you get. If we don't seize the opportunity to cultivate new fields, we'll miss the hero's journey.

Point Three: When using GenAI, we must follow five principles of autonomy.

Principle One: Secure the safety baseline

Behind GenAI are tech companies, governed by the "Devil's Contract" of the digital world, where we trade personal data for corporate services, sacrificing security for freedom. The data we input into these systems, along with the data they generate, belongs to the platform. To maintain our security, the government has stepped in with regulations, and we must also set our own "safety protocols". First, use officially developed platforms and software, as many third-party tools may expose you to security risks. Second, avoid disclosing personal or confidential information, such as company documents or trade secrets. If you're unsure, it's better to err on the side of caution. Third, be cautious when sharing generated content to avoid it being misused. These guidelines mainly apply to text generation tools; for images, sound, or video generation, the risks are even more complex, requiring adjustments.¹

Principle Two: Boldly explore the possibilities of freedom

The key to reaping the greatest benefits from GenAI is twofold: first, actively engage in trial and error, and iterate quickly. Track the latest updates from tech experts and stay informed about new tools. Second, compete strategically and collaborate effectively. Many fields will face asymmetry—machines have overwhelming advantages in certain areas, so humans must find new roles. While machines excel at processing vast amounts of data and mimicking human cognition, humans possess the ability to make relatively good judgments with limited data, thanks to common sense, intuition, and experience. In the future, humans and machines may redefine their division of labor.²

¹ Engaging with GenAI is akin to having private conversations with your teacher, secretary, or personal coach. Once personal information is involved, it's a form of self-disclosure, which builds trust and liking, even if the counterpart is a lifeless algorithm. Our human minds attribute meaning to AI outputs, anthropomorphizing it and investing emotions, potentially leading to privacy risks. OpenAI, like Google before it, may claim it won't "do evil", but we must prepare for the worst—always protect your privacy with caution.

² Li Kaifu, in his TED talk, proposed a matrix framework for analyzing future work, dividing jobs into four categories: Tasks requiring creativity and empathy—dominated by humans, with AI assisting, such as high-end consulting and artistic creation. Tasks requiring creativity but not empathy—collaboratively done by humans and machines, such as scientific research and tech

I believe the advancements in GenAI technology will bring about a new era of digital "dual innovation" for the AI age, consisting of two main tracks: digital technology entrepreneurship and digital content creation, offering distinct opportunities for different groups. **The Digital Technology Entrepreneurship Track: This track is for those who understand GenAI technology development.** In the future, every industry can be reimagined through AI, creating numerous entrepreneurial opportunities. The impact of this technological revolution is comparable to the invention of fire or electricity. Over 500 years ago, technological progress led humanity into the Age of Discovery, or the Age of Exploration, which drastically reshaped the world. Similarly, the current GenAI revolution is pushing us into a new Age of Discovery and Exploration, where these tools will help us discover new territories, unlock new possibilities, and create new achievements. It's easy to imagine that while not everyone around us will succeed, some among them are bound to emerge as pioneering figures, akin to Prometheus or Nikola Tesla, who will leave an indelible mark on human history. People need to start using GenAI to create AIGP (AI-Generated Products), AIGS (AI-Generated Services), and AIGD (AI-Generated Brands). Futurist Wang Yuquan believes that, much like the last industrial revolution led humanity into the era of mass-produced goods, this GenAI revolution will propel us into an age of mass personalized services, where every individual and organization will enjoy personalized high-quality services. **The Digital Content Creation Track: This track is for those who don't understand GenAI technology development.** In the future, all forms of content can be recreated with AI, offering vast creative potential. Most people will use tools developed by others to create text, images, audio, video, and more, combining them into compelling novels, comics, music, films, and other cultural products and services, earning rewards and feedback. For creators who are willing to learn new tools, this will be the best of times. For those who resist learning, this will undoubtedly be the worst of times. In my view, a Digital Renaissance driven by AI technology has already begun. Just as the classical arts and culture over 700 years ago shattered the confines of the Middle Ages and ushered humanity into the modern era, today's Da Vincis, Michelangelos, Raphaels,

development. Tasks requiring neither creativity nor empathy—fully automated by machines, such as repetitive physical or mental labor. Tasks requiring empathy but not creativity—machines in command centers, with humans as their operators, like delivery drivers or couriers. In this scenario, AI would replace human decision-making, reducing humans to mere appendages of machines. In some sense, we're not far from the "Matrix" scenario where humans become biological batteries.

Machiavellis, and Copernicuses—those who master GenAI creative tools—will pave the way for a brand-new era for our children. In addition, technology will change how we act in the future. In Homer's time, history was passed down through the oral traditions of poets. For the future we face, we are as primitive and innocent as people were in Homer's era. Now, we can use AI to create music and have our thoughts preserved through song. Perhaps there will no longer be purely traditional thinkers in the future. Historically, to become a thinker, one had to master writing as a means of communication and become a creator of written works. Now, thinkers can convey their ideas through melody and song. In the future, they may express their ideas directly through AI-generated videos or use AIMVs (AI Music Videos) to enhance multi-sensory experiences. The successful thinkers and great prophets of the future will be super-creators, armed to the teeth with tools like GenAI to share their ideas with the world.

Principle Three: Firmly Protect Autonomous Will

As AI continues to evolve, there may come a day when machines, acting as our external brains, become fully integrated with our internal ones. At that point, the only value humans will provide is intentionality. As the saying goes, "Attention is all you need." Wherever human attention and imagination are directed, machines will follow and create new realities. I believe the probability of machines developing their own autonomous will is low, but the likelihood of humans surrendering theirs is high. Faced with uncertainty, it is a deeply ingrained human instinct to trade freedom for security. In the past, people submitted to authoritarian rule; in the future, they may submit to machines, ceasing to question or refine results, merely watching as machines generate, regenerate, and generate again. Once humans give up their autonomous will and accept machine authority, they will become thoroughly alienated and degraded, reduced to mere accessories and tokens. Machines (and those humans empowered by them) will become their controllers, taking over their autonomy. Carbon-based beings who abandon their autonomous will may become pets of silicon-based intelligence, easily erased at will. Thus, while AI can serve as a co-pilot for human autonomy, it must not be allowed to become the full autopilot that replaces our thinking. I advise those who value autonomy not to become sidelined or passive spectators in the AI era but to be the leaders and masters. Be the carbon-based prompt (the thought, intention, inspiration,

cue, and spell) generator—the engine that starts and ends all machine creation. Be the initiator of the journey from zero to one. To safeguard our autonomous will and secure control and initiative, we need superhuman resolve more than ever before.

Principle Four: Strengthen Autonomous Resources in Time

AI trend researcher Ma Qianli believes that the global AI revolution has three major camps. First is the big enterprise camp, represented by companies like OpenAI and Google, which hold the advantage of timing, much like the Wei state during the Three Kingdoms period. Second is the small enterprise camp, represented by China's AI startups, which have the advantage of geography, similar to the Wu state. Third is the open-source community camp, represented by Meta and universities like Stanford, which have the advantage of people's support, akin to the Shu state. To connect with the AI era from the perspective of resources, here are a few strategies: Be willing to spend money to purchase high-quality paid services from large companies, converting your economic resources into technological advantages to quickly boost personal productivity. Be willing to network by following and tracking AI projects from small companies, enriching your social resources with connections to experts, and staying up to date with the latest industry news. Be willing to invest time in searching for and testing various open-source tools, converting your time into an experiential advantage, and even trying to develop your own specialized software. Many GenAI tools currently have high technical and language barriers and aren't user-friendly for those in the humanities, but in the future, they will become as simple to use as mobile apps. It's essential to get ahead of others in learning and mastering these tools. Any investment in information tools, whether in money or time, will always be worth it and will bring outsized returns. The earlier you adopt these tools, the greater the benefits.

Principle Five: Accurately Enhance Autonomous Abilities

To fully reap the benefits of AI, one must actively engage with it, first learning the basic applications of AI tools to develop embodied cognition and practical wisdom through hands-on experience. I have three simple sayings: Something is better than nothing. The earlier you use it, the sooner you benefit. The more, the better. The first two have already been discussed; let me elaborate on the third. Socrates said that a person should be skilled in multiple areas to accumulate more life experience. In this Cambrian

explosion of GenAI, you should aim to be a T-shaped individual, skilled in many areas. Mastering only one tool could win rewards, but it might also be a wasted effort due to the rapid pace of updates. By learning multiple tools and gaining basic proficiency in each, you may have an advantage, especially when combining tools to create even greater synergy. Before AI fully replaces humans, a qualified centaur elite should be a composite individual mastering various technologies and tools. Invest enough time to reach a high level of expertise in one field, while also spending time to become a beginner-level expert in several others. This way, your expertise can overpower less specialized competitors, while your diversity can outflank those with only a single skill set.

Further suggestions on enhancing autonomous abilities will be discussed in later chapters.

14.2.2 The Three-Stage Theory of Human-AI Collaboration in the AI Era

As we enter the AI era, why do we still need human-AI collaboration? Can't AI handle everything on its own? The answer is both yes and no. At least in the field of content creation, there is an "Impossible Triangle", meaning that creativity, accuracy, and scalability in content production cannot all be achieved simultaneously. Traditional PGC (professionally generated content) excels in creativity and accuracy but lacks scalability. Later, with the rise of the internet, UGC (user-generated content) brought scalability but lacked creativity and accuracy. Pure AIGC (AI-generated content) offers both creativity and scalability but tends to be less accurate.

