How Dawkins Got Pwned

Mencius Moldbug

How Dawkins got pwned (part 1)

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Richard Dawkins recently wrote a book called *The God Delusion* You've probably heard of it.

Professor Dawkins is a great scientist and one of my favorite writers. And I have no quarrel at all with his argument. I was raised as a scientific atheist, and I've never seen the slightest reason to think otherwise. These days I prefer the word "nontheist" — for reasons which will shortly be clear — but there's no substantive difference at all. Except in the context of role-playing games, I have no interest whatsoever in gods, goddesses, angels, devils, dryads, water elementals, or any such presumed metaphysical being.

Nonetheless, it's my sad duty to inform the world that Professor Dawkins has been *pwned*. Perhaps you're over 30 and you're unfamiliar with this curious new word. As La Wik puts it:

> The word "pwn" remains in use as Internet social-culture slang meaning: *to take unauthorized control of someone else or something belonging to someone else by exploiting a vulnerability.*

How could such a learned and wise mind exhibit an exploitable vulnerability? And who — or what — has taken unauthorized control over Professor Dawkins? The aliens? The CIA? The Jews? The mind boggles. As well it should. Patience, dear reader. All will become clear.

Professor Dawkins' explanation of religion, with which I agree completely, is that religion is a memeplex built around a central delusion, the God meme — an entirely unsubstantiated proposition. Religion exists because this memeplex is adaptive. This explanation is both necessary and sufficient. It is also parsimonious, a la Occam's razor. It may not be simple, but it's a heck of a lot simpler than "God."

(I dislike the word "meme" and the complex of terminology that's grown up around it, mainly because (a) the word has a dorky sound, and (b) it means the same thing as "idea." However, in deference to Professor Dawkins and his numerous acolytes, I'll use it for this discussion.)

In Darwinian terms, Professor Dawkins' main point is that the adaptive interests of religion — or of any other memeplex — are not the same as the adaptive interests of its host. As a celibate priest, for example, you are helping Christianity to be fruitful and multiply. It's performing no such service for you.

Biologists have a word for this: parasitism. Probably because he wants to be nice, Professor Dawkins tries not to use the p-word. But he's clearly thinking it.

The God delusion is a parasitic meme because, being alien to reason, it does not serve the interests of the host. Furthermore, some of the memeplexes which include it — or "religions" — include far more pernicious memes, such as suicide bombing, which are lethal both to the host and anyone within its blast

radius. The case would seem to be closed.

But immunology is tricky. After all, if Professor Dawkins is right, anyone who believes in God is most certainly pwned — that is, infected by a parasitic religious memeplex. This category includes some of the smartest people in the world today. Intelligence is certainly no barrier to memetic infection. Worse, there have clearly been periods of civilized history in which *everyone* was infected by this parasite. The things are dangerous, there is no doubt.

Therefore, without disputing Professor Dawkins' Darwinian conclusion, I think it's prudent to step back a little, and attack the problem with a slightly broader and more careful approach.

The God Delusion is what immunologists might call a *specific* immune response. Professor Dawkins notes that religion is alien to the reasoning mind. He notes that it reproduces and evolves. He sees that similar phenomena have caused many problems in the past and continue to do so in the present. He identifies a common feature of these problems, the God meme, and churns out antibodies to it.

This process is not infallible. Suppose, for example, you note that a patient is ill and can't eat. You take a biopsy of his guts and find that they're full of — bacteria! Bacteria are clearly not human. They're a well-known cause of disease. So the obvious problem is that the patient has a bacterial infection, and you prescribe broad-spectrum antibiotics. Meanwhile, the poor fellow is dying of colon cancer, and you're trying to eradicate his intestinal flora.

Biological immune systems make all kinds of mistakes. Presumably the same is true of memetic immunology. After all, what was the Inquisition thinking? They thought of heresy exactly the same way Professor Dawkins thinks of religion: as a sort of mental virus, whose eradication, while unavoidably painful, would bring peace and sanity.

In memetic immunology, it's often very difficult to distinguish parasite from counterparasite. When we see two populations of memes in conflict, we know both cannot be healthy, because a healthy meme is true by definition and the truth cannot conflict with itself. However, we might very well be watching two parasites competing with each other. They will certainly both claim to represent truth, justice and the American way.

So I think it might be worthwhile to attack the question from another angle, using the analogy of a *generalized* immune response. Rather than asking ourselves whether specific traditions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, etc, are parasitic, we can focus on the problem of parasitic memeplexes as a whole.

If Christianity, Judaism, Islam, etc, turn up on this screen, perhaps we'll want to point some T-cells at them. But a generalized approach will also detect any *other* parasitic memeplexes we may be infected with. After all, the God delusion isn't the only delusion in the world.

One way to approach generalized memetic immunology is to design a *generic parasitic memeplex*. Avoiding specific details which may confuse us, and focusing on the combination of adaptive success and parasitic morbidity, we can construct design rules for an optimal memetic parasite. We can evaluate potential threats by looking at how well they fit this template, which should be as nasty as possible.

When dealing with actual biological agents, of course, we can work in biosafety labs. The most dangerous viruses, such as smallpox, Ebola, and the 1918 flu, cannot be safely handled without elaborate, multiply redundant containment systems. Some would argue that they cannot be safely handled at all.

With memes and memeplexes, there's none of this. By designing the memeplex, we effectively release it into the wild. Fortunately, UR has a small and discreet audience, which strikes me as very wise and conscientious. I'm sure none of you will be tempted to abuse this dangerous memetic technology, which in the hands of less scrupulous thinkers could easily become a formula for total world domination. Remember, this is only a test.

So our generic parasitic memeplex will be as virulent as possible. It will be highly contagious, highly morbid, and highly persistent. A really ugly bug. Let's focus on these design aspects separately: contagion, morbidity, and persistence.

A contagious memeplex is one that spreads easily. The template may not have to infect everyone in the world — although that's certainly one option. However, for any really significant morbidity, we'll want massive, lemminglike misdirected collective action. This requires mass infection.

There are three general ways to transmit a memetic parasite: parental transmission, educational transmission, and social transmission. Needless to say, our template should be a champ at all of them.

If your parasite can't be transmitted *parentally*, it's really not much of a parasite. Children learn the basic principles of reality and morality before they are six, and — as the Jesuit proverb goes — anything that can slip in at this age is likely to stick. "Give me the child and I will give you the man." Fortunately, any simple idea, even if it is nonsense, can be transmitted at this age. Unless the template is fundamentally dependent on some meme which children are unlikely to grasp, such as partial differential equations, parental transmission is no problem.

But *educational transmission* — infection of children and young adults by institutions whose ostensible purpose is to instill universal knowledge and ethics — is the mainstay of any successful memetic parasite. Since these same institutions educate future educators, replication can continue indefinitely.

Over multiple generations, educational transmission outcompetes parental transmission. Changes of religion by executive fiat, for example, are common in European history. In the more recent past, the Allied victors eradicated militarist traditions in Germany and Japan through their control of the educational system. Furthermore, by treating the press as an educational institution, we can create a

system of continuing, lifelong reinfection in which parasitic memes are omnipresent. (Of course, it's important to remember that exactly the same techniques can also cure a memetic infection.)

But neither parental nor educational transmission can bootstrap itself from a small initial infection. While most parasitic memes probably originate as mutations of preexisting memes, they can certainly be invented from scratch (unlike genes). And even a mutation has to spread somehow.

Therefore, no memetic parasite is complete without a system for *social transmission*: informal transmission among adults, following existing social networks.

The first step in designing for social transmission is minimizing preexisting immunity. Nazism, for example, would not be an adaptive meme for a 21st-century parasitic memeplex, because so many prospective hosts have strong negative reactions to Nazism, Nazis, swastikas, etc. Any meme which conflicts with its prospective hosts' present perception of reality or morality is socially maladaptive.

The second step in designing for social transmission is to look at the *status structure* of social networks, and construct memes that will flow naturally along the usual network direction: from high status to low status.

That is, our parasite should be *intellectually fashionable.* All the cool people in town should want to get infected. And infection will make them even cooler. They will be the hosts with the most. For example, one common trope in various religious traditions is asceticism: the voluntary renunciation of material comforts. Since this tends to be much easier for those who start out wealthy and comfortable, it's an effective status marker. Any memes that can associate themselves with asceticism gain a clear adaptive advantage.

Our parasite is now optimized for contagion. But is it bad? Is it truly evil and destructive? The most contagious parasitic meme in the world, if all it brings to its hosts and those around them is happiness and prosperity, isn't worth worrying about.

So we need to move on to *morbidity*, which is a fancy medical word meaning "badness." The key to memetic morbidity is that, for a really nasty parasite, morbidity must be essential to its reproductive cycle. Otherwise, because morbidity is after all nasty, it will probably be maladaptive. Our parasite will be outcompeted by a benign mutation of itself — totally defeating the purpose. D'oh.

Most forms of morbidity involve a *political* step in the replication process. In other words, they allow the parasite to obtain informal *power*, which it can use to take over educational institutions, suppress counterparasites and competing parasites, etc, etc. There is no period in the history of any human civilization in which political (including military) power has not been a critical factor in the struggle of ideas. This is not to say that such a level playing field or "marketplace" of memes cannot be created — only that it has not yet been done.

First, a parasitic meme is not even parasitic if it is not *delusional*. It must contain some assertion which is alien to reason, which no sensible person would independently invent. The "God delusion" — a metaphysical construct, like [Russell's teapot](), with no basis in reality — is a perfect example.

How can a delusion be, on its own, adaptive? Very easily. A delusion is a perfect organizing principle for any kind of political movement. By accepting some body of nonsensical doxology, you demonstrate your loyalty to the group. The result is cohesive collective action. As we'll see, most forms of parasitic morbidity involve a political step in the replication cycle.

A frequent strategy, for example, is to present the delusion as recondite and counterintuitive, and the truth as simplistic and wrong. This "emperor's new clothes" strategy is a proven recipe for defeating Occam's razor. Who, for example, really understands the Trinity? But if you don't understand the Trinity, aren't you just stupid? Through internal competition, this counterintuitive delusion generates a revolutionary elite deeply steeped in Trinitology. The harder it is to understand the delusion, the more dedicated your cadre will be.

Another good general strategy for high morbidity is *antinomianism*, the opposition to law. Since the rule of law can be defined in terms of property rights — property is any right that you can own — any meme that opposes property opposes law. It therefore declares continuous and informal transfers of resources to be morally justified. Antinomianism builds political power by providing an easy avenue for punishing enemies and rewarding supporters, all in the service of whatever bogus concept of "justice" our parasite concocts as a replacement for law.

Finally, our parasite will employ a strategy of *politicization*, insisting that everyone in a society be involved in the contest for political power. Since our memetic parasite is already bound to one or more political factions, politicization leaves no one with the option to ignore it, and simply live their lives. Neutrality is not acceptable. All those who are not actively infected, and who do not openly endorse the parasite, are by definition its enemies. And they will be crushed. The safest thing is to play along, and raise your children in the faith — even if you don't really believe, they will.

High contagion and adaptive morbidity will allow our parasite to spread widely and rise to power, where it can continuously propagate itself through educational institutions. But there is still another problem: *persistence*. If our parasite does not resist competitors, or succumbs easily to healthy counterparasites, it won't last long and it won't be much of a threat. It should be as hard as possible for hosts to reject the parasite, whether they are replacing it with a competitor or simply returning to reason.

Our first defense against rejection is mere *euphoria*. It should feel good to be infected. It should improve the host's self-esteem, making them feel like a better, happier person. If they need to make sacrifices for their faith, if they suffer for it, fine. They are doing what's right.

At a certain level, euphoria graduates into full-on *anesthesia*. Anesthetized hosts can endure horrific

suffering, or the moral pain of inflicting suffering on others, in the name of the faith. Did a wolf come into your house and eat your baby? You have been blessed. The wolf is the sacred animal of Rome. Your baby now dwells with the gods of the city. If the wolf comes again, pet him and speak to him sweetly, and at least give him a hamburger or something.

Indiscriminate and total anesthesia constitutes *ovinization*. An ovinized individual never imagines responding to any kind of threat with any kind of defensive action, certainly not violence. To the ovinized, anything bad that happens is either (a) an accident, or (b) the result of some sin or other moral error. The concept of an "enemy" does not exist.

Needless to say, euphoria, anesthesia and ovinization all greatly inhibit the ability of our hosts to react against their parasite and eject it — and its followers — from their lives. But sometimes this is not enough. Humans, after all, are bipedal apes. They evolved from some very truculent ancestors. Even if they are specialized for civilization — a certain degree of genetic ovinization is almost certainly present in populations which have lived in governed societies for many generations — occasional throwbacks are to be expected.

Therefore, diversionary *hysteria* is another essential tactic in our parasite's bag of tricks. Hosts who would otherwise be tempted to notice the morbidities of infection, and attribute them to the parasite itself, must be diverted. Either their defensive energies will be directed either toward other symptoms which are in fact not serious, or they will attribute the real problems to other causes which are not in fact significant.

We can kill two birds with one stone by directing our hysteria toward those who reject the parasite, and identifying their efforts to cure it as the cause of the morbidity. This strategy of *counterimmunity*, in which the infected treat disinfection as if it were contagious — which, of course, it is — has been a staple of memetic parasites throughout the ages.

The goal of a counterimmune strategy — such as the Inquisition — is to eradicate heresy. But this is actually only the simplest approach to counterimmunity. We can get much fancier.

Suppose, for example, our parasite does not try to eradicate counterimmune responses, but in fact tolerates them. However, we make sure the heretical memes are contained and cannot engage in any serious attack on our replicative cycle. That way, we have them where we can see them — under control. How might we accomplish this?

One approach is to maintain a *neutered false opposition*. This gang of tolerated heretics, against whom our wise philosophers speak out at every opportunity, must be unable to establish a replicative cycle of their own.

For example, the tame heretical memeplex may include a meme which is delusional, and which anyone intelligent is obviously resistant to — thus binding to, and disabling, the dangerous countermemes which

would attack our parasite, by blocking the "early adopters" who would otherwise be tempted to consider the heresy. Similarly, it may include unfashionable memes which impair its power of social transmission. And it may be administratively excluded from educational transmission. It is hard to prevent parental transmission, but as we've seen, over time parents will tend to lose the battle against educational institutions, especially if social transmission is also blocked.

An especially effective approach is to treat the heretical memeplex as if it were, in fact, the dominant parasitic meme. Thus, siding with the parasite will be seen as an act of resistance and defiance, a pose which tends to be fashionable. Furthermore, if the delusional strategy is employed, our friendly hosts will be able to identify obvious delusions among the heretics, who will be unfashionable and educationally isolated.

Since parasites mutate, evolve and improve over time, a good choice for a tame heresy may in fact be an old edition of our parasite itself. Normally this would simply be discarded, and not tolerated at all. By definition it is less competitive. However, if we do tolerate it, we can modify it to attract heretics, doubters, and unbelievers of all kinds, keeping them safely neutered. Hosts infected with the latest version of the parasite will treat these stick-in-the-muds as deluded fools who have not yet liberated themselves from these ancient doctrines, and seen the new, brighter light — who, even worse, are working actively to prevent the truth from being born. Clearly, they must be stopped. And so on.

I think at this point we have a pretty good design for a successful memetic parasite. Don't you agree? If not, how do you think the parasite could be improved? (Of course, this sort of "intelligent design" by no means implies that any such beastie was designed by some purposive plan. We are just trying to reverse-engineer the effects of Darwinian selection.)

Now let's compare Professor Dawkins' target, the God delusion, to this ideal parasite.

Forgetting other religions for a moment, Christianity clearly fits the profile. Every one of the strategies observed above has been employed by some Christian sect, some set of believers in the "God delusion," at some point in time.

However, if I may project a little, Professor Dawkins' readers are not concerned about the Anabaptists, the Arians, the Monophysites, the Nestorians, or any such obsolete sect. They are concerned with vintage-2007 American Christian "fundamentalism." If your goal is to solve a problem, the problem must exist in the present tense.

Fundamentalist Christianity — I prefer the term "salvationism," because the belief that only those who are born again in Christ will be saved is essential to almost all "fundamentalist" sects — certainly matches some of the above descriptions.

For example, it is clearly political, and it is clearly using doctrine as an organizing tool. Antinomianism is

a little harder to find — salvationists for the most part are, if anything, big believers in law and order. But depriving women of the right to control their bodies counts to some extent, although this right cannot be transferred and thus only attacks enemies, without benefiting supporters. If this isn't morbidity, I don't know what is.

In the contagion department, however, salvationism is curiously lacking. Compared to other successful memetic parasites of the past — for example, Catholicism before the Reformation — its presence in educational institutions is negligible. In fact, under present law, salvationism is entirely barred from the entire mainstream educational system. At present its great ambition seems to be to sabotage the teaching of Darwinian evolution in primary schools, a goal which it has been generally unsuccessful in. And even if they were to succeed in this, I find it almost entirely impossible to see how it could be of any adaptive value to the salvationist memeplex.

Nor is social transmission of any help, because salvationism is incredibly unfashionable. Quick — how many salvationist celebrities can you name? At the average chic dinner party in Manhattan, how many of the guests are likely to be salvationists? How many salvationists are employed by Vanity Fair, the New Yorker, Random House, Viking or Knopf? And so on.

So, one might argue, the salvationist meme is a threat, it is just a small threat. It needs to be kept in its place, that's all. Sure, the influence of the God delusion has been steadily decreasing for the last four hundred years. But if we take our eye off it, it might come back! I'm certainly not prepared to dismiss this as absolutely inconceivable.

However, there's another candidate we have to consider.

In the first chapter of *The God Delusion*, Professor Dawkins describes himself as "a deeply religious non-believer." He calls his belief system "Einsteinian religion," and waxes poetical as follows:

> Let me sum up Einsteinian religion in one more quotation from Einstein himself: "To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is a something that our mind cannot grasp and whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly and as a feeble reflection, this is religiousness. In this sense I am religious."

It's easy to see that this statement is not exactly the theory of general relativity. In fact, it appears to have no factual content at all. Hm.

What, exactly, is this "Einsteinian religion?" Did Professor Dawkins invent it? Did Einstein? What else do Einsteinians believe in, besides "beauty and sublimity"? Are there other Einsteinians, or need only distinguished scientists apply? If an Einsteinian were to stoop to anything so mundane as voting, who would he or she vote for?

And how does "Einsteinian religion" stack up against our parasite test? We'll consider these fascinating

issues in part 2 of this essay, which will appear next Thursday.

[Please note that I'm on the road and will be more than usually tardy in responding to feedback. However, I will get to it all, hopefully this weekend. I'm especially curious to hear if anyone has any ideas for improving the parasite design.]

How Dawkins got pwned (part 2)

Thursday, October 4, 2007 at 5:00 AM

After a brief period of vagrancy and reflection, mostly in a disconnected state, I got back the other day and actually hesitated for a couple of days to look at the thread on part 1 of this essay, which I had dispatched, with more than my usual rambling and carelessness, from Powell's in Portland. (Mrs. Moldbug and I got on the R1100R and took a motorcycle pilgrimage to Chris McCandless's bus, where we stayed up three nights in a row, just thinking, then did a bunch of acid and emptied our pistols maniacally into the woods. "Smoke dat moose!", we were chanting. "Git dem maggots! Smoke dat moose!")

Anyway. I didn't expect many comments on part 1. It's really only the first third of the essay, and it would be charitable to call it a first draft. (Fortunately the practice known, in what calls itself the real world, as "editing," is considered unethical on a blog — and rightly so.) So I was delighted to see the conversation that ensued. It strikes me as one of the best UR threads so far, and hopefully I don't need to repeat my appreciation for the quality of discussion here.

But I've decided not to respond to these comments individually, at least not yet. There are far too many of them and they are far too perspicacious. Many are answered in part 2, and more will be answered in part 3 (the last). After part 3 I will try and respond to any unanswered comments in a sort of vermiform appendix. For now, I'll confine myself to declaring that, at least here at UR, *pwned* alliterates with *posse* and rhymes with *loaned*.

The commenters on part 1 have certainly done an fine job of figuring out where I'm going with this. If I started with any suspense, it is gone. But please indulge me when I restate the argument in my own words — if only for clarity of further discussion.

My hypothesis is that Professor Dawkins is not just an atheist. He is a *Christian atheist*. Or as I prefer to put it, a *nontheistic Christian*. His "Einsteinian religion" is no more or less than the dominant present-day current of *Christianity itself* — "M.42," as farÃ© so concisely put it.

If we accept this hypothesis, the conclusion that Professor Dawkins has been pwned strikes me as quite incontrovertible. He thinks he is attacking superstition on behalf of the armies of reason. In fact he is attacking M.41 on behalf of the armies of M.42. D'oh!

Of course, I'm sure Professor Dawkins is quite sincere in his beliefs. Hosts always are. However, he has devoted a remarkable level of ratiocinative attention to one phenotypically insignificant meme — the God delusion — in which M.42 conflicts with M.41. My view is that this behavior is best explained by memetic infection, ie, pwnage.

I share Professor Dawkins' preference for the derived M.42 meme, at least at this one spot on the chromosome. But I can't help observing that (a) M.42 and M.41 are both large and intricate memeplexes; (b) it strikes me as by no means obvious that when M.42 and M.41 are compared in toto, M.42 is more reasonable or less morbid than M.41; (c) M.42 (like M.41) includes many other memes which replicate via the same arational indoctrination paths as the God delusion; and (d) while some of the M.42 (and M.41) memes are quite reasonable, others strike me as inadequately examined at best, transparently preposterous at worst.

Ergo, pwning Professor Dawkins is quite adaptive for M.42. It focuses potential hosts on the question of whether M.42 is superior to M.41 on this particular point — as it clearly is. This distracts them from considering the more general and interesting question of whether or not M.42, considered by itself, is stark raving bonkers, and if so constructing a reasonable perspective which is [reassembled from scratch](#) and which can correct both M.42 and M.41.

I would love to see Professor Dawkins rotate his impressive intellectual artillery to this angle. But if I'm right that his neocortex has been devoured and replaced by a foam of M.42 cysts, I wouldn't exactly hold my breath. *[Megaloponera foetens](#)* to the white courtesy phone.

