

Section 1 – The Non-participant

Across communities today, the greatest obstacle to meaningful climate action is not a lack of knowledge, but a deeper fracture between what we know and how we live. The non-participant – an archetype who understands the science yet struggles to embody its demands – shows us how psychological dissonance, cultural isolation, and systemic inertia entangle our best intentions. To bridge this gap, we must reimagine climate action not as a distant global crusade, but as a local, collective movement where small shifts ripple outward. Only by rebuilding the link between belief and behavior at the community level can we hope to meet the challenges ahead.

The non-participant archetype I will argue is the most prominent and least discussed of the six faces. I define the non-participant archetype as one in which the individual knows, both intellectually and scientifically, that the climate crisis is real— yet acts otherwise. In spite of their knowledge, their actions do not reflect this knowledge or their beliefs. These individuals are well aware, and possibly eloquently spoken on the subject, however, the key identifier for them is that they fail to alter their activities to reflect this knowledge that they hold. If belief in climate science fails to engender action, then belief itself demands reevaluation—not as a guide to action, but as a hollow performance increasingly shaped by social and psychological defenses. While information is widely available, behavior often remains unchanged; this paradox defines the non-participant.

For instance, they often memorized the data points suggesting that a reduction in meat consumption would have a dramatic effect on the methane produced by the livestock industry, and yet steak is what they'll be having for dinner. They fully grasp the implications surrounding a need for our society to move away from its reliance on internal combustion engines as the primary method of transporting goods and services, while simultaneously continuing to make short trips across town for minor errands. As Zizek writes, "This is how ideology functions today: nobody takes seriously democracy or justice, we are all aware of their corruption, but we practice them - i.e., display our belief in them - because we assume they work even if we do not believe in them." [ZZ pg 11]. The non-participant doesn't take seriously the impacts of climate change, but they practice it through their eco-consumerism and signaling. We then must explore how these attempts at signaling interfere with the goals and systematic issues we face in terms of confronting the climate crisis.

The nonparticipant does participate in the signaling of climate change as a virtue, they participate in talks and workshops where the topics align with their understanding of the world they inhabit, but they are non-participatory in the work that is

required to move the needle of progress toward a sustainable future. Much like the capital minded, they may even engage in acts of greenwashing, perhaps less obviously, or for different reasons, but the action remains. This archetype is well equipped with a proverbial utility belt of quips, facts, and “Think Local, Act Global” stickers in which they employ with the deftness of a seasoned weapons specialist.

The lack of exhibited change of behaviors of these individuals is one of the most damaging effects of the climate change struggle. Because it is emblematic of the difficulties with large-scale societal change. Idealists would believe that if only people were equipped with the rational arguments, held the data close to them, had ready access to the graphs and charts and information systems, could explain in detail the implications of the latest ice core retrieval, that change would be inevitable. However, this archetype is an unceremonious refutation of this system, a bold denial that we are but one stylish infographic, or creative video, or sad polar bear sticker away from systematic and sociological change.

Conceptualizing complete ecological collapse through the lens of a pinterest board filled with mantras is odd, but it is also descriptive of an issue that the non-participant runs headlong into when emulating a sort of ‘performative climate action’. And that is at its best, at worst it is a symptom of eco-consumerism, or a manifestation of consumption that allows for less individualized guilt. I may have driven across town to the store, but I bought a lettuce wrap, wrapped in environmentally friendly plastic. Look! It even has the requisite eco-sustainable-nonGMO-organic-green sticker! I mentioned above that the non-participant does, on a technical level, participate, being that they observe certain rituals that signal to any perceiving audience that they are, in fact, in the know. This sort of performative climate action is a hallmark of the non-participant archetype, as the actions that are used as a virtue signal are in essence rather meaningless. Zizek again recognized this aphrodisiac, “In this way, even if we are aware of the threat, the subtle message of our media is that we should just go on living the way we do, with no great changes. Recycle your trash, put your Coke cans into one bag and old newspapers into another, and you did your duty... [ZZ pg 86]”. We can simultaneously acknowledge that the consumer is responsible for their consumption habits, while recognizing that the financial power that underlays the advertising and ease of accessing these articles of consumption, are ultimately the force behind why individuals make the choices that they make. We can’t fully exonerate the non-participant, but we can examine the mindset that drives them.

While this archetype is not actively malicious, they do represent a serious challenge to the ways in which we attempt to affect societal change. Does their lack of participation in the betterment of the situation stem from a lack of accountability, or an underdeveloped sense of moral responsibility? Must we apply more community pressures and accountability? Or are the effects better explained by a certain

psychological inertia, an understanding of the situation, though without the will to change habitual patterns of behavior?

Repeated appeals to morality have exhausted their reach. It would seem that thirty some odd year history of environmental activists and advocates that have attempted that framework have reached all of the individuals that they can. If, after thirty years of being consistently reminded that the fate of future generations is at stake, and changes need to be made to avert catastrophe, actions are still not taken, I am reluctant to believe that we're but one strong PSA away from change. At worst these types of moralising statements, when combined with the greenwashing propaganda lead to a sort of coerced complacency. The moral argument has done its job, and the personalization of responsibility has done what it can, these frames should be retired in favor of new approaches.

Community accountability and responsibility are interesting avenues for this transition, as humans are notoriously influenced by the peer pressure of the societies in which they live. The will of a person can not help but be shaped by the company they keep. The reflection of this is oftentimes overlooked in individualist communities. In a cultural psychology paper by Gorodnichenko and Roland, the authors note, "Individualist culture is more likely to suffer from collective action problems than collectivist culture. Only individual incentives will lead individualists to engage in collective action whereas in a collectivist culture people will more easily volunteer." [G&R 2009]. In the US, the epicenter of much of the world's pollution generating activities, we are conditioned by our culture to regard any semblance of collectivism with the disdain of a bitter carpenter critiquing the work of a boy scout troop. While we simultaneously feel the guilt of personal inaction, we are not conditioned socio-culturally to seek collectivist avenues for remediation.

This simultaneous feeling affects the non-participant heavily, as it is a symptom of a greater level of cognitive dissonance between their relationship to the knowledge they have acquired and their perception of the role they have within the issue itself. This dissonance has been studied to be a substantial barrier between intent and action in the climate space, quoting Stoll-Kleemann and O'Riordan in their 2020 paper, '*Revisiting the Psychology of Denial Concerning Low-Carbon Behaviors*', the authors describe, "In [their previous] study, most individuals continued to be personally in dissonance over the contradictions between overall belief and actual deeds when it comes to climate change mitigation behaviors. Furthermore, these mechanisms acted powerfully in maintaining the gap between attitude and behavior with regard to climate-change norms." [Stoll-Kleemann 2020 pg 3]. The non-participant is driven as much by the need to escape personal guilt as by a learned helplessness toward systemic change. It manifests itself as a denial of the consequences of climate change, or at least a denial that they themselves in their actions can affect the system on whole.

We also find in this field of study, a reliance on moral disengagement, categorized here, “Moral disengagement refers to individual differences in mechanisms that reduce the perception of moral relevance (Bandura, Claudio, Caprara, & Concetta, 1996), often after an initial perception or judgment of moral relevance, which moral disengagement subsequently negates.” [Science Direct]. The authors outline eight ways by which moral disengagement can occur, but I argue that the most prominent when related to climate change is the notion of Diffusion of Responsibility. When the problem is so unyieldingly large, and the process so glacial in its pace, personal responsibility can be dissolved, “[c]limate change is a collective action problem, in which at least according to some authors an individual’s greenhouse gas emissions appear entirely faultless, since, taken separately, their effects are insignificant.” [Peeters, Diependaele, Sterckx]. It is understandable how individuals of this persuasion end up escaping their respective responsibilities toward actions that prevent the worst outcomes of climate change, they are learned enough to see the scale of the issue, and can relegate their responsibility onto the collective, versus recognizing the role that they play. However, much like the idiom of eating elephants suggests, we have the responsibility to tackle the issues we can tackle, even if they are piece by piece.

How can individuals who understand the existential stakes of climate change continue to act as if nothing is wrong? The non-participant archetype forces us to confront this uncomfortable dissonance. In order to best counteract some of the feelings that lead an individual to embrace the denial that stems from non-participation, the impacts and language need to be more person and community focused. Not to fully abandon the global implications of the climate crisis, but at such a scale individual action feels meaningless. To reinstill the value and meaning of action, it should be measured by communities and neighborhoods. Those metrics encourage participation, the antidote to non-participation. We must bring the impacts back down to the local level, and be stronger in communicating the value of subtle changes. In the way it has been said that a butterfly can influence an earthquake a million miles away, the choice to compost in a small town impacts the systems by which waste is gathered across the country. Systemic change rides on the efforts and innovations of local changes, as communities develop their unique systems that work well for their communities, those programs can become influential in helping other places see examples of how they may as well influence change as well.

Localized language, localized systems, and localized action is how we conquer non-participation. Make the small actions matter the most, and individuals who have the information, those of this archetype who have studied the science and know the facts and figures, will be among the first to adopt new behaviors, and through their actions and inert pressures influence the changes we need to see in our communities. Thaler and Sunstein in their book *Nudge*, offer us a glimpse of this pressure in action,

“Sometimes massive social changes, in markets and politics alike, start with a small and even serendipitous social nudge. A prominent person might state an opinion or engage in an action, which gives a kind of signal, a green light or a permission slip, to others, who do the same.” [Thaler and Sunstein, pg 64]. If saving the planet feels too big to fit into a mindmap, don’t worry— it actually starts in your kitchen. Change doesn’t need a parade, it simply requires one neighbor to start composting, one town to rethink its routines, and one leader to say: ‘What if we tried things another way?’.