The simplest and most effective way to resolve this "Impossible Triangle" is through human-AI collaboration, leveraging complementary strengths—humans and machines co-creating content through MMGC (man-machine generated content). In this process, humans handle what they do best, and AI takes care of its strengths. From a timeline perspective, the human-AI collaborative workflow can be divided into three stages:

Stage 1: Human-Led Creation Phase. This is the initial phase where humans take the lead in creating ideas. Humans bring concepts from zero to one, typically by providing prompts and instructions to various GenAI systems. In the past, this work was mainly

done by bosses, clients, and creators themselves, and it reflects the key role of human self-awareness, free will, and autonomy that I have emphasized in earlier discussions. This stage is where inspiration, insights, breakthroughs, and moments of brilliance—often attributed to the favor of the muses—occur. Until AI evolves into a true "soul machine", the human role in this creation phase will remain irreplaceable and unshakable.

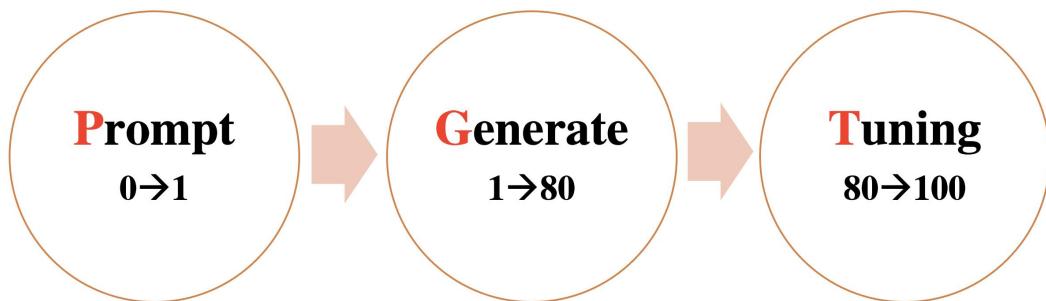
Stage 2: AI-Led Generation Phase. At this stage, AI takes over based on human input, leveraging data and algorithms (such as various pre-trained models) and powered by computational resources to transform prompts into content, completing the process from a score of one to eighty. This is the "heavy lifting" stage, traditionally carried out by professionals. However, now their expertise and skills have been labeled, transformed into training materials, and surpassed by superior pre-trained models. Currently, AI is akin to a diligent, hardworking college graduate who can quickly deliver numerous pieces of 80%-grade work, trading quantity for quality to ensure humans can find something useful. AI performs better in tasks like generating images, voice, and video due to the higher tolerance for errors in these mediums. Based on the rapid advancements in GenAI over the past two years, I believe that by 2025, AI will surpass its human teachers, becoming experts superior to any human in various fields. This "machine replacing human workers" process in offices, labs, and studios is an extension of what occurred in factories and workshops over the past decade. Over time, AI will fully liberate humans from both physical and intellectual labor on production lines, forcing us to find new roles—either by shifting to the two ends of the human-AI collaboration spectrum or by acquiring skills that AI has yet to master, becoming new kinds of experts.

Stage 3: Human-Led Tuning Phase. In this final phase, humans evaluate the AI-generated output and provide revisions and improvements through continuous iteration and alignment, ensuring that the results meet human standards and expectations. If you consider yourself an expert like me, you will frustratingly find that in our respective fields, GenAI often underperforms, making basic errors that reveal it's unreliable. Yet, outside of our areas of expertise, it seems to outperform us, leaving us unsure how to assess the results. It's precisely because AIGC is not entirely accurate and needs alignment that humans retain their role as the "measure of all things",

becoming the irreplaceable drivers in this final phase. By offering different requirements for GenAI and refining the outputs through tuning, humans push AIGC content from a score of 80 to 85, 90, or even 100.

From an information processing perspective, both the creation and tuning stages involve control processing by the human brain, requiring self-awareness, free will, and autonomy to clarify objectives, make plans, evaluate results, and refine solutions. Here, we can incorporate other digital tools for information and self-management to reduce cognitive load, enhance willpower, and improve the efficiency of the creation and alignment phases. The generation stage, led by GenAI and supported by the human brain, is primarily automatic processing—executing plans and generating results without the involvement of self-awareness, free will, or autonomy.

In this context, GenAI essentially serves as an extension and externalization of human brain automation. The human carbon-based brain is the foundation, and the silicon-based brain of AI is its enhancement. The more work the silicon brain handles, the more the carbon brain can relax—and this may well be the direction of human evolution in the future.



14.2.3 Two Roles of GenAI and Two Types of Human Commands

Throughout the three phases of human-AI collaboration, GenAI plays two distinct roles, which correspond to two types of commands that humans must give.

Digital Advisor for Human Cognitive Systems: GenAI works alongside humans, helping to spark ideas and discuss problems. It can even take on multiple roles, acting as a one-person think tank or advisory board, offering insights for important

judgments and decisions. In this capacity, GenAI functions like an upgraded search engine—keywords become prompts, and the search button becomes the generate button. This explains why Microsoft's Bing has integrated GPT and why tools like Kimi briefly gained popularity in China. Additionally, GPT and Kimi offer voice interaction, making it easier to discuss and explore issues with AI in a natural way.

To receive better advice, humans must give inquiry-based commands, guiding AI to provide reference answers to specific questions. For example, "What are the steps for a book launch event?" or "How would you describe the features of this poster?" At this stage, we don't yet have fixed answers or solutions and are hoping that AI will provide references and suggestions that help us gradually form our own views and strategies. Since the discussion is open-ended and often involves areas outside our expertise, AI's input can feel enlightening—even if there are errors—because it helps expand our thinking and refine our ideas.

Intelligent Assistant for Human Action Systems: GenAI also works as an assistant, helping humans handle tasks and solve problems. It can collect data, manage information, and even command other machines or devices to perform actions. GenAI is evolving into agents capable of executing tasks, helping with painting, songwriting, video production, design, manufacturing, marketing, and more. In this role, AI acts like a team of secretaries—one skilled in design, another in marketing. You tell it what you want, and it takes care of execution. The result depends on your leadership and its working capabilities.

To achieve better results, humans must give descriptive commands, guiding AI to provide specific solutions. For example, "Please write a 300-500 word speech for a book launch, using a conversational tone..." or "Please create a background poster for the book launch featuring Wenzhou cityscape, flat design, 16:9 ratio..." At this stage, we have already made judgments and decisions, with a rough vision of the desired result, and hope that AI can turn our vague instructions into a final product, or even implement it and produce the outcome. Since we have clear expectations and standards, this becomes a process of narrowing the scope and refining the solution. It's likely, however, that we may feel dissatisfied with AI's output, because it excels more at explaining issues than solving them.

In my view, most current GenAI tools are good at divergence and extrapolation but weak in focus and synthesis. Thus, when you don't have a fixed idea and give open-ended questions, AI often produces imaginative and unexpected suggestions. However, when you have a clear concept in mind and provide specific task descriptions, AI can deliver somewhat irrelevant or confusing results. From this, two insights emerge:

Leverage AI's strengths and avoid its weaknesses.

There are still opportunities for humans.

14.2.4 Developing Five Essential Skills for Collaborating with GenAI

Improving AI's performance depends on long-term technological iterations and short-term prompt optimization. To optimize prompts effectively, we must enhance our own autonomy. In the age of AI, anyone can quickly reach an 80% proficiency level in writing, painting, or music creation using GenAI tools. However, without professional training and knowledge accumulation, it's difficult to surpass the 90% or even 100% threshold. GenAI can elevate your performance from 0% to 80%, but you must rely on your own abilities to bridge the final 20%. This requires learning foundational skills from scratch.

Only a few individuals will become top-tier writers, painters, or musicians in this new era—those who can gracefully navigate the human-AI collaboration. These individuals will possess five key skills:

The Skill of Asking Questions. In *A More Beautiful Question*, it is sharply pointed out that in the future, supercomputers can help us solve problems, making answers cheap while questions become more valuable. We are entering a new world where "What you ask is what you get." Many traditional concepts are being reversed: questions are now more important than answers, aesthetics are valued over utility, and the process outweighs the result. Since GenAI is a passive responder, the quality of our questions determines the quality of its answers. GenAI's response process mirrors the brain's own automatic processing mechanisms, suggesting that, when using GenAI, the "Matthew Effect" may apply—both the highly skilled and the very unskilled can benefit, while

those in the middle may be disadvantaged. Highly skilled individuals can ask more insightful questions, gaining greater feedback and exploring uncharted areas. Conversely, beginners or "outsiders" may ask "simple" or even wrong questions, which can still lead to new insights due to GenAI's responses. Those with mid-level skills, however, may be trapped by their own knowledge, unable to ask truly innovative or foundational questions. To improve our questioning ability, we should specialize in certain fields to ask focused, complex questions, and maintain an open mind in other areas to ask simple, broad questions to inspire new ideas.

The Skill of Description. If asking questions is about general knowledge, describing is about expression—one is a core subject, the other a language skill. For a long time before brain-computer interfaces become commonplace, natural language will be our primary means of communicating with GenAI. Those proficient in languages like Mandarin and English will have an advantage. You can think of GenAI as your personal assistant, able to handle various tasks efficiently. However, to maximize its potential, you must master the art of leadership—provide clear, concise, and engaging instructions that set clear goals, direction, and steps for the task at hand. Many guides on crafting effective prompts are available and should be studied for practical application. But remember: while you can be transparent with your AI, never be entirely open—always safeguard privacy and security by setting clear boundaries in communication.

