DIVERSITY, EMPATHY, AND INTEGRATION

*Reframing and Reclaiming
a Movement Toward
Healing and Wholeness*

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The letters DEI have become a well-known shorthand for the words diversity, equity, and inclusion, and those three words have come to represent much more than any dictionary definition would imply. In the overlapping and cross-pollinating social worlds of K-12 education, higher education, NGOs, non-profits, the corporate sector, and various levels of local and federal government, the past decade has witnessed the rapid and widespread adoption of a particular approach to talking about and addressing questions of race, gender, social inequality, and cultural diversity, and DEI has come to symbolize and refer to that diffuse yet amazingly standardized approach. The purpose of this essay is to share insights from an ongoing inquiry into what DEI has come to mean, represent, and imply, and to point toward ways that we can work together to build on the good intentions and aspirations of the DEI movement and industry while making significant changes and course-corrections to enable more positive outcomes for our society and planet.

The twists and turns of cultural diffusion and social change are not always what they seem at first glance, and are often tinged with irony, paradox, contradiction, and unexpected consequences. As our social, cultural, and technological world grows more complex and confusing, it becomes increasingly difficult to understand what is happening, due in part to the ever-increasing assortment of perspectives that permeate our media and experience. The meanings, purposes, and cumulative effects of DEI in our society are all contested and impossible to determine exactly, but if we tread carefully and keep our eyes on the prize of shared understanding, always open to new insights and shifts in perspective, we can find our way along the road that we need to travel together. As will become clear as we venture down the path of this essay, one of our primary tasks is the refinement and clarification of the language we use to communicate. And one of the proposals we will come to along the way, as evoked by the essay title, is to move toward the language and substantiation of *empathy* and *integration,* and away from language that serves to divide, confuse, or mislead.

Our more-than-human world is more than a language game, however, and we must attend not only to our words but also to the qualities and values that we embody and promote. It is with this in mind that I intend to argue for some significant changes to the DEI paradigm—its words, injunctions, assumptions, arguments, and systems of relations must all be improved to ensure they are truly in service of humanity. But in the spirit of empathy, let us begin with appreciation.

The Positive Premises and Promises of Social Justice

It is important to note from the start, and to emphasize throughout, that this is not an attack on or critique of the underlying importance or purpose of DEI work, broadly conceived as a manifestation of the struggle for social justice. In the past 25 years I have worked in district, charter, and independent schools as a teacher, school leader, and/or researcher in five states, and I have extensive personal experience with progressive education and the DEI work that is happening in schools across the country. I have spent my adult life devoted to the cause of social justice, and I vow to continue this work as best I can. The question is not whether to strive for peace, fairness, and social harmony—the question is how. And the only way to answer that question, and to cultivate skillful means to achieve our desired goals for improving social relations and the quality of life for all people, is to look carefully at what is happening and why, so we can learn from the past and continue to improve our strategies, communication, and practices for the benefit of everyone. The key word here being *everyone.*

The core argument of DEI work is that various forms of inequality are real and problematic and can be rightly understood as examples of injustice. Therefore, we strive for social justice. And the core premise of this argument is that some meaningful form of equality applies to all humans; it is because we are fundamentally equal as humans that inequality presents itself as an injustice in need of correction. Therefore, much depends upon how we understand the meaning of human equality, and its relationship to equity, or fairness.

There is a way in which all people are equal. We can call this our ground value or ultimate value. Ultimately, every human life is of equal value and worth, and therefore we all deserve equal basic rights in society. This is the claim of countless teachers and teachings throughout history, and it is a deep and fundamental tenet of cross-cultural common sense. It is this abiding conviction that has remained at the core of our collective struggle for human rights—civil rights, women's rights, gay rights, and children's rights, as reflected in landmark documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations. The purpose of such documents, and of our ongoing struggle for social justice, is to support the creation of a social world where all people are treated fairly and justly, and to account for, remedy, and ideally eliminate ways in which people experience social life unfairly.

There are also many ways in which people are not equal that cannot be reduced to or explained by social injustice or unfairness. Every individual is different; every individual

is unique. In a very fundamental and meaningful way, each person is a marvel, and a marvelously unprecedented manifestation of our incredible universe. Through some irreducible and never fully explainable combination and co-arising of physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, natural selection, sexual reproduction, and phylogenetic and ontogenetic evolution (along with other forces and realities we do not have adequate names for, which nonetheless influence the evolution of consciousness and culture), we are born and grow as unique exemplars of life, profoundly influenced but never completely determined by our individual or collective past or our environment. But just as individuals are different, so are groups, and differences between groups have tended to breed inter-group conflict throughout human (and pre-human) history.