My interpretation makes sense if and only if the following claims are sensible:

1. The concept of "nontheistic Christianity" is coherent.

2. "Einsteinian religion" is best classified as a sect of nontheistic Christianity.

3. This sect is the most successful version of Christianity today.

4. It includes propositions which are inconsistent with reason.

5. These propositions are associated with significant morbidity.

Before considering these claims, let's adjust our terms a little. Precise thinking requires clear, emotionally neutral, and aesthetically elegant terminology. While in general I buy the Dawkinsian model of "memetics," I think it falls short on all these counts.

Let's call a memeplex stable enough to propagate across generations a *tradition*. Not only is this an actual word in the actual English language, it also has the virtue of being ajudgmental. Surely anyone who is not a complete, foaming-at-the-mouth fanatic, of whatever persuasion, can admit that the world contains both good traditions and bad traditions.

An individual infected by such a memeplex is a *host* who *subscribes* to the tradition. If the subject and object must be reversed, the tradition *directs* the host. An institution which propagates some tradition is a *repeater* of that tradition. The name of a tradition is its *label*.

Specific features of traditions can be called *themes*. For example, the *God theme* is a trait of many traditions. The [*Trinity theme*](#) is a trait of many Christian traditions. Traditions can be taxonomically grouped and classified, along the lines of Professor Dawkins' biological analogy, and we can follow the analogy in calling a group of related traditions a *clade*.

Different versions of a single related theme are *variants*. A set of themes transmitted as a unit can be called a *haplotheme* (the analogy is to a [haplotype](#)). Any two themes which cannot simultaneously direct one individual *conflict*. We can also follow biology in referring to *ancestral* and *derived* variants, and borrow other terminology from [cladistics](#). And the set of themes an individual subscribes to is that individual's *kernel*.

Like many simple bacteria, traditions have no reproductive barriers. They can exchange themes across clade lines, or *introgress*. Thus their taxonomy is strictly speaking not a tree, but a lattice, [dag](#), bush, etc. As in biology, however, introgression is often insignificant at the 30,000-foot level, and we can usually get away with ignoring it.

If a theme makes a substantive claim about reality (Hume's "is"), we can call it *mundane*. If it makes a moral statement about right and wrong (Hume's "ought"), we can call it *ethical*. If it makes neither, we can call it *metaphysical*.

If a theme is not justified by reason, we can call it *arational*. Metaphysical themes are arational by definition. Mundane themes are arational if they depend on logical fallacies or violate Ockham's razor. No single ethical theme can be arational, but a set of ethical themes is arational if it ascribes mutually inconsistent ethical values to a single action. While any action can be either right or wrong, no action can be both right and wrong.

If a tradition causes its hosts to make miscalculations that compromise their personal goals, it exhibits *Misesian morbidity*. If it causes its hosts to act in ways that compromise their genes' reproductive interests, it exhibits *Darwinian morbidity*. If subscribing to the tradition is individually advantageous or neutral (defectors are rewarded, or at least unpunished) but collectively harmful, the tradition is *parasitic*. If subscribing is individually disadvantageous but collectively beneficial, the tradition is *altruistic*. If it is both individually and collectively benign, it is *symbiotic*. If it is both individually and collectively harmful, it is *malignant*. Each of these labels can be applied to either Misesian or Darwinian morbidity. A theme that is arational, but does not exhibit either Misesian or Darwinian morbidity, is *trivially morbid*.

Thus, one might translate the part of Professor Dawkins' argument I agree with as the claim that the God theme is arational, because the variant in which "God" interacts with earthly affairs is mundane and fallacious (being unsubstantiated and unfalsifiable), and the variant in which "God" does not interact with earthly affairs is metaphysical. At least in the latter form, I see the God theme as trivially morbid. Professor Dawkins disagrees — he associates various Misesian and Darwinian morbidities, parasitic and

malignant, with various historical variants of the God theme. I see this as the result of confusing theme and haplotheme.

My counterargument is that Professor Dawkins' "Einsteinian religion" is the most successful modern-day tradition in the Christian clade, that it includes many arational themes, and that this tradition, evaluated as a whole, exhibits Misesian parasitic morbidity and Darwinian malignant morbidity. Therefore I believe it needs to be terminated with extreme prejudice. I am relatively unconcerned about other Christian traditions, as I consider them of negligible present-day political power and therefore negligible collective morbidity — though, of course, this situation could always change.

Fortified by this doxology, let's get back to demonstrating pwnage.

Our first essential claim is that the concept of *nontheistic Christianity* is not, as most readers would probably assume at first glance, self-contradictory or meaningless.

This is very easy to see. In the biological analogy, *nontheistic Christianity* is a phrase in the same class as *flightless bird* or *bipedal tetrapod*. The adjective in this phrase is morphological, the noun is taxonomic. There is no contradiction at all.

Professor Dawkins is hoist by his own petard here. Since the biological analogy is his own invention, he cannot possibly object to the application of the modern cladistic method. If we classify traditions according to a single morphological feature, the God theme, we might as well classify both birds and bats as "flying, warm-blooded animals." Perhaps this was good enough for Aristotle, but it's certainly not good enough for Professor Dawkins.

We can watch Eliezer Yudkowsky, who for all his faults is certainly an intelligent young man, falling into this trap here. He implicitly classifies a wide variety of historical traditions as either theistic or nontheistic, just as a naive taxonomist might classify animals as flying or non-flying, bipedal or quadrupedal, etc. In Yudkowsky's defense, this confusion — which is inherent in the usual modern usage of the word *religion* — is so common as to be conventional. But that doesn't make it cogent. Overcome that bias, Eliezer! You can do it!

In my opinion, the only sensible way to classify traditions — as with species — is by ancestral structure. While the existence of introgression and the absence of reproductive isolation makes it technically impossible to construct a precise cladogram of human traditional history, we can certainly produce sensible approximations. Note that perhaps an even better analogy is to languages and linguistic history, in which cladistic classification is commonplace.

So: Professor Dawkins is an atheist. But — as his writing makes plain — atheism is not the only theme in his personal kernel. Professor Dawkins believes in many other things. He labels the tradition to which he subscribes as *Einsteinian religion*. Since no one else has used this label, he is entitled to define

Einsteinian religion — perhaps we can just call it *Einsteinism* — as whatever he wants. And he has.

My observation is that Einsteinism exhibits many [synapomorphies](#) with Christianity. For example, it appears that Professor Dawkins believes in the *fair distribution of goods*, the *futility of violence*, the *universal brotherhood of man*, and the *reification of community*. These might be labeled as the themes of [*Rawlsianism*](#), [*pacifism*](#), *fraternism* and *communalism*.

Following the first two links above will take you to UR discussions of these themes, in which I outline their evolutionary history in the Christian clade and make a case for their morbidity. I have not yet discussed fraternism and communalism, but I'll say a little about them later. If nothing else, they are certainly very easy to find in the Bible.

If Professor Dawkins was not a Christian atheist, but rather a Confucian or Buddhist atheist, or even an Islamic atheist (some clades of Sufism come daringly close to this rara avis), we would not expect to see these obvious synapomorphies with Christianity. Instead, we would expect to see synapomorphies with Confucianism, Buddhism or Islam, and we would have to construct a historical explanation of how these faiths made it to Cambridge. Fortunately we are spared this onerous task.

Nontheistic Christianity, therefore, can describe any tradition in the Christian clade in which the ancestral God theme has been replaced by the derived theme of atheism or agnosticism.

This is no more surprising than the replacement of the ancestral [Trinitarian](#) theme, which was part of all significant Christian traditions for a thousand years, with the derived [Unitarian](#) theme. Every variant of Christianity, by definition, considers itself orthodox. And as such it must question the legitimacy of any other Christian tradition which contains conflicting themes. To a good Trinitarian circa 1807, a Unitarian was simply not a Christian. Today, while most Christian traditions still officially conform to Trinitarianism, few spend a huge amount of time worrying about the Holy Ghost. If more examples are needed, denying the divinity of Jesus is another obvious intermediate form between Christian theism and Christian atheism.

We can also ignore the fact that Professor Dawkins does not classify Einsteinism as a form of Christianity, and nor do any non-Einsteinian Christian traditions. Clearly, accepting a tradition's classification of itself, or of its competitors, is foolish in the extreme. These minor thematic features are best explained adaptively.

For example, it would be maladaptive for Einsteinism to self-classify as Christian. One of the most adaptive features of M.42 is that nontheistic or [secular](#) Christianity can be propagated by American official institutions, which are constitutionally prohibited from endorsing its ancestor and competitor, M.41 or theistic Christianity. Considering as this set includes the most influential repeater network in the world, the US educational system, it's hard to see what could justify abandoning such a replicative advantage.

It would also be maladaptive for theistic Christianity to classify nontheistic Christianity as Christian. M.41 deploys the unchristian nature of its enemy, the dreaded "secular humanism," as a rallying point for its dwindling band of followers. If Einsteinian religion was Christian, M.41 would have to define its (increasingly ineffective) counterattack not as a defense of faith, but as a mere theological spat. Once this may have had some resonance, but in a world where God Himself is under fire, it's hard to excite anyone over such sectarian minutiae.

Therefore, I conclude that claim 1 is satisfied: nontheistic Christianity is a sensible concept.

As for claim 2, I've already described some of the links between Einsteinism and Christianity. Let's sharpen this claim, however, by proposing a hypothetical chain of events that outlines the exact historical connection.

My belief is that Professor Dawkins is not just a Christian atheist. He is a *Protestant atheist*. And he is not just a Protestant atheist. He is a *Calvinist atheist*. And he is not just a Calvinist atheist. He is an *Anglo-Calvinist atheist*. In other words, he can be also be described as a *Puritan atheist*, a *Dissenter atheist*, a *Nonconformist atheist*, an *Evangelical atheist*, etc, etc.

This cladistic taxonomy traces Professor Dawkins' intellectual ancestry back about 400 years, to the era of the English Civil War. Except of course for the atheism theme, Professor Dawkins' kernel is a remarkable match for the [Ranter](#), [Leveller](#), [Digger](#), [Quaker](#), [Fifth Monarchist](#), or any of the more extreme [English Dissenter](#) traditions that flourished during the [Cromwellian interregnum](#).

Frankly, these dudes were freaks. Maniacal fanatics. Any mainstream English thinker of the 17th, 18th or 19th century, informed that this tradition (or its modern descendant) is now the planet's dominant Christian denomination, would regard this as a sign of imminent apocalypse. If you're sure they're wrong, you're more sure than me.

Fortunately, Cromwell himself was comparatively moderate. The extreme ultra-Puritan sects never got a solid lock on power under the Protectorate. Even more fortunately, Cromwell got old and died, and Cromwellism died with him. Lawful government was restored to Great Britain, as was the Church of England, and Dissenters became a marginal fringe again. And frankly, a damned good riddance it was.

However, you can't keep a good parasite down. A community of Puritans fled to America and founded the theocratic colonies of New England. After its military victories in the American Rebellion and the War of Secession, American Puritanism was well on the way to world domination. Its victories in World War I, World War II, and the Cold War confirmed its global hegemony. All legitimate mainstream thought on Earth today is descended from the American Puritans, and through them the English Dissenters.

Of course, the tradition evolved over time. Its theology took significant steps toward modern secularism in the form of Unitarianism, which deleted the Trinity and other points of Calvinist doctrine, and

especially under Transcendentalism, which elided the nasty idea of hell and declared that God loves everyone. Many of Professor Dawkins' reveries about Einsteinian pantheistic natural grandeur are reminiscent of Emerson, who was trained as a Unitarian minister. During and after the War of Secession, New England Christianity established a cozy relationship with the Federal government, which it has continued to the present day, under labels such as *liberalism* and *progressivism.*

Two new histories of this process, though they are written by "conservatives" and thus become hopelessly confused after World War II, are David Gelernter's Americanism and George McKenna's The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism. (I've only just started the latter, but so far I find it far superior, and I say this though I love Gelernter to death.) The same phenomenon was ably defined by Murray Rothbard as postmillennial pietism. For a snapshot of this terrifying militarist theocracy in action around WWI, try Richard Gamble's The War for Righteousness. (Most people probably don't know that the original noun which adjoined the adjective *progressive* was "Christianity.") For an especially unusual M.41-flavored look at American Puritanism replicating in its favorite niche — government schools — check out R.J. Rushdoony's Messianic Character of American Education. And for a primary-source view of this tradition at the last point in history at which it had the humility to classify itself as mere religion, rather than absolute righteousness and truth, see one of my favorite examples, this Time Magazine article from 1942 — written in the lifetime, as they used to say, of those now living. Professor Dawkins would certainly qualify as a "super-protestant" by its definition.

Of course, Professor Dawkins is not American, but English. Sharing a language and culture, however, American Puritanism (and the broader clade of American mainline Protestantism) and the English Dissenters evolved largely as a single community. For example, in the War of Secession, Britain's Anglican aristocracy tended to support the Confederates, and its Evangelical churchmen the Union. As American Puritanism won military victories and grew in political power, its British counterparts advanced as well. Everyone loves a strong horse.

After World War II, American influence ensured that the entire country was more or less surrendered to the Labour Party — the political organ of the Nonconformist tradition. The result is well described in Peter Hitchens' uber-reactionary, but quite cogent, Abolition of Britain, or somewhat more apolitically in Theodore Dalrymple's Life at the Bottom. New Labour is more or less a Cromwellian restoration, and one can only hope that its long-awaited comeuppance will be enlivened by the hanging of a corpse or two.

Professor Dawkins himself was raised as a high-church Anglican, an animal now essentially extinct on Planet Three. The present Archbishop of Canterbury is so low-church, it's surprising he can preach anywhere but an underground parking garage. If he were any lower-church, he'd be in either Hell or China. And as of late, the so-called Tories have undergone the same degrading humiliation. In the UK, any significant resistance to "super-protestantism" is now a footnote of history. The country's descent into sheer ecstatic barbarism, as long foretold by critics of the Nonconformist ascendancy, is now at hand.

(It's worth noting that before 1945, anti-Americanism in Europe was essentially a right-wing tradition, primarily opposed to Yankee millennialist democratism. As I have written, postwar anti-Americanism is an entirely different animal, which might be more accurately described as "ultra-Americanism." It is a consequence of the projection of American power, specifically of the New Deal, which represented the culminating triumph of the American progressive tradition, into a conquered Europe. These days, Europe has almost the same relationship to the US as the US, in the days when it was the refuge of Dissenter mania, bore to the UK.)

Moving briefly to the Continent, we encounter the strange phenomenon of the so-called "Enlightenment." Of course, everyone is enlightened by their own lights, so this word tells us nothing. In my view, the "Enlightenment" and the similarly self-congratulatory "Reformation" are best understood as a continuum. But the former is notable because it may constitute the basal synapomorphy of nontheistic Christianity. Briefly, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes created a niche in France where it was more adaptive to be an unbeliever than a Protestant. The result was the rise of the philosophes, and eventually the terrifying Rousseauvian cult of Reason, which should have been enough to make everyone swear off atheism forever.

Surprisingly, it wasn't. And there is no better demonstration of the ties between the English Dissenters and the French Jacobins, and thus of the connection between Puritanism and atheism, than figures such as Rev. Richard Price, whose pro-Jacobin sermon, Discourse on the Love of our Country, was so memorably ass-raped by Burke in his Reflections.

If we compare Rev. Price's sentiments with those of the Rev. Harvey Cox, a modern exponent of secular theology — see this essay, written exactly two centuries after the *Discourse* — the family resemblance is unmistakable. I can't think of a single point on which either of these reverends could raise their voice to the other. Puritanism and secularism are simply the same thing. The existence of such modern sects as Unitarian Universalism demonstrates that there are zero thematic conflicts between the two. In UUism, the God theme is reduced to such irrelevance that congregants in the same church can simply agree to disagree on it. But you certainly won't find them disagreeing on the proposition that, say, all men are brothers.

Of course I've discussed this phenomenon before on UR. The label I prefer for the modern version of the Puritan tradition — Professor Dawkins' Einsteinism — is Universalism. I hope I'm not boring people by continually harping on the subject, but I'd like to take a few paragraphs to once again justify this terminology.

One criticism of "Universalism" is that this label is not used by any present-day Christian denomination to identify itself. I regard this as a virtue, not a vice. First, one of the main themes of Universalism is that it does not self-classify as a Christian sect. Second, one notes that most Christian sects in the past have wound up attached to labels which were originally composed by their enemies. This stands to reason.

After all, if these traditions are parasitic, one can expect them to be a little bit deceptive.

Another criticism of the label "Universalism" is that the word is derived from — and easily confused with — the simple English word *universalism*. Earlier, I tested some artificial labels which did not have this limitation, but after a while they struck me as dorky. (However, they mean the same thing and you can use them if you like — if you don't mind sounding dorky.) Suffice it to say that although Methodists are indeed often methodical, the Jurassic strata are indeed exposed in the Jura, etc, etc, the fact that most Universalists can indeed be described as universalist does not render these labels in any way, shape, or form equivalent or synonymous.

As a term of technical theology, *universalism* also has a specific, although now much-disused, meaning: the belief that everyone is saved, and no one will go to Hell. Fortunately, Universalists in my sense of the word are certainly *universalists* in this sense — ie, they don't believe in Hell, and they do believe that every human is essentially good. Michael S. wrote very eloquently about this correspondence here.

Of course, if what you really mean is *universalist* in either English sense above, rather than Universalist as in a believer in Universalism the post-Puritan tradition, I can't ask you to mean something else. But here at UR the former is a confusing term, and if you feel the need to use it, please at least consider searching for a synonym. Above all, if you mean Universalism with a capital U, please say Universalism with a capital U. You can deploy inverted commas, as in "Universalism," if you have any residual skepticism.

How do we relate Einsteinism to Universalism? One easy approach is to look at Einstein himself. Einstein was an assimilated, non-observant Jew with a Reform background, Reform Judaism being essentially a Jewish version of Protestantism. (In Israel, Reform is not really considered Jewish at all.) A good summary of Einstein's beliefs is here. Note his affection for Quakerism, the Cromwellian uber-Puritan sect *par excellence.* I have no qualms at all about describing Einstein as a Universalist.

It's also amusing to read Einstein's 1939 time-capsule message to 6939, whose entire text is:

> Our time is rich in inventive minds, the inventions of which could facilitate our lives considerably. We are crossing the seas by power and utilize power also in order to relieve humanity from all tiring muscular work. We have learned to fly and we are able to send messages and news without any difficulty over the entire world through electric waves.

> However, the production and distribution of commodities is entirely unorganized so that everybody must live in fear of being eliminated from the economic cycle, in this way suffering for the want of everything.

> Furthermore, people living in different countries kill each other at irregular time intervals, so that also for this reason anyone who thinks about the future must live in fear and terror. This is due to the fact that the intelligence and character of the masses are incomparably lower than the

intelligence and character of the few who produce something valuable for the community.

I trust that posterity will read these statements with a feeling of proud and justified superiority.

Note the confession of faith in economic central planning, a common Progressive Era belief. I feel quite confident that the residents of 6959, whomever they may be, will read that one with a feeling of proud and justified superiority. If not quite in the way Einstein intended.

If you are a Universalist (I was certainly raised as a Universalist, so I sympathize), and you are having trouble believing in the existence of this tradition, its Christian heritage, or its involvement with the American political system, please allow me to recommend some books. Try George Packer's [Blood of the Liberals](), Anthony Lukas's [Common Ground](), Richard Ellis's [Dark Side of the Left](), Arthur Lipow's [Authoritarian Socialism in America](), Steven Pinker's [The Blank Slate](), and Gordon Wood's [Radicalism of the American Revolution](). What all these works have in common is that they were written by orthodox Universalists, not "conservatives," and as such they will not set off the massively hypertrophied M.41 alarm that comes with your M.42 infection. The result will be a rather weird and eclectic picture of American Universalist history, with many gigantic lacunae, but it ought to at least get you started.

Let me step back and take one last look at this entire phenomenon. Again, I am arguing that the Enlightenment is not orthogonal to the Reformation, that secularism is best considered as a form of Protestantism. Moreover — though this is a separate discussion — the modern battle between "left" and "right" displays clear continuity with the Protestant-Catholic conflict. As an extremely rough approximation, when we factor out the God theme, what we see is that leftism is Protestantism and rightism is Catholicism.

One of the reasons this generalization is so rough — it's easy to find counterexamples, such as modern Northern Ireland, in which Catholics are clearly "left" and Protestants are "right" — is that Catholicism and Protestantism are themselves extremely vague terms. [Ultramontanism]() and [liberation theology]() are both nominally Catholic, although I would certainly describe the latter as a Protestantizing "low-church" intrusion. [Jansenism]() is another historical example of Protestantized Catholicism, which competed with the *philosophes* for the niche left open by the expulsion of the Huguenots. And the [adaptive radiation]() of the Protestant clade needs no comment. [Homoplasies]() and [introgressions]() are legion in this gigantic bag of worms.

One way to produce a better generalization is to see this same conflict as not a competition between two clades, but between two adaptive niches. We can describe these niches very abstractly as *[pietist]()* and *[liturgist]()*. Pietist traditions in Christianity are abstract, ascetic, monastic, philosophical, and democratic. Liturgist traditions are ritualist, charismatic, materialistic, doctrinal, and hierarchical. Strains of Christianity going back well before the Reformation can be described as occupying the pietist or liturgist niche, often shifting between them.

With this adaptive taxonomy, atheism, secularism, laicism, etc, appear as extreme variants of pietism. The urge to tear down all ritual, to worship Reason and Man rather than Church and God, to whitewash the frescoes and melt down the candlesticks, is everpresent in pietism. Professor Dawkins' entire shtick is perfectly consistent with the pietist niche. No wonder it's so successful.

Whereas the "fundamentalist" American born-again Christians, whom Professor Dawkins so loathes and so longs to outlaw — as if they weren't already quite thoroughly expelled from the official educational system, not to mention utterly eradicated in Europe — have developed a faith that, though its cladistic origins are thoroughly Protestant, is clearly settling in to the liturgist niche.