These local changes also rely on the change in question making decisions easier. One of the largest unspoken issues when creating the atmosphere for change at a societal level, is how do we make this the easiest possible option? Oftentimes, at the offset, ease is not a strong contender for the most valuable metric by which something is developed. However, one should argue that this “easification” is integral to a successful long term adoption of a practice, technology, norm or the like. This Tyranny of Convenience is what currently keeps the nonparticipant locked in climate negative behaviors. It is by this convenience that they can push beyond where the knowledge they hold guides them to be. Solutions to climate change need to be made readily available, and the easier option if we are to achieve the mass adoption that we are aiming for. While recently exploring the streets of Oslo, I was taken aback by the amount of effort that would be required to *not* actively participate in sustainability efforts. Sustainability behaviors were so embedded that opting out required conscious effort. All of the to-go materials were compostable and green, the signs for disposal clearly displayed, even all of the cars within the city center were electric. Public transportation was readily available, the city’s streets walkable, and electric scooters seemed to be the preferred method of transportation for most of the city’s youth. All of the choices that were made available were the green options, it was convenient to make the right decision to the point that many were seemingly unaware that the opposite could be true.

To offer an exploration of another potential of community based solutions, we can look across the pond at an initiative spearheaded by Britain and Ireland. The Transition Network is an ethos turned program that emphasises community-led action. One example that has sprung up closer to home is the River Song Cohousing community in Eugene, Oregon. This intentional community forgoes the trappings of suburbia, with its concrete and asphalt barriers that keep neighbors away from one another, and instead turns to a cul-de-sac design that incentivizes community engagement. Taken from their website, “The heart of River Song Cohousing lies in its collection of common spaces, which foster a sense of community and togetherness. The common house is a hub of activity and connection, featuring a shared kitchen and a spacious dining area where residents gather for communal meals.” [Riversong]. It maintains the individuality of having a private space to hide away from the bustle of the

world, while also facilitating neighborly engagement beyond the stereotypical, 'we just happen to be watering our water gluttonous, invasive front yard spaces at the same time' interactions.

If such a solution feels a bit to hemp clothes and crystals for one to ease into, a simpler solution would be advocating a local municipality to promote a community garden. Community gardens are not only better for the environment, giving people easier access to nutritious produce, but simultaneously invoke that spirit of community the non-participant desperately needs. The small activity of planting, learning, and engaging with the neighbors in the cities which we live in can become a gateway to more and better climate activities.

Section 2 – Fatalistic-resigned

Across our communities, the greatest challenge we face is not only the scale of the climate crisis, but how that scale fractures our sense of meaning and agency. Many among us — informed, concerned, yet overwhelmed — have slipped into a quiet resignation, shaped by cognitive limits, social media saturation, and the exhaustion of endless moral appeals. If despair thrives at the level of the unimaginable, then hope must be cultivated closer to home: through local action, tangible engagement, and the simple, stubborn belief that what we do together matters.

The Fatalistic-resigned archetype is one that has, as the name suggests, resigned the planet to destruction. Why try and recycle when the system itself is broken, why should one personally switch away from plastic when the largest industries in the world are consistently producing more plastic in a day than a person will use in a lifetime. They have tried to participate in the performance, and it is precisely that effort that has led them to where they are now. Why shouldn't I take a few extra car trips across town when I saw online a tracker of Taylor Swift's private jet flying halfway across the world on a whim? What is the point, they whisper through clenched teeth, as a foreboding darkness gathers across the valley. They see the storm coming, and they have chosen to lie down.

As identified earlier on, I would argue one of the primary drivers of this archetype is a sort of natural conclusion to the position of the non-participant. When the non-participant becomes increasingly disillusioned, they may drift into this archetype. One that holds all of the information and knowledge of just how bad things can get, and feels powerless in the face of such scale. Remember, the scale of this issue is truly outside of the vast majority of individuals comprehension, even just "the world" is too large for one to even really grapple with. In the same way that we struggle to visualize and truly grasp the concept of a billion, we can't hope to tackle the world's issues the

same way. We struggle to imagine a billion because we evolved to think in villages, not planets. Evolutionarily we have not been prepared to grapple with this scale of thought.

The decades of catastrophizing and moralizing have given rise to this perspective. As far back as the first Earth Day celebrations in the 1970s, we saw slogans such as, "Give Earth a Chance" and a moral framing that involved a responsibility toward the future generations. In the 1980s we saw Environmental NGOs lean further into the moral shock iconography, with images of melting glaciers and endangered species. Along with the now iconic confused and isolated polar bear floating alone on a sheet of ice surrounded by the unforgiving depths of the ocean. These criticisms are not meant to lambast those who came before, the truth is destructive, however, it is no longer in the best interest of our societies to continue a campaign that emphasises the futility of action. The guilt trips and framing of world ending destruction, and the hopelessness of future generations, needs to be retired, the doomerism and fatalistic moralizing is no longer serving us.

From the 2010s to now we have seen a return to the moralizing slogans, "There is no Planet B", "We're Skipping Our Lessons to Teach You One", "The Earth is In Your Hands". While these slogans, often present at climate rallies across Europe attributable to Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion (though not exclusively), are not wrong, they are unhelpful. When catastrophe becomes constant background noise, hope becomes inaudible. What was originally calls for environmental stewardship gradually became more alarming, and redirected responsibility toward the individual. As the individual's cries became louder, they stretched across the globe. As months turned to decades, these screams turned hoarse, and we now see a rise in moral exhaustion. This exhaustion gives rise to the Fatalistic-Resigned archetype.

They have come to see systematic inertia as an unstoppable force. The roaring engines of capitalism and the systems we've built around our pursuit of capital rages, powered by more than the dead trees they burn, they're powered by Pathos. A confrontation with such a force feels futile for the individual. Consequently, they see activists across their social channels fighting, and being systematically denied by mainstream media outlets. The fatalist cheers when Stop Oil tosses soup onto the display case of a priceless artifact, they rally when a speech is given, when it appears the dial might move. And yet it doesn't. At worst, those that strive for change are ridiculed, *how dare those children throw soup at the glass, don't they understand that "isn't how you protest properly"*, the pundit chides. While discussing the activist work of Greta Thunberg, Žižek acknowledges her statement that, "They (adults) know very well what is going on but... they add the usual "but nonetheless...", which prevents us from taking action upon our knowledge. [ZZ pg 83]", this dismissal is common though not the last word.

Social media intensifies fatalism by turning concern into compulsive doomscrolling — a cycle of rage, despair, and helpless engagement. Doomscrolling as an activity is a relatively new invention, powered by the hum of a million computer chips that algorithmically generate infinite content for the user to mindlessly consume. Much of the content, by design, is confrontational. This emotional engagement design is psychologically significant, as it functions as an engagement trap. You see something that stimulates you, perhaps it makes you angry, or sad, or concerned etc. and feel compelled to interact, that media is then amplified to others that scroll in a similar way. In his influential COVID-19 inspired album *'Inside'*, artist Bo Burnham describes the effect of doomscrolling in his song, *'Welcome to the Internet'*, "Welcome to the internet. What would you prefer? Would you like to fight for civil rights or tweet a racial slur? Be happy. Be horny. Be bursting with rage. We got a million different ways to engage". [Bo Burnham]. Here he highlights how it felt for millions of people during the pandemic to experience the effects of doomscrolling, consuming content upon content, much of which unrequested. His most powerful quote in the song comes later, "Apathy's a tragedy and boredom is a crime", suggesting that the very real human condition of boredom, to sit with one's thoughts, becomes tantamount to the breaking of a law, or at least a socially accepted code of conduct.

Characteristically, this group is very well informed, they read, they see and hear, they understand what inaction looks like. Another IPCC comes and goes, and no meaningful action has been accomplished since the last. Their government seems unwilling or unable, and the thought leaders around them seem distracted by a myriad of other concerns. Their neighbors spout oil industry talking points, their co-workers, "don't get what all the fuss is about", even the southern drunkard from Atlanta, hogging two bar stools rants and raves about the Global Climate Hoax Conspiracy and "their" Space Lasers. The Fatalist's own community is against them. And so they concede.

A natural side effect of their education, and one could posit a rationale for their fatalistic views, is that they are more likely to succumb to or be afflicted by climate anxiety. Hickman et al notes that, "Climate anxiety and eco-anxiety (distress relating to the climate and ecological crises) are gaining attention worldwide as people become increasingly aware of the current and future global threats associated with our warming planet." [F1]. The feelings that underpin climate anxiety are varied, individuals expressing their anxieties in a variety of ways, that speaks to the diversity of their experiences, and the range of the problem on whole. The authors reflect that scale when they continue, "However, because the climate crisis is so complex and lacks a clear solution, anxiety can easily become too intense and even overwhelming." [F1]. It is that overwhelming sensation that we see reflected in the mindset of the Fatalistic Archetype, a fully realized expression of the anxieties created by a problem so massive, and interwoven with global systems, that it appears impossible to tackle.