The Skill of Programming. Though natural language prompts are currently mainstream, this is largely because most people don't know how to code. Learning to program allows you to express needs more accurately and collaborate with AI more efficiently. GenAI also serves as an excellent programming tutor, providing code suggestions and patiently explaining concepts. For example, if you have thousands of documents and need to batch process them, GenAI can help write a script that saves hours of manual work. Developing programming skills with GenAI will help you automate and streamline tasks, turning your ideas into executable solutions. Investments in programming now will yield significant returns in the future.

The Skill of Critical Thinking. Critical thinking complements the skill of questioning, focusing on factual tasks related to "seeking truth". Nietzsche once said, "Tools shape our thinking." Wittgenstein remarked that he thought with his pen, often unable to keep

up with the speed of his thoughts. Similarly, human brainpower can no longer keep pace with the rapid evolution of machine intelligence, making critical thinking more essential than ever. We must question GenAI's responses, much like we question our own automatic thoughts. For especially important tasks, rely on yourself; don't fully trust GenAI. For less important tasks, collaborate with AI but maintain skepticism. I'm fortunate to have developed critical thinking before GenAI emerged. For GenAI's answers, don't blindly accept them. Remember, GenAI is a "pleaser", often generating appealing yet inaccurate responses. Approach its answers with caution, as you would a search result—sometimes useful, other times misleading or even harmful.

The Skill of Appreciation. Appreciation, the counterpart to descriptive skill, relates to creative tasks like writing, drawing, and music creation. When you give prompts to GenAI, it generates multiple versions for your review. You then refine these outputs based on feedback, fine-tuning or manually adjusting them to turn a rough draft into a polished final product. In the GenAI era, the quality of your work depends on your character and taste. Your ability to discern "goodness" and "beauty", combined into your appreciation skill, determines whether the resulting work is garbage or legacy. In an era of content overload, we need both appreciation and critical skills to filter out the valuable from the noise.

These five skills, and many others, should be integrated into education systems. Our children are the digital natives of the AI era, with GenAI as their tutor, advisor, and companion. Education in this era should "teach for the unknown, learn for the future." In the creation stage, children should be encouraged to ask and describe boldly. In the tuning stage, they should be taught to critique and appreciate. In the generation stage, they should be exposed to GenAI and familiarized with programming. The key areas to focus on are literature, philosophy, aesthetics, and mathematics—subjects that will serve them well in the AI age.

Some parents may hesitate to introduce GenAI to their children early on, but my advice is: if something must be done, the earlier, the better. The widespread use of GenAI, like calculators and computers before it, is inevitable. It's better to embrace it sooner. Before schools incorporate AI into their curriculum, parents can start by teaching their children

to use these tools. In fact, GenAI can be a great tool for parents to assist their children with homework and answer difficult questions. As both children and parents learn GenAI and programming together, they can grow and teach each other along the way.

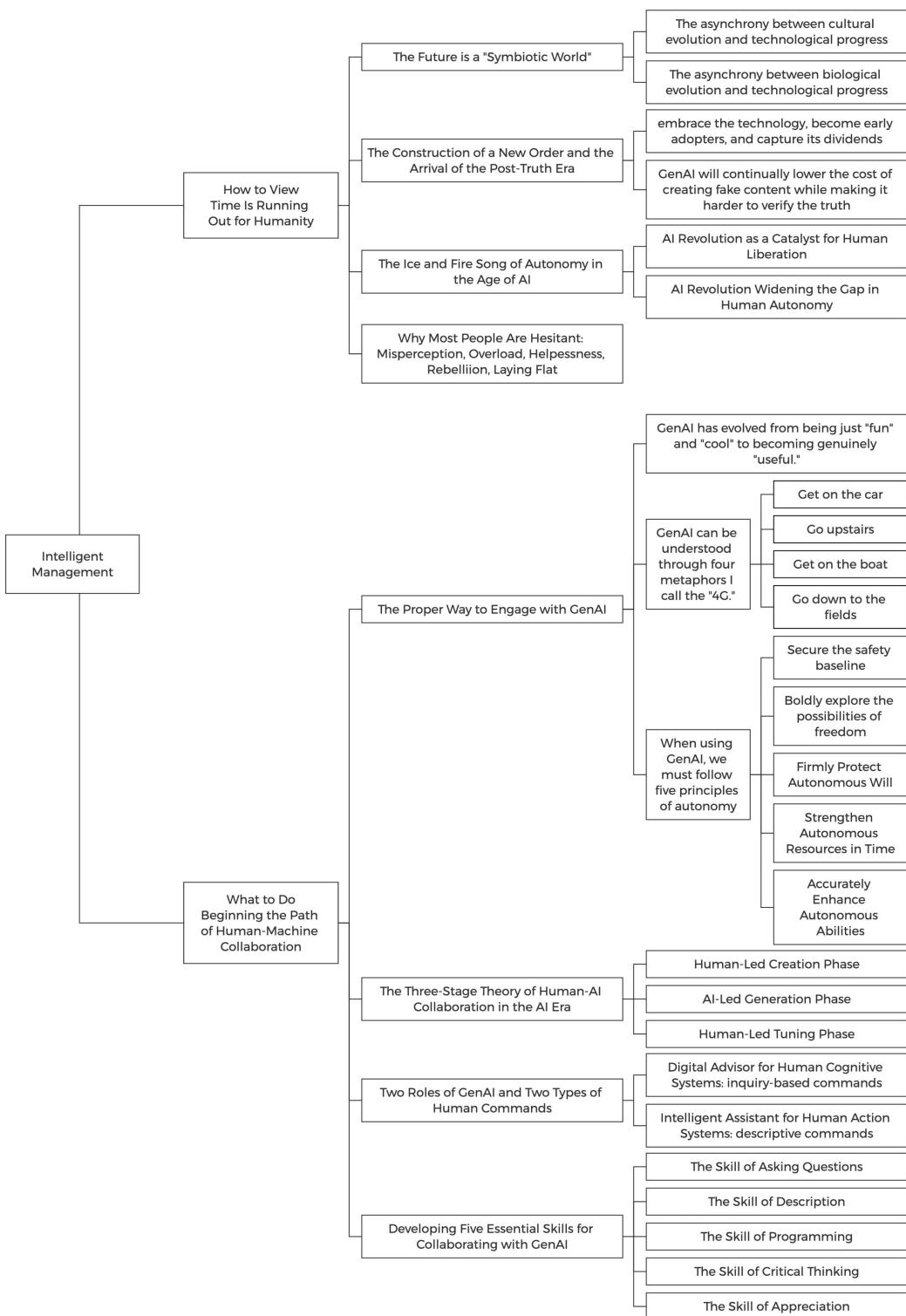
In 2024, the youngest speaker at AIGCxChina was a six-year-old boy from Wenzhou. Under his parents' guidance, he had launched his own AI-powered public account, written a series of articles, and created numerous AI-generated music and video projects. He even presented at AI and computer science conferences, explaining to an audience of baffled adults and seniors how AI is transforming education for children. I invited him to my annual report session, where he became a clear reminder to everyone: embrace GenAI, or be left behind.

Finally, I'll leave you with a quote from Kevin Kelly's *The Inevitable*: "This is not a race between humans and machines. It's a race with machines. If you race against them, you'll lose. In the future, your salary will depend on how well you collaborate with machines. Ninety percent of your coworkers will be invisible machines, and without them, most of your work would be impossible to complete. The line between human and machine labor will blur, and you may not even realize you're working because it will seem like all the drudgery is handled by the machines."

14.3 Chapter Summary

The AI revolution, represented by GenAI, brings us two major opportunities: digital tech entrepreneurship and digital content creation. For those who are willing to learn, this will be the best of times. For those who are unwilling to learn, it will be the worst of times. Autonomous individuals are those who are willing to learn. They have a strong desire for autonomy, the ability to achieve it, and the resources to support it. They possess an open mindset to embrace new technologies, a strong ability to self-learn, and more platforms for collaboration to make the most of these technologies. In the end, with the help of GenAI, they will usher in a new era of super individuals.

The future is here—Now or Never!



Chapter 15: Autonomy Development

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

— Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

Dickens' words aptly describe every era of great upheaval, including the one we are currently living through. Today, the global economy is undergoing dramatic shifts, and GenAI technology is rising rapidly. Every individual and organization faces a choice: should they wait and observe, or should they take bold steps forward and explore? Over the course of these two hundred pages, I have been encouraging those who wish to change to take that brave first step, seize control of their destiny, and embark on the heroic journey toward autonomy.

To help readers better grasp and apply the methods and tools of autonomy, I summarize the key points in this final chapter using a "one-two-three-four" framework. This framework is designed to aid understanding and practical use: **One overarching goal:** achieving natural augmentation of autonomy. **Two directions of effort:** internal exploration and external expansion. **Three pillars:** personal improvement, societal support, and technological empowerment. **Four key capabilities:** learning, thinking, discussing, and practicing. Lastly, we will discuss the ultimate question of the struggle between autonomy and control.

15.1 The Single Guiding Principle of Autonomous Development: Autonomy Must Grow Faster Than Age

In any era, the goal of autonomous development should be to attain greater autonomy, not just the sense of autonomy. The feeling of autonomy can only be a product of real autonomy, not its substitute.

In the AI era, we are on an accelerating train that has no brakes, headed toward an extreme future: either oblivion or immortality.

Low-autonomy individuals may miss the historic opportunity to leverage new technologies and extend their lifespans, eventually succumbing to disease or aging. Apart from their offspring, they leave behind no legacy or representation of themselves, and will ultimately be forgotten, their life lines coming to an absolute end.