Indeed, Professor Dawkins seems to feel exactly the same way about these awful people (I prefer to call them *salvationists*, because their core belief is in salvation through faith) that his Dissenter forebears felt about those scheming Papists. For literally centuries, fear of the Romish menace animated Protestant faithful on both sides of the pond. The fact that any serious possibility of an Anglo-Catholic restoration ended in [1746](#) was hardly a check on this rich, ever-flowing wellspring of demagogic paranoia.

The [Kulturkampf](#) in Germany and the [Dreyfus affair](#) in France (note that just because the anti-Dreyfusards were wrong about Dreyfus, doesn't mean they were wrong about everything) are other, more recent outbreaks of the liturgist-pietist war — which Professor Dawkins seems so eager to resurrect. Essentially, Professor Dawkins and his fellow [New Atheists](#) have planted the seed of a political movement which might well be described as neo-[anticlericalism](#). I'd like to think that if they took a closer look at the [past fruits of this particular vegetable](#), they might think twice and decide to backpedal with a quick dose of Roundup.

I believe that at this point I have adequately demonstrated claim 2. If you are not convinced, I really have no idea what I could say to convince you further.

As for claim 3 — the claim that Universalism is the most successful Christian tradition today — this strikes me as simply obvious.

Some confusion may be afforded by the definition of *success*, by which I mean of course Darwinian, that is, *reproductive* success. The fact that the most influential repeaters of the Western world, the universities, state schools and the official press, are by any standards Universalist organs, is quite sufficient to demonstrate claim 3. It's also worth nothing that Universalism is far, far more fashionable — that is, simply *cooler* — than any of its competitors. To find social situations in which it's a faux pas to express Universalist sentiments, you have to dig very deep on the fashion scale, certainly well into Wal-Mart or yobbo territory (in the US and Britain respectively). The converse is not exactly the case.

Explaining that George W. Bush, who is at least nominally a salvationist (though the veneer is pretty thin and pretty transparent, I have to say), is president of the most powerful country on Earth, is not going to convince me that your anti-salvationist fears are justified. First, you might want to take a look at the

actual power of the US President, and the achievements of a far more dedicated, powerful and popular salvationist — Ronald Reagan — in rolling back Universalism or promoting salvationism. Does the word "nada" mean anything to you?

Second, the reason the US has a president who is at least nominally salvationist is simply that the number of diehard salvationists and the number of fanatical Universalists in the US is roughly equal. Considering the fact that the latter control essentially all institutions by which traditions are installed in the young — not to mention the fact that Universalists are importing new voters like it was going out of style — we can expect the balance of power to shift toward Universalism. Which is pretty much what it's been doing for about the last 150 years.

Where, for instance, is [Anita Bryant](#) today? What mainstream Republican even dares to oppose "affirmative action"? Where are even the pro-lifers, for God's sake? You couldn't get 5% of the vote in the US now for the bedrock shibboleths of the 1970s' salvationist reaction.

I am certainly not a salvationist. Au contraire — I am a hardcore, deep-fried atheist. And my connection with Middle-American culture is not much stronger than that of [Pauline Kael](#), who famously didn't know anyone who voted for Nixon. I would certainly not enjoy living in an America which was dominated by salvationists, if we define dominance as the sort of power Universalism enjoys today.

But this possibility strikes me as remote to the point of absurdity. And quite frankly, I refuse to let myself be led around by the nose by kneejerk reactions of fear and hate. Selah. If you are not convinced on claim 3, again, there is little more I can say. Perhaps you should try washing your eyes out with a little soapy water.

This is already way too long, and it's 5 in the morning. I will discuss claims 4 and 5 in part 3, due out next Thursday. I will also try to integrate parts 1 and 2, whose connection seems to have grown a little loose. Again, please feel free to post any comments you have below, but be warned that I will continue my pattern of shameful commentary procrastination until part 3 is out and the essay is complete. However, I have not yet written part 3, and the comments will surely help me do so — as the comments on part 1 helped with part 2. A maze of twisty little numbers, all alike...

(Update: I corrected an embarrassing error in the above. Of course, the anti-Dreyfusards were wrong about Dreyfus, not right. Thanks to the commenter who pointed this out.)

How Dawkins got pwned (part 3)

Thursday, October 11, 2007 at 2:53 AM

(See part 1 and part 2, and perhaps 2.5. *Chomei at Toyama* also may help put you in the right mood for this big downer of a post.)

This week I'd like to discuss some morbidity issues around Universalism.

To review: having made a case that there is such a thing as Universalism, that it is a nontheistic Christian tradition, and that the distinction between theistic and nontheistic traditions is not terribly significant (see also Eric Hoffer, who said much the same thing in The True Believer), it seems reasonable to take a fresh look at the effect of Universalism on present-day society, and to decide in which ways its effects can be described as positive or negative.

We should certainly expect to find positive effects of Universalism. If nothing else, any decent memetic parasite has the trivial positive effect of interfering with, undercutting, and generally destroying any potential competitors. For example, one cannot simultaneously be an Aztec and a Catholic. (Or at least not a good Aztec and a good Catholic.)

G.K. Chesterton had a handle on the trivial positive effect when he noted that when people try to believe in nothing, they often wind up believing in anything. Universalists think they believe in nothing. In reality they believe in Universalism. And this has the trivial positive effect of keeping them from worshiping anything else, such as Baal, Hitler, or Manchester United. Like clean water, fresh air, or a good selection of ethnic restaurants, the trivial positive effect is easy to forget until you find yourself without it.

There are probably other positive effects of Universalism. And we should probably note them when we stumble over them. If only to be fair. However, hiding its light under a bushel is not exactly Universalism's style. Why would it be? So let's accentuate the negative.

In describing the negative effects of Universalism, we're looking for three basic criteria. First, we want to show that the theme is *arational*, that is, alien to reason. Second, we want to show that it is *adaptive*, ie, that it helps Universalism (and itself) propagate. Third, we want to show that it is *morbid*, ie, that it makes bad stuff happen.

"Morbidity" just means "badness." Badness is always in the eye of the beholder. However, an easy way to escape this problem of Hume's ought is to use the standards of Universalism itself. This gets a little tricky when Universalism contradicts itself, but we'll deal. Recall also that, by the standards of Universalism itself, any arationality is trivially morbid. But I'm afraid we may turn up some less trivial

morbidities.

If we find no arational, adaptive morbid themes, we can conclude that Universalism is not a parasitic tradition at all. It is actually a symbiotic tradition. I don't think there are any historical examples of a perfectly symbiotic tradition, but perhaps Universalism is simply the first. (It certainly claims to be the first.)

We'd also like to understand the *ancestry* of these themes. As several commenters pointed out, explaining (for example) that some theme originated in 17th-century England, among some group of people now generally acknowledged as [major wackjobs](), does not show that it's arational or morbid. But it may help us understand why the theme is so successful. And it often helps to start with ancestry, because it creates a nice narrative flow.

Let's start with what might well be Universalism's central belief, the principle of *fraternism*. *Fraternism* is the belief that all ~~men~~ men and women are ~~created~~ born equal.

As my jocular overstrikes indicate, the ancestry of fraternism ain't exactly no [Voynich manuscript](). Universalism is a generally [pietist]() strain of Protestant Christianity. Pietism deemphasizes ritual, authority, and God, in favor of devotion, equality, and Man. Universalism could be summarized easily as the worship of humanity, and indeed the New Testament is positively strewn with fraternist doxology. I'll go with Occam on this one.

From a theological perspective, there's an easy way to see why all men and women are born equal. It's because they all have souls, and a soul is a soul. There is no such thing as a big soul, a little soul, a yellow soul, a green soul, or a white soul. In fact, to a modern Universalist, there is not even such a thing as a bad soul. All dogs go to Heaven, and all souls are good. (If there's anyone we have to thank for this one, it's [Emerson]().) If a person does bad things, it is not that his or her soul is bad but that it is in some way wounded, untaught or misguided.

Of course Universalism does not use the word *soul*. Instead it deploys the word *human*.

This word *human*, in Universalism, is what I call a *cult word*. Its emotional associations are so strong that it's simply impossible to reason around. *God* is of course a cult word to a theist (and, in its own way, to an atheist — which is why I prefer "nontheist").

If I was writing Professor Dawkins' book, and I actually wanted to convince believers rather than just whipping the choir into a mouth-foaming orgy of hate, I might start by changing the word. One might say: assuming that *God* is the same thing as *Manitou*, does *Manitou* exist? If your reader is unwilling to accept a mere change of labels, he or she is beyond reason. Otherwise, the discussion has freed itself from unproductive emotional reflexes.

Similarly, we can avoid the word *human* by deploying the precise Linnean term *[hominid]()*. Or it should be

precise, anyway. The paleontologists seem to change its meaning [every five minutes](#). As per La Wik, the current proper term for "bipedal ape" is *hominan* — which gets less than 1000 Google hits. People! Are you *trying* to confuse us? Until you get your story straight, I'll stick with *hominid* as anything in genus [Homo](#).

If the fossil record is to be believed (who knows — maybe all those bones date to 4004 BC, when *Manitou* instantiated the universe), the past contained quite a few types of hominid whose like is no longer to be found. Which I have to say is a pity. Perhaps they would have made good pets. However, we can refer to the set of hominids now living on Planet Three as *neohominids*.

A *human* is a neohominid with a soul. But since all neohominids have souls, the qualification is redundant. So we can restate Universalist fraternism: *all neohominids are born equal.*

Now, let's evaluate this proposition. First, we need to describe whether it is factual, ethical, or metaphysical. Is it a description of reality? Does it ascribe moral valence to some action? Or is it just a sticky lump of linguistic ambergris?

I think most Universalists consider fraternism factual. Some might say it's also ethical, but I think it's more accurate to say that Universalists consider it unethical to act on or propagate afraternism (disbelief in fraternism). If fraternism is true, afraternism is false, and since it is unethical to act on or propagate a lie, the factual case covers this.

So fraternism is a factual claim. Next we need to consider what this sentence is actually saying. We get *neohominids*, we get *born*, but what about this word *equal*?

An alien might well assume it meant *identical*. So for example, all black 2007 Honda Civic DXes are created equal. There may be some minor assembly differences, but we would not expect these differences to matter, at least to whoever is buying the vehicle, and we would not expect to see any detectable patterns of difference, except of course for option package, etc. And neohominids don't have option packages — though it would certainly be cool if they did.

However, we notice various differences between newborn neohominids, such as the shape of the nose, the texture of the hair, the color of the poop, etc, etc. So *identical* is not an option. We are left with the conclusion that congenital differences between neohominids are in some sense *unimportant*.

For example, perhaps these differences do not affect the neohominid's ability to succeed at various tasks of economic significance. While this was not true in the past, in the world of 2007 most of a neohominid's economic productivity is the result of its central nervous system. Of course, the CNS of a newborn neohominid is not only unproductive, but downright annoying. What we mean is obviously its potential for development. And we can also disregard diseased or otherwise malformed individuals.

So, without I think much loss of information, we can state fraternism as the proposition that *all healthy*

neohominids are born with equal potential for neurological development. Is this proposition rational, or arational?

Whichever it is, Professor Dawkins certainly buys it. He writes (p. 266, *TGD*):

> [Thomas Henry Huxley](), by the standards of his times, was an enlightened and liberal progressive. But his times were not ours, and in 1871 he wrote the following:
>
>> No rational man, cognizant of the facts, believes that the average negro is the equal, still less the superior, of the white man. And if this be true, it is simply incredible that, when all his disabilities are removed, and our prognathous relative has a fair field and no favor, as well as no oppressor, he will be able to compete successfully with his bigger-brained and smaller-jawed rival, in a contest which is to be carried out by thoughts and not by bites. The highest places in the hierarchy of civilization will assuredly not be within the reach of our dusky cousins.
>
> It is a commonplace that good historians don't judge statements from past times by the standards of their own... Had Huxley... been born and educated in our time, [he] would have been the first to cringe with us at [his] Victorian sentiments and unctuous tone. I quote them only to illustrate how the *Zeitgeist* moves on.

What, exactly, is this *Zeitgeist* thing? Is it anything like *Manitou*? We'll return to this fascinating question.

In any case, had Professor Huxley been born and educated in North Korea, he would have been the first to praise the Dear Leader. Had he been born and educated in 4th-century Byzantium, he would have been the first to perform the proskynesis before the Emperor Constantine. Had my aunt had balls, she'd be my uncle.

And had Professor Huxley *himself* been extracted from 1871 — perhaps the *Zeitgeist* has some kind of supplemental time-travel feature — he might want to know *why* Professor Dawkins disagrees so confidently — so, dare I say, *unctuously* — with him. This arrogant, bewhiskered troglodyte, still damp with the ichor of the twelfth dimension, might even dare to demand some actual *evidence*.

Obviously, it would be easy for us to satisfy Professor Huxley. Once he saw that one out of five Americans drives a Haitian car, that the last two winners of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry hailed from Papua New Guinea, and that Japan has trouble exporting anything it can trade for Mozambican semiconductors, I'm sure he'd sing a different tune. As Thomas Friedman once put it, back when he had [something to say](), "a Swiss soldier stole my Syrian watch."

In all seriousness, what is the evidence for fraternism? Why, exactly, does Professor Dawkins believe that all neohominids are born with identical potential for neurological development? He doesn't say. Perhaps he thinks it's obvious.

Perhaps, if he's anything like Cosma Shalizi (and [Professor Shalizi](#) is, if anything, even smarter than Professor Dawkins), he believes that there is [no convincing evidence](#) that all neohominids are *not* born with identical potential for neurological development. Similarly, another very smart person, [Aaron Swartz](#), sees [no convincing evidence](#) that neohominid males and females are *not* neurologically identical.

Of course, Professor Dawkins has no convincing evidence that *Manitou* does *not* exist. Now isn't this fascinating? Don't you just love these double negatives?

What we have here is a factual proposition which has swept to dominance not through the presentation of any evidence, but by the simple trick of *reassigning the burden of proof* to rest solely on those who doubt it. It is not the fraternists who have to demonstrate that fraternism is true. It is the afraternists who have to demonstrate that it's false. D'oh!

If I were to claim that the neohominid male liver is functionally indistinguishable from the neohominid female liver — that there is no sexual dimorphism in the neohominid liver — I'd expect someone to ask me why I was justified in making this claim. I would not expect them to accept the response that I see no convincing evidence that my claim is untrue. And this is despite the fact that the liver is not directly involved in the neohominid reproductive cycle. When we replace *liver* with *brain*, we have a considerably longer row to hoe. Yet somehow, the *Zeitgeist* shows up and hoes it overnight. If only it would do the same for my laundry.

If you're actually interested in a positive empirical case for afraternism, let me recommend [Thompson & Gray 2004](#). Bob Williams has also put together a good [summary](#). And it's worth noting that afraternism is [Steven Pinker's dangerous idea](#). Michael Hart's [Understanding Human History](#) has to be the worst job of book design in human history, and my general reaction is that Hart understands neohominids a heck of a lot better than he understands history. However, all the cool kids are reading it.

But my concern is not empirical. It is philosophical and historical. What I'm interested in is how and why it came to be the case that fraternism is assumed true until proven false, and afraternism is assumed false until proven true.

One simple answer is that, since we are assuming Universalist ethics, fraternism is the ideal state of the world. My ethics are basically Universalist, and if I had a blue button I could push to institute fraternism — regardless of the actual present state of reality — I'd push it, and I'd feel good about pushing it. If I had an opposite red button, I wouldn't push it, and if I accidentally pushed it anyway I would feel *really, really bad*.

Thus we can say that fraternism is *optimistic* and afraternism is *pessimistic*. But is it rational to assert that optimistic propositions should be assumed true until proven false, and pessimistic propositions should be assumed false until proven true? Not in the slightest. We are back at square one.

One could also suggest a technical explanation, which might go like this: since there is no reproductive isolation between any two neohominid populations, we should expect these populations to be genetically homogeneous. Anyone who wants to make a case for any kind of genetic inhomogeneity, therefore, should have to make it. Perhaps Lewontin's fallacy could be drug into the picture as well, just for color.

However, as we can see by outwardly visible traits such as nose shape, hair texture, etc, the antecedent is false. It's possible that the disparities in visible traits are the result of genetic drift. It's also possible that they're the result of natural selection. But it doesn't matter which, because any evolutionary process that can vary a visible feature can vary an invisible one. (We've recently learned that neohominid populations show substantial evidence of recent selection — much more recent than the divergence of continental gene pools. But even before we knew this, we had no biological reason to assign fraternism the benefit of the doubt.)

Clearly, fraternism did not get the benefit of the doubt in 1871. So at some point it must have changed, n'est ce pas? How, when, and why?

Perhaps Charles Francis Adams Jr. can enlighten us on the subject. As the great-grandson and grandson of Federalist and Whig Presidents, son of and aide to one of the North's leading abolitionist statesmen, and a Union general himself, one might expect he had some opinions on the matter. And one would be right. From a 1913 speech:

> Beyond all this, and coming still under the head of individual theories, was the doctrine enunciated by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence,--the doctrine that all men were created equal,--meaning, of course, equal before the law. But the theorist and humanitarian of the North, accepting the fundamental principle laid down in the Declaration, gave to it a far wider application than had been intended by its authors,--a breadth of application it would not bear. Such science as he had being of scriptural origin, he interpreted the word "equal" as signifying equal in the possibilities of their attributes,--physical, moral, intellectual; and in so doing, he of course ignored the first principles of ethnology. It was, I now realize, a somewhat wild-eyed school of philosophy, that of which I myself was a youthful disciple.

> [...]

> So far, then, as the institution of slavery is concerned, in its relations to ownership and property in those of the human species,--I have seen no reason whatever to revise or in any way to alter the theories and principles I entertained in 1853, and in the maintenance of which I subsequently bore arms between 1861 and 1865. Economically, socially, and from the point of view of abstract political justice, I hold that the institution of slavery, as it existed in this country prior to the year 1865, was in no respect either desirable or justifiable. That it had its good and even its elevating side, so far at least as the African is concerned, I am not here to deny. On the contrary, I see and recognize those features of the institution far more clearly now than I should have said would have been possible in

1853. That the institution in itself, under conditions then existing, tended to the elevation of the less advanced race, I frankly admit I did not then think. On the other hand, that it exercised a most pernicious influence upon those of the more advanced race, and especially upon that large majority of the more advanced race who were not themselves owners of slaves,--of that I have become with time ever more and more satisfied. The noticeable feature, however, so far as I individually am concerned, has been the entire change of view as respects certain of the fundamental propositions at the base of our whole American political and social edifice brought about by a more careful and intelligent ethnological study. I refer to the political equality of man, and to that race absorption to which I have alluded,--that belief that any foreign element introduced into the American social system and body politic would speedily be absorbed therein, and in a brief space thoroughly assimilated. In this all-important respect I do not hesitate to say we theorists and abstractionists of the North, throughout that long anti-slavery discussion which ended with the 1861 clash of arms, were thoroughly wrong. In utter disregard of fundamental, scientific facts, we theoretically believed that all men--no matter what might be the color of their skin, or the texture of their hair--were, if placed under exactly similar conditions, in essentials the same. In other words, we indulged in the curious and, as is now admitted, utterly erroneous theory that the African was, so to speak, an Anglo-Saxon, or, if you will, a Yankee "who had never had a chance,"--a fellow-man who was guilty, as we chose to express it, of a skin not colored like our own. In other words, though carved in ebony, he also was in the image of God.

Apparently the *Zeitgeist* doesn't just work in one direction. What is this *Zeitgeist*, anyway? Here is Professor Dawkins' definition:

In any society there exists a somewhat mysterious consensus, which changes over the decades, and for which it is not pretentious to use the German loan-word *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the times).

If we adopt a slightly more literal translation, we could call our mysterious phenomenon the *Spirit of Time*. And if we ignore the even more mysterious backward lurch from 1871 to 1913, and simply accept Professor Dawkins' interpretation of our *Spirit*'s actions, we see that the *Zeitgeist* is a basically optimistic force. Its goal appears to be that history turns out for the better (again, defining *better* in terms of Universalist ethics). Pretty nice to have around the house, wouldn't you say?

In fact, Professor Dawkins' *Zeitgeist* is so nice that it's indistinguishable from a concept that would have been quite familiar to any member of the Adams family — the old Anglo-Calvinist or Puritan concept of *Providence*. Perhaps this is a false match. But it's quite a close one.

Another word for *Zeitgeist* is *Progress*. It's unsurprising that Universalists tend to believe in *Progress* — in fact, in a political context, they often call themselves *progressives*. Universalism has indeed made quite a bit of progress since 1913. But this hardly refutes the proposition that Universalism is a parasitic tradition. Progress for the tick is not progress for the dog.

Whether we call it *Providence*, *Zeitgeist* or *Progress*, the idea of a mysterious force that causes history to flow in some direction — which generally happens to be the right one — is called [historicism](). Karl Popper is [your man]() on this one.

Needless to say, historicism is profoundly arational. It is also rampant in the West today. You can't open a newspaper without reading some sentence that makes no sense at all unless the *Zeitgeist* is behind the curtain. Historicism also informs the consensus understanding of the recent past among even the best-educated Westerners today. You have to go back about 250 years — ie, to the predemocratic era — before ahistoricist explanations start to predominate.

(Recently I ran into the most astounding little book, this [ahistoricist history of the French Revolution](), written by an obscure Canadian historian who appears to be a specialist. Very calm and highly recommended. Imagine that all your life you'd been drinking what you thought was water but was in fact corn syrup, and then someone gave you a glass of actual water. The taste of a good revisionist history is simply unmistakable.)

In any case, I digress. The point is that we've found two thoroughly arational themes in the Universalism complex: *fraternism* and *historicism*. Moreover, these are arational in exactly the same sense as the *Manitou* delusion. They are not demonstrably false. They are just (a) believed by billions of people, and (b) essentially unsubstantiated.

We can extend this list with the two arational Universalist themes I've discussed before, [Rawlsianism]() (also discussed [here]()) and [pacifism](). And there is a fifth which I haven't yet given its due, *communalism* (the error of ascribing individual identity to neohominid groups).

I think I've done a fair job of demonstrating arationality for at least the first four. Arationality implies at least trivial morbidity. I think I'll leave the task of showing nontrivial morbidity for fraternism and historicism to the reader's imagination, on which I don't think it makes any particularly onerous demands. If you have any interesting thoughts on the subject, please feel free to leave them in the comments.