This complexity leads to another psychological condition that feeds the Fatalistic-resigned, that of compassion collapse. Described here by Dr. Daryl Cameron, director of Empathy and Moral Psychology Lab at Penn State, “People tend to feel and act less compassionately for multiple suffering victims than for a single suffering victim”[templeton], in other words, we as a species have a tendency to become numb to numbers. As described at the beginning of this section, the true scale of a global crisis is well outside of an individual’s ability to grapple with. Combined by the information and sensory overload, as well as the disconnected nature of the conversations that surround them, one can not help but empathize with the fatalistic mindset.

How then do we approach the Fatalistic-resigned? Change the messaging. While the storm is on the horizon, and we can not disagree with that, nor ignore its implications, we can be more thoughtful about how we choose to frame it. A storm is building, however, storms break. It was through the action of humans that we got into this mess in the first place. We as people have influenced the entire world and its ecosystem with our actions, this is true, and by that extension we can influence it again. While it may be true that it takes a multitude of tiny actions to affect the change that we need to see, we can lean on the inherent power within the individual. “The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.” [F2] We broke it, but we alone have the power to fix it.

Relatedly to a quote from Camus, we can call upon the work of another French existentialist philosopher, Simon de Beauvoir, to assist in the reframing of fatalism toward healthy actions. De Beauvoir discussed the role of the individual in her text, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, in it she argues that individual freedom can be best defined by its relation to others, “...since the individual is defined only by his relationship to the world and to other individuals; he exists only by transcending himself, and his freedom can be achieved only through the freedom of others” [ibid 154]. In a similar vein to how we encourage the non-participant to engage with their communities, the same can be said of how we convince the Fatalistic-resigned to begin to see the power within individual action. Their freedom is related to the freedoms of others, and by extension, as they explore and control what they can control within their spaces, it extends its reach to those they can then affect. Individual being as a conduit to change, the imperceptible alteration of actions and engagements by virtue of simply existing. The Fatalistic-resigned must be encouraged to assume the ethical weight of this freedom, to engage with the act of choosing, without the guarantee of moral perfectionism, and grapple with the responsibility of shaping a shared future.

How then do we alter our communication styles to better focus on the empowerment of the individual? We could focus on breaking those large numbers down into more manageable chunks, we then measure ourselves not against the scale of the planet, but the scale of our communities. Globalization has made it easier than ever to

compare oneself with people half the world away, but consequently, has made it difficult to see the scale of the places we call home. Much of the U.S. resides outside of the major population centers, they live in towns, cities, villages, and unincorporated areas. In a town of 450 people, a single person could make a significant difference. It's the smaller scale that we need to focus on.

For instance, one could start to help the Fatalist understand that the choice of where they spend that dollar they have, influences changes up the market. In terms of economics, a single dollar is more powerful than we typically give it credit for. Once you begin to make changes, five dollars here, five dollars there, amplified by the number of people making that decision independently, you can cause markets to shift. For example, imagine a grocery store having two categories of bread. Were a health conscious group to walk in weekly, and buy out the stock of wheat, leaving the white to rot on the shelves, the store owner would on the next truck, would order more wheat. If that process continues until the proportions have flipped, suddenly that change is large enough for the wholesaler to take notice. As the orders of wheat increase, that signals the manufacturers, who in turn signal the economists. From this we can glean that small acts do matter, especially when multiplied.

This outcome heavily mirrors the suggested avenue for the Non-participant, as they are a gradient of the same mindset. Localize action, and provide tangible experiences that create noticeable improvements. In this concept we can explore Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as it posits that individuals are not merely passive recipients of circumstance, but active agents in shaping their environments and outcomes. As we localize the concept of climate engagement, even modest forms of participation—such as tree planting, community gardening, waste reduction, or involvement in local sustainability initiatives—serve to reinforce an individual's perceived capacity to effect meaningful change. These actions, while localized, cultivate a sense of agency, and simultaneously, a sense of identity, that counteracts the paralysis often associated with the overwhelming scale of the climate crisis.

One of the most powerful aspects of localized action is the recognition that, at a small scale, impacts are felt, and the perpetrators assessed. These actions can begin to form the basis of a new conceptualization of self, a new identity. In the text, *'60 days to a greener life'* the author suggests, "We must embrace what I call the Law of Identity to make habits— such as a daily routine of sustainability—stick. If you view the ritual as part of *who you are*, you're more likely to sustain it." [White, pg 28]. Encouraging small localized action has a compounding effect, it encourages the participation of the community the activity is taking place in, and simultaneously pushes away the doomscrolling identity, replacing it with an active and participatory self.

Small communities in particular are perfect for making a big deal out of a little thing. It's one strategy to have the city inform the citizenry that they will be planting 100

trees to improve urban canopy. And quite another to have them host an event where individuals get the chance to help plant those trees. Even a silly festival honoring the 100th tree would be an impactful way of engaging the fatalist and the nonparticipant, while also making the steps necessary to see larger societal change. Make it small, make it meaningful, and if you have the capacity, make it a little whimsical. We need more of that. We must imagine Sisyphean, gardening.

Section 3 – Misinformed

In a world saturated with information, it is no surprise that many among us struggle to separate fact from feeling. Climate misinformation spreads not through ignorance alone, but through a system that rewards outrage over understanding. To move forward, we must focus on building resilience – giving our communities the tools to think critically, question deeply, and act wisely.

The Misinformed archetype is defined by a strong dependency on social networks for information. They rely on, and give stronger credit too, perspectives that are crafted and presented to them. Caught in this epistemic dependency, these individuals can be swayed and influenced by any number of sources. As they, willingly or not, refuse to engage critically with the information and perspectives that are given to them. Expressed in such terms this sort of blindness is often regarded as a criticism, alternatively we recognize it is *prima facie* the matter at hand. It should be noted that many of this archetype are not purposefully seeking this bad information maliciously, they are subject to the whims of complex systems. A system that is oftentimes purposefully obfuscated in how the financial incentives power the content which is generated.

In our digitalized era we have become enveloped by the mists of communication channels, and seeing through that thick fog requires more effort than some are willing to admit. This archetype is more victim than villain, being pulled by the demands of life in so many simultaneous directions that they are unable to devote the proper time to research and digest the severity of the issues they are confronted with. This digital information overload has developed many names for the condition, "... including: information overabundance, infobesity, infoglut, data smog, information pollution, information fatigue, social media fatigue, social media overload, information anxiety, library anxiety, infostress, infoxication, reading overload, communication overload, cognitive overload, information violence, and information assault." [AC.UK] This phenomenon is characterized by a cognitive overload that fragments attention and paralyzes judgement. Climate Change has, as a topic, been the victim of this torrential

downpour of information, as such, it makes parsing the information accurately a challenge, particularly for those that are restricted in their time, interest, or predilection.

It is important to recognize that this overload of information can come in two distinct modes, Active and Passive. Active infoglut is when a source, or sources, purposefully flood the field in order to distract and overwhelm the conversation. This malicious type of information spread is a tool that industries have used previously to create confusion. The term, “muddy the water” is related to this type of information overload. In his text *Homo Deus*, Yuval Noah Harari describes the historical background of this effect as, “In the past, censorship worked by blocking the flow of information. In the twenty-first century, censorship works by flooding people with irrelevant information. We just don't know what to pay attention to, and often spend our time investigating and debating side issues. In ancient times having power meant having access to data. Today having power means knowing what to ignore.” (Harari 2017, p.462). In the age of information overload, censorship isn't about silence—it's about noise. When the goal is confusion, flooding the field beats blocking the facts. Harari reminds us: the powerful now win not by knowing more, but by knowing what to ignore.

A recent example of this effect struck a small town in Michigan, when a misinformation report spread widely across the internet. This report suggested falsely that the town of Gaylord had cut down 420 acres of pristine forest land in order to make room for a solar complex development. The *Midland Daily* news describes the event as, “A breathless viral meme told the story of devious deep-state plotters who were conniving with greedy globalist solar developers to cut down a pristine tract of virgin old growth forest near Gaylord.” [Midland Daily]. The story itself was marred in obvious mistakes and misinformation tactics, the *Midland Daily* article also describes how a news item from a Pakistani website amplified the story while featuring an image that was completely disconnected from the forest they were referencing, (it is also not a stretch to imagine the chronically misinformed and immature found the name of the city, Gaylord, MI to be humorous, combined with the 420 acres a well recognized number that represents cannabis consumption, made for easy bait to attract attention). The absurdity of the Gaylord story mattered less than its emotional charge, outrage and mockery ensured its viral spread. The article goes on to rather dryly and succinctly describe the process, “It's not because Pakistanis are following Michigan news. Rather, it's clickbait manufactured to show up on search engines and feed the dopamine addiction of ideologically-driven keyboard warriors who are the self deputized gatekeepers at hundreds of walled off internet echo-chambers, which are the only news source for a frightening number of low information voters.” [Midland Daily], clearly the author has reached a point of no return in humoring misinformation campaigns.