Importantly, it seems that the circumference of care that encompasses humanity has been increasing over time, leading to an ever-expanding inclusion of people within the ongoing project to create and improve social justice. Over long stretches of time, people have generally expanded the scope of their relations with others, moving from small communities to villages to towns and cities; from independent tribes to feudal kingdoms to nation states to an interconnected planet. And with this expanded network of relationships and communication there has also extended an increasingly expansive moral and empathic circle of rights, responsibilities, and obligations, oriented toward values like justice and fairness. Our social systems have evolved to ensure equal rights and systems of justice for increasing numbers of people over time. The fact that our systems are terribly imperfect and therefore unjust, and in need of ongoing improvement, should not blind us to this evolutionary context. We are going somewhere.

However, amidst our ongoing attempts to bring the principles of equality and fairness to fruition in our social reality, we have not always been completely clear about how these truths of equality and fairness fit together. Because there are ways that we are equal and ways that we are not, and because all the reasons and explanations for various kinds of inequality are different, overlapping, and often (if not always) partially inscrutable or not completely knowable, it is very challenging to find the best and most helpful distinctions between what is just and what is not. And who gets to decide?

As difficult and intractable as this may be, we seem to have reached a point where the basic idea of fairness and equality is widespread across the globe—to the point where hundreds of states and nations have governments that will at least pay lip service to these ideals, if not actually try to enact them—yet our collective application of these values continues to be far from ideal, and unevenly distributed. Seeing this ongoing

imperfection, and the incalculable human suffering and trauma that we continue to inflict on ourselves, many of us are impelled to double down in our striving for justice, and to *demand equity*—in some cases, by any means necessary, and regardless of the cost or collateral damage. But as the people of the world come together to form one interdependent web of relationships, mediated by digital technology and hyper-financialized economies, it is becoming harder to understand clearly just what this means; to tease apart and fully appreciate the complex ways in which the past informs and shapes the present; to determine how individuals are impacted by the collective influence of others; and to understand to what degree present systems and actors are responsible for the inequalities and injustices that we continue to experience today.

As we continue our journey to embody and instantiate our deeply held values and ideals of equality and fairness, it is important that we always remember (and strive to deepen our understanding of) our shared evolutionary context, and the inherent challenges that we face in our shared project to bring our values and ideals into our social reality. Let us not oversimplify, or jump to conclusions, or act as if things 'should be' different right now. We cannot look at the suffering of the present only through the prism of our abstract ideals; we must also see it in the light (and through the shadows) of our collective historical inheritance, which is irrefutably one of overwhelming and almost unimaginable suffering, conflict, violence, and oppression.[1]

There are myriad causes and conditions that have brought us to this point, and our work is to figure out the best way forward. To do that, we need to understand what is happening now, and why, so that we can adjust our trajectory accordingly, for the benefit of all.

A Critical Evolutionary Appraisal of the DEI Industry and Postmodern Activism
Our rising consciousness and concern for social equality has led to some real progress, and to some unfortunate regressions and confusions. There are many ways to adjudicate both the promise and the peril of contemporary DEI work, but there are three things I will highlight, each of which represents an important piece of the puzzle for us to understand in order to improve the impact of social justice work and to heal the ongoing polarization and cultural conflict that we find on the rise in society:

- The loss of respect for and failure to integrate modern liberal values
- The bureaucratic spread of DEI as an industry with its own incentives and motivations

- The shift in meaning and policy that accompanies a distorted understanding of equity

Losing Liberal Values: An Excursion into Some Salient Characteristics of our Modern and Postmodern Social World

The core tenets of civil rights and social justice rest on the foundation of modern liberal values.[2] Liberty, equality, and fraternity/solidarity are the principles that both expressed and enabled the democratic revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries, and which continued to be the guiding lights and aspirational attractors for social movements into the 20th century around the world. It is so important for us to understand and appreciate, and to never take for granted, the cross-cultural and historical significance of the fact that these fundamental values have come to be understood as *applicable to all people* by so many citizens of the contemporary world. The emergence and spread of modern democratic values across the globe over the last 300 years is an amazing collective human accomplishment, and it was our striving to attain the ideals of those values that drove social justice movements in the 20th century.

It is also important to recognize and appreciate that the values of liberty, equality, and solidarity are not exclusively or originally European. They have many sources and inspirations, and their coincidence with the spread of democracy has been overshadowed by their concurrent overlap with European colonialism, which has led to an unfortunate association and conflation between modern Europe and modern values. To equate particular qualities or values with a particular group of people is to inhibit or exclude others from being able to actualize and identify with qualities or values that are potentially applicable and accessible to them, and this is a terrible injustice.[3] While it may be appropriate to associate some emergent qualities and values as distinctively modern, with a sense of historical unfolding based on our imperfect knowledge of the past (and always open to revision), it is essential that we understand these 'modern values' as equally available to all people in the present. Once something emerges in a human culture, it has the potential to spread, and therefore belongs potentially to everyone; human culture belongs to humanity, and in fact every human culture has evolved through processes of appropriation, assimilation, and diffusion to varying degrees.[4] The conflation of modern values with a particular group of people is a tragedy of collective misunderstanding, and we have to liberate ourselves from such inaccurate and unhelpful historical interpretations if we are going to cohere and collaborate as a species.[5]