However, I haven't really discussed adaptiveness. And, if we want to demonstrate pwnage, we have to show adaptiveness, because arational themes could be in some way accidental or transient, a result of thematic drift as it were. If these arationalities do not contribute to the reproductive success of Universalism, they will probably go away on their own, and they are much less worrisome. Thus describing Professor Dawkins as pwned may be a stretch.

In part 4, due next Thursday, I'll try to tie some of these ends together, and talk about adaptive arationality. Of course hopefully the commenters will have covered the subject completely by then, and I won't have to write anything at all.

How Dawkins got pwned (part 4)

(See part 1, part 2, and part 3.)

To review, I've argued that Professor Dawkins is pwned because he's chosen quite unthinkingly to lend his literary talents to a received tradition I call *Universalism*, which is a nontheistic Christian sect. Some other current labels for this same tradition, more or less synonymous, are *progressivism*, *multiculturalism*, *liberalism*, *humanism, leftism, political correctness*, and the like. My only excuse for minting my own term is that these other labels, since they are in common use, imply various associations which may confuse the reader.

In my humble but convinced opinion, Universalism is far more important, far more dangerous, and far more antirational than its theistic Christian competitors, which Professor Dawkins attacks with such fury. He thinks he's a Galileo, Vavilov or Darwin. But if my perspective is accurate, Professor Dawkins is more a Caccini, Lysenko or Wilberforce. He is pwned in every sense of the word, and history will treat him in its usual harsh manner. A few librarians may remember him as a curiosity of the era.

Of course, I am just a humble blogger and I have no control at all over history. Sometimes I write out my screeds in tiny, cramped longhand, and staple them to telephone poles. You, dear reader, should treat them as if you found them that way. After all, anyone can start a blog.

In my opinion, however, Universalism is the dominant modern branch of Christianity on the Calvinist line, evolving from the English Dissenter or Puritan tradition through the Unitarian, Transcendentalist, and Progressive movements. Its ancestral briar patch also includes a few sideways sprigs that are important enough to name but whose Christian ancestry is slightly better concealed, such as Rousseauvian laicism, Benthamite utilitarianism, Reformed Judaism, Comtean positivism, German Idealism, Marxist scientific socialism, Sartrean existentialism, Heideggerian postmodernism, etc, etc, etc. All but the first can be traced back to the first, and Rousseau himself was a Genevan and acknowledged his political debt to Calvin's republic. So Universalism traces almost all of its memetic DNA to this hateful little phony, this pissant, heretic-roasting tyrant on the lake, Jehan Cauvin — so well-sketched by Stefan Zweig.

Which is no reason to automatically condemn it. After all, Scarlett Johansson traces all of her actual DNA to chimps. Evolution can change anything. Universalism as we know it today, a la Port Huron Statement, would be quite unrecognizable to any of its 16th-century or 17th-century ancestors. It would shock the living daylights out of most of its 18th-century or 19th-century ones. It is what it is. It is not something else.

Most of my previous discussions of Universalism have been devoted simply to the task of demonstrating that the label is apt, that the tradition is real, and that its pedigree is accurate. I don't regard this as audacious at all, since most religions and other traditions in history have been named by their enemies. Labels such as *Unitarian*, *Methodist*, *Whig*, *Tory*, and many others originated as hostile slurs and were subsequently accepted as accurate.

But again, the thing can only be judged as itself. I've described a few ways in which I think Universalism should be considered harmful — for example, in part 3. But I don't think I've really presented a high-level overview of the thing as it is today, abjuring any and all snide references to the Jukes and Kallikaks in its stud book.

Universalism, in my opinion, is best described as a *mystery cult of power*.

It's a *cult of power* because one critical stage in its replicative lifecycle is a little critter called the *State*. When we look at the big U's surface proteins, we notice that most of them can be explained by its need to capture, retain, and maintain the State, and direct its powers toward the creation of conditions that favor the continued replication of Universalism. It's as hard to imagine Universalism without the State as malaria without the mosquito.

It's a *mystery cult* because it displaces theistic traditions by replacing metaphysical superstitions with philosophical *mysteries*, such as *humanity*, *progress*, *equality*, *democracy*, *justice*, *environment*, *community*, *peace*, etc.

None of these concepts, as defined in orthodox Universalist doctrine, is even slightly coherent. All can absorb arbitrary mental energy without producing any rational thought. In this they are best compared to Plotinian, Talmudic, or Scholastic nonsense. (I link to this David Stove piece often, and I encourage anyone who hasn't read it to do so. No, this does not constitute an endorsement of everything that Professor Stove ever wrote.)

The Universalist mysteries are best regarded as *mechanisms*. When we apply our neohominid intuitions to a successful adaptive system such as Universalism, we should think of its goal as replicative success. Of course, a tradition is not a person, just as a meme is not a gene, and it no more has goals than a meme has Mendelian inheritance. It's especially important not to confuse the personal goals of Universalists with the adaptive goals of Universalism. But with these caveats, we can use this analogy to deploy our mirror neurons in our own defense.

For Universalism as for any other tradition, the adaptive purpose of a mystery is to *confuse* its host. Lacking a clear perception of reality, the infected host behaves in ways that an uninfected host would not. We can call this confusion *camouflage*.

As compared to the behavior of the uninfected, sometimes these actions are beneficial to the host, or to a

group which includes the host, but their actual effect is contrary to the host's ethical standards. We can call this *positive camouflage*. Sometimes these actions are harmful to the host or a group which includes the host. We can call this *negative camouflage*.

If we can deploy the e-word, positive camouflage contributes to evil by convincing those who do evil that they are actually doing good. For example, if we believe Himmler's [Posen speech](), those who perpetrated the Holocaust believed that they were carrying out a difficult but necessary duty. Negative camouflage contributes to evil by preventing its victims from resisting it. While we're on Nazis, the great example is the [Oxford Union peace resolution]().

Of course, if we are to deploy the e-word, we have to tackle the thorny problem of defining good and evil. We have two approaches to this.

One, we can define our moral axis with respect to Universalism itself. For example, if we apply this test to Nazism, we see that Nazism was evil even with respect to itself. Nazi ethics defined good as the power and prosperity of the *Deutsche Volk* and its guide Adolf Hitler. The result of Nazi policies was the physical destruction of Germany, the conversion of the German people to Universalism, the total suppression of *Volkisch* thought, and the death of Adolf Hitler — not exactly as advertised. This approach gives us *reflexive evil* or *reflexive good*.

Two, we can define our moral axis with respect to the personal or reproductive interests of you yourself, dear reader. If this criterion makes sense only with respect to a group, we can speak of the group of UR readers — which includes me, because I sometimes do try to slog through my own long posts. If Universalism harms or advances your or our personal interests, we say it exhibits *Misesian evil or good*. If it harms or advances your or our reproductive interests, it exhibits *Darwinian evil or good*.

Darwinian morality is an especially good reality check, because the neohominid brain is of course designed to advance its own Darwinian interests. Any tradition that can persuade it to do otherwise has to be some pretty heavy crack. As we'll see, Universalism more than fits the bill. However, to generate a really strong moral conclusion, we'd like to see agreement among all three criteria: reflexive, Misesian and Darwinian.

One easy way to do this is to examine some scenarios in which Universalism could lead to either the *extinction of the neohominid species*, or the *destruction of Western civilization*. Clearly, any such result represents the triumph of reflexive, Misesian and Darwinian evil. And if such results are plausible, worrying about anything smaller is a waste of time.

Let's unravel this problem by starting with the Universalist mystery of *progress*, which Professor Dawkins calls the *Zeitgeist* or *Spirit of Time*.

First, it's worth noting that chapter 7 of *The God Delusion*, in which Professor Dawkins introduces this concept, opens with a quote by one [Sean O'Casey]():

> *Politics has slain its thousands, but religion*
> *has slain its tens of thousands.*

La Wik describes O'Casey as a "nationalist and socialist." Frankly, he sounds like an [evil little fucker](). The evil little fucker was born in 1880, and presumably he uttered his little ort of shite at some point before nationalist, socialist politics — not to mention National Socialism proper — managed to slay its [tens of millions](). The fact that Professor Dawkins could, in 2007, quote this Stalinist flack and his fatuous, thoroughly-obsolete line — and his legion of acolytes swallow it without a hiccup — may be a sufficient demonstration of Universalist pwnage.

But if it's worth continuing, it's worth repeating Professor Dawkins' definition of the *Zeitgeist*: *a mysterious consensus, which changes over the decades*. For some reason, these changes over the decades almost always favor Universalism itself. This is of course *progress*, and our *Spirit of Time* bears a suspicious resemblance to the MO of [Divine Providence](), minus of course the Divine bit.

Since Professor Dawkins does not have Providence to lean on, he is forced to find a rational explanation for this historical curiosity. His struggles are wonderful reading:

> Where, then, have these concerted and steady changes in social consciousness come from? The onus is not on me to answer. For my purposes it is sufficient that they certainly have not come from religion.

[Exeter Hall]() would beg to differ. So would [Henry Ward Beecher](), [Walter Rauschenbusch](), [William Sloane Coffin](), etc, etc.

> We need to explain why the changing moral Zeitgeist is so widely synchronized across large numbers of people and we need to explain its relatively consistent direction.

Indeed.

> First, how is it synchronized across so many people? It spreads itself from mind to mind through conversations in bars and at dinner parties, through books and book reviews, through newspapers and broadcasting, and nowadays through the Internet.

Not to mention the State and its entire educational system, from kindergarten to grad school. Obviously this is less important than "bars and dinner parties." But I'm just saying.

> Changes in the moral climate are signalled in editorials, on radio talk shows, in political speeches, in the pattern of stand-up comedians and the scripts of soap operas, in the votes of parliaments making laws and the decisions of judges interpreting them.

That's an interesting word — "signalled."

One way to put it would be in terms of changing meme frequencies in the meme pool, but I shall not pursue that.

Fortunately, Professor Dawkins, you don't have to.

What impels it in its consistent direction? We mustn't neglect the driving role of individual leaders who, ahead of their time, stand up and persuade the rest of us to move on with them.

Curiously enough, leaders come in all kinds of flavors. We mustn't neglect the fascinating question of why the Universalist ones always win, and the others always lose. Oh, wait, we must neglect it. Obviously these aren't the droids we're looking for.

In America, the ideals of racial equality were fostered by political leaders of the calibre of Martin Luther King,

I know it's cheap, but I simply can't resist the temptation to attach a little innuendo to the word "calibre." As Dr. King himself put it, "I'm not a Negro tonight!"

and entertainers, sportsmen and other public figures such as Paul Robeson, Sidney Poitier, Jesse Owens and Jackie Robinson.

Isn't it interesting how the *Zeitgeist* seems to correlate with dermal pigmentation?

The emancipations of slaves and of women owed much to charismatic leaders. Some of these leaders were religious; some were not. Some who were religious did their good deeds because of they were religious. In other cases their religion was incidental.

Presumably if Professor Dawkins discovered a fossil which looked a little like a chimpanzee and a little like a neohominid, he might regard it as an indication of a link between the two. Sadly, in the memetic department, this lobe of his brain seems to be in the off position.

Although Martin Luther King was a Christian, he derived his philosophy of non-violent civil disobedience directly from Gandhi, who was not.

The number of historical solecisms in this sentence is astounding. The modern idea of civil disobedience — that is, breaking the actual legal law, in favor of some mysterious higher law, an obvious case of positive camouflage — dates to neither King nor Gandhi, but to Thoreau and the Transcendentalists, who were of course direct ancestors of Universalism.

As for Gandhi, this Richard Grenier essay is simply essential. But what it fails to point out is that Gandhi's weird communist pseudo-Hinduism was a invention, a sort of Ossianism or Kwanzaa, an Indian equivalent of the phony Gaelic revival associated with the Fenian movement. Like Nehru, Gandhi was a British lawyer with brown skin. Their movement — like its Irish counterpart — succeeded entirely

through its alliance with British political forces, and in specific the Nonconformist and proto-Universalist Labour Party. For example, in Paul Scott's [Jewel in the Crown](), one character is a Nonconformist missionary nun, and it's taken for granted that she has a picture of Gandhi on her wall and despises the Raj.

Anyway, to finish with this sport:

> It is beyond my amateur psychology and sociology to go any further in explaining why the moral *Zeitgeist* moves in its broadly concerted way.

Professor Dawkins, if you were to go any less further, you'd need a rear-view mirror.

> For my purposes it is enough that, as a matter of observed fact, it *does* move, and it is not driven by religion — and certainly not by scripture.

Which obviously makes it a product of pure reason.

> It is probably not a single force like gravity, but a complex interplay of disparate forces like the one that propels Moore's Law, describing the exponential increase in computer power.

Boys and girls, can you say "[epicycle]()?"

The epicycle in Professor Dawkins' theory of history is needed to explain why, when we look at history, good always prevails over evil. Or almost always:

> Even when he was railing against Christianity, Hitler never ceased using the language of Providence: a mysterious agency which, he believed, had singled him out for a divine mission to lead Germany.

This second "mysterious agency" appears just six pages from Professor Dawkins' own *Zeitgeist*. One really wonders whether this man has read his own book.

Of course, a theism-independent perspective of memetic evolution eliminates our need for the epicycle. What Professor Dawkins is observing is simply the selective success of Universalism. Universalism succeeded, by definition, because it was better-adapted than its competitors. Since Professor Dawkins is a Universalist, of course he views this as the triumph of good over evil. But his *Zeitgeist* is no more than the well-known fallacy of [survivor bias](). And Hitler's Providence, which doubtless made itself scarce around 1942, is exactly the same animal.

So the question remains: why does good so consistently triumph over evil?

If we exclude supernatural forces which cause the good side to win elections, battles and wars, we are left with no explanation at all of this strange phenomenon, so reminiscent of Tom Stoppard's [Rosencrantz & Guildenstern](). "Heads. Heads. Heads. Heads. Heads..."

It's true that people want to be good. Perhaps we should expect them to flock to the good side, outnumbering the evil. On the other hand, when we remember the phenomenon of positive camouflage, and see that most who do evil think of themselves as doing good, it's hard to take this seriously. And moreover, actual good has to be actually good, whereas evil by definition is capable of anything. If the military advantage is anywhere, it would seem to lie with the latter.

Essentially, what we've found behind this particular Universalist mystery is the assertion that Universalism has triumphed because Universalism is good and good triumphs. Good triumphs because Universalism is successful and Universalism is good. Spot the unsubstantiated assertion!

Just as we have no reason at all to assume that neohominid populations are geographically uniform, we have no reason at all to assume that Universalism is good — in either the reflexive, Darwinian, or Misesian sense. Of course we learned in school that Universalism is good, in at least the first and third senses. But who did we learn this from? Universalist teachers. Again, all we know is that Universalism is successful. And we can say the same of Universalism's ancestors. The winners write history. If Nazism had won its war, citizens of the Nazi 2007 would see history as an inevitable progress toward the National Socialist present.

Thus, Universalist historicism is effective camouflage both negative and positive. The circular reasoning behind the mystery of *progress*, *Zeitgeist* or *Providence* dissuades those who might be harmed by Universalism from considering the possibility that Universalism is not, in fact, good, and needs to be fought against. And it persuades those whose interests Universalism advances that they are serving good, not evil.

We are now in a position to strip off this camouflage and have a look at what's behind it.

If *progress* is simply the victory of Universalism, and Universalism need not be entirely good, we need to construct an interpretation of history which recognizes both *progress* and *decay*. Where Universalism is good, its victory is by definition *progress*. Where Universalism is bad, its victory must be *decay*. Without mysterious or supernatural pro-good forces, we would expect to see some mix of the former and the latter.

Let's cap this exercise at about 250 years, ie, at 1757. Some Universalist distortions may go back farther, but they dwindle rapidly. Before this period it is usually hard, when reading a typical Universalist history, to tell which side is supposed to be righteous and which wrongtious. Once we get to the American and French Revolutions, we are left in no doubt.

It is very difficult for a modern American to construct the history of the last 250 years as a history of decay. Decay is especially concealed by the obvious history of technical and scientific progress. While this has no reason at all to correlate with political or cultural progress, the two are certainly not hard to confuse.

However, one way to look at the question is to look at the traditional opposite of the word *progressive*: that is, *reactionary.*

Howard Zinn, for example, has given us an [progressive interpretation of history](#). What is a comparable reactionary narrative? Professor Zinn, of course, would like us to believe that any narrative less progressive than his is reactionary. But perhaps it is only reactionary compared to Professor Zinn.

What we really need is an interpretation of history so reactionary that it contains no Universalism or proto-Universalism at all. Instead, it should start with the mainstream perspective of 1757, and interpret all evidence of impending Universalism as the story of decline, disaster and decay.

Then, we can compare the progressive and reactionary narratives on a level playing field, evaluating the relative credibility of both, and decide on what points to accept which — thus allocating Universalist history, and implicitly Universalism itself, between progress and decay.

For this we need our pure reactionary theory of history. Needless to say, this is a very specialized product. It is not sold in any stores. It is not even found in a single volume. Nonetheless, the Internet is of great assistance in assembling the product.

If I had to pick ten books from which to construct a reactionary theory of modern history, I would pick — in order of composition, which makes a good reading order:

- [Edmund Burke](#) — [Reflections on the Revolution in France](#)
- [Henry Maine](#) — [Popular Government](#)
- [W.E.H. Lecky](#) — [Democracy and Liberty](#)
- [Walter Lippmann](#) — [Public Opinion](#)
- [Edgar Lee Masters](#) — [Lincoln the Man](#)
- [Albert Jay Nock](#) — [Memoirs of a Superfluous Man](#)
- [John T. Flynn](#) — [As We Go Marching](#)
- [Bertrand de Jouvenel](#) — [On Power](#)
- [Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn](#) — [Liberty or Equality](#)
- [James Burnham](#) — [Suicide of the West](#)

I've included links to online editions where available. All of these are, in my opinion, absolute classics and should be read by anyone even remotely interested in history.

(A question for readers: can anyone recommend a good reactionary history of the American Revolution? Or should I say, Rebellion? For some reason, I haven't bumped into any Tory treatments which live up to the above standard.)

Let me also mention [James Stephen](#)'s [Liberty, Equality, Fraternity](#), a wonderful book which is a little too close to the Maine to make this list, and also suffers from the disability that I have not yet read all of it. However, just to show that there is nothing new under the sun, here is how Stephen's classic opens:

> The object of this work is to examine the doctrines which are rather hinted at than expressed by the phrase 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.' This phrase has been the motto of more than one Republic. It is indeed something more than a motto. It is the creed of a religion, less definite than any one of the forms of Christianity, which are in part its rivals, in part its antagonists, and in part its associates, but not on that account the less powerful. It is, on the contrary, one of the most penetrating influences of the day. It shows itself now and then in definite forms, of which Positivism is the one best known to our generation, but its special manifestations give no adequate measure of its depth or width. It penetrates other creeds. It has often transformed Christianity into a system of optimism, which has in some cases retained and in others rejected Christian phraseology. It deeply influences politics and legislation. It has its solemn festivals, its sober adherents, its enthusiasts, its Anabaptists and Antinomians. The Religion of Humanity is perhaps as good a name as could be found for it, if the expression is used in a wider sense than the narrow and technical one associated with it by Comte. It is one of the commonest beliefs of the day that the human race collectively has before it splendid destinies of various kinds, and that the road to them is to be found in the removal of all restraints on human conduct, in the recognition of a substantial equality between all human creatures, and in fraternity or general love. These doctrines are in very many cases held as a religious faith. They are regarded not merely as truths, but as truths for which those who believe in them are ready to do battle, and for the establishment of which they are prepared to sacrifice all merely personal ends.

> Such, stated of course in the most general terms, is the religion of which I take 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' to be the creed. I do not believe it.

> I am not the advocate of Slavery, Caste, and Hatred, nor do I deny that a sense may be given to the words, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, in which they may be regarded as good. I wish to assert with respect to them two propositions.

> First, that in the present day even those who use those words most rationally — that is to say, as the names of elements of social life which, like others, have their advantages and disadvantages according to time, place, and circumstance — have a great disposition to exaggerate their advantages and to deny the existence, or at any rate to underrate the importance, of their disadvantages.

> Next, that whatever signification be attached to them, these words are ill-adapted to be the creed of a religion, that the things which they denote are not ends in themselves, and that when used collectively the words do not typify, however vaguely, any state of society which a reasonable man ought to regard with enthusiasm or self-devotion.

Compare to Maine's brilliant reactionary blast:

It has always been my desire and hope to apply the Historical Method to the political institutions of men. But, here again, the inquiry into the history of these institutions, and the attempt to estimate their true value by the results of such an inquiry, are seriously embarrassed by a mass of ideas and beliefs which have grown up in our day on the subject of one particular form of government, that extreme form of popular government which is called Democracy. A portion of the notions which prevail in Europe concerning Popular Government are derived (and these are worthy of all respect) from observation of its practical working; a larger portion merely reproduce technical rules of the British or American constitutions in an altered or disguised form; but a multitude of ideas on this subject, ideas which are steadily absorbing or displacing all others, appear to me, like the theories of jurisprudence of which I have spoken, to have been conceived a priori. They are, in fact, another set of deductions from the assumption of a State of Nature. Their true source has never been forgotten on the Continent of Europe, where they are well known to have sprung from the teaching of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who believed that men emerged from the primitive natural condition by a process which made every form of government, except Democracy, illegitimate. In this country they are not often explicitly, or even consciously, referred to their real origin, which is, nevertheless, constantly betrayed by the language in which they are expressed. Democracy is commonly described as having an inherent superiority over every other form of government. It is supposed to advance with an irresistible and preordained movement. It is thought to be full of the promise of blessings to mankind; yet if it fails to bring with it these blessings, or even proves to be prolific of the heaviest calamities, it is not held to deserve condemnation. These are the familiar marks of a theory which claims to be independent of experience and observation on the plea that it bears the credentials of a golden age, non-historical and unverifiable.

Let me quickly explain my reactionary theory of history, which comes from reading weird old forgotten books such as the above. Note that this theory is quite simple. Depending on your inclinations, you may regard this as a good thing or a bad thing.