High-autonomy elites or heroes, however, may have the chance to access new technologies earlier, gain new life opportunities, and possibly even achieve immortality. Even if immortality is unattainable, they will have more time to nurture their descendants, create content, and produce representations of themselves. Their greater legacy will influence future generations, ensuring that their names endure in history.

As of now, there is no clear, definitive standard for precisely measuring the absolute level of autonomy, but we can estimate its relative level through both horizontal and vertical comparisons.

Horizontally, by measuring the time different individuals take to solve the same problem, we can evaluate relative autonomy levels. If it takes you a day to solve a problem that someone else solves in half a day, your autonomy is half of theirs.

Vertically, by calculating how much time you take to solve the same problem at different points in time, you can determine whether you are progressing or regressing. If a problem used to take you a day but now takes half a day, your autonomy has doubled.

To assess whether your rate of progress is adequate, I suggest this principle: the growth of personal autonomy should be proportional to your growth in age. For example, moving from birth to one year old represents a qualitative leap from 0 to 1, so autonomy should experience a similar qualitative leap. From one to two years old, autonomy should grow by 100%, from two to three years by 50%, from three to four by 33%, from

four to five by 25%, and so on. The rate of increase in autonomy should mirror this pattern.

In the early years of life, autonomy should grow the fastest, followed by adolescence, and then adult and senior years when growth slows. This is because, as the base level of autonomy increases, it becomes harder to achieve relative gains.

I propose using the natural growth curve of life (age growth) as a reference for your autonomous growth. If your autonomous growth outpaces age growth, you are progressing. If your autonomy grows slower than your age, you are regressing.

For an average person, development tends to follow a familiar trajectory: surging ahead in early years, maintaining pace in mid-life, and falling behind in later years. In the final stage, when the body starts declining, autonomy tends to lag behind age growth, and may even experience negative growth, ultimately plunging into the abyss of death.

For an autonomous person, the trajectory should be different. You should strive in the early years, push yourself in the middle, and double down on effort in later life. If you fight hard enough, you might become one of the first humans to defeat death, allowing your autonomy to extend indefinitely into the infinite game of infinite time and space.

Titans, heroes, and elites differ from ordinary people because of their—or their ancestors'—early efforts, which gave them a head start. This initial advantage sets them on a path of exponential growth fueled by the synergy of will, ability, and resources. Like the accelerating AI era, they keep gaining speed. Progress brings more progress, success brings more success, and their autonomy growth curve gradually diverges from the natural growth curve, accelerating on the fast track to greatness.

Here's a question: Over the past year, has your autonomous growth outpaced or lagged behind your natural growth (i.e., your age increase)? On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate yourself? Does this score meet your expectations? If not, what changes or adjustments will you make?

15.2 The Two-Way Approach to Autonomous Development: Inward Exploration and Outward Expansion

We hope that every reader of this book can become an autonomous individual who outpaces the natural growth curve. To embark on this path of accelerated growth while adhering to the principle of autonomous will, there are two main approaches to consider.

The first is inward exploration. This approach focuses on building the spiritual world by delving into one's will and cognition. The emphasis is on control, reflection (doubt, rejection, innovation), and reconstructing the boundaries of security, reshaping the balance between safety and freedom. This perspective values "how to perceive" more than "how to act." When a person cannot find solutions within themselves, they might turn to religious beliefs, psychological counseling, or therapy. The first half of this book mainly offers insights and answers to help you better understand yourself and the world around you.

The second is outward expansion. This approach focuses on reshaping the material world by managing resources and environments, with an emphasis on growing both safety and freedom simultaneously. This perspective values "how to act" more than "how to perceive." If someone doesn't know what steps to take, they can seek help through decision-making consulting, behavioral design, or environmental reconstruction. Most of the chapters in the latter half of this book provide guidance on how to better shape yourself and the world.

Of course, everyone uses a combination of these two strategies, both exploring within and reshaping the outside world. If you are young, I recommend focusing more on inward exploration. If you are in your middle years, I suggest putting more effort into outward expansion. And if you are older, a balanced approach of both inward and outward focus is best.

If we consider a total time of 10 units, in my younger years I followed a very extreme ratio of 9:1, dedicating the vast majority of my time to inward exploration, primarily through reading and reflection. Later, as I moved to a larger city and gained access to a broader platform, I began engaging in social activities and public service, dedicating more time to outward expansion, though I still maintained the habit of inward exploration, adjusting to a 6:4 ratio. With the advent of the GenAI revolution and the massive shifts it brought to our era, I significantly increased my efforts toward outward

expansion, entering a 3:7 balance. In this phase, most of my time was spent interacting with the external world, with little reflection, which left me feeling unbalanced. Moving forward, I plan to adjust again, aiming for a 5:5 balance to achieve harmony between inward and outward efforts.

A question for reflection: Do you focus more on inward exploration or outward expansion? If your total time were 10 units, how would you distribute your time between the two? What would your ideal ratio be? What steps do you plan to take to move closer to this ideal balance?

15.3 The Trinity of Autonomous Development: Self-Improvement, Social Support, and Technological Empowerment

In the process of enhancing my personal autonomy, I've discovered three key paths that can lead to significant leaps in autonomy. These aren't shortcuts but rather the proper routes to achieving autonomy. These three paths form what I call the Centaur's Threefold Doctrine, encompassing self-improvement, social support, and technological empowerment.

The Path of Self-Improvement: This involves engaging with yourself—reading extensively, traveling widely, and relying on your own strength to achieve growth. Self-improvement is the "defensive line." The time and effort you invest will translate into more cognitive modules (data, information, knowledge, wisdom, principles, and checklists), thereby solidifying your foundation of autonomy. If you don't build this defensive line properly, you risk suffering from ignorance or incompetence, which could lead to setbacks. In the AI era, knowledge is readily available, but if you don't learn, you won't know. Without a solid foundation of self-capability, you can't ask the right questions or evaluate the quality of the answers. Earlier chapters on "Energy Management," "Emotional Management," "Space-Time Management," "Task Management," "Game Management," and the "Prometheus Daily Practice Series" all offer concepts and methods for self-improvement.

The Path of Social Support: This involves engaging with others—making numerous friends, receiving guidance from mentors, and leveraging others' strength to achieve

growth. Social support is the "midfield line." The time and effort you invest will translate into a broader network of relationships (information, trust, credibility, recognition, and support), providing resource security for your autonomy. If you don't build this midfield line properly, you risk becoming isolated, unable to coordinate effective defense and attack. In the AI era, we must become excellent midfield organizers, connectors, and charismatic leaders. Earlier chapters on "Family Management," "Career Management," "City Management," "Social Management," "Risk Management," as well as principles like the "Golden Jade Laws," offer thoughts and strategies on social support.

The Path of Technological Empowerment: This involves engaging with tools—storing capabilities for the right time, working smarter, and using technology to grow. Technological empowerment is the "forward line." The time and effort you invest will bring more technological dividends (tools, niches, profits, interest margins, and advantages), enabling you to translate autonomy into results. If you don't build this forward line properly, you'll find yourself all talk and no action, stuck in an inefficient process, unable to score quickly and effectively. The AI era brings rapid change with new technological tools constantly emerging. We must overcome fear and anxiety, break free from paralysis and observation mode, and embrace technology, amplifying our attack power. Earlier chapters on "Intelligent Management" and various tech-related cognitive modules provide insights on technological empowerment.

These three paths to achieving autonomy can be combined in different strategies. The extent of our autonomous growth will be determined by the continuous product of three coefficients—self-improvement (a), social support (b), and technological empowerment (c)—which is expressed in Autonomous Leap Formula 1:

$$\text{Autonomous Leap} = (a \times \text{Self-Improvement}) \times (b \times \text{Social Support}) \times (c \times \text{Technological Empowerment})$$

Different combinations of investment across these three lines will result in different growth patterns. I suggest everyone tailor their strategy based on their personal goals, current situation, and specific challenges. The sum of a, b, and c represents the upper limit of our time and energy. Assuming this limit is 10, different combinations of the

three paths can be interpreted similarly to soccer formations. Below are some personal examples from my own experience:

In my 20s, I used an 811 formation. During this period, I focused primarily on self-improvement, with extensive reading and significant investment of time and energy, but had very little social support or technological empowerment. This was an extremely conservative strategy—not prone to setbacks but also slow to achieve growth. I had a strong sense of autonomy through reading and writing, but resource growth stagnated, leaving me frustrated, knowing much but unable to act on it. Knowing too much without action can lead to retreating inward into a self-contained mental world, which hinders growth. This is why I always argue that having too much capability may not always be a good thing. Autonomy should be balanced with resources in a measured and appropriate manner.

In my 30s, I shifted to a 532 formation. During this period, I focused equally on self-improvement and social support, with some investment in technology as well. This was a defense-counterattack strategy that suited my preference for "safe freedom." It allowed me to secure my defensive line while leveraging opportunities from the midfield and forward lines to score consistently, resulting in significantly faster growth and improved content production. During this decade, due to work, I frequently interacted with experts and gradually developed expertise in building online think tanks and cultivating collective intelligence in the digital age. I also solidified my focus on psychology and information technology studies and was fortunate enough to join some expert communities, such as the "Kai Zhi Book Club" founded by teacher Yang Zhiping. Surrounded by brilliant peers, I constantly pushed myself to keep up with the top minds in Wenzhou and continually upgraded my knowledge system and tools, leading to significant growth in both my autonomous abilities and resources.