The significance of the global spread of modern values can be appreciated in relation to our understanding of pre-modern life. I am not claiming that modern life is better than pre-modern life, nor am I claiming that violence, oppression, and warfare are things of the past. Please do not misunderstand me; this is not a tale of linear growth-to-goodness or naïve presentism. My point is much narrower, but still incredibly far-reaching in its consequences. The point is that the basic values that we take for granted as what 'should' be the case in society, and the ideological basis by which we critique our current society, are precisely those values and principles that spread historically as a result of cross-cultural contact, conflict, assimilation, and appropriation in the modern world system, and came to be understood as applicable to all people; and this kind of universal application of basic rights and equality for all humans simply did not exist in any widespread or meaningful way prior to the dominance of the modern world system of recent centuries.[6]

However, several things have happened in recent decades that have influenced our perception and understanding of this historical development. In particular, the merits and significance of modern values have been devalued and undermined through the emergence of postmodern culture and critique; and the underlying social and psychological power dynamics of human groups have continued to evolve in the modern world by weaponizing language and cultural norms to serve the interests of some groups of people in rivalry with others (i.e., groups are co-opting the language of modern values to justify various forms of identity politics). These developments have coincided with developments in technology and media that have led to a degradation of some aspects of human attention and communication, along with a fragmentation of cultural identities, and these cumulative effects continue to have an impact on just about every aspect of our lives.[7]

The key point here is that we cannot understand what is happening in the world of DEI, race, and gender in the 21st century if we don't understand the modern and postmodern cultural influences that have shaped our thinking and behavior. We have to have some shared understanding of history and philosophy to know what we are talking about and responding to.

The modern world signifies and represents many things: the industrial revolution, capitalism, European colonialism, democracy, world war, the atom bomb, globalization, scientific and technological advances, the abolition of slavery, women's rights, scientism, materialism, and ecological devastation are all important manifestations of the past 500

years. And an underlying theme that connects many of these modern events is the force of human reason—at times aligned with modern values (leading to democracy, women's rights, and the abolition of slavery), and sometimes divorced from a deeper connection to the reality of value and nature (leading to scientism, materialism, and environmental degradation). Modern systems of civilization and patterns of behavior became based on and justified by principles, values, and processes that were thought to be objectively true. The quest for objective truth, evidenced by the emergence of new scientific paradigms, and in the technological innovations of applied science and engineering that followed, can be seen in contrast to a world of local, competing, culture-bound myths and stories about life and reality. The pre-modern world can be seen as a world of diverse, mutually incompatible, place-based, ethnocentric worldviews, cultures, and societies. (With large empires, such as the Ottoman, and early cosmopolitan networks, like those in Persia and India, showing signs of early modernity, and also still clearly limited in scope and reach compared to later modern empires and subsequent globalization).[8] The modern world can be seen in part through the emergence and spread of a dominant, quasi-objective, scientifically oriented relation to reality that attempts to transcend and include the diverse stories of different groups, with truth claims being (ostensibly) subject to the ongoing process of scientific validation—at least that was the story that spread in the collective imagination, which coincided with very real social consequences, along with military, economic, and political systems that outcompeted prior social forms (in the short term, and in unsustainable ways).

This does not mean that modern societies or people are better than pre-modern societies or people! It also *does not* mean that pre-modern societies or people did not have tremendous wisdom and knowledge that expressed universal truths, values, and principles (much of which we have lost and must recover and reintegrate into our collective psyche and behavior). There is much to be explained and unpacked to tease apart the dignities *and disasters* of social and cultural evolution; fortunately many able minds have done so, and it is on the basis of their work that I submit that the broad and general characterization of pre-modernity, modernity, and postmodernity that I offer here does provide a helpful, relevant, and meaningful frame of reference for our understanding of our shared past.[9] A critique of modern systems of science, economics, and philosophy, and what Jem Bendell has recently referred to as Imperial Modernity, is very important and has been well-documented elsewhere.[10] But in order to understand what is happening now, we also have to understand how our collective reaction to those problems has created new ones.