In order to get to the reactionary theory of history, we need a reactionary theory of government. History, again, is interpretation, and interpretation requires theory. I've described this theory before under the name of [neocameralism](), but on a blog it never hurts to be a little repetitive.

First: government is not a mystical or mysterious institution. A government is simply a group of people working together for a common aim, ie, a corporation. Whether a government is good or bad is not determined by who its employees are or how they are selected. It is determined by whether the actions of the government are good or bad.

Second: the only difference between a government and a "private corporation" is that the former is *sovereign*: it has no higher authority to which it can appeal to protect its property. A sovereign

corporation owns its territory, and maintains that ownership by demonstrating unchallenged control. It is stable if no other party, internal or external, has any incentive to attack it. Especially in the nuclear age, it is not difficult to deter prospective attackers.

Third: a good government is a well-managed sovereign corporation. Good government is efficient management. Efficient management is profitable management. A profitable government has no incentive to break its promises, abuse its citizens (who are its capital), or attack its neighbors.

Fourth: efficient management can be implemented by the same techniques in sovereign corporations as in nonsovereign ones. The company's profit is distributed equally to holders of negotiable shares. The shareholders elect a board, which selects a CEO.

Fifth: although the full neocameralist approach has never been tried, its closest historical equivalents to this approach are the 18th-century tradition of enlightened absolutism as represented by Frederick the Great, and the 21st-century nondemocratic tradition as seen in lost fragments of the British Empire such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai. These states appear to provide a very high quality of service to their citizens, with no meaningful democracy at all. They have minimal crime and high levels of personal and economic freedom. They tend to be quite prosperous. They are weak only in political freedom, and political freedom is unimportant by definition when government is stable and effective.

Sixth: the comparative success of the American and European postwar systems appears to be due to their abandonment of democratic politics as a practical mechanism of government, in favor of a civil-service [Beamtenstaat](#) in which democratic politicians are increasingly symbolic. The post-communist civil-service states, China and Russia, appear to be converging on the same system, although their stability is ensured primarily by direct military authority, rather than by a system of managed public opinion.

Seventh: the post-democratic civil-service state, while not utterly disastrous, is not the end of history. It has two problems. One, the size and complexity of its regulatory system tends to increase without bound, resulting in economic stagnation and general apathy. Two, more critically, it can neither abolish democratic politics formally, nor defend itself against changes in information flow that may destabilize public opinion. Notably, the rise of the Internet disrupts the feedback loop between public education and political power, allowing noncanonical ideas to flourish. If these ideas are both rationally compelling and politically delegitimating, the state is threatened.

Eighth: therefore, productive political efforts should focus on peacefully terminating, restructuring and decentralizing the 20th-century civil-service state along neocameralist lines. The ideal result is a planet of thousands, even tens of thousands, of independent city-states, each managed for profit by its shareholders.

Note that this perspective has nothing at all in common with the Universalist theory of government. Note also the simplicity of the transition that it suggests *should* have happened, from monarchy as a family

business to a modern corporate structure with separate board and CEO, eliminating the vagaries of the hereditary principle.

Now let's look — from this reactionary perspective — at what actually *did* happen.

First, in America and Europe from the late 18th through the middle of the 19th century, we see a series of violent changes in power, in which states were overthrown and territories captured by disorganized mobs of their own residents, sometimes in cahoots with the army. These were called *revolutions*. They were almost entirely destructive phenomena, with no major point to recommend them. There is no revolution in this period which had benign results. The French revolutions of 1789 and 1830, for example, can be blamed entirely on irresolute monarchs without the courage, dexterity or both to use the military against the mob.

Moreover, even when states did not capitulate totally to revolutionary mobs, they often surrendered partially, as for example in the Reform Bill of 1832. This led to a progressive acceleration of democracy, and its inevitable accomplice, paramilitary violence. The US, for example, in the height of its democratic period from 1828 to 1932, was almost never without violent elections or political gangs. Democratic government before the civil-service era was also corrupt on an almost indescribable scale.

Democracy, and democratic ideologies and religions, had become power cults which attracted and selected for the ambitious and unscrupulous. Numerous corrupt systems which could command voting blocs sprung up, from urban ward-heeler machines to yellow-journalist newspapers. Deceiving the voting population was job one for these political engineers, and public opinion on all political subjects — government, law, economics, and war — began to diverge significantly from reality.

This situation culminated in the first great total war of the democratic era, the War of Secession between Union and Confederacy. The proximate cause of the War of Secession was the anti-slavery campaign, a political-religious nationalist movement in the North that harangued the South with apocalyptic rhetoric, supported paramilitary terrorist attacks on it, extracted vast quantities of tax through an almost punitive tariff, unilaterally and informally rewrote the Constitution to strengthen its own power and hold the South captive, and in general did everything it could to stoke Southern paranoia. But the latter was hardly lacking, as the South had developed its own bizarre nationalist movement, a romantic cult which glorified a hereditary caste system and threatened to invade the entire Western hemisphere, Yankeeland excluded — and only because it was bad land for sugarcane, tobacco or cotton. Neither of these competing nationalisms was conceivable in the 19th century, and both are most parsimoniously ascribed to the effect of 80 years of democracy on the mass mind.

The War of Secession was a war of mass destruction in which all previously known laws of war were violated, generally by the North with its revived Puritan cult of righteousness. It killed half a million men and brought happiness to none but the killers — not even the slaves, whose liberation was a sham but whose destitution was certainly not. As such it prefigured the even more destructive wars of the

following century. It also destroyed the American tradition of limited government, setting the scene for the megastate to come.

Probably the most destructive result of the 19th-century democratic movement was the rise of militant nationalism, which beleaguered aristocratic elites found all too effective in deflecting the sympathies of the increasingly violent mob. Contrary to the promises of democrats, the first tastes of socialist plunder only whetted the mob's appetite for more. Democratic factions divided according to their preferred food for this great beast: money or blood.

This jingoist tendency, also inconceivable in the 18th century, eventually culminated in the war which destroyed European civilization, the Great War. The first outbreak of the Great War, which lasted from 1914 to 1918 killed millions of young men and left Russia in the hands of a barbaric neo-Jacobin military death cult. The same cult later devastated Spain, where order was fortunately restored under a nationalist movement that was at least neither socialist nor expansionist. Finally, the ultimate synthesis of nationalism and socialism, fascism, restarted the Great War, which became a worldwide conflict between the militarist and socialist traditions. At the end of the Great War in 1945, memory of the *belle epoque* had dwindled to near extinction, and there was no significant political force which supported the restoration of the classical liberal era.

The US had succumbed to a socialist revolution under false electoral premises in 1932. This was primarily the result of a financial panic, which was caused by unscrupulous dilution of the currency in the boom of the 1920s, through the new Federal Reserve System. After the first phase of the Great War, the gold standard, which was never entirely stable under the Anglo-American fractional-reserve system, had been restored in a broken form (the "gold-exchange standard") which was more tolerant of dilution through state-guaranteed maturity-mismatched lending, but not tolerant enough. The collapse of this system allowed inflationist economists to claim that capitalism itself had failed, not unlike the famous orphan who requested clemency for the murder of his parents. This brought on a socialist revolution, the New Deal, in which the Federal government and the Progressive civil-service machine claimed unlimited legislative power to deal with the emergency it had created for itself.

It has never relinquished this power, nor can it ever be expected to. It has never restored a metallic currency, nor can it ever be expected to. Its civil service and judiciary are entirely insulated from democracy. Its legislative body, which remains bicameral for reasons now only historical, has an incumbent reelection rate in the high 90s. Its two political parties, which are no longer meaningful organizations and are now mere labels, are identical on all substantive domestic policy issues. Most of their efforts are put into fighting proxy wars against each other, often involving American soldiers, on distant parts of the globe which have no relevance at all to domestic security. The Federal government consumes 30% of GNP, and the US borrows 6% of GNP from abroad every year just to stay afloat. Crime is rampant, with many parts of many major cities effectively uninhabitable by any civilized person, and a substantial criminal class. Some cities, such as Detroit, have been entirely cleansed of their white

population and in some places are even reverting to prairie (but very dangerous prairie). Former residents of the cities, whose old Irish, Italian and Jewish quarters no longer exist, have fled to more defensible quarters in hideous strip-mall suburbs. Encouraged by both parties, which jockey for their votes, uneducated peasants from Latin America are flooding in unknown numbers across its uncontrolled borders. Fortunately, so far this new generation of immigrants has seen little of the joys of the criminal lifestyle, but this seems to change quickly for their children. In short, the US is rapidly becoming a Third World country, not unlike present-day Brazil. The only mercy is that its respite from democracy has lasted.

After the Great War, the socialist powers fell out, as gangs often do. The first split was the US-Soviet split, in which the latter turned out to be more interested in territory and power than in a position as a US satellite. In the resulting Cold War, these two powers dismembered the remnants of European law and order in the Third World, in the worst scramble for colonial supremacy the world had yet seen. Any pretext of bringing good government to uncivilized peoples was forgotten, and any nationalist thug, preferably as socialist as possible, was a satisfactory client for either side. Most of the non-European world, including even formerly civilized countries such as China, reverted to the rule of national-socialist warlords who competed for American and Soviet favor. Some, such as Yugoslavia and China, split from both factions and courted the aid of both. Perhaps a hundred million people around the world were murdered in this "liberation," which is still revered as such worldwide. The supposedly "independent" countries of the Third World are still dependent on aid from the US and its European satellites. There is one independent Third World country in the world — Somaliland.

Meanwhile, competing branches of the US government still engage in Third World proxy wars, in which the Defense Department and its political allies and satellites (the Republican Party, the arms and energy industry, Israel) face off against the State Department and its allies and satellites (the Democratic Party, the NGOs and universities, Europe, Palestine). The true nature of these conflicts, which would end instantly if the US was under unitary leadership, or even if both American factions could agree to cut off all "aid" to all their foreign satellites, is admitted by no one. It is considered entirely normal that the US often arms, and always talks with, both sides of these bizarre, incurable pseudo-wars.

Lately, the old Third World national-socialist movement has managed to refit itself with an Islamic facade, and destroyed a couple of very large buildings in New York, killing thousands of people. No effective effort against the perpetrators has been mounted, probably because any successful American military effort brings political prestige to the American right and threatens to reignite the old era of nationalist jingoism, a threat which terrifies the American left — and for good reason. So many individuals involved with the attack live and continue their efforts in a country which is not at war with the US, nor vice versa. Most Americans consider this entirely normal. The concept of war itself has been under attack for the last fifty years, in favor of an entirely new legal model which is derived from domestic criminal justice, and which seems designed to make it as difficult as possible for civilized forces to defeat uncivilized ones, a theory which certainly fits the short-term political needs of its proponents.

The resulting concept of "asymmetric warfare" is also generally accepted, with only a little grumbling, as a necessary burden that must be shouldered by our great and moral nation.

Other than this, everything is fine. Technology is moving along pretty well. Moore's Law continues to zoom along. We have fast computers and fancy mobile phones and other things that no one in the 18th century could dream of. If they could see our political system, however, I'm afraid they'd understand it all too well.

Frankly, any system of thought that can convincingly present this history as a case of *progress* is capable of anything. Readers may, of course, differ with my interpretation of events. But hopefully at this point they at least understand why I see Universalism as a parasitic tradition.

Next week, I'll talk about how Universalism could destroy the world, the species, or at least just civilization. As always, please feel free to anticipate me in the comments.

How Dawkins got pwned (part 5)

So, in the course of parts 1, 2, 3, and 4, we've established that Professor Dawkins is pwned.

He is pwned because he is serving the interests of a tradition called Universalism, a nontheistic sect of Christianity which is currently the planet's dominant religion. And Professor Dawkins has not done his homework on Universalism. As we've seen, he's accepted orthodox Universalist interpretations of major aspects of reality — if anthropology and history count as "major" — in exactly the same way that his favorite strawmen accept theistic metaphysics: by declaring it true until proven false. He appears to be quite unaware of how creepy this is.

Or at least he was unaware. If he is reading these messages, Professor Dawkins is now sunk, I'm sure, in misery and despair. He is questioning his own sanity. Is there any path back to reality? Is anything left but sickness, confusion, lies? Can anything now be real and good and true? Or has the worm but lunched too long?

The answer, actually, is yes. The worm *has* lunched too long. There is no escape. Not for Professor Dawkins, not for me, not for you, not for anyone. We'll simply have to deal.

If the infection was fresh, we could escape just by asking and answering two simple questions. One: is Universalism good, or evil? Two: if the latter, what should I, personally, do about it?

If Universalism was Scientology — or the cult of Kim Jong Il — or even Communism — this might be an effective initial state from which to consider its merits or demerits. But Universalism is to these pissant little knockoffs as the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church is to Robert Schuller's Hour of Power. As Rutger Hauer put it in Split Second, "Bigger guns! We've got to have bigger guns!"

In fact, if you just *translate* the word "Catholicism" into 21st-century English, it comes out... you guessed it. I was recently disappointed to learn that, contrary to the assertion of my 10th-grade English teacher, "Darth Vader" does not actually mean "Dark Father" in Dutch. That would be *Donker Vader*, which somehow doesn't have the same *je ne sais quoi*. But you get the idea. The point is that this thing, whatever you care to call it, is at least two hundred years old and probably more like five. It's basically the *Reformation itself*. It's certainly the most up-to-date revision of Jouvenel's Minotaur. And just walking up to it and denouncing it as evil is about as likely to work as suing Shub-Niggurath in small-claims court.

So, if there's any way to even contemplate this history-devouring horror, it can only be by thinking *around* Universalism. We cannot hope to assault the Elder Ones. We cannot even offend them. Our only

hope is to amuse them for a little while.

In other words: it may be a fun parlor game to answer every political question by asking how the [Duke of Wellington](#) would handle it. But we lack anything like the shared cultural capital we'd need to simply evaluate the proposition that Universalism is just evil, and needs to be terminated with extreme prejudice. We can't even imagine how to think these thoughts. And Universalism at every turn would be telling us we were evil for even starting to think them.

On the bright side, however, by accepting the possibility that Universalism exists, that it is not simply "ethics" or "justice" or "science" or "history," you have already taken the first step toward thinking around it. Let's take a few more steps and see where we end up.

First, remember that Universalism is a *mystery cult of political power*. As John Gray [puts it](#), "Modern politics is a chapter in the history of religion." This is not to excuse Professor Gray, whose incredible legerdemain in skipping directly from the French Revolution to George W. Bush does much more to conceal than to explain. But, as Hunter S. Thompson used to put it, even a blind pig finds an acorn every once in a while.

To engage the neohominid instinct for worship, you need a *grand mystery*: some question of transcendental importance to which no meaningful answer can be constructed. It is even better if inside the mystery is some *high agency*, some power which works in mysterious ways. Christopher Moltisanti decided that the higher power for his 12-step program was his Mafia oath. Sometimes I suspect that if you go to an AA meeting in Berkeley, their higher power is the United Nations, or maybe the State Department, or even just NPR.

Anyway. In this post, we're going to try to raise the tone, and avoid taking these cheap little digs at Universalism or Universalists. The point is: the spiritual antennae of the Universalist are aimed almost exclusively in the direction of the State. When a Universalist thinks about good or evil, she thinks about the good State and the evil State.

Our goal, in learning to think around Universalism, is to construct a way to think about the State that is morally neutral, and that does not depend at all on Universalist concepts. The end product should be a complete, drop-in replacement for Universalism which does not challenge or threaten it in any way.

Our first step is a full linguistic reconstruction of politics and history. I'll outline this reconstruction for the State I live in, which I think is reasonable, because this particular polity happens to more or less dominate the world. (As Thom Yorke put it, "Radiohead works like the United Nations. I'm the US.") If you live in Greenland or Poland or Uzbekistan or wherever, the transformation should not be too difficult.

Just as we saw in the Universalist concept of *humanity*, there is an enormous inherent confusion in Universalist political linguistics. When I talk about *America* or *the US*, I may mean one of the following

concepts: a political organization, a geographical region, or a population of neohominids. For the first or the third, I may mean this concept solely in the present, or I may be referring to some period of historical continuity. A more preposterous hodgepodge could scarcely be contemplated.

Frankly, this is ridiculous. It has to go. The Empsonian ambiguity — a programmer might call it overloading — may be poetically touching, that is, if you're a political shill-poet like Lowell, Whitman, MacLeish or Dove. Finish your ode to Stalin and get outta here. The rest of us would like a way to clearly refer to clear, specific concepts.

One way to do this is to imagine we're thinking about an alternate reality. In Reality #2, there is a clone of Planet 3, Planet 3.01, which is exactly identical and follows the same orbit around the Sun, 180 degrees out of phase so that neither can see the other.

On Planet 3.01, the temperate and subtropical latitudes of the northern continent in the western hemisphere are a region called *Plainland*. (An English translation of Vinland.) The inhabitants of Plainland are the *Plainlanders*.

Culturally, our Plainlanders fall into five major castes: the *Brahmins*, *Dalits*, *Helots*, *Optimates* and *Vaisyas*. They can also be divided by descent: *European*, *African*, *Asian* or *Beringian*. And their political conflicts identify them as either *Coaster* (blue) or *Middler* (red). Of course, none of these categories is precise or complete. All sorts of overlaps and subcategories exist. Nonetheless, these very rough high-level abstractions are quite useful.

Plainland is owned by a sovereign corporation, or *sovcorp*. Its name is *Washcorp*: the Washington Corporation. (I like this slightly better than one I tried earlier, *Fedco*. It sounds even more neutral and enormous. Of course, Planet 3.0 has plenty of actual companies named both Washcorp and Fedco, but none is particularly significant.)

A *corporation* is just a set of people working together with a common purpose — basically, any organization. I should probably replace this word as well, but it is such an effective offensive weapon that it would be a pity to just throw it out, and the English meaning is extremely clear.

A corporation is *sovereign* — and thus a sovcorp — if there is no controlling legal authority to which it can appeal, and it is responsible for enforcing and defending its own law. Again, the English meaning of this word is extremely clear and historically accurate.

Aside from the fact that it is sovereign, Washcorp owns Plainland in the same sense that any person or organization owns any piece of property. It exercises absolute and total domination and control. Plainlanders exist at Washcorp's sufferance. It can expel them, kill them, or order them to obey arbitrary commands. There is no other power to which they can appeal, and no Plainlander or combination of Plainlanders has, or could conceivably have, even a thousandth of the military force needed to defeat

Washcorp. Nor does any such force exist anywhere else on the planet.

Note that Planet 3.01 remains identical to Planet 3.0 in all substantive details. Let me add, however, the stipulation that on Planet 3.01, and within the boundaries of Plainland, Washcorp is absolutely invincible. It is not even worth thinking about thinking about a military strategy which could wrest Plainland from the eternal iron grip of Washcorp. Also, the flag of Washcorp is a red W inscribed in a white circle on a black field, and this sigil is honored with the Roman salute. Everything else is the same, though.

I should also describe the history of Washcorp. It was founded by an aristocrat and military leader, General Washington (hence the name), a prominent sympathizer of a paramilitary gang called the Sons of Liberty. The Sons evolved into the first identifiable ancestor of Washcorp as we know it today, the Continental Congress, with its Continental Army under Washington, who swiftly established himself as princeps.

This version of Washcorp is the *First Corporation* or the *Continental Corporation*. The period of its formal existence, 1776 to 1789, is the *Continental Period*. The First Corporation's goal was to use violent force to seize Plainland from its original European owner, the sovcorp British Crown. Assisted by political divisions within British Crown, it succeeded in this task and assumed ownership of Plainland through adverse possession, winning the *War of Atlantic Separation*.

The original First Corporation was very weak and had limited power over its subsidiaries, the provinces of Plainland, which retained much of their original sovereignty as recognized in both its primary contract, the Articles of Confederation, and its deed of cession as conceded by British Crown, the Treaty of Paris. In 1789, a group of prominent managers wrested power from the First Corporation and replaced it with the *Second* or *Constitutional Corporation* (1789-1861), which left the relationship between Washcorp and its provinces informal.

The primary contract of the Second Corporation, the Constitution, was designed by its primary architect Alexander Hamilton, one of Washington's cronies, to shift sovereign power gradually, subtly and irreversibly away from the provinces and toward Washcorp itself. (Compare to the similar approach of present-day Eurocorp.) Interprovincial tensions always undermined this strategy, and in 1861 a group of provinces joined forces and attempted to seize the southern half of Plainland in the *War of Southern Separation*.

Under the messianic dictator Abraham Lincoln, Washcorp won this war and subjugated the rebellious provinces. No more was heard about provincial sovereignty. The War of Southern Separation effectively revoked the Constitution, and converted Washcorp's management process to an informal system with no strict textual basis, opening the *Third* or *Nationalist Period* (1861-1933). It is also notable for its introduction of military slavery — ie, the draft — to Washcorp's playbook. All major Washcorp wars through the 1970s were fought with Plainlander slave soldiers.

The Third Corporation retained many elements of the old Constitutional system, notably the theory that Washcorp's sovereign discretion was constrained by a list of enumerated powers. However, it also developed a state religion of transcendental power worship, or Nationalism. The quintessential Nationalist tract was the science-fiction novel Looking Backward by the Social Gospel fanatic Edward Bellamy, which predicted with remarkable prescience that by the year 2000, Washcorp would exercise complete and detailed control over the lives and occupations of all Plainlanders.

The essential idea of Nationalism was that Washcorp was deeply and fundamentally good, and could bring this spirit of righteousness to everything it touched or did. If this seems hard to understand, it is best explained as a continuation of the Protestant postmillennial tradition, with its emphasis on achieving the New Jerusalem, the kingdom of Christ on earth.

Nationalism can only be understood with respect to the system known as democracy, in which Plainlanders reconsecrate their obeisance to Washcorp regularly and indirectly, pledging their submission to one of several (typically two, but rarely one or three) political gangs, or parties. The parties alternate in power according to headcount of registered supporters. In the late Constitutional and early Nationalist periods, Washcorp operated under the spoils system, in which the parties distributed Washcorp's revenue to their supporters by disguising these dividends as the salaries for so-called jobs.