The second hand sharing of this news story from Michigan is a great example of the second kind of infoglut, or passive infoglut, this is when a topic generates much

conversation. Typified by the ease of submitting individual opinions to the public commons, our technologies have created a social zeitgeist that demands of individuals their input into these conversations or they run the risk of being left behind. Everyone is expected to have an opinion on this and that topic, oftentimes these opinions are well outside their area of expertise. As a result, a large swath of individuals may use quick search, soundbites, and headlines to form a ready-made package they can then provide when prompted to input into a topic. This passive infoglut is less intentionally misleading, and a passive consumption of information leads to the passive generation of content of a similar vein. The sources an individual chooses to align with provide them with these ready-made packages, opinions formed and modeled to deliver a measure of respectability, to mimic the academic in their thoughtfulness, however behind the facade we find naught but a collection of planks and haphazard paint strewn about.

Once information floods our cognitive channels, repetition, not truth, becomes the arbiter of belief. That intuitive, quick judgement that occurs effortlessly when we take in information is related to the study of cognitive miserliness. Rapid fire judgements can lead to what has been called the “Illusory Truth Effect”, a rapid exposure to misinformation, when repeatedly viewed often enough, can encourage the participant to regard the information as truthful. In an interview for the Guardian, “[Dr.] Mocatta said her own soon-to-be-published research had found that climate sceptical claims and climate misinformation tended to “travel faster, further and longer from its origin than accurate climate information”. She said climate sceptic claims tended to be more negative and emotion-arousing.” [Guardian]. Relatedly to the Michigan example, an emotionally charged article, even when it is not rooted in reality, can spread far and wide within our systems that actively allow for both active and passive infoglut.

As discussed the misinformed are heavily influenced by social proof and an availability heuristic bias. By relying on the opinions and information provided by social groups, influencers, or simply the information that is most readily available to them, they begin to embody this archetype. A misinformed individual does not seek out various opinions and dissect the matters that are presented to them, they are inundated by rhetoric and talking points from the figures algorithmically presented to them. Again we may point fingers at the algorithmic way we have structured communication with our modern society, a topic that will undoubtedly lead to many prestigious awards for its dissection over the next century. These algorithms greatest strengths lay in their ability to detect an outrageous statement, and amplify that statement to those who engage with it. Where once a tin-hatted man with an “end is nigh” sign would elicit empathetic reactions from one in a hundred thousand passers-by across the span of days, in the social media era, now ten thousand pairs of eyes could pass over a piece of content

within moments. And once the reactions begin to flood in, the amplification is exponential.

These clusters of highly reactive individuals can thus push snake oil out into the public zeitgeist with more efficiency than a high velocity peregrine falcon. The critical mass of congregated misinformed individuals to then influence a large swath of equally impressionable individuals is lower than anyone would wish for. A clustering that is emphasized by the sheer volume of information locations. Where once there may be only a few sources of news, that number has ballooned into the hundreds of thousands. Creating a cacophony of sound that drowns out any attempts to provide critical corrections or discussions of nuance.

Faced with such tremendous amounts of information, it can be tempting to avoid the issue all together and enjoy a relaxing stroll around town. Unfortunately, the dangers possessed by excessive amounts of misinformation can and do have terrifying consequences on everyday life. One of the strategies currently being tested by major platform holders is the act of “Pre-bunking”, this strategy involves pushing out advertising and materials that describe how to spot false claims. This sort of media literacy is something we should have ought to have already developed as a core curriculum for participating in a digitalized society, but better late than never as they say. How these digital education campaigns are able to gather their initial successes is described by the Associated Press as, “They also avoid the political challenge altogether by focusing not on the topics of false claims, which are often cultural lightning rods, but on the techniques that make viral misinformation so infectious. [AP Prebunking]. Google initially rolled out this strategy across Eastern Europe, an area that has been the target of state sanctioned misinformation campaigns in the past, an estimated 38 million people viewed these educational anti-misinformation videos, and “Researchers found that compared to people who hadn’t seen the videos, those who did watch were more likely to be able to identify misinformation techniques, and less likely to spread false claims to others.” [AP Prebunking]. As is the case with fighting infectious diseases, the viral nature of online misinformation is best fought with the same tactics as a viral illness, inoculation.

Science is at the forefront of both the fight against disease and the spread of misinformation, and it would be unacceptable to not acknowledge the role that scientists play. I am hardly the first to recognize that Academia has a serious communication issue. As we have specialized far outside the grasp of even the most devoted intellectuals ability to coalesce the information into usable forms. A doctor is no longer just a doctor, they are an endocrinologist, or a psychoneuroimmunologist. Each specialty containing a litany of terms familiar only to those who are also deep in the weeds.

Since the terms and subjects are firmly out of reach, and scientists are not effectively communicating their findings, we leave the translation between the two up to journalists. Leaving out the possibility of malicious action from journalists, we can agree they are wholly unqualified to play the role of scientific translator, and when they do, we find troubling narratives emerge. All it takes is one misinterpreted conclusion to hit the 6pm News and suddenly two full generations still believe that vaccinations cause autism. Putting the genie back into the bottle, containing the Streisand effect, is unbelievably difficult, if not a fool's errand entirely.

Shortcuts in knowledge generation are widely regarded as a function of our evolutionary mind. Our brains, given that they can realistically only process so much information in any condition, look for avenues by which they can understand something, without having to expend additional resources in analysing the concept fully. The availability heuristic, mentioned above, is one such shortcut, allowing us to decide based on the amount of times, and the quickness by which we engage with a topic can alter its reasonability. "Since its discovery in 1977 [12], the key finding is among the most robust results in cognitive psychology: a given claim is more likely to be judged true when it has been encountered before. -Source). Thanks to our shortcut-hungry brains, the more we hear a myth, the more we believe it. In the end, repetition masquerades as reality, and good science loses to good copy.

In addition to shortcuts allowing us to skip viewing a large issue in its entirety, another issue with climate change in particular is the nature of its probabilistic harms. In terms of harm, we are quick to recognize ones that are immediately impactful in terms of cause and effect, were I to strike the electronic device out of your hands while you were attempting to read this, there would be an immediate recourse. However, the impacts of climate change are more probabilistic and predictive. Science has predicted more major storms and wildfires, and when they appear, we ought to look at those predictions with respect. "To be sure, the science of climate attribution is rapidly advancing, and many scientists correctly emphasize that climate change increases the expected frequency and severity of hurricanes and fires. Still, it may not be possible to insist that any particular event is attributable to climate change. [Nudge, pg 284]" It is this inability to accurately point to an event and assign its cause that leads to speculation.

It is important to make note, that not all speculation is merely an annoyance, something to entertain as a "potential perspective", some speculation is dangerous. It can be a radicalizing force, or simply one that erodes public trust in institutions. After a recent devastating wildfire in California for example, one representative from a southern state speculated that, "Space solar generators collect the sun's energy and then beam it back to earth to a transmitter to convert to electricity... If they are beaming the sun's energy back to Earth, I'm sure they wouldn't ever miss a transmitter receiving station

right???... Could that cause a fire?”[nymag]. In the article that contains the full transcription the representative also ties the potential for these solar beams back to initiatives launched by the Rothschild family, an incredibly common name tossed around in anti-Semitic conspiracy circles and second only to other prominent Jewish figure George Soros in the ‘Q-anon’ fringe identity. The author of the article continues in an attempt to humorously establish the absurdity of the claim by saying, “Now, you might wonder why, if an international cabal of Jewish bankers wanted to finance a rail project, they would go about it by using their space lasers to set a catastrophic blaze. Aren’t there easier ways to get your rail stations approved by the state legislature?” [NYMAG]. While it is easy to brush aside these types of claims as conspiratorial, absurd, or comical, we must understand that this sort of brazen “speculation” could be taken by individuals as something other than satirical, it could be seen as a fact. Particularly for those that passively consume the media and information presented to them. That is the danger here.

While the misinformed archetype may at first appear to be merely passive—too distracted or time-starved to engage with the truth—there is a deeper undercurrent to consider. In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard argued that the gravest form of despair, and thus sin, is not simply to be ignorant, but to willfully avoid the truth. In this light, the misinformed individual might be read not as innocent, but as one who “knows enough to know they do not wish to know more.” The flickers of awareness they suppress are not trivial—they are existential calls. To continually divert attention away from the ethical demand posed by climate change is not just evasion; it becomes a form of willful sin, an inward rebellion against truth and responsibility.

The misinformed is a troubling archetype, their perspectives being shaped by media channels and other forms of misinformation & disinformation campaigns creates a legion of voters and public commenters that decry attempts to make progress on the issue of climate change. How might we go about remedying the damages done by these types of thinkers? Education has to come to the forefront, educational campaigns and a heightened cultural sense of media literacy. The misinformed would be less susceptible to PR campaigns if they knew how to ask questions, if they consumed their media with a healthy dose of skepticism.

Section 4 – Pseudo-scientific

Across our communities, the rise of pseudoscientific beliefs is not simply a failure of education — it is the result of systems that reward emotional spectacle over critical engagement. When individuals seek information to defend their assumptions, and when platforms amplify outrage for profit, misinformation spreads not as

accidental, but as intentionally designed. If we are to protect the foundations of public understanding and rebuild trust in truth itself, we must confront the economies of spectacle that thrive in the absence of discernment.

The fourth archetype, The Pseudo-Scientific, is one of the longest standing types of belief systems, to have existed as long as the oil of snakes was available to sell. Related heavily to the rhetorical grifts mentioned above that dissuade the misinformed from participation, the pseudoscientific are of a different stock. The pseudoscientific seek out information not for the sake of fact finding, and truth gathering, but instead for reinforcement of already held beliefs.