Postmodern culture can be understood partly as the attempt to critique, deconstruct, and refute the modern project and its claims of objectivity. There were many ways in which the philosophies, policies, and uses of power enacted by modern civilizations evidenced partial and limited perspectives of reality, and in which claims of objectivity and scientific truth were used and abused to justify power over others. The stark and brutal injustice, unfairness, and inequality of the modern world led to many justified and valid attempts to refute the underlying basis of the truth claims being made by individuals in modern European organizations and governments. Postmodern culture and consciousness brought awareness and criticism to the ways in which European culture and social norms came to dominate the globe, and elaborated ideas of how the assumptions, norms, and values of European societies are just as relative, socially constructed, and therefore non-objective as any other. This realization and critique then became coupled over time with insinuations or direct claims that European society and/or white people are particularly or uniquely bad, as evidenced by the recent history of European colonialism. The homogenization of diverse European peoples into 'whiteness,' and the subsequent conflation of whiteness and modernity, combined with increasing consciousness about the contradictions and injustices of the modern era, have led to widespread oversimplifications and historical narratives that have reinforced modern racial categories and perpetuated polarization and social fragmentation. I will pick up this thread in the section about race, below.

Overall, we can see that several cultural and ideological currents have been mixed together and entangled in a short amount of time, and now we have to disambiguate and reconstruct what has happened so we can learn and grow together in a healthy way (and, hopefully, figure out how to work together to heal our collective trauma and avoid a dystopian collapse of our global civilization). Postmodern culture has evolved as a combination of many things; there have been some good intentions (generally wanting to improve society by tearing down unfair power structures and myopic ideologies), as well as some deep insights (into cultural relativism, the power of bias, and the deceptions of discourse), and an opening of possibilities for future social arrangements. But there has also been widespread cultural confusion and social disorientation, along with a pervasive sense of relativism, cynicism, materialism, and nihilism.[11] These negative and regressive aspects of postmodern culture have become established in concert with changes in our digital media environment, which has exacerbated and accelerated their spread and influence globally.

In the past 30 years we have witnessed some very unhealthy cultural messages, worldviews, and ideologies being spread across the globe in a way that is truly unprecedented. There were seeds of a critical worldview that were planted in the modern world, which grew in small circles of postmodern critique and philosophy, and which have spread in distorted and over-simplified forms through new avenues of media in recent decades. It is incredibly difficult to not get swept up in such cultural waves and movements if we are not able to look at them critically and create some healthy distance in our psyche between our individual perspective and the cultural status quo, norms, and assumptions of the groups we most identify with. For many of us, that means taking a critical look at the progressive, justice-oriented perspectives and identities that have been influenced by postmodern critiques and sensibilities.

One of the underlying features of the postmodern perspective that has spread in conscious and unconscious ways is the sense of 'the disenchantment of the modern world,' which many people have written about since Max Weber popularized the term, and which tends to come as a package deal along with presumptions of materialism, scientism, relativism, and nihilism—i.e., God is dead; human values are just culturally-relative, fictional stories and myths; conscious experience is an epiphenomena of the brain and everything can be explained by or reduced to material causes/physics or neurochemistry; there is no ultimate purpose or meaning to life or the universe—it's all either a contingent accident, or a deterministic, mechanistic series of causes and effects, and either way any story we have about it is ultimately irrelevant and empty, etc. Seeing into the heart (or perhaps the mechanistic brain?) of this worldview is a crucial capacity and defining feature of the *post-postmodern* culture that is yearning to be born.[12] This disenchanted and materialist worldview is not leading us to a good place, and one of the many things being influenced by this widespread but mostly subconscious cultural matrix is how we conceptualize and understand human identity and what it means to be human, including (of course) how we relate to conceptual categories like gender and race. I will pick up those threads below.

Another significant and influential aspect of the postmodern mood and worldview is the aversion to and rejection of grand narratives. Because every narrative is seen as relative to a particular cultural context, there is no possibility for an 'objective' narrative or metanarrative. There is no 'view from nowhere.' Unfortunately, this leaves us in an untenable situation, where it is hard to determine how we can come to shared agreements about matters of truth, ethics, or justice, or how any person or group can have any claim to a form of knowledge that would provide an adequate sense of validity and direction in life. If every view, claim, and philosophy is, like, just our opinion, then what can we do

but fall back on a default assumption of a materialist and meaningless universe? (Though, of course, that would also be, like, just an opinion). And then why not just accept that there is no way out of our ongoing win-lose games of power, with conflicting and incommensurate stories of 'truth' and 'value' destined to do battle with each other in a field of identity politics, with no chance of ever finding some ultimate or objective truth or shared reality? And if these are the background assumptions or our nascent global culture, and the actual arguments of some of our influential elites, then how would we expect children to constitute their identities and sense of self in this disenchanted world of power politics and relativist language games? Wouldn't we expect them to retreat into self-referential and self-protective identities and neo-tribes, in the face of confusing, discordant, incoherent, and incommensurable multiplicity and cultural fragmentation?