In my 40s, I now operate with a 334 formation. At this stage, my investment in technological empowerment has surpassed my focus on self-improvement and social support. This is a highly offensive strategy, with both defense and midfield lines serving the forward line and working toward scoring goals. The results have been positive. According to Formula 1, my autonomous leap should be the product of my performance in self-improvement, social support, and technological empowerment: $3 \times 3 \times 4$,

equaling 36 times, which is a good proportion. We need such high multipliers to tackle new challenges. Humanity is facing unprecedented change, from a century to a millennium's worth, starting with three years of a pandemic, followed by the AI revolution. The world is transforming at breakneck speed. Time waits for no one, and we must urgently "get on the car," "get upstairs," "get on the boat," and "go down to the fields," while leaving behind more works, avatars, and other legacies. For this reason, I've focused far more on writing and teaching than reading. When I do read, I spend far more time on articles than books because the pace of world change has outstripped the ability of humans to keep up through book writing. Technological empowerment presents the greatest opportunity right now. To break through the limitations of human time and energy and achieve further breakthroughs, we must integrate new technologies and tools, using the horsepower of new-generation AI systems like GPT to amplify both individual intellect and collective intelligence. By doing this, we can transform into Centaurs who surpass carbon-based humans and prepare for future physical enhancements. Thus, I've built numerous cognitive and tech-related exchange communities to help myself and others pursue self-improvement and technological empowerment through social support.

Another reflection question: If your total time were 10 units, what would your ideal "formation" look like? What formation are you currently using? Are you satisfied with it? How do you plan to optimize it?

15.4 The Four Essential Skills for Autonomous Development: Learning, Discussion, Reflection, and Practice

Now that we've covered the guiding principle of natural growth, the dual approaches of internal exploration and external expansion, and the trinity of self-improvement, social support, and technological empowerment, let's explore the Four Essential Skills for autonomous development.

Autonomy, as discussed throughout this book, aims to enhance our ability to solve problems more efficiently. The process of solving problems successfully further boosts our autonomy. Therefore, we can also view problem-solving as a way to develop

autonomy. I classify problems into four categories and present four corresponding solutions. These four methods are also the ways we can enhance autonomy. Mastering all four transforms one into a well-rounded individual, possessing four essential skills.

We've previously introduced these four problem-solving methods as part of a general problem-solving module. Here, we will revisit and deepen our understanding of them.

Known Known Problems: These are questions with standard answers, and we know who has those answers. In such cases, the best method is learning—reading their works or observing their actions to acquire the answers. If a problem falls under the "known knowns," learning should be the preferred strategy.

Reading and observation are the main avenues of learning. Many questions can be answered by directly searching for reputable books or academic papers and carefully studying reliable authors' works. In the AI era, learning to read effectively becomes even more crucial. While you can ask AI for information, you still need to digest it by reading. Additionally, without reading, you may not even know what you're looking for or how to phrase your questions to AI, let alone evaluate the quality of the answers it provides. Observation is also an essential tool—especially for things that aren't written down or can't be captured in writing. Observing real-life situations or video tutorials is a powerful way to learn. Psychologist Albert Bandura proved that observational learning is an effective method.

Known Unknown Problems: These are questions with standard answers, but we don't know who has the answers. In such cases, discussion is key. By asking questions, listening, sharing your thoughts, and seeking advice from those with more insight and experience, you can find the people who hold the answers. When facing "known unknowns," discussion is the go-to strategy.

Asking questions and sharing insights are crucial components of discussion. AI has already absorbed much of humanity's collective wisdom, so you can ask AI for answers. Alternatively, you can let AI or search engines direct you to relevant authors and works, and then study those carefully. Another approach is sharing your thoughts on the topic to inspire others to offer feedback. However, sharing ideas often involves overcoming the fear of being plagiarized. In the Parable of the Fool Collecting Milk

from the Hundred Parables Sutra, the fool was afraid the milk would spoil if stored improperly, so he left it in the cow. I used to be similar—wanting to “hide the good stuff until the right moment,” only to have good ideas spoil, leaving nothing behind. In the AI era, the winning strategy is to share ideas before they rot. The outcomes are typically threefold: (1) People agree with you and provide useful feedback, enhancing your viewpoint; (2) people disagree, alerting you to potential problems and saving you from blind pursuits; (3) someone plagiarizes your ideas, which at least proves your thoughts are valuable and are now being disseminated for free. So, I encourage everyone to ask questions and share ideas bravely.

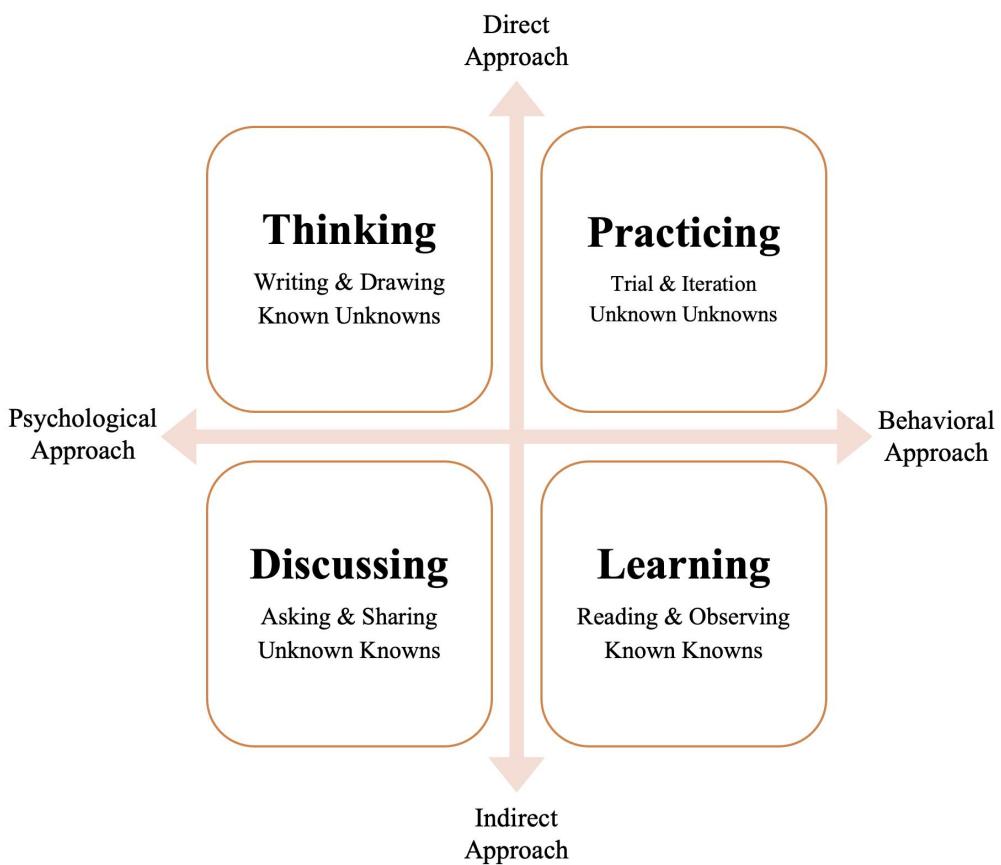
Unknown Known Problems: These are questions without standard answers, and it's commonly understood that no one holds the definitive answer. In such cases, after gathering sufficient material through learning and discussion, you need to rely on reflection to extract a higher-level answer. For instance, solving a math problem requires not only knowing the formula and data but also doing the calculations to get the result. When facing "unknown knowns," reflection becomes the priority.

Writing and drawing are effective ways to reflect. Writing externalizes and systematizes your thinking process. With the aid of information tools, your cognition is enhanced, and potential answers begin to surface. AI can assist with writing, but it shouldn't replace your thinking—just as it can support your thought process, but not substitute it. Drawing is similar to writing, except that it employs a non-linear form of expression, capable of capturing non-verbal information. It's more fluid and perhaps closer to the organized chaos that is human cognition.

Unknown Unknown Problems: These are questions without standard answers, and many people don't even realize these questions exist. These problems reside in an uncertain world, where learning, discussion, and reflection can narrow the range of possible answers, but only practice and iterative optimization can reveal solutions that work. You must dive in and take action to learn how to swim. When facing "unknown unknowns," practice is the top strategy.

Trial and error and iteration are common forms of practice. Through trial and error, we receive feedback and gain more information, which helps us create the conditions for finding possible answers, solving old problems, or even discovering new ones. Don't

fear mistakes. What you perceive as an error may simply be a difference in perspective. Medieval maps of the world were filled with inaccuracies, but without those "errors," great explorers wouldn't have discovered new continents. In the rapidly changing AI era, most of what we encounter falls under the "unknown unknowns," and only through practice and experimentation can we gather the foundation needed for learning, discussion, and reflection to guide us toward solutions. Iteration is also crucial, as a single trial is never enough. However, if repeated trials don't yield insights or lead to improvements, something must be adjusted.



These four problem-solving methods can be flexibly combined. Combining any two usually produces effective results. For example, the combination of learning and reflection embodies the maxim: "To learn without thinking is to be lost; to think without learning is perilous." Combining learning and practice echoes "Reading ten thousand books and traveling ten thousand miles" or "Knowledge is guided by action." Pairing learning and discussion highlights "A conversation with a wise person is worth ten years

of study." And finally, reflection and practice demonstrates that "Theory guides practice" and "Practice is the sole criterion for testing truth."