The sources by which individuals seek out their information is one of the primary drivers of falling into this type of thinking. Often, the “choice” of source is left only to impulse, a purposefully crafted headline that makes individuals respond emotionally to drive engagement. Relying heavily on reinforcing bias. Picture the chyrons employed by mainstream news outlets, or the flashy titles that online sources use to drive that engagement. The algorithm then is a malicious wheel that turns discourse into a rabbit hole of compounding bad information. We have known for decades that the drivers of this bad science are part of a coordinated public relations campaign that has been fueled by economic actors, those that have a capital interest in maintaining the status quo. The capital motives have been thoroughly identified, and though they have accomplished their goal of creating an entire disinformation ecosystem. One that heavily awards those who have become increasingly effective at distributing this type of information, while farming the engagement required to keep the ecosystem pushing steadily ahead. Thus, it is important to engage with the role that these curators of misinformation play in perpetuating bad science.

The commonality that unites those of this archetype, and the reflection that can be most accurately called diabolical, is the sources by which they rally. Social, in our social media landscape no longer refers to the connections we build to those around us, and those in our communities, “In social networks, the function of “friends” is primarily to heighten narcissism by granting attention, as consumers, to the ego exhibited as a commodity.” (Burnout Society - pg 43). The direct consequence of engaging with these systems in a performative narcissistic way, is that it incentivizes those who are best performers, not those who show sincerity with the beliefs they hold. Directly because of these monetary incentives, we find the profession of snake oil salesmen has transitioned to the new age, the Rhetorical Influencer emerges. These pseudo-intellectual, anti-intellectual rhetoricians or Rhetorical Influencers, represent one of the worst outcomes of a monetized, algorithmic organization of thought. These rhetoricians are formed of both pseudo and anti intellectual backgrounds, combining together to form a dangerous element that seeks to pervert discourse to such a level that any “reasonable” individual would be unable to coherently engage. Given their

rhetorical mastery, the authoritative tones in which they employ often convince individuals of the pseudoscientific archetype that they are, in fact, authoritative, even when evidence to the contrary is distributed.

Once these rhetorical influencers establish their presence within a specific communication channel, they are incentivized to continue to maintain their stances, oftentimes directly in the face of credible challenges to their core premises. They go where the money is. In a leaked series of emails regarding the funding behind the organization known as the Heartland Institute, “The documents confirm what environmental groups such as Greenpeace have long suspected: that Heartland itself is a major source of funding to a network of experts and bloggers who have been prominent in the campaign to discredit established science.” [Guardian - Heartland]. This is where the discourse transforms from debate into the diabolical energy mentioned previously. They are, at their core, storytellers. The stories they tell need not have any connection to real events, or be based in any sort of logical argumentation. They hold the crumbs they find aloft denoting even the tiniest speck as worthy of examination, in-so-far as it confirms their beliefs. Though at the same time, an absence of information is itself worthy of examination, “who is keeping the truth secret?”.

Historically, pseudo-science has served as a powerful vehicle for preserving entrenched ideologies under the veneer of scientific and empirical legitimacy. To choose one from many examples, the push by the Monsanto company in the late 60s and early 70s against regulations designed to limit, if not outright eliminate, the usage of Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, or DDT, the now infamous insecticide that had widespread adoption throughout the United States after its discovery in the 1940s until its usage was heavily limited by the Department of Agriculture in the late 1960s after an wave of public backlash. The Department of Agriculture eventually gave rise to the Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA, “In 1972, EPA issued a cancellation order for DDT based on its adverse environmental effects, such as those to wildlife, as well as its potential human health risks. Since then, studies have continued, and a relationship between DDT exposure and reproductive effects in humans is suspected, based on studies in animals.” [EPA]. When profit masquerades as proof, public trust pays the price. The DDT saga reminds us: scientific authority, once bent by industry, takes decades to unbend. The real cost of pseudo-science isn’t just bad policy—it’s institutional memory warped by the residue of credibility once weaponized.

The science behind the environmental impacts of DDT had never really been the true focus of debate, however, in the late sixties in opposition to the growing movement, financial interests in the form of large corporations began pouring money into a coordinated disinformation campaign, designed to not rehabilitate the image of DDT, as it was primarily banned only in the US at the time, but to cast doubt on the science that underpinned the consequences of its use. One of the methods that was exploited for

the disinformation campaign was the acquisition of an authority figure from the green space to turncoat and lobby on behalf of the DDT industry. Monsanto famously hired Patrick Moore, former president of GreenPeace international, and put him to work spreading both anti-climate and pro-Roundup insecticide disinformation through a myriad of channels. This change of heart of a prominent figure in the environmental space was a boon to the strategic PR campaigns that were operating at the time. Finding such an asset certainly earned someone at the Koch foundation a healthy bonus and status increase.

Consequently, in order to properly maintain their status as the source of “true” information, the real information that the ominous Heideggarian “they” are trying to keep from you, the influencer must undermine the sources and institutions who distribute information that contradicts their stances. Institutions then are authoritative only insofar as they agree with the messaging being pushed forward. These processes don’t happen overnight, it goes from healthy skepticism, a desire to truth seek and consume accurate information, to conspiratorial, an inherent distrust of anything beyond one’s field of view, particularly upward, on a scale of years.

These faux authoritative sources draw upon the anxieties that exist within the pseudoscientific archetype, and instill with those rhetorical flourishes a distrust of the real institutions by which they ape their appeal. In a cosmically ironic fashion these rhetorical influencers seek to draw from the prestige of rigid academic and discussion structures, in order to bolster their claims to authority, while decrying the same as untrustworthy. This sentiment is showcased by video essayist Harry Brewis in his video, ‘Climate Denial: A Measured Response’, in the video Brewis shows a clip of a Rhetorical Influencer, Steven Crowder, attempting to refute the scientific claim that earth’s ice sheets are melting, while relying on the authority of a scientific source. The influencer appeals to the authority that he undermines when he says, “The Antarctic Ice Sheets are actually growing by billions of tons per year. Does that come to me from ‘ClimateChangeDenials/FlatEarthers.com?’ No, how about NASA.” [Hbomber 7:30s]. In the clip the influencer continues by reading an article from the NASA website about the conditions of the Antarctic ice sheet, using a cherry picked source to confirm the bias he entered the room with. The point of his referencing of NASA is not to lend credibility to science, but to stand in the light of a faux authoritative posture, taking the stance of “Science is wrong, until it agrees with me”. NASA here simultaneously fills the role of respectable source, and untrustworthy falsehood spreader. Trust in institutions is a prime target for the rhetorical influencer, and one that has wide ranging impacts.

I reflect on this rhetorical influencer’s strategy, because it is emblematic of what Thomas Kuhn argues as, “Paradigm Mimicry”, often used to mimic the surface level structure of scientific paradigm shifts. It is characterized by its utilization of scientific-sounding language, data, charts, experts, and “peer-review” styled papers, all

the while lacking in internal rigor, falsifiability, and community standards. Denialist organizations and for-profit think tanks have become experts in the disinformation strategy of producing convincing enough illusions of academic white papers. Filled with charts and citations, they mimic the structure of serious academic content. These skeptical positions can then be used as a counter balance. Our current media climate often favors a perception of 'balance' with a reckless disregard for correctness. Positioning the substandard white papers published by vested interest groups as equivalent to that of serious academic professionals.

Like the quote above about the Rhetorical Influencer who cited Nasa as their source. These groups use real science and scientific figures to create the illusion that there is a healthy debate or discourse occurring, that sound minds may differ or disagree. When in reality, the science of climate change has been settled. In a meta research paper from 2021, Mark Lynes et al showcased that the combined consensus of climate change research clearly shows a 99% agreement between scientists that a) climate change is real, and b) it is anthropogenic. [Lynes, 2021]. A moment of time did exist when the science was less clear, and more open to disagreements, however that was long ago. The organizations that continue to push against the well established science do so knowing that they are incorrect, and purposefully shelling information that is by its very design seeking to influence the perceptions of individuals too distracted to dig deeper than their inundating campaigns.

Again, as that influencer example shows us, another of the stronger methods by which mimicry is used in this way, is by cherry picking data. They find a source that purports to agree with their views, and hold it on high as an example of the "ruse" that the "establishment" uses to hide the truth. In the example above, the influencer points out that a single ice sheet in the Antarctic has gained ice during the last ten years. This is a true statement, however, he then continues to describe a conspiracy. "Why would they say the ice sheets are melting when this one is clearly growing? It must be a conspiracy", he says to his audience. While the truth is that yes, one of the Antarctic ice sheets did experience a period of growth, if you zoom out on the graph from the one isolated area showcased, you find that the trend in total ice is down on the scale of tens of thousands of years. Not only that, Greenland within the same timeframe he references, did lose ice at a greater rate than Antarctica gained it, resulting in an overall net loss of ice worldwide.

As trust in these institutions wane, more Rhetorical Influencer's can fill the gap, creating a perverse feedback loop that degrades truth telling to the realm of opinion swapping. This dangerous combination of influential people, and people susceptible to being influenced can have destructive implications for any society. The real question hiding behind the scene is why? Why attempt to circumvent the need for renewable and

green energy generating sources? Why allow the world to carreen off of a cliff face? The answer seems to be, Capitalism.