Democracy, which had deep roots in the English Dissenter sects to which early Euro-Plainlanders subscribed, is best seen in terms of the system of ritual legitimacy it replaced, divine-right monarchy. The older divine-right sovcorps legitimized their ownership — that is, persuaded their subjects not to rebel — by attributing it to divine intervention. Democracy arrived with the advent of new religious systems which stressed the divine nature of humanity. This inner light, of which all adult males (and later females) had exactly one, could be counted and summed. If Washcorp was directed by this arithmetic, its actions could not fail to be righteous.

As the 20th century opened, Nationalism evolved into its more sophisticated successor Progressivism, a label still used today. Progressivism, which is essentially the political projection of Universalism, was a check to the abuses of democracy, reducing the power of corrupt elected officials in favor of permanent Washcorp employees, or civil servants. (Perhaps the word "master" would be more apropos.) Progressives consider these employees "professional," "nonpartisan," "objective," etc, but they still operate under the moral umbrella of democracy, whose righteousness is undiminished however symbolic or passive its elected officials may become. Note that this is not unlike the modern fate of constitutional monarchy.

In extreme progressivism, as practiced today by Eurocorp, meaningful politics can be eliminated entirely, but the sovcorp still considers itself perfectly democratic. Needless to say, so do its subjects. The defunct "people's democracies" of Russia and Central Europe, though dominated by security forces rather than educational organs, followed a similar pattern.

Washcorp was also a leader in developing a comprehensive official education system. Like many techniques of 20th-century sovcorps, official education — which includes official primary, secondary and tertiary instruction, official scientific research, official journalism and broadcasting, etc — is essential to prevent democracy from degenerating into civil war or rebellion. Otherwise, political conflicts are simply too real, and parties become attracted by the creative opportunities of escalating violence. Either the sovcorp's security organs become its first line of defense, or it succumbs to the mayhem. There are no modern examples of a stable democratic sovcorp without an effective system of official education.

Needless to say, coordinating the opinions of the population is one way to make them loyal workers and soldiers in wartime, and reliable taxpayers in peacetime. 20th-century sovcorps can be classed broadly by their choice between two models of domestic security: *educracy*, in which the sovcorp manages the opinions of its subjects with an official education system and confirms that this system is working by subjecting itself to democratic elections, and *securocracy*, in which the sovcorp forgets democracy and simply trusts its security forces as the ultimate guardians of order.

This is a continuous spectrum: all securocratic sovcorps also maintain official education systems, and all educratic sovcorps have effective, trustworthy security forces. But there is generally a consistent pattern of dominance in conflicts between educational and security agencies — for example, between journalists and policemen — which favors one or the other.

Official education was an essential step in Washcorp's new goal for the 20th century, the conquest of Europe. By intervening in the First Great War, Europe's first total civil war since 1815, at a point when the Central and Entente Powers had nearly defeated each other, Washcorp smashed the remnants of the Concert of Europe, destroyed the House of Romanov and conveyed its possessions to the new, ultraprogressive and ultraviolent sovcorp *Sovetskiy Soyuz*, and began the process of remodeling Europe as a cluster of Washcorp client states. By forming an alliance with Sovetskiy Soyuz, the notorious Popular Front, and by using diplomatic ultimatums to intimidate the Japanese sovcorp *Dai Nippon* into a hopeless preemptive attack, Washcorp inserted itself into the Second Great War, completed the destruction of Europe and Japan with merciless, indiscriminate bombing campaigns that killed more than a million civilians, and graduated to the task of dividing global power between itself and Sovetskiy Soyuz. When you're feelin' it, as they say, you're feelin' it.

Meanwhile, the Nationalist Period ended in 1933 with the rise of the Voldemort system, or New Deal. Washcorp had destroyed its financial system by adopting the British model of central banking, in which Washcorp itself guaranteed the value of private loans. During the 1920s this created a pyramid of debt substantially exceeding the quantity of gold available to pay it, and when the pyramid collapsed Plainland — along with most other countries — was devastated. This set the stage for the rise of an unscrupulous aristocrat, Lord Franklin Voldemort, often known simply as *That Man*, whose rule inaugurated the current *Fourth* or *Universalist Corporation*.

Lord Voldemort, elected on a [platform](#) of scaling back Washcorp, instead seized absolute power, eliminating the last formal limits to Washcorp's domestic power. His staff of extreme Progressives dedicated themselves to implementing Bellamy's vision of an [Industrial Army](#), an ideal planned society in which Washcorp employees coordinated all productive activity in Plainland. (Voldemort even put his name on a book called *Looking Forward*.) Nationalist holdouts prevented this vision from being realized before Washcorp's intervention in the Second Great War, but after 1941 the last anti-Voldemort forces were politically isolated and destroyed. The postwar period saw an enormous expansion of official education in the Progressive tradition, completing and cementing the Fourth Corporation, which rules Plainland to this day.

All official education in Plainland today instructs Plainlanders to revere Lord Voldemort and his movement. All orthodox political factions claim pure Voldemortian descent. And all private businesses operate as quasiautonomous subsidiaries of Washcorp, which has settled on the elegant design of allowing their managers full entrepreneurial freedom, while maintaining total regulatory control over their operational policies and procedures.

However, all is not utterly copacetic in Plainland. The 1920s saw the first outbreaks of genuine anti-Washcorp murmuring since the War of Southern Separation, as some Plainlanders started to realize that their interests and Washcorp's were not always identical. After the proto-Voldemortian era of Progressive fanatic [Woodrow Wilson](#), the Return to Normalcy — ie, sanity — of [Warren Harding](#) and [Calvin Coolidge](#) actually reduced the size and importance of Washcorp. The same feat was achieved by [Ronald Reagan](#), and attempted unsuccessfully by a variety of failed political rebellions, such as those of [Strom Thurmond](#), [Joseph McCarthy](#), [Barry Goldwater](#), and [George Wallace](#). While none of these movements actually aimed at the destruction of Washcorp, and none had any chance of permanently checking its expansion, they can only be described as worrisome.

One fascinating response to the development of discontent is the rise of pro-Washcorp ultraloyal pseudo-opposition movements, comparable to Catholic [ultramontanism](#). After the Second Great War, the size, efficiency and ideological consistency of Washcorp's system of official education considerably increased. The 1960s saw the harvest of this program, with the rise of extremist ultra movements such as the [SDS](#). The SDS's manifesto, the [Port Huron Statement](#), is worth reading in full — as a Universalist confession, as an expression of faith in the absolute righteousness of Washcorp (if led, of course, by the enlightened), and an action plan for seizing the universities and redoubling the ideological intensity of official education. Needless to say, the plan succeeded, and the ideas of the SDS are now mainstream.

With Washcorp becoming the default employer and financial guardian of all Plainlanders, political conflict in Plainland increasingly transitioned to a highly stable phase in which all significant conflict was not between pro-Washcorp and anti-Washcorp Plainlanders, but between different factions within Washcorp itself.

These battles tended to play out in Washcorp's so-called "foreign policy." In the 1940s, the high Voldemortian plan of creating a single global sovcorp, by converting the victorious alliance of the Second Great War, the [United Nations](), into a permanent sovcorp cartel which could cohere gradually in the usual manner, suffered a major setback when a schism appeared between Washcorp and its primary progressive client, Sovetskiy Soyuz. This [Anglo-Soviet split]() was due to the paranoid, militaristic management style of the securocratic progressive "people's democracies," as was demonstrated by further mafia-style catfights, such as the Titoist and Maoist splits with Moscow.

However, the Anglo-Soviet split also divided Washcorpers into one faction whose primary goal was opposing Soviet power, and another faction whose primary goal was healing the split and restoring unity in the global progressive movement. These factions faced off in three Asian proxy wars, two of which actually involved Plainlander slave soldiers: the Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese civil wars.

In the Chinese civil war, different departments of Washcorp backed opposing armies, with the State Department supporting Mao and the Pentagon Chiang. State succeeded with the aid of the New Deal political general [George Marshall](), imposing an arms embargo on Chiang, who was reactionary and corrupt, and ensuring his defeat at the hands of Mao, who was a murderous megalomaniac. Not only did Mao murder 30 million Chinese, but only three years later his slave armies were fighting directly against the Pentagon's own.

It was slightly difficult to explain to Plainlanders that, while Hitler's Nazi myrmidons were so evil that it was necessary to level Germany and accept no terms but unconditional surrender, Mao's progressive volunteers could not even be frowned at until they had actually crossed the Korean border — and preferably not even the 38th parallel. Progress, however, can explain anything, and by the 1950s Washcorp had had a lot of practice.

The even more bizarre gladiatorial bloodbath of Vietnam, in which it was almost impossible to recognize anything resembling a military strategy or objective, was so hard for Plainlanders to understand that it actually wound up as a political victory for the ultra-loyalist radicals, now recognizable as our modern-day "blue-state" Coasters. Vietnam was so confusing that after the Pentagon had won a complete military victory over the South Vietnamese insurgents, State prevailed by simply capturing Congress and imposing a surprise arms embargo on the corrupt, reactionary leaders of South Vietnam, treating them much as it had treated Chiang. The resulting North Vietnamese invasion surely reminded a few diplomatic silverbacks of the good old Popular Front days, when the Red Army rode into Poland on Plainland-made Jeeps.

The pattern repeated itself across most of the planet. Any ally was a good ally for State, so long as it was not reactionary and corrupt, ie, an ally of the Pentagon. The more nationalist, socialist, and violent, however, the better. For some reason it was important for Washcorp to have more allies in more places than Sovetskiy Soyuz, and these three factions — Pentagon, State, and Soviet — competed for the

privilege of funneling money and weapons to the murderous and criminally mismanaged Third World sovcorps that emerged from the postwar destruction of European law and order in most of Africa and Asia. Tens of millions of people were killed and billions left destitute in this new imperial scramble, which is still described today as the "liberation" and "independence" of the Third World. Apparently "liberation" requires the rule of sovcorps whose managers have the right skin color, and "independence" involves receiving billions of dollars a year in "aid."

The so-called "conservative" strategy, in which confused, half-brainwashed Middlers attempted to revolt against the Coaster departments of Washcorp through aggressive military provocations overseas, which if victorious would strengthen Middler politicians and the Middler-dominated armed forces (now mercifully relieved of slave troops), after a few minor successes in the 1980s and 1990s found its tragic, yet blackly comical, Waterloo in Iraq.

After a spectacular attack by neo-Islamic progressive terrorists on New York, Plainlanders became vehemently, if temporarily, done with the systematic adoration of any Third World thug whose only saving grace was to be an enemy of the Pentagon. Coasters found it impossible to prevent the Pentagon's invasion of Iraq, whose ruling sovcorp, [Baathco](), had done an exceptionally poor job of maintaining its membership as a State Department client. Instead Baathco had cultivated the Europeans, leaving two degrees of separation between itself and State. Two turned out to be one too many.

The invasion of Iraq was a smashing military success. But it was a tactical success and a strategic defeat, because the tremendous political power of 21st-century progressivism left the Pentagon with no viable options. It could not rule Iraq as a possession, as [Arthur MacArthur]() had in the Philippines. It could not govern Iraq as a subjugated enemy, like [his son]() in Japan. It could not restore a monarchy, as [Kermit Roosevelt]() had in Iran. It could not even install one of its patented reactionary, corrupt dictators, like Chiang or [Diem]() or [Syngman Rhee]().

No, the same military force that subjugated the South of Plainland itself and ruled it under the [Lieber Code](), which let it shoot any uniformless combatant, without a trial — that, under the same code, invaded the Philippines and turned it into one of the most famously pro-Washcorp regions outside Plainland itself — that obliterated Germany and Japan from the air, killing a million civilians, and reconstructed them as pacifist communes under the notorious [JCS 1067]() — could only execute a politically and militarily absurd plan which installed a democratic sovcorp, using proportional representation of all systems, promised to leave as soon as the ballots were dry, and bound itself to obey rules of engagement probably insufficient to impose order in Newark, New Jersey.

It might as well have issued every Iraqi with an AK-47, an RPG and three IEDs, and ordered everyone to join a paramilitary gang as soon as possible, winners to be selected by whatever prowess they could demonstrate in killing Plainlanders.

While this strategy was certainly well-designed for Coaster factions to prevent a military and hence

Middler victory, it was not exactly designed to make Washcorp popular among Middlers. As if it they didn't love it already! And with its security forces essentially in the hands of its enemies, Washcorp faces a difficult political struggle. As its educational system becomes increasingly stagnant and moribund, inculcating at least as much apathy as loyalty, its natural evolution would be to transition from educracy to securocracy. But its own military caste despises it profoundly.

The only way to keep them in check is more democracy. Which means extending the franchise. Which, since the entire framework of nationalism depends on the identity between geography, sovcorp and population, and the ideal solution of letting actual Europeans vote in Washcorp elections is simply beyond reach, means importing more and more Beringian voters from Mexico, while reducing the power of the White House (no Democrat has won the Euro-Plainlander presidential vote since Lyndon Johnson), in favor of that of Congress, which through seniority and gerrymandering has achieved the ideal Universalist combination of democratic legitimacy and civil-service stability. As demonstrated by its approval ratings, which seem to hover barely in the double digits without any degradation of power. Whereas if a President has an 11% rating, not even his hairdresser will do his combover the way he asks.

Now that the last strategy which seemed to offer some hope to Middlers, invading the world and restoring Western civilization to places from which it has spent the last hundred years evaporating, is off the table, the evolutionary path of Washcorp seems obvious. Until such time as its creditors tire of loaning it another trillion dollars every year, it will join Eurocorp in its gradual progress toward becoming a bureaucratic, Brezhnevian *Beamtenstaat*. As in Europe, the distinction between working as a direct employee of Washcorp and working for a "private" company will become increasingly irrelevant, as companies become branded, financially independent arms of the State in which the entire process of production is dictated by regulation, a la [ISO 9000](#) or [Sarbox](#).

So: this is Washcorp. I hope I have covered the major points. Hopefully for any missing details, it should be reasonably easy to translate the official story to fit with the above. The official story is almost never wrong as a matter of fact. It is usually just interpretation.

Of course, even if this jaundiced and decidedly unofficial biography of Washcorp is an accurate perspective, [Hume's ought](#) does not entitle us to claim that Washcorp is evil. Still less are we left with any idea of what to do about it, if it is.

However, there are still some interesting observations we can make.

The first observation is that the employees of Washcorp are overwhelmingly Universalist — except for the disgruntled military.

The second is that Washcorpers think of their employer as a fundamentally charitable — ie, [eleemosynary](#) — institution. It's not just that Washcorp has Google's motto, "do no evil." The point is so obvious that to state it is to sully it. The meaning of Washcorp is that Washcorp does good.

Not just for Plainland, of course, but for the whole world. Because Universalists do not, of course, value Plainlanders over any other neohominids. And Washcorpers are Universalists, so good to Washcorp is Universalist good. The archaic legacy policies and procedures that force Washcorp to discriminate in favor of Plainlanders are distasteful and detestable, and should be discarded as fast as possible. Ideally, Washcorp itself would become only an unimportant unit of a single global sovcorp.

The third is that, even though the source of Washcorp's fundamental goodness is its connection to public opinion, which can never be misguided or evil, there is still a way to evaluate Washcorp without reference to the cult of democracy. Democracy, like the principle of divine right, legitimizes Washcorp's ownership of Plainland. To a good Universalist, the only way in which Washcorp can become evil is if it abandons democracy, in which case it is no longer legitimate and should be treated as a tyrannical dictatorship. Until then, it is good. Etc.

A formalist, however, can duck this entire trap. A formalist has no interest at all in Washcorp's political formula. She does not care whether Washcorp's democracy is good democracy, bad democracy, or no democracy at all. To her, Washcorp simply owns Plainland. There is no why. Ownership is demonstrated by unchallenged control. Washcorp has it. Perhaps some debate is possible over what other parts of the world Washcorp owns. As far as Plainland goes, it's a no-brainer.

The formalist, therefore, judges Washcorp only by its actions. She can say: why does Washcorp do X or Y? Why do the people involved with Washcorp act in ways that lead it to do X or Y? Would it be better, in her opinion, if it did Z instead? And — granted that Washcorp is invincible and cannot be destroyed — how, if at all, can she act to help change it into something whose actions are more desirable?

We'll cover this next week. But essentially, my view is that people who oppose Washcorp are simply barking up the wrong tree. It's not just that Washcorp can't be defeated. It's that even trying to weaken it is a mistake. Weaken a sovcorp, make it less efficient, and it compensates by getting larger and more complex.

Rather, I think only the way to fix Washcorp is to *improve it out of existence.* It needs to become so much more powerful and so much more efficient that it no longer exists as such. And this effort must not contradict Universalism in any way, shape or form. If this doesn't make any sense or strike you as possible, please be patient and stay tuned.

How Dawkins got pwned (part 6)

Thursday, November 1, 2007 at 2:15 AM

(See parts 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.)

At this point we've established, at least to my satisfaction, that (a) there is such a thing as Universalism; (b) Universalism is an educationally-transmitted tradition that works just like any theistic religion, and is best understood as a descendant of Christianity; (c) Professor Dawkins is (despite his occasional twinges of conscience) operating as a vector of Universalism; and (d) orthodox Universalism insists on some rather unsupported conclusions about biology, and some theories of history and politics which seem less than parsimonious.

This is all very well and good. But it hasn't brought us that much closer to constructing a way of thinking which is thoroughly non-Universalist, from which we can look back at Universalism and evaluate it aesthetically as a whole. Is Universalism basically normal and healthy, with a few historical quirks? Or is it basically weird and creepy, with a few redeeming graces?

This is obviously a subjective judgment. It's obvious what I think. But I cannot change anyone else's opinion by just repeating my own.

Rather, I think the only way to evaluate Universalism is to construct a reference ideology so foreign to Universalism that the Universalist immune system does not attack it, because it does not recognize it as comparable to any past or present enemy. By imagining the perspective of someone raised to believe in this ideology — which I've called neocameralism or formalism — you can start to assemble your own picture of what Universalism might look like from the outside.

In the last two posts I synthesized a bit of neocameralist history. This week, we'll do a little "political science" — a singularly inapt name for the logic of law and power.

Universalism, again, is a mystery cult of power. Its supreme being is the State. And all of the Universalist mysteries — *humanity*, *democracy*, *equality*, and so on — cluster around the philosophy of collective action. Christianity has been a state religion since Constantine, of course, but it always also included magical and metaphysical mysteries, which the advance of science has rendered superfluous at best, embarrassing at worst. So Universalism, unlike its ancestors, is not concerned with *the Trinity* or *transubstantiation* or *predestination*. But its political mysteries remain chewy enough to delight the most hypertrophied of mental mandibles.

We want to avoid all this. Therefore, we have to build a new language which describes the logic of collective action in a way that does not remind us of Universalism. We'll retain the Universalist legal or

political terminology only in cases where the old word is (a) precisely defined, and (b) has no positive connotations.

Essentially, formalism is a system of collective action in which the only sin is to break your own promise. Neocameralism is formalism on a political scale.

Formalism starts with the idea of an *agreement*. When you are party to an agreement, you promise others that your future actions will follow some pattern. For example, you may promise to paint Joe's house, as long as Joe promises to pay you for the job. You and Joe may also agree on how unexpected events, disputes, and so forth, will be handled.

The concept of *property* emerges naturally from formalism. You and Joe agree to be neighbors, rather than enemies. You construct an agreement which draws an imaginary line on the ground, and keep your respective cattle on your respective sides of the line.

Another concept that will emerge in any system of agreements is the *corporation*. A corporation is just a named pattern of agreement. If you and Joe construct a shared sheep-dip, it may be easiest to describe this virtual entity as a corporation, and describe its agreements with Fred's Pesticide Supply as agreements between two parties — rather than between you, Joe, and all the owners and employees of Fred's. Without this level of indirection, agreements would balloon to incredible size through cascading inclusion.

This model of labeling and indirection can be applied to even the most trivial cases. Instead of dealing with Joe, you can deal with JoeCorp, whose sole owner is Joe. There is really no use in constructing a system of agreements which does not recognize virtual entities.

Neocameralism deals with the special case of *sovereign corporations*, or *sovcorps*. A sovcorp is a corporation which is not dependent on any other power. To make agreements with other sovcorps, it must ensure that it is not in the other sovcorp's interest to break those agreements — otherwise, it will probably do so. How it achieves this is the problem of *security*.

Universalism, of course, has its own word meaning "sovcorp." In fact, if you discard every doctrine or mystery of Universalism except for those which determine what a legitimate sovcorp is and whether or not it's righteous, you'll find that you still have most of it left. As [Hume noted](), righteousness is not susceptible to logic. We cannot disprove Universalism by describing its political doxology as weird. We can only attempt to construct an alternative system from which Universalism may strike us as, in retrospect, weird.

First, you and I are not sovcorps. We are people. We may be employees of sovcorps. We may be customers of sovcorps. We may even be slaves of sovcorps. Depending on the exact details of the relationship, some or all of these words may apply. However, if you make your home on a patch of land owned by some sovcorp S, it is certainly fair to describe you as a *tenant* of S. And anyone reading this

today is certainly a tenant of some sovcorp — in my case, Washcorp.

Therefore, from the perspective of a tenant, we can ask: what makes a sovcorp good or bad?

This question is too abstract to be useful. To sharpen it slightly, we should place it in terms that are both relative and personal. We can do this by saying: given two sovcorps S and T, identical except in feature F, would you, dear reader, rather be a tenant of S or of T? For example, would you consider moving from T to S to take advantage of F, or from S to T to escape from F?

This approach leads us to two orthogonal criteria for judging sovcorps. A sovcorp should be judged by its *stability*, and by its *actions*.

We cannot assess a sovcorp without assessing its stability. If it fails to maintain security, the consequences are likely to be appalling. Transitions of power at the sovereign level, while they certainly may replace a worse sovcorp with a better one, can result in an arbitrary level of collateral damage. While it is always in the winner's interest to seize the territory and its occupants intact, as both constitute capital, tactical considerations may demand devastation.

There are certainly cases in which a tenant may favor war or revolution. However, there is no reason to support a violent transition in power unless (a) that transition is likely to succeed, and (b) its destination is preferable to its origin, counting all tactical devastation. Neither of these tests is anywhere near positive in the West today, so I don't find these cases interesting. And unless the tests are met, a tenant should always prefer a stable sovcorp (longevity can be easily assessed with a prediction market) to an unstable one.