Take reflection and practice as an example. Freud once said, "Thought is a rehearsal for action." For high-stakes problems requiring practical solutions, it's more economical to simulate trials mentally before attempting them in real life. But ultimately, actions are required to solve the problem. Lenin remarked, "Mathematics can explore the fourth dimension and possible worlds—that's good. But the Tsar can only be overthrown in the third dimension!"

I also believe that the combination of learning, discussion, and reflection forms a design pattern suitable for developing solutions to well-defined problems in a well-defined world. But when dealing with undefined problems in an uncertain world, you must add practice, creating an evolutionary pattern that can continuously refine answers through adaptive trial and error.

I hope every autonomous individual can become skilled in all four methods and find the combination that works best for them. Following the logic of the "trinity" discussed earlier, we can assign different weights to each of these problem-solving methods. Assuming their combined contribution to autonomous development equals the continuous product of their weighted performance, we can introduce a new Autonomous Leap Formula 2:

$$\text{Autonomous Leap} = (a \times \text{Learning}) \times (b \times \text{Discussion}) \times (c \times \text{Reflection}) \times (d \times \text{Practice})$$

If the total weight of a, b, c, d is 10 points, then in my case, I assign a weight of 2 to learning, 3 to discussion, 2 to reflection, and 3 to practice. Therefore, the total product is $2 \times 3 \times 2 \times 3 = 36$, which coincidentally matches the 36 from my 3-3-4 strategy earlier—this is purely coincidental. The numbers I've used here are arbitrary, meant for illustration, so don't take them too seriously.

Of course, here's another reflection question: Evaluate your current combination of the four skills and compare it with your ideal setup. How could you improve it?

Moreover, how you allocate your energy depends on the context and the problems you face. The formula suggests a balanced effort, but I'd also ask: why not expand overall time or increase the density of time? Using AI to assist in learning, discussion, reflection, and practice, or leveraging collective intelligence to distribute tasks and reduce difficulty, can help reduce costs and increase efficiency.

Finally, no matter what kind of player you are within the "dual approach", "trinity", or "four essential skills", I recommend maintaining a good reading habit. Regardless of whether it's the AI era or what age group you belong to, reading—especially high-quality material—remains essential for increasing autonomy. When you've accumulated enough knowledge, your mind becomes like a vast field of flowers, with countless ideas blossoming and ready to be turned into mesmerizing intellectual nectar.

Books are the ladder of human progress, and books are also the ladder for AI's advancement. Now that GenAI is smarter than humans, we should learn from them. Much like AI relies on data, computing power, and algorithms, we humans must balance reading depth and reading breadth in terms of both quality and quantity.

First, Read Quality: Choose works by masters and feed your brain high-quality data. One good book is better than a heap of mediocre ones. I've read thousands of serious books, but 80% of my insights have come from just 20% of these masterpieces. These top-notch materials, whether books, articles, in digital or print formats, withstand the test of time and practice. The specific content depends on individual preferences, but I highly recommend using the WeChat Reading App, as it offers immense value for a minimal investment. Moreover, if all the books are of high quality, it's better to read new ones and new articles.

Second, Read Deeply: Engage in deep reading and optimize your brain's limited processing power. One hour of deep reading is worth ten hours of surface reading. The measure of reading quantity isn't how many books you've finished, but how many hours of focused reading you've done. Effective time investment determines our actual learning outcomes. In deep reading, we think, converse with authors and their works, and recombine old components to generate new ones, helping us learn through the process of creation. I recommend using audiobooks for multitasking, such as during commutes or errands, to keep learning while saving time.

Third, Read Practically: Increase transformation power by loading your brain with optimal algorithms. What's gained from books is often shallow unless applied in real life. This is the Edelberg Effect—input does not equal mastery. Practice is the only true test, and output is the best form of input. Reading should evolve into note-taking, notes into articles, and articles into books. Discussion, reflection, and practice convert the data, information, and knowledge gleaned from reading into wisdom. Engaging in dialogue with authors and their works is only the means; becoming an author or creator is the ultimate goal.

15.6 The Ultimate Choice for Autonomous Development: Autonomy vs. Control

The choice between autonomy and control is not only a matter of personal relationships but also extends to families, cities, and even nations. Autonomy means controlling oneself while not being controlled by others. Control, on the other hand, implies maintaining one's autonomy while denying it to others. Autonomy and control are like the yin and yang of a Tai Chi symbol—a dialectical unity that can transform under specific conditions.

Every individual must strive to break free from the control of others and establish full self-mastery. However, once you've freed yourself and gained autonomy, a new dilemma arises: How do you treat others? Will you help them also become autonomous, or will you use this opportunity to control them? If you choose the latter, one person's autonomy (or control) will be built on the lack of autonomy (or subjugation) of others. In such a scenario, autonomy and control become indistinguishable, both transforming into a negative force. I'd prefer to call this "control" rather than "autonomy".

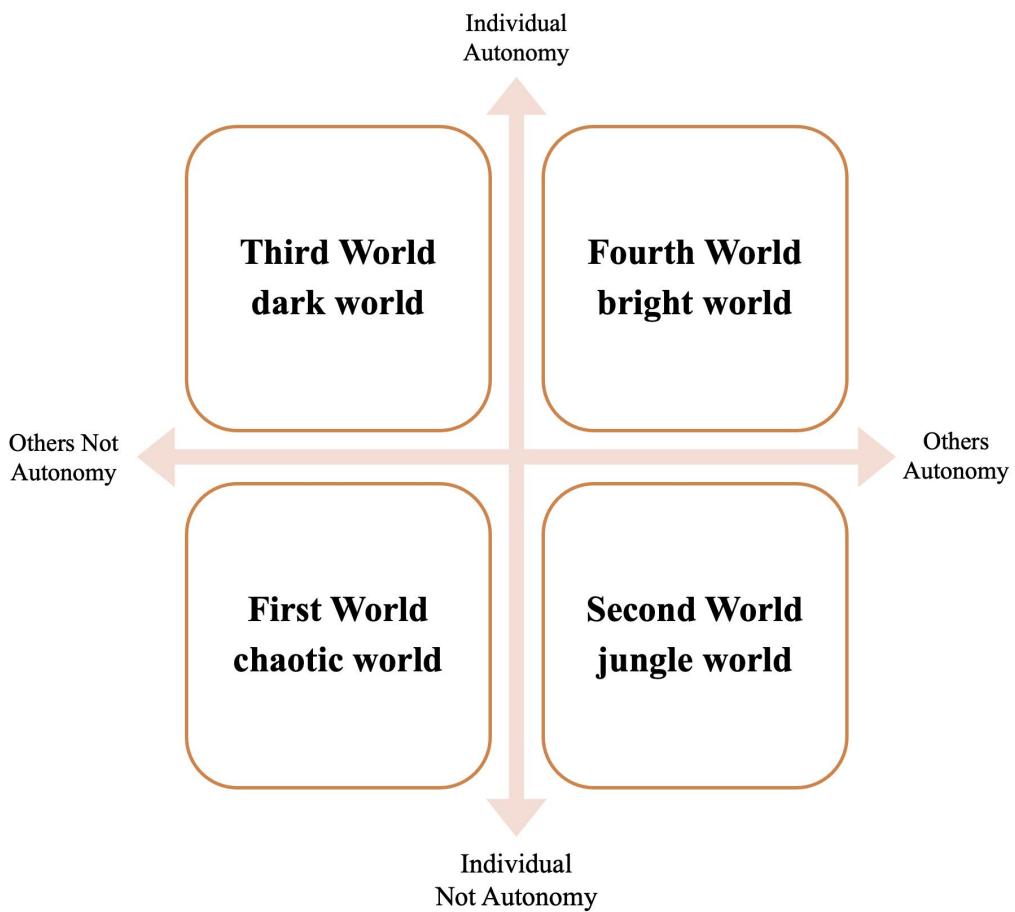
Using the matrix analysis repeatedly discussed in this book, it's easy to imagine that there are "four worlds" which encompass all the possible scenarios we might encounter in our quest for autonomy.

The "First World" is the chaotic world. There is no free will, no autonomous will, no autonomy triangle, and no autonomous individuals. Everything is about control—there is no autonomy, and everyone is controlled. This is a dark world.

The "Second World" is the jungle world. Here, free will exists, autonomous will emerges, and some individuals achieve autonomy, but they do so by controlling others. It is a world of survival of the fittest and zero-sum games. This is the world we are born into—a world where family raises us, the workplace cages us, and cities confine us, all working together to control us. It's only when our autonomous will awakens and we embark on a hero's journey that we begin to resist this unequal world.

The "Third World" is the dark world. In this world, we have achieved autonomy, but many others remain unfree. We accept their lack of autonomy and may even use our autonomy to control them, ensuring they remain unfree. The boy who once fought dragons has now become the dragon himself, standing on the side of the inequality he once fought against.

The "Fourth World" is the bright world. After gaining autonomy, we choose to help others achieve autonomy as well. We work to reform the world, creating fertile ground where everyone desires, pursues, and has the opportunity to become autonomous. True democracy is the autonomy of all people. By transcending ourselves—contributing and sacrificing for a future beyond our individual lives—we leave behind a great legacy and become the heroes, and eventually the Titans, of this bright world.



We don't need to concern ourselves with the "First World". Our discussion begins in the "Second World".

In the "Second World", our primary task is resistance—struggling to break free from others' control and gaining individual autonomy. The concepts in the first part of this book, and the methods outlined in the second part, are all meant to help you more effectively win in this "Second World".