Capitalism, and its bread and butter, capital, inform the desires of these major conglomerates and their decisions. Capital flows into the pockets of the disinformation brokers, and from their lips spreads dissent and their touch turns the waters of conversation into a murky puddle. These financial motivations can not be ignored, they pervade each of the decisions made from the 70s to now, the moment that Exxon Mobil and BP realized the consequences of their actions, they began to pour money into these PR disinformation campaigns, and why? To maintain their status. It requires multiples more in terms of investment to transition an entire industry from its comfort zone into a new market. All of those oil rigs, transportation channels, warehouses and trade deals can not be undone overnight, they are sunk costs, and heaven forbid they have to decommission these structures, the cost would be exorbitant. So they push back, they funnel capital into disinformation to slow progress as much as they are able, to maintain their status and influence. Capital is what fuels pseudo-science, in the same way that the plentiful coins jingling in the pocket of the snake oil merchant makes the salesmen ignore their ethics.

Section 5 – Theological

Across our communities, the theological perspective on climate change invites a different kind of conversation — one rooted not in data alone, but in deeper questions of creation, stewardship, and purpose. For many, denying human-driven environmental harm is an act of faithfulness, not ignorance: a defense of divine order against what feels like secular intrusion. If we are to bridge this divide, we must move beyond fear-based appeals and instead reclaim the language of care, responsibility, and sacred trust toward the world we share.

The fifth archetype we will examine is the role that theology plays in climate denialism. Theological influences represent an undercurrent through other archetypes, particularly that of the pseudo-scientific. Religiosity has always provided a foil to the role of science throughout history, a tension point as scientific progress has pushed beyond what religion is comfortable ascribing to natural phenomena, invading into the realms of what the gods are responsible for. A distinctive religiosity pervades the theological archetype, while not entirely constrained to a single belief system, it does often emanate most strongly from the modern evangelical christian tradition commonly found throughout North America. Robin Veldman during an interview after their text, 'The Gospel of Climate Skepticism' was published described the interwoven nature of those beliefs. In the text Veldman explores the "embattled mentality" prevalent among

conservative evangelicals, characterized by a perception of being under siege by secular society. This mindset has been shown to foster skepticism towards scientific consensus on climate change, viewing environmentalism as aligned with secular or liberal agendas. Such a perspective may reinforce resistance to climate action. This skepticism often forms from a mould that itself is an adherence to literalist interpretations of scripture, and what could be deemed by an outsider as problematic positions including dominion theology, problems with identity and group membership, and the alluring tendrils of eschatology. Combined these nuances create a bedrock foundation for the misbelief in the Climate Crisis, amplified by other channels that we have discussed previously.

The arguments that are put forward by this archetype have a peculiar ting, they rely on assumptions that are derived from their various religious texts. To offer a frame of one of the arguments, we can assume the presupposition ‘the Earth is 6,000 years old, and put in place, in perfect balance, by a higher power’, is true, then the conclusion of anthropogenic climate change as impossible can be drawn by this theologic framing. That argument may resemble, “God created a perfect system, this system is in balance and that balance reflects God’s existence and power, therefore Humans can not influence that system.” Were humans able to impact a system of God’s creation, it would by extension affect either the strength of the creator, or the existence of that creator. A research paper from the Pew Research Center from 2022 describes how, “For example, a third of all evangelical Protestants say climate change is not a serious problem because there are much bigger problems in the world (34%). Nearly as many say it’s not a problem because God is in control of the climate (29%).” [PEW]. Almost 30% of a survey group holding the position that the climate crisis is unaffected by human action is problematic when we recall that these individuals lobby and act in ways that are actively accelerating climate change. When a failure to properly respond to the climate crisis at the level we need to curb the worst effects, we can not get sucked into the trap of letting “to each his own” mantras end all potential conversation before it has begun.

Another variation of the argument could be drawn from dominion theology, or the concept of humans having dominion over the planet, in which case their activities, exploitative or not, are within our divine right. That argument might be framed as, “Humans were granted dominion over the planet and its ecosystems by a higher power, this higher power entrusts the usage of its resources to the top species”. Within this frame, humans have absolute control over the domain in which they were given prominence, and from that logic, it is easy to derive that any and all exploitation of the planet or its resources is within the power of the ordained species.

Beyond these two arguments, a third, and more sinister argument underpins certain evangelical sects, with the notion of eschatology, or end of the world thinking. In this mindset, the end times are nearing, and thus any action to prevent the end of the

world is either irrelevant within “God’s plan”, or the most damaging elements of climate change, the increase in natural disasters, is a sign of divine punishment, and is thus encouraged to continue. This argumentation from the theological archetype is the most terrifying to consider, and must be pushed back against the strongest. And it does not represent a fringe view, as Robin Veldman the author of ‘The Gospel of Climate Skepticism’ pointed out in an interview, “End-time beliefs are a very important part of modern evangelicals’ religious worldview. They are a key element of the faith, and they play a central role in a lot of evangelical culture.” [ARC]. We can not succumb to a belief that those tens of thousands of people who perish in climate change related natural disasters *deserve* it.

One of the behaviors that perpetuates some of these issues, and keeps the theologic in the dark in terms of the reality of our situation is the will to protect one's status within the in-group. This sort of signaling can be related to Social Identity Theory, wherein people derive their sense of self, their sense of identity and belonging from being a part of the in-group. Once an individual has tied an inexorable part of themselves, their identity, into membership with a group, they are far, far less likely to engage in actions outside of the norm. And the norm is well established, reflecting again on the Pew Research Center, the authors found that in terms of how often climate change is discussed during service, “Another one-in-five say they hear some discussion of the topic from the pulpit, but seven-in-ten say they hear little or nothing about it.” [PEW]. 70% of respondents hearing little to nothing about climate change reinforces the idea that it is only a topic for the out-group to engage with. The act of bringing those conversations up within one's congregation could signal a departure from the in-group, and that is not an option for those of whom membership comprises a substantial percentage of their self identity.

Once we recognize that some that hold the position of climate denial, are doing so for theological reasons, it becomes overtly clear why certain discourses regarding the science become so vitriolic, it is but a new expression of the millennial old struggle between religion and science. It can also explain some of the theological reliance on implausible, or metaphysical senses. The conclusion has been chosen, and one must then work backward to uncover ‘truths’ that defend the conclusion. The theological archetype is approaching science backward, and will perpetually be at odds with forward moving scientific insights.

Once we recognize the mindset that informs this archetype we can explore how conventional messaging has been ineffective at reaching this subset of our population. Environmental messaging that leans too hard into secular iconography runs the risk of being dismissed outright as worldly, or ungodly. Secular arguments avoid making religious claims, or adhering to dogma, but instead focus on the human element and a connection to science. Concepts such as anthropogenic climate change become

targets by virtue of their connection to the human (or creature) versus an argument that places the creator above the worldly.

Fear based messaging is also ineffective when approaching the theological archetype, as we described above, threats against self or the state of our planet fall upon deaf ears when they can be placed alongside the “plan”. If the world is ending, it must be by design. Why then would an evangelical, who believes they will be saved before or during the rapture, be concerned about the effects of climate change? The environmentalists' tendency overtime to rely on fear based messages such as, “There is no Planet B” or “Act Now or Face Extinction”, are entirely useless as a strategy against the theologically minded.

Leaning into societal examples, one of the most powerful evangelical movements opposed to climate change went by the name of the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation. This organization, with ties to the Heritage Foundation and other oil backed lobbying groups, was established in 2006 by Calvin Beisner, and outspokenly argued that environmentalism was “one of the greatest threats to society and the church today” [desmog]. After gathering the necessary funds from certain ideologically conjoined funders, this movement was heavily influential through most of the 2010s in pushing concepts such as, “Earth and its ecosystems — created by God’s intelligent design and infinite power and sustained by His faithful providence — are robust, resilient, self-regulating, and self-correcting, admirably suited for human flourishing, and displaying His glory. Earth’s climate system is no exception.” [Rabble]. This ideology is reflected in the argumentation that we have already explored, namely the ‘God’s plan’ focal point. It is an unfortunate consequence of metaphysical planning that the orchestrator’s roadmap for this plan is written in metaphor and ancient roman sigils rather than the much less poetic empirical measurements. The last piece of the quote relating to human flourishing is another element in which we have to dissect more fully.

A key element of how the Cornwallists and others of the theological archetype explain away the need for climate action is by placing human flourishing above and beyond ecosystem necessities. This sort of salvation of self mindset allows for the disconnection between the consequences of human action and the ramifications of environmental disasters. We are unable to destroy the “robust, resilient, self-regulating, and self-correcting” providence provided to us, and we can extract from that providence all of which we require to become fulfilled. The Cornwall Alliance manifesto states, “We affirm that God placed minerals, plants, and animals in and on the Earth for His pleasure, to reveal His glory and elicit man’s praise, and to serve human needs through godly use. (Cornwall Alliance, 2013) [Bjorgen]”. Echoing a continued line of argumentation from the dominion theory discussed earlier. The world is ours to play with, to do of it what we will, and if that play leads to destruction and suffering, then it

was by the plan of a higher power and we are unable to contradict or influence that in any way. A surprisingly defeatist line of reasoning, to suggest that we have no control over the world. We do possess the ability to shape and cultivate the world as we see fit, however, as Žižek points out, “The lesson of global warming is that the freedom of humankind was possible only against the backdrop of stable natural parameters of life on earth (temperature, composition of the air, sufficient water and energy supply, etc.): humans can “do what they want” only insofar as they remain marginal enough, so that they don’t seriously perturb the parameters of life on earth.” [ZZ]. When dominion is mistaken for exemption, accountability vanishes. The Cornwallist creed reframes exploitation as virtue, casting collapse as divine inevitability. But as Žižek warns, freedom only flourishes within stable bounds—we were never meant to play god with a planet we barely understand.