A cursory glance at our social media ecology, combined with recent data about significant declines in adolescent mental health, offers some startling answers.[13] It should be clear to us by now—and if it is not, we must make it so—that the unhealthy elements of postmodern culture have contributed to an environment that is not appropriate for raising generations of people. We have to see and understand why well enough to figure out how to grow out of this evolutionary cul-de-sac of culture, and beyond the culture wars that reinforce and sustain it. Unfortunately, this is an incredibly daunting challenge, and another key feature of our predicament: there are developmental demands associated with growing beyond unhealthy postmodern culture and resolving the underlying criticisms and claims that support the pervasive trends of relativism, materialism, and nihilism--which remain mostly unconscious, yet which subsist, easy to find and plain to see, right beneath the surface of our most commonplace assumptions and communications.

Ultimately, it is to these developmental demands that we must turn, which is why these all-important questions—of culture, identity, meaning, purpose, and the possibilities of global collaboration to resolve very real global problems—are all in fact educational questions. It is no coincidence that the DEI industry is both propagated and contested primarily in the domain of education, and it is important to see that there is a strong relationship between current DEI discourse and the overarching project of postmodern critique. It has become very common to hear DEI advocates and practitioners using and repeating language that undermines and contradicts the values and ideals that have served as the basis for social justice and civil rights movements, and this has led to serious contradictions and hypocrisies that have fed and deepened elements of resistance and polarization that are threatening to undermine the aims and progress of the DEI movement itself.[14]

The gist of the postmodern critique is that the underlying universalism of modern values —the aim to establish values, principles, and laws that apply to everyone—is impossible, and is itself an imposition of power of one group over others. In other words: no one group of people has a right to claim that liberty, equality, and solidarity (or anything) apply to all. All such claims are seen as relative, contextual, cultural constructions, and therefore no universal principles or values are possible. Further, since universality is impossible, any such claim to universality is seen as a power play, or even a form of colonialism.

Many have pointed to these connections and contradictions, and many are resisting their incursion into schools, and some are trying to address the deeper philosophical and cultural roots of the problem, but far too many of us are overly identified with the overt intentions of DEI, and unwilling or unable to acknowledge the very real problems that DEI resistance is responding to.[15] The takeaway for us, right now, in the midst of a global metacrisis that requires the coordination of billions of people and hundreds of countries in order to create actual solutions to very real global problems, is that we have to grow beyond the limits of postmodern criticism and into a new cultural renaissance that enables the widespread establishment and acceptance of global values for global cooperation, global justice, global equality, and global society. The postmodern criticism on which current DEI theory rests is counterproductive and inadequate. It claims that there are no universal values, and yet it proclaims this to be universally true. It claims that all values, principles, and norms are culturally relative and socially constructed, and yet it relies on an underdeveloped intuition of justice and freedom for all people, with no way to adjudicate the relative goodness or merits between peoples and cultures. Ultimately, it lands us in a cul-de-sac of cultural conflict where there is no way to bring all people together under one shared banner of value and identity, and we are left instead with the dysfunctional feeling of cultural fragmentation, rooted in philosophical confusion that leads in many ways to forms of relativism, materialism, cynicism, and nihilism. If there are no universal values, and if everything is just a culturally relative social construction, then what is the point of it all, and what is to keep us from constructing ideas and systems in ways that garner advantage for our group over others?

Cultural evolution is proceeding at a quickening pace, and the horizon of tomorrow offers the possibility of a broader cultural context in which the healthy and potentially necessary aspects of postmodern critique can fulfill their potential for meaning and purpose in a broader and more comprehensive story. The remnants of postmodern culture are in

desperate need of *healing and integration.* I will expand on this more below, but the key idea is that we must find a way to respond to and grow beyond a critical stance on modern values, not to return or go backward, but to move through and out of the cultural fragmentation and polarization that has coincided with a hyper-critical stance toward the modern world, and toward the people and values that have become identified and conflated with modernity. Healing and integrating here means liberating ourselves from the one-sidedness of antithetical negativity and releasing the potential of higher-order synthesis by including the values of liberty, equality, and solidarity within the de-centered and re-contextualized diversity of an emerging, cross-cultural, transnational planetary network of human relationships. Not bypassing. Not a quick fix. Not language games or trauma denial. We have to cultivate embodied, grounded, meaningful relationships to establish deep diversity, deep discourse, deep resilience, and deep healing.[16] Only then will the post-postmodern planetary culture to come be ready and able to emerge in a healthy form.

The Bureaucratization and Scope Creep of DEI as an Industry

While much has changed over time in human societies, and while some changes can be seen as forms of progress, we also face persistent and perpetual challenges in our collective social life. One of the primary patterns that recurs in societies of all kinds is the establishment of in-groups and out-groups, us vs them divisions, or tribalization of one kind or another. We're social, we form groups, and those groups define themselves in relation (and in opposition) to each other. And when there is a disturbance within a group —which happens quite often—one of the most common ways to appease the group and regain harmony or homeostasis is by finding a scapegoat to blame. These social patterns —group formation, intergroup conflict, and scapegoating—have been fundamental building blocks of our social world for millennia. We cannot understand human culture without understanding and accounting for these patterns.[17]

Another deep pattern is the tendency for a group or system to perpetuate itself. Once a social form comes into being, whether it be a group, an ideology, or a layer of social bureaucracy, there are strong incentives for people in that group to seek to perpetuate and expand their scope, reach, and influence, to ensure their survival. This is true of families, tribes, nations, and organizations—anything that has a shared sense of identity will seek to maintain and perpetuate itself, and any individual with an incentive for that group to continue (such as a paycheck and/or social status) will fight for its perpetuation. Perhaps there are exceptions, but the general idea should be clear and uncontroversial.