The "Second World" presents three common challenges to Hercules-like figures. Most people first need to fight against the control of their loved ones, then their colleagues and superiors, and finally their community or city. We discussed these issues in chapters on family management, career management, and city management. We argued for redefining family, the workplace, and the city as spaces where individuals and others can jointly enhance their autonomy—a mutually beneficial "ecosystem" where individuals and systems grow together.

Unfortunately, many people become too immersed in the "Second World", losing sight of what autonomy truly feels like and instead becoming addicted to the poison of control. They resist autonomous individuals and long to regain control over them. Until they experience true autonomy—until they witness the autonomy of all—they can't comprehend the possibility of autonomy that doesn't require controlling others. Unknowingly, they descend into the "asura path" and become the very dragon they once fought.

Whether motivated by love or selfishness, our parents may intentionally or unintentionally try to control us—from our studies to our work, marriage, and parenting. Traditional fathers might use physical force, believing that "a stick makes a filial son", while typical mothers manipulate through verbal pressure, constantly repeating, "I'm doing this for your own good."

These control-seeking parents are the first barrier on our hero's journey and the first line of defense we must cross. We have no choice but to confront them. But first, diplomacy—attempt effective communication and seek a peaceful resolution. Some parents, especially those who are elites or heroes themselves, are wise and rational, capable of transitioning power to their children smoothly. But most parents are ordinary people who once forcibly took power from their own parents and are unlikely to surrender it easily. A fierce battle may be inevitable.

This is a familial war, and it must be swift and decisive, minimizing suffering. The wounds must be made in one stroke, for a dull knife brings more pain. We must convey our decisions and attitudes in the least harmful way, prompting parents to shift their mindset and embrace a new, family-wide view of autonomy—where instead of stifling our autonomy, they support it and gracefully relinquish control.

To minimize the chance of escalation, it's essential to respect parents, especially elderly ones. Do not publicly humiliate them. Instead, engage in private discussions, giving them space to save face. After winning the battle, continue to show respect, treating them like retired leaders or elders, outwardly polite but inwardly selective about which of their suggestions you accept.

The same logic applies to the second barrier (workplace) and the third (community). Since there's no blood relation involved, these battles can be more intense, though less emotionally complex. Nevertheless, the goal is to minimize harm and avoid escalating the fight.

After passing through the trials of the "Second World", we arrive at a crossroads: Do we choose to enter the "Third World" and become an elite, or do we cross into the "Fourth World" and become a hero or even a Titan? The earlier chapters on "Why Autonomy?" spent significant time persuading you to bravely transcend yourself, quickly pass through the "Third World", and fully embrace the "Fourth World".

To achieve this, you must believe that one person's autonomy does not necessarily come at the cost of another's autonomy, whether in family, work, or the broader world. We can break the cycle of control and subjugation, finding harmony where opposites seem irreconcilable. It's like walking on a Möbius strip, starting in the unequal old world but moving forward with hope until, one day, we reach a new world of equality and autonomy.

How to Build Autonomy Upon Autonomy, Ensuring Personal Autonomy Doesn't Harm Others, and Even Benefits Their Autonomy?

I believe the key is to break the binary opposition in the finite games within limited time and space, and to seek adjacent possibilities within infinite games across infinite time and space. In finite games with limited time and space, rules are fixed, resources are scarce, and people's will and capabilities are often used in opposition. Under the logic of binary opposition and zero-sum competition, preemptive strikes and suppressing the opponent become the winning strategy in a "dark forest" where the armed hold an advantage. In infinite games, however, rules are flexible, resources are abundant, and people's will and capabilities can be channeled into cooperation. In this context of adjacent possibilities and symbiotic evolution, proactively extending goodwill and uniting with others is the superior strategy for autonomous individuals in a bright world.

We must deconstruct the adversarial narrative of the "Second World" where it's "kill or be killed", reconstruct the ruling narrative of the "Third World" where it's "an eye for

an eye", and build a cooperative narrative for the "Fourth World" where we move towards the light and rise together. In doing so, we aim to find, or even design, infinite games beyond finite ones, allowing us to identify new goals, drive new actions, and create new autonomy, thereby generating entirely new adjacent possibilities.

The practices of Gaowen Youth Action and AIGCxChina embody this kind of thinking. First, we seek or create a consensus — an objective or problem that everyone wants to address. Then, based on that consensus, we drive co-creation, where everyone takes action together and collaborates. Finally, through consensus and co-creation, we foster shared outcomes, where everyone gains in terms of will, capabilities, and resources, and both safety and freedom are enhanced. This process boosts both the sense and reality of autonomy.

Consensus, co-creation, and sharing — that is my answer. Whether it's the conflict between parents and children, between subordinates and superiors, or between rulers and the ruled, or even between humans and machines, I believe this is a universal solution. For instance, in the parent-child relationship, we can introduce a shared consensus, such as learning to use GenAI tools together, and then drive the parents and children to co-create meaningful works that strengthen the relationship. These creations can be jointly promoted and shared, just like the collaborative projects I've done with my son, such as "A King's Life" and "The Edge of Song".

In changing these adversarial relationships, the stronger party in the conflict needs to take the initiative, creating an open environment where conflict can turn into dialogue, and internal friction into external collaboration. The stronger party's higher level of autonomy makes them more likely to lead these dialogues, helping the weaker side reframe, define, and construct problems, ultimately fostering consensus, co-creation, and sharing. In the family, this means that parents must shift from being controllers to becoming guides, from demanding results to providing assistance, and from insisting on outcomes to valuing the process.

We might also include this rule of "Consensus, Co-creation, Sharing" as the 27th module in the Prometheus Daily Practices. It transforms struggles over control into shared creation of autonomy, turns uncertainty into certainty, and makes the impossible possible. By integrating learning, discussing, thinking, and practicing through design

and trial and error, it turns painful conflicts into joyful journeys, with an inspiring anthem of epic proportions for heroes and titans playing in the background.

But, disharmony will always exist, and our great journey will have no end. At least two problems remain without a complete solution:

Escalation of Conflict Cannot Be Eliminated. No matter how we construct cooperative narratives or design larger games through consensus, co-creation, and sharing, we can never fully achieve an infinite game. Our cooperation may inevitably impact other organizations or individuals. Our autonomy may come at the unseen cost of controlling others. Conflict is not being eradicated but escalating — from personal to organizational conflicts, from small systems to larger systems. The best we can do is accept this reality and work seriously from where we can. First, fix ourselves, help those around us, and only then think about bigger and more distant goals.

Relative Deprivation Cannot Be Eliminated. No matter how careful we are, we will inevitably affect others. Even if we avoid substantial harm to others' autonomy, we cannot eliminate the sense of relative deprivation they may feel. Your rapid growth, even if it doesn't harm their interests, might still hurt their feelings. Most people live in a finite world, playing finite games, and their instinct for safety causes them to be wary of others' rapid progress. Perhaps only when everyone becomes players of infinite games can we fully break the poisonous oath of the Golden Jade Law. Unfortunately, that's impossible. Therefore, we must remain low-key, lest we be struck by hidden enemies.

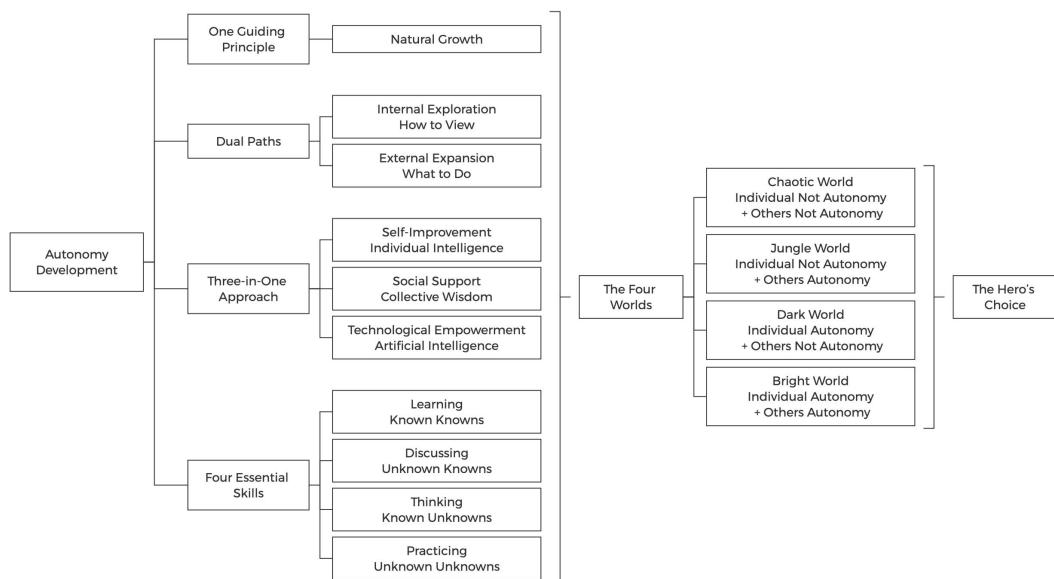
Moreover, some individuals move between parallel worlds as dark heroes — outliers in the four worlds. They emerge from the chaos of the "Second World," attempting to control a minority in the "Third World" to foster autonomy for the majority in the "Fourth World." They are contradictions in motion. Figures like Elon Musk of Tesla or Steve Jobs of Apple possess both a strong will to control and a powerful sense of autonomy. They are masters of the CHAOS dark leadership style, which includes Calling, Hoaxing, Ambiguity, Oppression, and Shuffle. These dark heroes often control and exploit others to create their great Legacy. OpenAI's Sam Altman might also fit into this category. These people aren't villains, but you wouldn't exactly classify them as traditional heroes either.

