

Simplified Civilizational Persistence Framework

1. Disclaimer

This is not a new theory or a universal law. It is a simplification, a thinking tool, not a philosophy. The central concept is any self-organizing system that maintains its boundaries must minimize free energy by reducing prediction error. This is a physical necessity for persistence in a fluctuating environment. What follows is a descriptive baseline; history and chaos add complexity.

2. Principle

In civilizations that are adrift and entering late stage luxus individuals stop exercising moral agency.

In Kantian terms: they may treat another human as a means, not an end and themselves a means of a cultural and instinctual processes they could not control.

In Freudian terms: their egos may be hijacked by instinctual aggression and cultural pressure. They become dominated by the superego and id.

In biophysical terms: Their opportunity space collapses into compulsion rather than choice.

3. Key Variables (Operational Proxies)

S (Survival Stress): environmental pressures requiring adaptation. Proxies: mortality risk, scarcity, external threat.

F (Feedback): capacity to learn from error. Proxies: institutional memory, error correction, reinforcement loops.

L (Luxus): affluence/comfort buffering stress. Proxies: caloric surplus, technological ease, overabundance.

R (Reproductive Drive): biological + cultural propagation. Proxies: fertility rate, meme/institutional persistence.

ϵ (Chaos): stochastic perturbations, butterfly effects, accidents of history.

4. Formulas

1. Will as Opportunity Space

$$W = (S \cdot F) / (1 + kS)$$

Will grows with stress \times feedback, but at high stress levels returns diminish (burnout, collapse).

2. Luxus (Erosion of Stress)

$$S = S_0 - L + \delta L$$

Luxus reduces baseline stress, but excessive luxury (δL) can create new stresses (inequality, decadence).

3. Continuity (Persistence)

$$C = W \cdot R$$

Continuity = will \times reproductive drive.

4. Unified Expression (with Chaos)

$$C_{\text{real}} = ((S_0 - L + \delta L) \cdot F / (1 + kS)) \cdot R + \epsilon$$

5. Interpretation

Baseline drift: Luxus erodes adaptive stress; continuity falters as will shrinks.

Nonlinear dynamics: Excess stress produces burnout; excess luxus displaces reality and introduces new stressors.

Chaos scatter: Random shocks (ϵ) explain divergence: why one society reforms and another collapses, why one individual assassinates and another does not.

Scaling: Cells, brains, civilizations all persist by pruning opportunity space through feedback while resisting entropy.

6. Historical Parallel (test case)

Rome: Peak affluence ($L \uparrow$) eroded survival stress ($S \downarrow$), will weakened ($W \downarrow$), continuity faltered ($C \downarrow$). Luxus itself created new stress (δL : elite inequality). Chaos (ϵ : invasions, plagues) pushed it past tipping point.

Nordic states today: Luxus buffered by strong feedback ($F \uparrow$ via institutions and societal standards), sustaining continuity (C stable despite $L \uparrow$).

7. Principle Restated

Continuity requires survival stress balanced by feedback and “reproductive” or persistence drive. Luxus erodes stress but also creates new pressures. Collapse happens not from “decadence” in a moral sense but from the biophysical fact that opportunity space narrows when adaptive stress vanishes.

8. Morality clause

In applying adaptive systems models to civilization, I make one core moral claim. All individuals who possess agency, however limited, deserve equal dignity as moral ends. Competence varies, but dignity does not.

This is not because dignity is sentimental; it's because civilization cannot remain stable without respecting the adaptive integrity of its agents.

References and additional reading.

1. Evolutionary Biology

- **Peter Turchin (cliodynamics)** → Societies oscillate between stability and instability as *elite overproduction* and resource pressures create surplus ambitious young men without outlets. These men often become the fuel for radical movements or violence.
 - **Richard Wrangham** (*Demonic Males*) → Violence is not just pathology; it's an evolved male reproductive strategy. In stable environments, it gets channeled through status competition, but without structure, it can spill into destructive outlets.
 - **Robert Sapolsky** → While often read as determinist, his work on stress shows that too much or too little stress destabilizes individuals. For reference: *luxus* societies take away *functional stress* and leave a void.
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2. Anthropology & Cultural Systems

- **Joseph Henrich** (*The WEIRDest People in the World*) → Cultural norms (monogamy, church institutions, literacy) re-shaped reproductive and cooperative strategies, channeling aggression into longer-term structures. Remove these constraints, and instincts resurface.
 - **Victor Davis Hanson** → Agrarian societies maintained resilience because survival stress was daily and obvious. Post-industrial elites drift toward luxury, which detaches them from the roots of meaning and stability.
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3. Sociology & Psychology of Meaning

- **Émile Durkheim** (*Suicide*) → Anomie (loss of social norms/meaning) emerges when societies modernize too quickly, leaving individuals without anchors. Radicalization can be seen as an attempt to resolve anomie through belonging or sacrifice.
 - **Viktor Frankl** (*Man's Search for Meaning*) → Humans cannot endure meaninglessness; when survival stress fades, the search for meaning intensifies. Violence and ideology can provide “borrowed meaning.”
 - **Ernest Becker** (*The Denial of Death*) → Much of human striving (including violence and martyrdom) comes from the need to deny mortality and achieve symbolic immortality.
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4. Political Science & Ideology

- **Eric Hoffer** (*The True Believer*) → Mass movements thrive on disaffected people who need an outlet. They don't need deprivation; they need frustration, boredom, or alienation. Luxus produces those conditions.
 - **Samuel Huntington** (*Clash of Civilizations*) → Cultural and religious systems shape how instincts and meaning-making are channeled. Islam, as you noted, provides a strong warrior harnessing mechanism. Luxus societies have weaker ones.
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5. Systems & Information Theory

- **Geoffrey West** (*Scale*) → Civilizations collapse when growth can no longer be sustained, often due to complexity outrunning adaptive capacity. Luxus accelerates complexity while dulling adaptive will.
 - **Robert Hazen** (functional information) → Complexity persists only when information is processed efficiently. Luxus societies lose selection pressure for efficient information use, which parallels your Landauer/Shannon framing.
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6. Biophysics

- An argument exists that “agency” has a necessary condition of being able to simulate and predict future environmental conditions, which is the result of entropy exportation. This is basically just a description of the free-energy principle. The FEP is an account of self-organisation and sentient behavior, with sentient behavior being described as optimal Bayesian design and decision-making (making predictive decisions based on belief, and updating those beliefs as new information is encountered).

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S037015732300203X>