Given these fundamental social patterns and tendencies, if we add the simple truth that those of us who identify with the struggle for social justice, and who are engaged in 'doing the work' of DEI, are equal to others—i.e., we are not fundamentally different from all other humans—then it stands to reason (in fact, it should be a given) that we are also susceptible to these basic drives to perpetuate and propagate our ideas, influence, and power over others in order to ensure the growth of our ideology, values, and social movement. In all honesty, we must face the fact that we are driven in part by social, cultural, economic, and psychological dynamics and patterns that are not consciously integrated within our ideology of social justice or anti-racism; we are influenced by and prone to perpetuating the same social drives as everyone else—*and this is true precisely because we are all equal!* If social justice advocates are not fundamentally different from all other people, then we are just as likely to pursue our own interests and to create and elaborate creative ideas, ideologies, and language to justify our self-interested actions. We cannot reduce the actions of the socially righteous to such selfish drives, but nor can we reduce the lives, beliefs, ideas, or actions of anyone else. We are all multifaceted; we all contain multitudes, and we all succumb to these primal drives and patterns at times—especially when we feel threatened or attacked.

Others have documented and explained this element of the DEI industry.[18] Once you see it, it is as plain as day, and not worth trying to deny. And it is a real problem. The power of the DEI industry has become a culture-shaping force, and an unintentional contributor to the suppression of free speech and open dialogue in institutions and schools across the country.[19] And the DEI movement has ironically (and tragically) become associated with a layer of social and bureaucratic power that is perceived as reinforcing and propagating some of the divisions of identity and tribalism that it depends on in order to justify its reason for being; but these are the very things that it is supposed to be eradicating, and which we as a society have to figure out how to transcend and integrate. Examples of educators, elected officials, and DEI practitioners working and speaking in ways that appear to contradict the values of liberty, free speech, and equality in the name of equity are counterproductive and disheartening, and those of us who share the underlying intentions of social justice need to look soberly and honestly at what is happening and acknowledge why so many people are upset about it.[20] Those of us in the field who care about the higher purposes and intentions of DEI work need to acknowledge these underlying incentives and work mindfully to tease them out and limit their influence.

For example: the work of anti-racism should be to eliminate racism. Full stop. We should be focusing our efforts toward identifying, understanding, and healing racism at its roots,

not reinforcing the idea that the legacies of the past will be permanently present. Any intellectual justification to the contrary should be met with all due suspicion and skepticism. If we want DEI work to be successful, we need to ensure that its aims, purposes, and uses of power are as clear and transparent as possible. The goal is not to grow the market for DEI consultants or profit from collective guilt;[21] the goal is to work effectively so we can transition out of our current DEI paradigm and focus ever-more on collaborating to solve the myriad social, political, economic, and ecological problems that we must face together—and for which time is running out.[22]

From Equal Rights to Equal Outcomes to Equal Humanity
Now to home in on a key feature of our current DEI landscape: the meaning of equity. The longstanding legacy and logic of human rights and civil rights has been based on the premise that all humans are created equal and therefore deserve equal rights under the law. The struggle for civil rights is the struggle to ensure equal rights, equal protection, and equal representation in the eyes of the state. Of course, there is also a desire to be seen and treated as an equal in the eyes of one's fellow citizens, and there is a deep relationship between how people see each other and how those people act toward each other as representatives of the state, but there is a fundamental difference between the two, in part because of the balancing value of liberty. We can demand equal rights and equality under the law, but we cannot demand how another person thinks or feels about us. They are free to (pre)judge as they wish, as are we, but they should not be able to take away our rights. The difference is crucial.