When approaching the topic of climate change from the perspective of human flourishing above the state of natural ecosystems, it should be unsurprising that the Cornwallists’ thought process also leads to economic arguments. Again quoting the founder of the alliance, “It is imperative that Christians, before we venture to advise the world about environmental policy, first learn [...] not only the general science and economics of the issue, but also how to apply the principle of prudence.” [Bjorgen]. We must put prudent economic interests above environmental policy, “Oh! Won’t someone think of the economics” the author bellows, pearls firmly clutched. Capitalistic instincts can and do find a way to permeate through and affect various ideological positions. And one would do well to be mindful of their far reaching impacts when discussing how a person reaches their conclusions.

A metaphysical argument and a scientific one are like water and oil. In order to approach a theocratic angle when regarding climate change, we must be mindful to not challenge the underlying theology, instead rely on it to sway the conversation. If, assuming a theological stance, we can instead redirect the conversation toward, “Humans as Stewards of the Earth”. We are not discussing the cataclysmic impacts of climate change, but instead how we, as people, take care of this land that ‘God’ ascribed to us for stewardship. Sustainability, renewability, and regeneration become ordained by the theology that was the original challenger. History is littered with stories of failed attempts to remove a religious man’s iconography, it simply does not work, instead redirect the energy toward possibility and stewardship.

This stewardship also has a direct parallel to previous iterations of conservation work in the United States. In the late 1800s we saw the rise of the sportsmen naturalist, the common archetype at the time was an individual who possessed the ability to transition from city politik to the outdoors and live within the bounds of nature. The original Conservation movement in the US can trace its roots back to this phenomena. In that time, analogous to today, the same individual who might engage in that

archetype, was a fairly religious individual. Mark R. Stoll points out in the text, *'Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism'* that, "Virtually all its founders in the nineteenth century were within a generation of a Congregationalist church. Presbyterian Progressives made conservation, parks, and forests into national causes." [Environment]. Over time the denominational configurations changed, however various sects continued to pressure the U.S. Government to uphold, in some ways, echoes of the Public Trust Doctrine. The overlay of religion and environmentalism has a core in history, and it is from that kernel that we draw parallels to inform the societal shift that we must to combat the changing climate.

I have argued elsewhere in this paper that for other archetypes, we need to transition the messaging language away from a continued reliance on moralizing, however, for the theologically minded, moral obligation is analogous to their worldview. It does require a shifting in the moral object of question, escaping from the planet ending fear messaging of obligation, and instead focusing on the sustainability and stewardship as a required part of the identity of belonging for certain religious piety. This course of action as I suggest it is far from a new concept, back in 2015 an author commenting on a future of cooperative international environmentalism wrote, "Such a consensus could lead, for example, to planning a sustainable and diversified agriculture, developing renewable and less polluting forms of energy, encouraging a more efficient use of energy, promoting a better management of marine and forest resources, and ensuring universal access to drinking water." [Laudato Si]. The author of this aggressively secular, unapologetically liberal, and disgustingly worldly text was of course Pope Francis.

Similarly to other passages, a running theme emerges that the primary challenge to anti-science and anti-climate change messaging is a renewed sense of community. Pope Francis again writes, "In some places, cooperatives are being developed to exploit renewable sources of energy which ensure local self-sufficiency and even the sale of surplus energy. This simple example shows that, while the existing world order proves powerless to assume its responsibilities, local individuals and groups can make a real difference." [Laudato Si]. Local connections and partnerships, particularly between religious organizations and scientific groups can provide a strong resistance to forms of thought that seek to divide or underplay the most dangerous aspects of climate change. We should seek to build these collaborations locally, and promote the small local successes that we see in our backyards. We have to localize a global issue before we can see the impacts of our approaches. It may be unacceptably challenging to assume that the world can be changed by conversation, but the ethos of a municipality primarily changes through those small, local conversations.

Section 6 – Capital-driven

In many of our most powerful sectors, climate change is still seen not as a crisis to solve, but as a liability to manage. So long as markets thrive, the true costs are passed along – to the environment, to future generations, to those with less voice. To challenge this mindset, we must speak the language of risk: showing that sustainability is not charity, but survival.

The capital driven archetype is subsumed by the allure of capital generation, and its subsequent benefits, be it socio-cultural, status, power, or influence. They have not drifted into the realm of sycophantic behavior, we see no altars being erected in honor of the “God of Liquid Gold”. The capital driven mindset sees polluting industry, or rather, big industry on whole, to be a means to an end. This self interested motivation, while not unique to the American mentality, is woven particularly well into the fabric of its society. A pervasive, self interest as primary economic driver compels them to treat a cost-benefit analysis as equivocal to an ethical examination. The individuals that express this archetype are codified by a willful leasing of externalities as inconsequential. Too complicated to work into the careful models of capital ‘E’ Economics, they are left as irrelevant to the conversation. This function is by and large an extension of the field of economics desperately trying to become on-par with the social sciences, while carefully omitting elements that become too cumbersome to account for. By this nature, this understanding of the function and role of industry in society, the effects of climate change are seen as either non-existent, or not impactful enough to warrant further examination. In-keeping with the theme of capital generation as a means to acquiring social status, those of this type, may pursue some measure of ‘greenification’. Though their participation in sustainable activities can primarily be explained through a pursuit of optics, or when the participation is of greater monetary or social capital value than non-participation.

Historical context constantly reminds us that the pursuit of status, power, influence and the like within a society is not a novel concept. These have long been goals of individuals existing within various societies in various historical contexts. While individualist societies may have these goals as more explicitly included in the cultural zeitgeist, they are not the genesis of the thought. Capital, and through its influence in practice, industry, has long been a method of acquiring the material resources necessary to assume a position of power within a society.

American society has transitioned through many variations of industry that provided a standing pathway to power, from the textile industry to steel and oil through to banking and technology. Each of these eras of industry carried with them powerful individuals who were unnaturally influential in the direction of society. Though there may

be many issues with the “Great Man” framing of history; the framing itself has the consequence of creating a mythos that carries well into today. It's a frame that lends itself to a normalization, to a societal conceptualization of individual economic actors as the primary driver of future successes. The industry of Technology arises with the dawn of the computer revolution and brings with it a new type of industrialist. Combined with the dramatic changes in the ways in which we consume resources, and as a people consume information.

Between the origins of industry in America, and the recent addition of a new frame to view industrial magnetism, a norm has emerged, creating for itself a niche to occupy. This niche has grown steadily over time to become one of the primary understandings in which Americans view themselves in comparison to the world. We are Economically free, and that freedom reinforces the staunch individual conceptualization of economic status. Self interest has guided powerful people, and those people have held the trappings that I wish to possess, therefore a self interested approach to economic theory is beneficial.

Good people rise to the top, therefore people on the top must be good. Or in the context of capitalistic power, ‘Good people are rewarded with wealth, therefore wealthy people are good.’ While this tautology seems plain, and its rebuttals many, we must respect the hold that it has upon the American psyche. It is unspoken, but embraced by many, a simplistic view of morality, but one with dangerous consequences. When one holds this tautology as true, that individual can proceed to justify all manner of terrible actions. Whether it be ignoring externalities, removing the self responsibility of actions taken, or simply refusing to consider anything beyond that which appears disconnected from their own movements.

It is from this corrupted understanding of goodness and power that leads individuals and organizations to justify the privatization of natural resources. They see through the lens of capital, a resource to be controlled and distributed based on the powers of economy. Not as resources that should be shared amongst those of whom occupy the same territorial space. Even allegiance becomes secondary to the pursuit of growth. It matters not that I sell the goods of the lands we jointly occupy to my own countrymen, for if they are good, they will have the resources necessary to acquire their slice of the pie. Anyone who can not is not worthy of consideration.

This privatization has led to unsettling conversations surrounding the nature of natural resources. One would be surprised that the phrase, “Water as a human right is an extreme position” was uttered by a human. Perhaps during some scathing pass of satire, but not as a realistic point to argue. And yet here we are, “The one opinion, which I think is extreme, is represented by the NGOs, who bang on about declaring water a public right. That means that as a human being you should have a right to water. That's an extreme solution. The other view says that water is a foodstuff like any other, and like

any other foodstuff it should have a market value.” [Snopes], while the originator of this reprehensible comment has taken steps to walk it back, their latest rebuttal still leaves the precise concept that is abhorrent in, “The water you need for survival is a human right, and must be made available to everyone, wherever they are, even if they cannot afford to pay for it. However I do also believe that water has a value.” [Snopes]. It is that last section that is the issue at hand, ‘*water has value*’, it is a good, a commodity to be bought and sold. A commodity to be privatized, and access restricted to those who have the means.

Another consequence of this pursuit of privatization is to view the world through the lens of commodification. With these glasses placed over one's eyes, the world and each object within it can be prescribed a speculative financial value. That land will be worth more at some indeterminate point in the future. That forest looks better as an asset in a portfolio than it does in its natural state. That water source could produce “x” value. “Those Beanie Babies are a vital vehicle for my retirement!”, the speculator screams into the sky.