Note that stability replaces the Universalist mystery of *legitimacy*. Legitimacy is an outlier in Universalist political doxology: it dates back to a pre-Universalist era which had far more in common with neocameralism. Universalists have no moral explanation of why any ruthless armed gang which seizes control of a historically-significant territory should be termed a *government*, develop the mysterious grandeur associated with this word, and be entitled to its seat in the United Nations. Apparently that's just the way it is. Can you say "epicycle," boys and girls?

Given stability, we arrive at a second criterion, which that a sovcorp should be judged by its *actions*. As tenants, we can have no possible reason to care who is running the sovcorp or why, except inasmuch as this contributes to its stability.

For example, if I live in Plainland, do I have any good reason to care about the identity of the administrators or the owners of the sovcorp that owns Plainland? They could be Plainlanders. They also could be from Deutschland, Thailand, or Somaliland. As a tenant, what matters to me is not who they are, but what they do. It will probably be cheapest for the sovcorp to employ Plainlanders as its low-level functionaries, but for executives and owners this is quite irrelevant. And using foreigners as executives

has its own advantage for the sovcorp — they are far less likely to become involved in conflicts of interest.

When we consider other elements of sovcorp design, therefore, we will consider them only inasmuch as they affect the actions and the stability of the sovcorp. For example, is the [rotary system](#) a desirable feature in a sovcorp? Perhaps, but only if it makes the sovcorp more stable or its actions more desirable.

In my opinion as a tenant, there are four characteristics which describe the actions of the kind of sovcorp I prefer. Bear in mind that, since the first function of a sovcorp is security, its most desirable attribute is stability, and there is no stability without security, authentic security motivations justify exceptions to any of these principles.

One, the sovcorp respects all agreements between itself and its tenants. A good sovcorp employs an external arbitrator which resolves all disputes that may result from conflicting, confusing or poorly-drafted agreements. It accepts the arbitrator's judgment as final.

Two, the sovcorp can enforce any agreement between its tenants. Since the sovcorp needs a security force to protect itself against other sovcorps, it must maintain unchallenged military control of its territory. It can — and should — allow tenants to invoke this power in their own agreements. For example, I can agree with Joe that if he pays me to paint his house, but I don't paint his house, Washcorp will descend upon me and give Joe his money back. As a tenant, I have no reason to prefer a sovcorp which does not provide this service.

Three, the sovcorp does not artificially restrict its tenants. In other words, it maintains [Pareto optimality](#). For example, I have no reason to prefer a sovcorp which does not allow me to wear red clothing, because my garish garb cannot harm Joe or anyone else. (Point two can be seen as a special case of point three — a sovcorp that does not enforce tenant agreements cannot be Pareto optimal, because any sovcorp has this capability.)

Four, the sovcorp does not tax its tenants, except as needed to secure its territory. And this is not a tax, but a security fee. A sovcorp should not be profitable. It should exist to protect and serve, not to harvest and render. Obviously, one reason to move from S to T may be that T has lower taxes — as long as these are not so low that security is jeopardized.

Now: which of these things is not like the other?

Obviously, as a tenant, I prefer all four of these features. But if I have to give up any one, I will give up the fourth. Giving up any of the other three involves at best major weirdness, and at worst a bullet in the head. Giving up profitable taxation involves, essentially, a rent increase.

A profitable sovcorp will attempt to maximize revenue. In other words, it will try to hit the top of the [Laffer curve](#). Given that all sovcorps in the world today, and almost all in history, operate as revenue

maximizers, this should not be too frightening or controversial.

There are three major reasons why profitability is a desirable feature in a sovcorp, despite its obvious disadvantage from the perspective of the tenant.

The first is that a profitable sovcorp is a more stable sovcorp. A sovcorp that is not maximizing revenue is leaving money on the table. Attackers can use the prospect of capturing this revenue stream to capitalize their attempts to defeat the sovcorp. The promise of loot has been an essential motivator in many invasions and revolutions. The miracle of capitalism allows the attacker to deploy this resource before it is even captured. If the defender cannot do likewise — because it is in some way bound to not maximize revenue — the advantage shifts to the attacker.

The second is that the nonprofit sovcorp is actually a general case of the profitable sovcorp. This is easy to see. If the nonprofit sovcorp were to go profitable and maximize its revenue, it would increase every payment P made by its tenants from Pn, the nonprofit fee, to Pp, the profitable tax. It can easily duplicate the effect by going profitable anyway, and treating (Pp - Pn) as a dividend payment or rebate. This is Pareto-optimizing, because the recipient of this dividend can treat the right to receive it as a share, and sell the share.

The third is an argument I made in [this post](): that the advantage of profitability, from the tenant's perspective, is that it creates a coherent management objective. Profitable corporations tend to provide better customer service, because coherently managed organizations tend to be more efficient. This is why you never see the National Hamburger Society on the list of restaurants at the next exit.

Of course, a sovcorp is not a restaurant. We can reasonably ask whether it *should* be efficient. As tenants, would we prefer to live in a territory managed by a sovcorp which has coherent corporate goals, and achieves them at minimum expense? Or one whose owner is slow, bumbling, and harmless?

In my view, once you get to the point where it is preferable for a sovcorp to be inefficient, you are already into war-or-revolution territory. A sovcorp should be inefficient only in doing evil. If it's in the evil business, it has already violated one of the major criteria, and it's hardly worth debating its efficiency.

Once we've decided that our sovcorp should be both profitable and efficient, we are into very familiar territory. We know a lot about how to design profitable, efficient corporations.

A profitable, efficient sovcorp has two forms of capital. The first is the territory it owns. The second is its reputation. It protects these not out of the goodness of its heart, but for financial reasons — which, unlike the hearts of corporate managers, are extremely reliable.

So, for example, the sovcorp does not renege on its agreements with its tenants, because the capital value of a territory in which the rule of law holds is much greater than one in which it doesn't. Prosperity flees uncertainty, and sovcorps profit by taxing prosperity. And it is quite unheard of for corporate executives

to intentionally drive their own stock price down.

Thus, a profitable, efficient sovcorp should obey the first three rules above (and not, of course, the fourth). The problem would seem to be solved.

We would expect a profitable and efficient — and hence desirable — sovcorp to look very much like today's private, non-sovereign corporations. That is, we would expect them to distribute their revenues as dividends to a set of voting shareholders, who choose a board in voting by shares, which chooses a CEO, who has complete management authority.

And yet today's sovcorps look nothing like private corporations at all.

They are not in any way profitable. They are renowned not for their efficiency, but for their inefficiency. They are managed by byzantine networks of conflicting committees and books of procedure. Their managers do not have hire and fire power. Their customers are part of their executive selection process. They do not come even close to Pareto optimization. There is really no resemblance at all. The only thing today's "governments" have in common with the sovcorp design above is that a "government" is, without question, a sovereign corporation.

So this analysis leaves us with three interesting questions.

First, why did this simple design process produce a sovcorp architecture so different from the one that history has bequeathed to us?

Second, how do shareholders maintain control of a sovcorp, when there is no higher sovereign authority to enforce the corporate charter? Why won't the managers just perform an [autogolpe](#)? And who decides whether a security exception is "authentic?"

Third, how does understanding Universalism help us answer the first and second questions?

How Dawkins got pwned (part 7)

(See parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.)

Part 7 is actually the actual conclusion to this monstrous piece. Even better, next week I'll try to answer some of the very cogent questions that have built up in the comments.

At the risk of sounding like Maya Angelou, the only way to end is to return to the beginning. Our beginning is of course Professor Dawkins, and that little blind spot in the back of his head which we've learned to call Universalism.

Let's not forget what makes Professor Dawkins so pwned. The great exploit is that the good professor genuinely believes that he subscribes to *no belief system at all*. As Sam Harris puts it:

> We should not call ourselves atheists. We should not call ourselves secularists. We should not call ourselves humanists, or secular humanists, or naturalists, or skeptics, or anti-theists, or rationalists, or freethinkers, or brights. We should not call ourselves anything.

In other words: the only pattern that describes our beliefs is reason, reality, or truth. Thus no additional label is necessary. There is no word for people who believe that a dropped stone accelerates at 9.8 meters per second squared. Why should there be?

If you're right, of course, you're right. However, it is not difficult to see the potential for arrogance and intolerance in any such reluctance to self-label. No 13th-century Frenchman would have labeled himself as "a Catholic." He did not call himself anything, any more than Sam Harris. His beliefs were universal — that's what *catholic* means. But were they true? Certainly not by Sam Harris's light.

Admittedly, this "No Logo" approach — which I suspect Professor Dawkins is a little too sharp to fall for — is preferable to the appalling coinage *bright*, which suggests that anyone who disagrees is not only ignorant but also stupid. 21st-century fanaticism really knows no shame.

But even the term *atheist* defines a belief system as an absence of creed — and thus of credulity. (If you're an atheist, as I am.) Thus it is essentially the same sort of evasion. The *atheist* label serves as a token of agreement between Professor Dawkins and his burgeoning legion of followers that the only pattern which describes their collective beliefs is that they have escaped from — or at least failed to succumb to — one particular barbaric, medieval superstition. While this may be correct, it's hardly modest.

Let's say there are two kinds of belief systems. A class A belief system propagates nothing but an accurate

perception of reality. A class B belief system propagates fictions, distortions, contradictions, and/or other general nonsense. Since no one has any conscious desire to believe in nonsense, it's hard to see how any class B belief system can survive unless it can disguise itself as a class A belief system. (I see no reason to think there has ever been any such beast in the wild as a class A belief system.)

The hack that has exploited Professor Dawkins is almost too simple to work. It's truly elegant. When I was 17, I found a setgid violation on a SunOS kernel profiler and used it to find the address of my U area, which I could zero from the console debugger, giving my shell process root. I found this terribly cool. Then I showed it to an older hacker, who must have been all of 21 (Tom Lawrence? Is Tom Lawrence in the building? I think he worked at SGI for a while…) and he showed me how he'd used a link editor on the kernel objects to construct a version of SunOS (bootable from the console debugger) with a disabled setuid() function, on which *all processes* were unavoidably root. Trust me — this was much, much cooler. But it wasn't as cool as "atheism."

By sacrificing a single metaphysical construct — "God" — this new release of Christianity, Universalism, has constructed a convincing case (at least it seems to convince Professor Dawkins) that it has transitioned from a class B system to a class A system. And how has it done this? Simply by pointing to its predecessor, and noting that the former is class B. Well, duh.

Everyone knows that Western thought today, even in its most fashionable incarnations, has Christian roots. But somehow, most of us think it's possible to escape the implications of this connection by simply denying the Christian label, and adopting a metaphysical doctrine — atheism — which is repugnant to the unwashed who have not made this great leap. The result is that we land in "No Logo" nirvana. We are the enlightened ones. Hail us!

Imagine if I tried the same with Nazism. I could march around in a brown leather uniform all day, waving a swastika banner and condemning the filthy Zionist-Bolshevik hordes. When questioned by the usual voices of decency, I could respond that:

- I'm not a Nazi. In fact, I oppose Nazism. So I'm not a Nazi.

- I'm half-Jewish. The Nazis would never have me. So I'm not a Nazi.

- Nazis believe in the leadership of Adolf Hitler. I don't. So I'm not a Nazi.

- My inverted swastika is actually a Hindu fertility symbol. So I'm not a Nazi.

Etc, etc, etc. How much ice do you think this would cut with the diversity committee? But somehow, when the creed is Christianity rather than Nazism, it can be ditched as easily as a Muslim's wife. Just say: "I'm an atheist, I'm an atheist, I'm an atheist." And no one will ever be able to accuse you of being a religious fanatic, at least not without substantial preparatory explanation. What more perfect cover story for an actual religious fanatic?

Anyway. I apologize if I'm getting a little repetitive here. I don't think this trick can be analyzed too many times. I grew up as a Universalist myself, and there's nothing like finding one of those Brawndo moments in one's own head, especially after 30-plus years of believing any such mental baggage was reserved for one's lessers. "But Brawndo has electrolytes." And so it does.

This poor little blog cannot possibly hope to topple or even shake the great Gibraltar that is the Universalist church. But what I love about exploring Universalism, what makes it so fun for me, is that there's a genuine sense of newness to it. The anaesthetic that the Universalist brainworm secretes, euphoric though it is — who can deny the believer's genuine joy? — conceals all kinds of fascinating adaptive structures. With the magic sunglasses, these pop right out in living color, and you can see them every day on the front page of the Times. It's like going on a galactic mission to Planet Earth. America the home of the free and the brave, and Plainland the home of the Universalist corporate theocracy, are the same physical place. But you can be excused for wishing you hadn't left your spacesuit back on the ship.

Anyway. To continue the discussion from part 6, we were talking about governments. Or as we say when we use the magic sunglasses, sovcorps.

The fundamental problem of modern history is to understand the great massacres of the 20th century. To at least the first approximation, any general theory of modern history must be a theory of democide.

I've expressed this before, but let me state it more bluntly: the cause of democide is democracy. The democides of the 20th century — plus one important adumbration, the War of Secession, the first modern total war — can only be understood as a consequence of the victory of democracy. And therefore of the defeat of the Concert of Europe and the Holy Alliance.

Needless to say, this belief is the polar opposite of Universalist doctrine. Of all Universalist cult words, there is perhaps none more holy than *democracy*. And these days the especially daring may make so bold as to praise Enoch Powell, but no significant political intellectual at least in my lifetime has tipped much hat to Wellington, Metternich or Castlereagh. I always liked Shelley's verse:

> I met Murder on the way —
> He had a mask like Castlereagh —
> Very smooth he looked, yet grim;
> Seven blood-hounds followed him;
> All were fat; and well they might
> Be in admirable plight,
> For one by one, and two by two,
> He tossed them human hearts to chew
> Which from his wide cloak he drew.

The latter stanza is doggerel, but the former with its cute anti-sightrhyme is really memorable. Which is

a shame in a way. Because if anyone's philosophy came flanked by murderous hounds, it was Shelley's revolutionary democratic nationalism. Whereas all Castlereagh's reactionary monarchism produced was European peace and prosperity for most of a century. But why should history be sane?

Of course, Universalists have their own theory of democide. In the Universalist narrative, the cause of democide is dictatorship, or more precisely *autocracy*.

I have been unable to determine the exact meaning of this word. However, it seems to be the case that a sovcorp is either a *democracy*, or an *autocracy*. I've certainly never heard of any regime that was both democratic and autocratic, or any that was neither. So presumably they are antonyms. However, a common synonym for the former is *self-government*. Since this is also the literal meaning of the latter, we can see that we're on some tricky linguistic ground.

So we have two theories of democide to compare: the reservationist theory (mine), and the Universalist theory (everyone else's). If popularity is your ruler, the answer is obvious. But in that case, surely there are other blogs you could be reading.

In questions of this appalling magnitude, I find the best way to "overcome bias" is often to find perspectives which seem to make each answer obvious. Once we recognize that both A and B are obviously true, and A is inconsistent with B, we are in the right mindset for actual thought.

From the reservationist perspective, democracy is obviously the cause of democide — because the Age of Democracy is also the Age of Democide. The last major outbreak of indiscriminate mass murder in Europe was the massacre of Beziers in the [Albigensian Crusade](), which is easy to explain as a breakdown in military discipline, and whose memory also has suspicious links to the anticlerical [Black Legend]().

This was in 1209. (Possibly some nasty things also happened in the [Thirty Years War](). But defenestration is not democide. Nor is famine or the pest. And even if we admit that the [Sack of Magdeburg]() was no picnic, it was again a failure of discipline — the opposite of [Eichmann]().)

Then, 780 years later, the association between popular government and democide opens with the [French Revolution]() (if not with [Cromwell's plantation of Ireland]()), and continues to pop up everywhere. Every sovcorp which has ever committed democide has claimed to be the one true representative of the People. [Black Legend]() notwithstanding, significant cases of monarchist mass murder are hard to find. (For example, most of what you know about the so-called "Inquisition" [isn't true]().)

Furthermore, before our great Age of Democracy, it was widely assumed that progress would simply continue and civilization would only get more civilized. The famous example is Gibbon, from his [General Observations]():

> It is the duty of a patriot to prefer and promote the exclusive interest and glory of his native country; but a philosopher may be permitted to enlarge his views, and to consider Europe as one great

republic, whose various inhabitants have attained almost the same level of politeness and cultivation. The balance of power will continue to fluctuate, and the prosperity of our own or the neighbouring kingdoms may be alternately exalted or depressed; but these partial events cannot essentially injure our general state of happiness, the system of arts, and laws, and manners, which so advantageously distinguish, above the rest of mankind, the Europeans and their colonies. The savage nations of the globe are the common enemies of civilized society; and we may inquire with anxious curiosity, whether Europe is still threatened with a repetition of those calamities which formerly oppressed the arms and institutions of Rome. Perhaps the same reflections will illustrate the fall of that mighty empire, and explain the probable causes of our actual security.

The Romans were ignorant of the extent of their danger, and the number of their enemies. Beyond the Rhine and Danube, the northern countries of Europe and Asia were filled with innumerable tribes of hunters and shepherds, poor, voracious, and turbulent; bold in arms, and impatient to ravish the fruits of industry. The Barbarian world was agitated by the rapid impulse of war; and the peace of Gaul or Italy was shaken by the distant revolutions of China. The Huns, who fled before a victorious enemy, directed their march towards the West; and the torrent was swelled by the gradual accession of captives and allies. The flying tribes who yielded to the Huns assumed in their turn the spirit of conquest; the endless column of Barbarians pressed on the Roman empire with accumulated weight; and, if the foremost were destroyed, the vacant space was instantly replenished by new assailants. Such formidable emigrations can no longer issue from the North; and the long repose, which has been imputed to the decrease of population, is the happy consequence of the progress of arts and agriculture. Instead of some rude villages, thinly scattered among its woods and morasses, Germany now produces a list of two thousand three hundred walled towns; the Christian kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden, and Poland, have been successively established; and the Hanse merchants, with the Teutonic knights, have extended their colonies along the coast of the Baltic, as far as the Gulf of Finland. From the Gulf of Finland to the Eastern Ocean, Russia now assumes the form of a powerful and civilized empire. The plough, the loom, and the forge, are introduced on the banks of the Volga, the Oby, and the Lena; and the fiercest of the Tartar hordes have been taught to tremble and obey. The reign of independent Barbarism is now contracted to a narrow span; and the remnant of Calmucks or Uzbecks, whose forces may be almost numbered, cannot seriously excite the apprehensions of the great republic of Europe. Yet this apparent security should not tempt us to forget that new enemies, and unknown dangers, may possibly arise from some obscure people, scarcely visible in the map of the world. The Arabs or Saracens, who spread their conquests from India to Spain, had languished in poverty and contempt, till Mahomet breathed into those savage bodies the soul of enthusiasm.

[...] Europe is now divided into twelve powerful, though unequal, kingdoms, three respectable commonwealths, and a variety of smaller, though independent, states; the chances of royal and ministerial talents are multiplied, at least with the number of its rulers; and a Julian, or Semiramis,

may reign in the North, while Arcadius and Honorius again slumber on the thrones of the South. The abuses of tyranny are restrained by the mutual influence of fear and shame; republics have acquired order and stability; monarchies have imbibed the principles of freedom, or, at least, of moderation; and some sense of honour and justice is introduced into the most defective constitutions by the general manners of the times. In peace, the progress of knowledge and industry is accelerated by the emulation of so many active rivals: in war, the European forces are exercised by temperate and undecisive contests. If a savage conqueror should issue from the deserts of Tartary, he must repeatedly vanquish the robust peasants of Russia, the numerous armies of Germany, the gallant nobles of France, and the intrepid freemen of Britain; who, perhaps, might confederate for their common defence. Should the victorious Barbarians carry slavery and desolation as far as the Atlantic Ocean, ten thousand vessels would transport beyond their pursuit the remains of civilized society; and Europe would revive and flourish in the American world which is already filled with her colonies and institutions.

Only a few years after Gibbon wrote these words, barbarism erupted in the heart of Europe — not among the Uzbecks and Calmucks, but in Paris herself. The City of Light became the City of Terror. Naturally, the tragedy is celebrated to this day.

Of course Gibbon agreed with Burke about this. (He also famously wrote that "if a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus [ie, the Antonine period].") Basically, everyone sensible agreed. However we may perceive it today, in its own wake the French Revolution was no more considered defensible than the Third Reich is today.

From the 1790s through the 1820s, the word *revolution* actually had negative connotations in the King's English. If you had invented some new steam gizmo, you would be no more likely to describe it as *revolutionary* than a modern inventor would be to describe her work as *fascist*. ("My new fascist programming language — with *really strong* typechecking.") Even if all you meant was that your gizmo went around in circles, you'd probably find some different word.

For example, note how Shelley denounces the Liverpool regime in *Masque of Anarchy* — he accuses it of being anarchy under a mask of law. Actually suggesting that law was bad and anarchy was good would have been too much even for Shelley. (Anything that was too much for Shelley was too much for anyone.)

I don't find the links from Robespierre to Stalin and Mao particularly debatable. As for Hitler, the Jacobins and Nazis were both violent, charismatic street-gang movements with aggressive utopian ideals and a penchant for paranoid conspiracy theories, whose popular base was concentrated in the lower middle class. Ie: Hitler was practically Robespierre 2.0.

The great [Carroll Quigley](#)'s observations about democracy and the Great War are also quite pertinent. From [Tragedy and Hope](#), Quigley's criminally underread history of the century:

> The influence of democracy served to increase the tension of a crisis because elected politicians felt it necessary to pander to the most irrational and crass motivations of the electorate in order to ensure future election, and did this by playing on hatred and fear of powerful neighbors or on such appealing issues as territorial expansion, nationalistic price, "a place in the sun," "outlets to the sea," and other real or imagined benefits. At the same time, the popular newspaper press, in order to sell papers, played on the same motives and issues, arousing their peoples, driving their own own politicians to extremes, and alarming neighboring states to the point where they hurried to adopt similar kinds of of action in the name of self-defense. Moreover, democracy made it impossible to examine international disputes on their merits, but instead transformed every petty argument into an affair of honor and national prestige so that no dispute could be examined on its merits or settled as a simple compromise because such a sensible approach would at once be hailed by one's democratic opposition as a loss of face and an unseemly compromise of exalted moral principles.