Over time the goals of social justice advocates have changed—in many ways and for many reasons. A key feature of change over time has been the widespread and dramatic shift from a demand for equal rights to a focus on equal outcomes. This is perhaps the clearest example of how the current DEI industry has moved away from the legacy and logic of the civil rights movement, and into the very different project of trying to judge and control the life outcomes of individuals and groups in society. For a long period of time it was well-established that equality implied equal rights and equal opportunity, not equal outcomes. It was (and should be) quite clear that any attempt to dictate and control the life outcomes of individual citizens would be a violation of their liberty, and of their individual efforts, merits, responsibilities, and agency. Diversity of outcome is fundamentally presupposed and required by the principle of freedom, and by the reality of diversity itself in all its forms. To overdetermine and attempt to control the life outcomes of all individuals and groups, and to reduce all individual outcomes to the characteristics of one group that they belong to, is a profound violation and

misunderstanding of the underlying aims and intentions of every human rights and civil rights movement that has preceded us, and of the underlying values of liberty, equality, and solidarity.[23]

An example: In some DEI contexts I have often heard the expression 'fair is not equal,' and this has meant that sometimes in order to be fair we do not treat people equally. We do not treat everyone the same because people are different and their context is different, so in order to be fair, we account for context and diversity and treat people accordingly, i.e., differently or unequally. As a teacher, I have personally found this to be a helpful frame of reference to help young children understand why a student may need extra help or more time, etc. The classic meme/image here is the picture of people of different heights trying to look over a fence. If they all stand on the ground, only one can see. In order for all to see over the fence, the shortest needs two boxes to stand on, the middle person needs one box to stand on, and the tallest person does not need a box to stand on. In this context it is equitable, or fair, for them to not have an equal number of boxes to stand on. All good.

But in retrospect, it makes me sad to admit that in over 20 years working in schools, and having been exposed to this image and idea many times, I have never seen anyone question the applicability of this illustration to the much larger and higher stakes educational reality that this metaphor is meant to represent. To compare being able to see over a fence, as determined by one's height, to one's overall ability to achieve in school, work, or life is incredibly misleading, deterministic, and cynical—and yet that is the common implication. This would mean that all achievement and all life outcomes are simply given, determined by immutable characteristics like height, and not at all related to other factors like effort, skill, study, passion, interest, motivation, or any of the unique ways that individuals show different capacities and capabilities for different things. It would also imply that all outcomes should be the same for all people; that everything—outcomes in every sport, every subject, every job, every domain for which questions of merit, skill, interest, and qualification would typically hold—should be adjusted so that all can achieve the same outcome. The absurdity of this line of thinking should be readily apparent; the fact that it isn't says much about the sad state of our cultural and educational discourse. We have to do better.

Another feature of this widespread line of thinking is that not only does it convey that all outcomes should be equal, but that the only reason they are not is due to some form of injustice or discrimination. In the current paradigm of popular DEI books, workshops,

and consultants, the word equity has come to represent and signal a demand for equal outcomes for different racialized groups.[24] It is very common for a radically binary logic to be employed, where there are only two options available to explain the outcomes of different groups: either the cause of diverse outcomes is 'systemic racism,' or one is forced to concede that those who obtain worse outcomes are somehow inherently inferior.[25] Since the latter notion is demonstrably racist, all 'good' people are impelled to select the former option—the cause must be systemic racism. But this is absurd. The actual reasons for the diverse outcomes of different individuals and groups are myriad, multifaceted, and ever changing. And charges of systemic racism lose their meaning if they are overused. *We honor the important reality of systemic racism by always being specific about what system we refer to and how it is racist.* Racism is real; it is a cancer that requires a scalpel, not a hammer looking for a nail. And we honor the spirit of equity by never allowing ourselves to fall prey to the sleight of hand that equates equity with the demand for something that is impossible. *It is literally impossible* for all groups of people to achieve equal outcomes in all areas of life in proportion to how those groups are racialized in a given place or context. It is an incredible and absurd idea. It is a ploy. We can do better!

The desire to obtain homogenous results for diverse people is not feasible, desirable, or wise; the only thing it ensures is a never-ending battle between racialized groups. The contradictions and inherent problems with these lines of thinking—which are clearly dominant in the domain of contemporary DEI work—are readily apparent, since counterfactuals are so abundant. (Does systemic racism explain the overrepresentation of Ethiopians in long-distance running? Russians in chess? East Asians in math testing? Black Americans in the NBA? The high median incomes of Indian-, Filipino-, and Taiwanese-Americans, or the relative economic success of Nigerian- and Ghanian-Americans?). These kinds of fallacies would be easy to dismiss if they weren't so impactful, with such dire consequences for our cultural discourse and collective decision making.

Again, the reasons for this cultural confusion are many and complex, and I won't be able to explain them adequately here, but it is crucial that we begin to break free from the constraints of social pressure and conformity that keep well-intended illogic from dominating our educational and social spaces. It is essential that we can question together, think together, and search together for better ways of thinking and acting in alignment with the values and ideals that remain at the core of our efforts to honor diversity, ensure fairness, and maintain freedom of thought and action for individuals and

groups everywhere. For us to do so means finding a way to clarify and reintegrate the values that animate our intentions and efforts. We have to return to an affirmation of our shared humanity, a humanity that will always include a diversity of diversities, and to a shared understanding about how the principles of equality and liberty must reinforce and balance each other in order for either to flourish.