This adopted norm when presented as a framework allows for an individual to view natural resources beyond their ecological value and into the self interested value of economic advantage. Self interest then becomes a motivator, the value of an object is removed from the thing itself, or how it contributes to its ecological system, and becomes another speculative financial vehicle, reduced to an avenue by which capital can be generated. In America, we have become increasingly accepting of the notion that water is not a naturally occurring resource that is vital to human life, but rather a commodity to be packaged and resold to those who, quite literally, could not live without it. This transformation occurs when we view the actions of individual economic actors as supra-natural, or above the natural order.

With the commodification justification in view, we can recognize the ethical considerations as representative of the cost-benefit equation. In a commodified world, gains both realized and unrealized become the primary motivator of activities. When viewed with these glasses, every object becomes speculative, and short term profits now are potentially long term plays. But plays viewed through monetary value. From this framework there is much less reason to invest ones, “hard earned labor” into restoring a riparian area, or contribution to the construction of beaver habitat. When you could be earning currency.

Financialization then is subsequently a consequence of bureaucratic systems, in an attempt to curtail the most egregious offenses of monopolization and theft, the financial system itself has become, in a way, gamified. What is a loop-hole if not a short cut to success? When no incentives exist to “play the game” correctly, it isn’t a surprise that those to whom winning is the primary goal, would be more than eager to engage in these shortcuts. As Zizek writes, “ This is also why reference to “greed” and the appeal

to capitalists to show social solidarity and responsibility are misplaced: "greed" (search for profit) is what motivates capitalists expansion, the wager of capitalism is that acting out of individual greed will contribute to the common good. [ZZ pg 59]." This greed capitalizes on the limited ability for a bureaucratic system to be flexible enough to prohibit all use cases. Capitalism didn't stumble into loopholes—it engineered them. Financialization is just a monopoly with better PR, and bureaucracy? A speed bump dressed up as oversight.

A common argument for this gamification is quasi-Moral philosophy in its reasoning. This "Growth as a Moral Imperative" mindset is one of the direct consequences of the frameworks we have established thus far. A growth mindset can hardly grapple with the concept of finiteness, as it pushes ever upward. After all the line must go up. Any suggestion to the contrary is an opposition to the system that surrounds it. More likely to be labeled a socialist ploy than taken as a solid critique of the operations of the system in and for itself.

We then arrive at the curious counter argument, but author, the reader suggests with a loud bang of their fist against wood, "How can you suggest that this incarnation of capitalism is a purely destructive force, when "Company A" engages in "Insert proactive social program here"". The Natural Resource Defense Council provides us with a solid definition to begin, "Greenwashing is the act of making false or misleading statements about the environmental benefits of a product or practice. It can be a way for companies to continue or expand their polluting as well as related harmful behaviors, all while gaming the system or profiting off well-intentioned, sustainably minded consumers." (NRDC, 2023). Ah yes, capitalism can't be harmful—look, it planted a tree! But tossing a coin at a social program while torching the planet is textbook greenwashing. As the NRDC makes clear, it's not sustainability, it's strategy, designed to polish the image while the engine runs on extraction.

One of the most well documented examples of greenwashing in the climate sphere comes from the fossil fuel industry. It is nearly common knowledge, and a tired analogy to recognize that major oil companies such as ExxonMobil and British Petroleum discovered the effects of pollution in the late 70's. Instead of beginning to transition away from toxic chemicals, they doubled down, and launched several, decades long marketing and public relations campaigns to both muddy the waters related to the science of climate change, as well as greenwash their actions, or defer blame. One of the most egregious products of this campaign was when BP introduced the concept of "Carbon Footprint". The Guardian highlights this fact with, "British Petroleum, the second largest non-state owned oil company in the world, with 18,700 gas and service stations worldwide, hired the public relations professionals Ogilvy & Mather to promote the slant that climate change is not the fault of an oil giant, but that of individuals. It's here that British Petroleum, or BP, first promoted and soon

successfully popularized the term “carbon footprint” in the early aughts.” [Guardian BP]. As the article describes, the core conceit behind this strategy was to pass off the blame of greenhouse gas emissions to the consumer instead of the producer. It is the individual and their insatiable desire for fuel that is causing the worst effects of climate change. The question is then, “what are *you* doing to help the planet?” instead of what reasonable restrictions can we place on the largest producers of oil. The Guardian article continues, “The company unveiled its “carbon footprint calculator” in 2004 so one could assess how their normal daily life – going to work, buying food, and (gasp) traveling – is largely responsible for heating the globe.” [Guardian BP].

The effect of the weight these large corporations are able to throw around has been felt the world over. Individuals have begun to internalize the guilt that comes from a personal responsibility for the climate. And while in some respects it is important for consumers to be conscious of their purchasing decisions, the imbalance in culpability is palpable. “Say, with regard to fuel costs, that what is really needed is not just cheap fuel; the true goal is to diminish our dependency on oil for ecological reasons, to change not only our transportation but our entire way of life. [ZZ pg 143]”, it is not that we need to continue to rely on these massive conglomerates to fuel our lifestyles, it is that we must transition away from the need for their products completely.

Having mentioned above two of the largest non-state oil producers, it is worthwhile to examine the greenwashing strategies of a third as a case-study on how not to pursue environmental neutrality in the face of climate change. The Shell company has put forward an ambitious set of 2050 net-zero emissions goals. This is, *prima facie*, ridiculous for an organization that profits off of the usage of one of the strongest sources of greenhouse gas emissions, fossil fuels, to galavant as though pious in their public relations “pledges”, “Our target to become a net-zero emissions energy business by 2050 is transforming our operations and energy products. We believe this target supports the more ambitious goal of the Paris Agreement, to limit the rise in the global average temperature this century to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.” [Shell Website]. This attempt at greenwashing is nearly as blatant as one could conjure, Reclaim Finance released a study comparing the Paris Agreement to the production of fossil fuels by Shell and found that, “Given that Shell does not plan to reduce carbon intensity fast enough, and plans to maintain high levels of oil and gas production, its absolute emissions will not decrease quickly enough. By 2050, our analysis shows that Shell will exceed its 1.5°C carbon budget by at least 40.9% (see graph n°2).” [ReclaimF pg 3].

This campaign as concocted by Shell was never intended to limit the greenhouse gas emissions that the company produced, but that is apparent by its simple titling. A “net-zero” pledge, or goal has been the easy way out for many organizations who have rightfully been labeled as predatory polluters, they claim that they can continue with

business as usual, while also contriving various offset strategies that would, in theory, reduce their emissions to zero once the balance was finalized. They will still pollute, but if they offset that pollution, mathematically it is as if it did not happen at all. However, these numbers never balance in reality, the Reclaim Finance authors continue, “If Shell were to keep relying on offsets in the longer term, and meet around 17.7% of its decarbonization targets until 2050, the company would have to grow a forest five times the size of the Netherlands and open 35 new CCUS centers.” [Reclaim F pg 8]. Where exactly Shell plans to plant this Netherlands(x5) forest is left to an abstraction, perhaps the plan is by 2050 we can place those trees on Mars? Or have the ability to plant the trees underwater when the coastlines have been swallowed?

To offer the reverse position, we do have an excellent case study in the ability for an organization to successfully make the pivot from the old industries to the new. The Danish company Ørsted, once known as the Danish Oil and Natural Gas company, is one such example. The company in 2017, after eleven years of producing fossil fuels and the pollution related to that industry, sold off its remaining holdings in polluting industries and transitioned its entire business to renewable energy production. Both in 2017 and in 2022 the company was recognized as the world's largest offshore wind power producer, and has implemented several cutting edge technologies and techniques related to rewilding the habitats below their installations [Orsted 1]. As far as organizations are concerned, they are also a well managed and well leveraged company according to their most recent annual report. They have strong financial metrics and fantastic growth potential, “For the first time ever, half of the EU’s electricity generation came from renewable energy sources in 2024... Towards 2030, we are thus anticipating a high growth in the global renewable energy market, with total combined capacity (offshore wind, onshore wind, solar PV, and energy storage) expected to reach >4,000 GW (excl. China). [Orsted 2]

This profitability is important, it is a strong indicator that those that take the plunge, exploiting the first mover advantage in this new market can have solid returns. The oldest of the fossil fuel companies will be the hardest to transition, however, markedly they are also the ones with the most potential capital to reinvest in more sustainable markets. Ultimately, it is important to remind the capital-driven individual that markets come and go. Even though the fossil fuel industry has been one of the longest lasting, all cycles must eventually adapt or fail. It is a far riskier investment to continue to support the fossil fuel industry than it is to transfer one's portfolio to renewables.

Risk then will be one of the most powerful persuaders when attempting to persuade the Capital-driven archetype. It will become vital for advocates to reframe their arguments away from pithy moral suggestions to the hard economic facts. No one will realize capital gains when the “natural” disasters destroy the means of production. The

system itself is rapidly becoming untenable, we must recognize that perpetual growth is unsustainable, and the system itself will have to change, “So, again, instead of focusing on individual greed and approaching the problem of growing inequality in moralist terms, the task is to change the system so that it will no longer allow or even solicit "greedy" acting. [ZZ pg 59]”. To truly tackle the global issue of climate change, we will also have to reckon with the system that allowed for its creation in the first place.

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