Quigley is of course describing the phenomenon known as [jingoism](#). Compared to its 1914 incarnation, jingoism is a pretty minor problem these days. My guess is that we have the decline of political democracy, and the rise of bureaucratic democracy, to thank for this.

One thing most people don't know about the Great War is that all sides were democracies. There were no "absolute" governments in Europe in 1914. Recognizable democratic politics existed in every country. Calling [Wilhelmine Germany](#) in some way *autocratic* because Germans did not elect the Kaiser makes no more sense than calling the US *autocratic* because Americans do not elect the Supreme Court, or Europeans the European Commission.

(Which is not to say it makes no sense at all. But it makes the notion of a *war for democracy* risible. Much as 25 years later, the next *war for democracy* resulted in the enslavement of half Europe and most of Asia. Could I make this stuff up?)

In jingoism we see the Concert of Europe's last gasp for political oxygen. Reactionary aristocrats toward the end of the [Belle Époque](#) found that jingoist nationalism was their only way to compete for public favor with the socialists, whose program of plunder had obvious democratic appeal. The three classical traditions of Continental reaction — [Legitimism](#), [Orléanism](#), and [Bonapartism](#) — wound up congealing into a single shrunken and unattractive mass, in the shape of the [anti-Dreyfusards](#), which combined the worst features of Bonapartism and Orléanism. It's hardly surprising that the defenders of [Esterhazy](#) have drifted out of historical respectability.

If we are looking for an objective definition of *democracy* rather than a moralistic one, there's no way we can stick with the Western distinction between *representative democracy* and the more malignant 20th-century forms, *people's democracy* and *folkish democracy*.

The idea of representation is implicit in the symbolic doxology of all these regimes, even to some extent in divine-right (as opposed to propertarian) monarchy — which is perhaps best seen as a sort of proto-democracy. Symbolically, the democratic State represents the *General Will*, the aspirations and needs of the entire community. The link between State and *People* is axiomatic in all democracies.

Like sausage, the rituals by which this submission is established and renewed rarely reward excessive inspection. Hitler loved his plebiscites, the Americans demand a two-party circus, the Europeans have parliaments and proportional representation, the Soviets got along fine with just one party, the East Germans had various toy oppositions, etc, etc, etc. Frankly, if there is a major categorical distinction here, I just ain't seeing it.

The distinction between political and apolitical democracy does not strike me as terribly significant. In fact, the latter is probably preferable. Certainly all modern democracies have delegated most important tasks to apolitical bureaucrats. As James Burnham pointed out 65 years ago, the administrative relevance of elected officials in the Western democracies is steadily decreasing. The insane orgiastic elections of the American 19th century are gone.

The difference between liberal democracy and totalitarian democracy is much more relevant. But it is a matter of the State's actions, not its management structure. I certainly favor liberal if not libertarian government, and I despise the tyrannical megastate. But I see no reason at all why the electoral structure of a democratic state should have much bearing on whether it is liberal or tyrannical.

The EU, for example, has little more in the way of electoral politics than the Soviet Union, but it is a much nicer place to live. I suspect the main difference is just that the former is in Western Europe and the latter was brought to us by Russia, a great and beautiful country, but never one noted for its appreciation of personal independence.

From a practical political perspective, the problem faced by all democracies is the same. The regime's survival is dependent on its popularity. Its military is only a backup, and probably will not be willing to resist any serious popular protest. Therefore, to establish any stability, the democratic State must manage public opinion. This is also known as *manufacturing consent*, and it typically involves a substantial system of official or quasiofficial education and/or journalism.

So a good way to see which faction holds real power in a democratic state is to look at which can get its people into influential roles in education and/or journalism. For example, if anyone reading this still retains any doubt in the matter, this algorithm shows us that the Republicans are the real party of power in the US, and the Democrats are a toy or decoy opposition. Statistics show that the vast majority of political contributions from educators and journalists in the US go to Republicans. Obviously this is why political opinions in the US are constantly shifting to the right. An amoral young political entrepreneur will "lead" this shifting moral Zeitgeist, and adjust his positions to be mainstream at such time as he expects to contend for office. This may be why so many young American intellectuals support torturing

terrorists who refuse to accept Jesus as their personal savior.

Once we understand jingoism as a symptom of democracy, and once we realize that the structure or even existence of a democratic political system is not terribly important, the inference from democracy to democide starts to approach the obvious level. It is the Eastern totalitarian democracies of the 20th century that seem more the rule, and the Western liberal democracies more the exception. And we begin to suspect that the West is liberal despite democracy, whereas the East was totalitarian because of it.

You will find people who don't smoke and get lung cancer. And you may find non-democratic states which go off the rails and engage in mass murder. But generally, wherever you find the effect, it's not hard to guess the cause. Smoking obviously causes lung cancer, and democracy obviously causes democide. Duh.

But then we look at the Universalist theory of democide — and we see an equally obvious answer, which strikes us as much simpler. It certainly demands no long essay to explain.

We all know this theory. It tells us that democide is the result of evil dictatorships. When we look at the Age of Democide — discounting occasional moments of military exuberance, such as the strategic bombing of Japan and Germany — what we see is very clear. We see that mass murder is practiced by dictators, such as Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Saddam, Pol Pot, etc, etc, etc. Meanwhile, under representative democracy, we see peace and prosperity. Ergo, democracy is the cure for democide, and absence of democracy is the cause. Duh.

Of course, my reservationist opinion is that this argument seems simple and obvious only because we know it so well. ("But Brawndo has electrolytes!") But at least we have the contradiction, and it puts us in the right mood for actual analytic thought.

Our goal in this last part of the Dawkins essay is to *understand* Universalism, and to see it *adaptively* — to explain why it has outcompeted all the other crazy things people could believe, but don't.

Explaining Universalism's historical roots and sectarian pedigree is always interesting, but it always carries a slight hint of eau de McCarthy. The history of the thing (once again, I recommend McKenna's [Puritan Origins of American Patriotism](#)) helps us sort up from down and get some idea of what questions to ask. But fundamentally — as some commenters have observed — the history of Universalism tells us no more than we learn by knowing that political party X is descended from Nazis, or Communists, or whatever. Like its biological counterpart, memetic evolution can cover an impressive distance in a short time. (Consider the [Socreds](#).)

So the question is: why is Universalism so successful? Why are so many Americans and Europeans these days Universalists? Especially so many smart, well-informed, talented Americans and Europeans? And why does the intensity of Universalism seem to be growing?

(If you doubt the latter point, I have two words for you: [Operation Wetback](). If you need three, try [Louise Day Hicks](). Professor Dawkins' *shifting moral Zeitgeist* may deserve some more prosaic name than the Spirit of Time, and its morality is arguable as morality is. But it's pretty hard to say it ain't shifting. And yes, that bit about torturing terrorists for Jesus was satire.)

The critical issue, I think, is the relationship between Universalism and the State.

As I said in a previous post, this is at least as close as the connection between malaria and the mosquito. You can imagine something like Universalism whose transmission vector was not the State. You can also imagine something like malaria whose transmission vector was, say, the tick. But it's hard to imagine anyone calling it "malaria."

Even closer is the relationship between Universalism and democracy. These phenomena have quite clearly evolved together. At this point we are talking about multiple features of the same organism — more like the relationship between malaria [schizonts and trophozoites](). (Okay, yuck. But remember, folks, this is just an analogy.)

Whatever the details of the lifecycle, it seems pretty clear that one of these beasties is the chicken and the other one is the egg. Thus, picking one at random, let's start with democracy and explain why Universalism is so successful in a democratically managed sovcorp. (A fun exercise would be to take the opposite path, and explain why democracy is so successful in a sovcorp whose tenants are Universalists.)

Our goal is to understand Universalism from a historical perspective which is completely non-Universalist. While it was certainly not utterly free from democratic cant, the Burkean Europe that the Congress of Vienna tried to create, and did to some extent and for some time create, is certainly as close as we can come to such a perspective. It certainly beats the next competitor, the Antonine Rome of [Marcus Aurelius]().

(The nice thing about both these periods is that they were both relatively non-Universalist, yet relatively acceptable to Universalist taste. You simply can't argue that Castlereagh had anything in common with Hitler. He would have had Hitler horsewhipped. The thought of Stalin in the presence of Aurelius is similarly comical and depressing.)

We can construct a complete non-Universalist narrative of the State, therefore, by pulling out the good old what-ifs, and imagining that instead of decaying into nationalist democracy the Concert of Europe had advanced into neocameralism.

Let's review the neocameralist theory of the sovcorp for a moment.

A sovcorp is a corporation that owns a populated territory, and is not dependent on any other power to enforce its claim of property. A planet whose surface area is divided among multiple sovcorps is a stable property system if and only if no sovcorp can profit by attacking another. This can be assured by a variety

of means — military deterrence or compellence, collective security, etc, etc. Tall fences make good neighbors, but a nuke or two doesn't hurt neither. Rationally managed sovcorps are especially good at deterrence, because the game theory is much simpler if you assume rational actors.

(The basic difference between neocameralism and anarcho-capitalism is that I don't think this sort of self-enforcing property model scales militarily, at least not anywhere near to the level where individuals are sovereign. I mean, someone is crazy here, and I don't think it's me. But then I wouldn't, would I?)

Assuming military stability, the essential property of a stable neocameralist sovcorp is that its revenues are formalized and distributed equally among its shareholders, who own and manage it in proportion to their holdings. An immutable corporate charter sets the sovcorp's rights and responsibilities, and prevents a majority of shareholders from abusing a minority, eg, by confiscating their shares.

And who ensures that the corporate definition is immutable? Again, there is no such thing as a self-enforcing law. The ultimate decision algorithm in every dispute is always military. Fortunately, obeying simple rules is what military men do best. If the Schelling point of simple, precise formal law fails, there's always my favorite gimcrack technical solution — cryptographic weapon locks. In the 21st century, there's no reason every rifle — even every bullet — can't have one.

My belief is that, except for the minor matter of taxation, which will go to the Laffer maximum and stay there, a neocameralist sovcorp's interests are perfectly aligned with the interests of its tenants. Specifically, a profitable, efficiently-run sovcorp — even in the degenerate and undesirable case of a single global monopoly — will operate a libertarian government which maintains Pareto optimality. My reasoning is that any Pareto inefficiency represents an uncaptured tax, which affects the Laffer curve but generates zero revenue. Basically, the territory and residents of a sovcorp are its capital, and a well-run corporation, sovereign or otherwise, treats its capital the way the way Mother Teresa holds a baby bird.

So we can imagine a coherent alternate history in which the States of the Concert of Europe converted themselves into neocameralist sovcorps, by formalizing their revenues, dividing them into shares, and ceding management to the shareholders. Essentially, from the perspective of a monarch, this is like converting a family business into a public corporation. History shows that it's possible to run a sovcorp as a family business, but it doesn't really demonstrate that it's a good idea.

If I'm right that a shareholder-controlled sovcorp is stable, this would almost certainly have averted the democides of the 20th century. So why didn't it happen?

The answer, unfortunately, is that I don't think it was a realistic possibility.

The problem is that it's one thing to suggest that an informal business be formalized, and another to do it. And it's even harder in a sovcorp. Even if the idea is obvious and available, which in 1815 it clearly was not, there are many cases where it may be simply impossible.

No European monarchy was ever anything like "absolute." The so-called [Age of Absolutism](#) is misnamed — as the book behind the link demonstrates elegantly.

First, "absolute" is in any case a pejorative slur. A better word would be *coherent*. A coherent enterprise can coordinate all of its actions through a single central decision process. (This does not mean that a coherent sovcorp needs to engage in economic central planning.)

Second, coherence was not a quality but an aspiration of the old European monarchies, and a distant aspiration at that. Probably the most coherent 18th-century sovcorp was the Prussia of [Frederick the Great](#), but to call even Prussia absolutely coherent would be stretching the term. The weakness of the French monarchy is adequately demonstrated by the circumstances of its collapse. The same goes, although much later, for the Russians. And so on.

So the monarchies of old Europe were both informal (with no clear equity structure) and incoherent (with no clear management structure). Imagine the task of formalizing an informal, incoherent monarchy. Being a minister at the Bourbon court was not an easy job — especially when you realize that at the time, there was actually no such thing as bourbon. I think if I had [Necker](#)'s job, I'd want to come home to a nice tall mint julep every night.

In the neocameralist scheme, we can distinguish four clear aspects of sovereign corporate governance. One is *revenue*: how is the sovcorp's cash flow handled? Another is *law*: what promises has the sovcorp made to its tenants? A third is *power*: who controls the administrative apparatus of the sovcorp? A fourth is *operations*: who works for the sovcorp?

A well-managed sovcorp is a single accounting entity which collects and distributes all revenue centrally, and which treats all payments as formal obligations.

A well-managed sovcorp obeys all its own laws, and binds itself with new laws only when it is satisfied that it will not have to break them. It keeps a public list of these laws, and it does not bind itself to obey any unwritten rules that are not laws.

A well-managed sovcorp is managed by the holders of the equity tranche of its securities, like any normal corporation. These shareholders make the management decisions because they have the highest exposure to risk and reward. (Although it is not utterly ridiculous to give votes to debtholders as well.) The shareholders are precisely defined and publicly listed, their shares are fungible, and voting is by blocks of shares.

A well-managed sovcorp distinguishes between its shareholders and its employees. The latter work at the sovcorp's administrative pleasure and can be dismissed at any time upon notice from the board. Any overlap between employees and creditors is coincidental and irrelevant. The same goes for any overlap between employees and customers.

Needless to say, no sovcorp in history has fit this profile. And France in 1788 was very, very far from it. In fact, it was a morass of venal offices, scheming factions, diverted revenues, etc, etc, etc. The Bourbon regime of 1788 may not have been doomed by the Zeitgeist to destruction, and it may not have been a nightmare of proto-Nazi tyranny. In fact, it wasn't either. But to call it well-managed would be going way, way too far.

When a sovcorp has an informal creditor structure and an incoherent power base, the two tend to overlap and interact in a very ugly way. Factions are constantly scheming for money and power. Some may have more money than power, some more power than money. Historically, telling people to stop scheming is not an effective way to stop them from scheming.

The natural path of development for a malstructured corporation is to become more malstructured. The informal structures of money and power are no less real for their informality. Their complexity tends to increase over time.

The typical mechanism of complexity collapse for a sovcorp is for an incoherent power base to break down into incoherent management, which works at cross purposes to itself. Incoherently managed organizations tend to operate by process rather than initiative, using procedural orders instead of *Aufragstaktik* or "mission orders." The resulting codes of procedure snowball into a giant mass of red tape, and the organization becomes paralyzed.

If the sovcorp does not have a central balance sheet, its revenues will be diverted not only by its power base, but also by its employees. The result is that employees effectively become creditors. Exactly the same can happen with customers, who will always take anything they are given. The result is that the whole elegant structure of the owner-controlled corporation devolves into a homogeneous, disorganized mass of so-called "stakeholders."

So, even if my contention that the neocameralist sovcorp is stable is correct, it is not the sort of stability that acts as a strong attractor. A slightly malstructured sovcorp will not tend to fix itself. It will tend to become even more malstructured.

This perspective lets us see democracy from a neocameralist perspective.

A modern democracy is nothing more and nothing less than a *very* malstructured sovcorp. Its basic problems are that its power base — its voters, who are at least in theory the owners of this collective enterprise — is completely deformalized. Voters cannot sell their shares, nor does a share guarantee an equal percentage of government revenue. New shares are constantly being issued to children of citizens and immigrants, a process with no relationship to any sound governance practice. The confusion of customers and shareholders is complete.

As a consequence, the sovcorp develops an incoherent management structure marked by constant factional tensions, overgrowth of process, etc, etc. It also develops an overgrowth of employees, who are

thinly disguised shareholders — aka, "jobs for the boys."

Worst of all, this management structure often has very little local incentive to treat the sovcorp's capital properly. Decisions that damage overall capital may generate revenue for a certain subset of shareholders, and not for anyone else.

The danger is especially acute when some shareholders are insecure. Violent conflict over the direction of sovcorp revenues is not at all impossible. Here we start to see the roots of democide. When management is incoherent, sovereignty itself becomes nebulous. Which parts of Washcorp wanted to invade Iraq, and which parts didn't? The question is easy to answer: look at the changes in revenue flow as a result of the decision. While the decision to invade Iraq was a rare example of coherent (if not intelligent) management in Washcorp, it is not difficult to see which agencies supported it and which didn't. They match the prediction.

In other words, we have left the simple world of corporate governance and entered into the hairy world of public choice theory. Neocameralist corporate governance has grave difficulty in explaining why a sovcorp would want to massacre its tenants. Public choice theory is only too glad to oblige.

Finally, when we see a democratic sovcorp as a profoundly mismanaged sovcorp, we start to be able to understand why Universalism is so darned successful.

Once again, Universalism is a *mystery cult of power*. And when we look at Universalism's mysteries — *equality*, *social justice*, *peace*, and so on, we see something I find very interesting.

We note that all of these mysteries serve as excellent excuses for why an individual should (a) break the law, (b) revise the law, (c) revise the distribution of property, or (d) organize with others to achieve (a), (b), or (c).

In a formalist society, there is one rule of social good behavior: obey the law. In a Universalist society, there is an enormous panoply of political mysteries, all of which can be deployed in the service of power. Since gaining power is always advantageous to the individual who gains it, it is advantageous to just about anyone in a Universalist society to be as Universalist as possible.

The result is that, as in decadent cultures throughout history, the principal occupation of talented and energetic young people is not productive effort. It is scheming for power.

For example, consult this Washington Post article. I'm sure none of the individuals the reporter profiled, and precious few like them, think of themselves as scheming for power. However, they are all so eager to work for NGOs that they have driven salaries down to the bare minimum required to purchase Ramen noodles and happy-hour cocktails.

NGOs have the N in their acronym for one reason: because their general mission is to affect government

policy, the beast being too paralyzed in process to make its own decisions. The term "paragovernmental" might be more appropriate. Essentially, these young people are all drones working for the State. They are certainly not producing goods or services.

Why are they so interested in this so-called work? Perhaps it's because their country's productive industries have been paralyzed in red tape to the point of complete Dilbert-Brezhnev Office-Space syndrome. But it may also be because they are paid not just in money but in power — the power to influence policy, to "change the world" — and this power translates to social status. Which, not to be too blunt, gets you laid.

Needless to say, a well-managed sovcorp has a minimal capacity to compensate its employees by paying them with power, not money. This is because it has a coherent decision process, which cannot indefinitely expand the supply of decisions. It also maintains Pareto optimality, so it does not intrude on its customers' private decisions. Someone always has to be CEO, and his or her balls or ovaries will no doubt sink and become plump. But in the neocameralist world, there is a bounded supply of policy, and the bound is small.

The natural endpoint of compensation in power is pure camp-guard sadism. However, before this point is reached, an infinite number of regulations can be written. No doubt they will be.

It gets worse. Because the obvious question is: in a democracy, why do voters put up with this?

After all, at least until the democracy reaches its degenerate terminal state, there are always far more tenants who are not employees of the sovcorp than those who are. Surely the mere tenants can react, and use their democratic rights to keep their sovcorp from metastasizing endlessly in the fashion described above? But for some reason, they don't. Even when they live in a country with a long tradition and an ironclad legal guarantee of "limited government."

A simple answer is that this small problem can be solved with the easy approach of vote-buying. In other words, the democratic masses can be converted not into employees, but into creditors of the sovcorp. Of course, this creditor relationship should be kept informal — otherwise, the creditor may just sell her formal negotiable asset, and her vote will not stay bought. Ideally, the sovcorp should provide the creditor not even with money, but with services, which can be very easily withdrawn if votes are not forthcoming. This makes a mockery of Pareto optimality, but it's great for maintaining continuity of government.

However, the question remains unanswered. Men vote not for bread alone. They also vote with their hearts. And the system of democratic government, as described above, is so utterly loathsome that I can't imagine anyone being persuaded to vote for it.

Also, neohominids have collective social instincts that override their personal interests. Everyone in a modern democracy, while doing his or her little bit to go to the box and support the State, is confident

that their fractional management decision is leading the sovcorp in a direction that will enhance peace, freedom and prosperity.

But if you can convince people that democracy is the cure for democide, rather than its cause, you can convince anyone of anything. Historically, democratic voters have made many decisions that they thought would lead to peace, freedom and prosperity, and instead led to war, slavery and poverty. Why should it be otherwise? I don't have a magic oracle of truth in my head. Do you? Does anyone else?

The trouble is that, while war, slavery and poverty are in general bad things, they may well be profitable for some. Especially in small doses. And if you can create a feedback loop by which Universalism causes war, slavery or poverty, but does so in such a way as to reward those who practice and promote Universalism, you have a loop that can continue indefinitely.

Take, for example, the "peace process" in Israel and Palestine. Now 60 years old and counting. How confident are you that this "peace process" is not, in fact, the cause of this similarly unending conflict? It certainly generates a very comfortable living, full of meaning and importance and not a few frequent-flier miles, for all those involved. Why shut it down?

And this, in my opinion, is why we have Universalism. We have Universalism because it is adaptive in a democratic sovcorp. Similarly, Universalism (and its ancestors) create democracy, in much the same way that they create "peace processes." The whole thing is an artifact of sovereign corporate governance gone horribly awry.

In short, the *adaptive* function of Universalism is to glorify and expand the modern democratic sovcorp. Of course, it has no purpose in any moral or metaphysical sense. It just exists.

Universalism is the latest, greatest incarnation of [Bertrand de Jouvenel](#)'s [Minotaur](#). It can also be seen as a perfectly distributed conspiracy, a la [H.G. Wells](#), with no central structure at all. And finally, it provides a complete explanation of [Robert Conquest](#)'s three laws of politics:

1. Everyone is conservative about what he knows best.

2. Any organization not explicitly right-wing sooner or later becomes left-wing.

3. The simplest way to explain the behavior of any bureaucratic organization is to assume that it is controlled by a cabal of its enemies.

In short, the thing is a menace. It's probably too late for Professor Dawkins. But perhaps it's not too late for the rest of us.