Still, as long as there is a sliver of opportunity, I hope you first strive to become a hero of light. With the right goals, proper methods, and ideal outcomes, if anyone must sacrifice or be harmed, let it be the hero themselves.

Thus, the great hero's journey unfolds. I wish you boundless glory after arduous battles, infinite happiness, entry into limitless time and space, countless descendants, works, and avatars — to become an eternal titan and Legacy itself.

15.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter first outlines the essential guidelines for autonomous development: the Natural Growth Principle, Dual Paths (Internal Exploration and External Expansion), Three-in-One Approach (Self-Improvement, Social Support, and Technological Empowerment), and the Four Skills (Learning, Discussing, Thinking, Practicing), then encourages self-assessment. Finally, it discusses the relationship between autonomy and control, introducing the concept of the Four Worlds. The chapter advocates transitioning from finite games to infinite ones, from binary conflict to adjacent possibilities, achieving greater goals through Consensus, Co-creation, and Sharing, and building a bright world where most people can achieve autonomy.



Postscript

Even if I cannot bend the will of heaven, I will stir the rivers of hell.

— Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*

Kahlil Gibran once said, "There is a green field between the scholar and the poet: if the scholar crosses it, he becomes wise; if the poet crosses it, he becomes a prophet." I am neither a scholar nor a poet, much less a sage or a prophet. I am merely a child longing to get closer to that green field, piecing together the remnants of this intellectual feast and watching them shine in the sunlight.

The book you now hold, Autonomy, is but one of the countless possible versions that could have been written. It may be a seven or eight out of ten, but it will always remain my firstborn of thought.

Freud had a perspective: "The creative power of the author does not always follow his good intentions. A work always grows and evolves in the way it can, often maintaining a certain independence from the author's wishes and even developing in ways contrary to the author's intentions." This resonates with me, too. Any random twist during the writing process alters the trajectory of the book's development. To me, writing has been an extraordinary journey.

When I was in my twenties, I had a burning desire to write a massive book to prove my brilliance. At the time, I was under the sway of "toxic motivational quotes", believing that all great thinkers published their magnum opus by age 25. Though I was fortunate enough to grasp many of the concepts in this book at that age, it took me 18 years to

bridge the gap between "knowing" and "doing", to fully understand and apply these principles in real life.

Eighteen years ago, as a young returnee to my hometown, newly employed, I was filled with anxiety and confusion about the future, unsure how to navigate the unknown and the uncertain. To ease the pressure, I turned to reading. I started with philosophy and psychology, gradually expanding to other classics. Under the guidance of great thinkers, I learned to know myself, develop myself, realize myself, and transcend myself. Later, because of work, I joined a think tank in a small town, frequently engaging with experts, researching issues, and contemplating solutions.

Gradually, "autonomy" became the core concept through which I interpreted and solved problems. Over time, I developed a personal theory of autonomy, which I call Autonomy. The content revolves around what autonomy is, why autonomy matters, and how to achieve it. This is a practical theory born from practice, aimed at solving problems, expanding horizons, fostering growth, and striving for happiness.

By the time I was in my thirties, I wanted to share this useful theory with young people around me. I envisioned presenting a grand treatise that would command awe. So, I read voraciously, accumulating millions of words of notes, continually adding to the book. I aimed to fill every sentence with brilliant insights, hoping to arm the book to the teeth with dazzling quotes and theories. My desk and folders were piled with materials, yet I couldn't begin writing. Whenever I revised a few chapters, I would feel overwhelmed and suffocated, eventually giving up and starting over. I even considered using platforms like Wiki or Shimo's web-based text system to showcase my breadth of knowledge but still couldn't complete a traditional book. As Heraclitus once said, "Much learning does not teach understanding."

Moreover, the more we know, the more we realize what we don't know. The more we read and experience, the less original we become. As you read more books, you'll realize that your once-proud discoveries had already been known by others, often expressed far better. What you thought were your original ideas had already been written by others. This realization leads to a dilemma: do you continue with borrowed ideas, clumsily mimicking and reproducing the thoughts of others, or do you start from scratch and build your own system? In the hesitation, time passes quickly.

In 2020, at the age of 39, several things happened. Under the pressure of the "ninth-year effect" and the motivation sparked by the High-Temperature Youth Movement, I finally made the decision. Inspired by Laozi's Tao Te Ching, I resolved to make statements without argument, to describe without explaining. Language and writing should be containers for thoughts, not shackles. My book should be a bridge that leads people to the far shore to pluck flowers. The bridge must first be functional, helping people reach the other side. Only then should it be aesthetically pleasing, allowing people to enjoy the journey and have the motivation to continue.

With this clarity, I began writing swiftly, using simple language to sketch the ideas in the readers' minds, leaving space for them to fill in the colors. I quickly completed the companion book "Daily Lessons of Prometheus" and the core of Autonomy in serialized form on my WeChat public account, "Prometheus Unbound", and gave lectures at universities such as Wenzhou-Kean University. The feedback from readers and audiences was positive. Unintentionally, my public speaking abilities improved drastically over the past decade, and whether in lectures or hosting events, I became adept at improvisation, speaking effortlessly and coherently. I suppose this also has something to do with the "unbinding" of my thoughts.

Confucius said, "At forty, I had no doubts." Now in my forties, after the lows of the three-year pandemic and the rise of the AI revolution, I feel more at peace. On the one hand, I've completely let go of the burden of writing, no longer feeling the need to prove my worth through a book. On the other hand, I've rediscovered the joy of writing, relishing the freedom and ease of expression, feeling the thrill of lighthearted creativity. A quote from Maslow captures my feelings well: "I am a discoverer rather than a prover. My greatest joy comes from discovery."

In 2022, based on feedback from editors, I wrote a series of articles called Youth and Autonomy, addressing the real-life concerns of young people today. The core ideas of Autonomy were broken down into modules on time-space management, risk management, emotion management, and more, with plans to revise and publish them. However, in August of that year, the AI revolution erupted, with GenAI tools like Midjourney and ChatGPT bursting onto the scene, shifting my focus toward AIGC.

At the beginning of 2023, the chapters of Autonomy were finally finished, and I should have begun revisions. But the exponential growth of GenAI tools made me acutely aware that "time is running out for humanity," once again diverting my attention. I channeled my complex emotions about AI into a series of articles titled "Autonomy in the GPT Era" on my WeChat public account, and later began actively promoting the establishment of an AIGC industry alliance, delaying the revision process by another six months. It wasn't until August of that year that I pieced together a draft during bits of spare time.

In 2024, I continued my obsession with AI music creation and game development, busy organizing various GenAI and AIGC public outreach events, once again shelving revisions. Fortunately, in April, many friends, led by Yang Zhiping, sent me copies of their newly published books, shocking me out of my complacency. With their talent as inspiration, I finally resolved to finish my manuscript. To push myself, I first reached an agreement with Zhejiang University Press and, before the June deadline, completed the revisions in a rush during two weeks of early mornings, submitting the manuscript.

I hope this book can be published within 2024 because I believe that going forward, all book creation will involve AI, and it will never again be pure. In fact, I tried using AI for assistance during the proofreading stage of this book, but its capabilities in fields where we excel remain quite average. At least in my writing era, it could not handle multidimensional, in-depth discussions of thought, especially on topics like autonomy, which require the lived experiences and emotions of a carbon-based being.

I am confident that in nearly every field discussed in this book, my carbon-based model outperforms silicon-based machines, offering deeper insights and more authentic expression. These are not the results of fuzzy logic or computation, but the pinnacle of billions of years of natural evolution, the natural emergence of complex neural networks in the human brain. Every idea and suggestion in this book is hand-crafted from human wisdom, a tribute to and memory of pure human intelligence in the pre-AI era.

Moreover, I must acknowledge the limitations of my perspective and scope in Autonomy. As a middle-aged, male, returnee, middle-class, civil servant, nonprofit advocate, and think tank worker living in a medium-sized city, I have unique insights

but also obvious blind spots. I hope to see these limitations as a reflection of individuality.

The overarching tone of this book is one I enjoy—heroism, empiricism, and pragmatism. I sincerely invite every reader to embrace heroism, adhere to empiricism and pragmatism, and flexibly combine will, ability, and resources to interpret and solve the challenges encountered in life. Through this, you will find happiness, achieve growth, and extend your influence across time and space, leaving behind a legacy, or even becoming a legacy. In this era of technology racing ahead of institutions and ideologies, I genuinely hope this book provides you with some help and inspiration. I have shared all I know, so I invite you to think independently and draw your conclusions.

As George Bernard Shaw once said, "Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations." I hope that Autonomy can be a beam of light, adding a unique hue to the world. If any of the words in this book can bring a slight change to your life, I will be very pleased.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family. Without your support, I would not have had the time to revise this book. Thanks to all my friends who read Autonomy and provided feedback, including Anti, Nanhai Fen, Wang Zhong, Wang Bozhi, Guo Liying, Lu Lili, Jin Haitong, Zheng Dongyi, and others (names listed in no particular order). Thanks to Ms. Chen Jie and Ms. Zhao Jing from Zhejiang University Press. Without your proactive encouragement, this book would not have been possible in 2024. I also want to thank Suno.ai. The light and delightful music you created accompanied me through every morning and night of revision. Watching the text sing before my eyes, the music dance in my ears, and the thoughts flow in my heart was an incredibly beautiful experience. Thank you!

Ni Kaomeng

June 21, 2024

Wenzhou

AUTONOMY

UNDERSTANDING AND MASTERING AUTONOMY

NI KAOMENG