With these distinctions and contexts in mind, let us take a closer look at the two areas of social life that have taken up the most energy and attention in the DEI industry—race and gender.

Course Correcting the Arc of Racial Justice
The distinctions noted above, between current popular notions of anti-racism and the underlying (modern) tenets of the civil rights movement, are widely underappreciated and misunderstood. Fortunately, there are many thoughtful scholars and writers who have been trying to sound the alarm and clarify some of these distinctions, in an attempt to reframe and reanimate the underlying intentions and purposes of civil rights and social justice movements.[26] Unfortunately, such perspectives are inadequately interpreted through the prism of the very ideology they are trying to expose and improve upon, and are consistently misrepresented in media contexts that tend to frame everything in binary left/right terms. Therefore, I will continue to emphasize that we cannot meaningfully address and understand these issues unless we also address the broader and hypercomplex context of social media, neotribalism, polarization, and cultural fragmentation, which is the dysfunctional water we're swimming in as we sputter and flail our way toward a post-postmodern world. I cannot unpack all of that adequately here, but must mention it again and point to sources for further reading.[27]

The question of race therefore cannot be addressed in the terms of popular discourse; nor can we fully explain how we ended up in a place where popular discourse is so misguided and unhealthy (though I've offered some pointers above). We must instead return to first principles and values, and attempt to find a new simplicity, or second simplicity, on the other side of social and cultural complexity. This is not a bypass. It is not naïve color-blindness.[28] It is not a disavowal of collective trauma or the ongoing legacy of racialized injustice. It is an affirmation of goals, values, and ideals that can be shared by all people. What we inevitably share, ultimately, is a potential, and a story: a shared story of human evolution that is the context of every human life, every injustice, every atrocity, and every redemption.

In the shared context of human (and cosmic) evolution, we can look at the question of race in both historical and contemporary terms, and in light of where we want to go together, collectively and interdependently. We can begin by distinguishing culture, ethnicity, and race. There are many ways to use and define these words, but the following distinctions may be helpful.

Ethnicity can refer to the fact that humans have evolved in different regions of the planet over long stretches of time, and there are some physiological differences between ethnic groups from different regions, which are readily apparent and need not be doubted or dismissed. For instance, it is often possible to discern if someone's recent ancestors are from Europe, Africa, or Asia based on how they look. However, it is necessary and important to assert the equally important fact that generalizations and assumptions about ethnicity are unwise, as they are only relevant to the broadest categories. There are also much more local ethnic differences that are not so easy to discern, and the process of globalization and cross-ethnic pollination means that more and more people will become multi-ethnic over time, so it is safe to predict that these categories will continue to break down and shift, as will any associations and characteristics of ethnic groups. This should be a central theme in every discussion of anything human: change is constant and is a central feature in our evolutionary story, so it is best not to get too attached to impermanent identities or their fluid associations.

Race, as distinct from ethnicity, and as we currently use the term, can be seen as a modern social construction, connected to the emergent social/economic category of whiteness.[29] This notion of race, which has played such a dominant role in the modern and postmodern world, emerged in a particular way in the era of European colonization and slavery, as a result of a *cultural need to justify* the ongoing enslavement and inequality of African slaves (I'll explain more what I mean by *cultural* below). As everyone reading this should know, the enslavement of Africans who were brought to the Americas was a terrible and tragic episode of human history. And everyone should also know that the practice of slavery extends much further back into human history, and has a very long and widespread legacy throughout every habitable continent, with various forms and permutations in different historical and cultural contexts over the course of millennia.[30] But in the Americas of the modern world, a particular shift took place, in language and in our collective imagination, which continues to cast a long shadow over the cultural fragmentation of postmodern society. However, at the same time, within the shadow of that tragedy lies the source of our salvation and collective liberation.

The tragedy of modern slavery was unique in human history because it was self-contradictory. Prior peoples enslaved prior peoples in part because they lived within cultural stories that did not problematize slavery. In the absence of universal human rights, and without a shared understanding that every person has inalienable rights as an individual simply by virtue of human birth, the violence of the past was not nearly as problematized as it has become in the modern world. It is very easy to project our widely shared assumptions about human rights and equality into the distant past, but this is a very significant and common mistake. To judge the past by the standards of the present is a form of presentism. It is anachronistic, and misguided, precisely because of our shared context of evolution. Values change and evolve, along with everything else. This is a key point that is hard to overstate or fully appreciate. So much of our contemporary discourse and collective understanding depends on the foundation of our relationship to the past, and on our presuppositions about human nature, cultural change, and evolution (cosmic, planetary, and human). *And the prevalence and constitution of those presuppositions all change over time*, as do the explanatory frameworks of each individual as they grow, learn, and mature. So there is a relationship between our personal maturation process and the way we situate ourselves in a historical context—our relationship to history can deepen and mature over the course of our lives. And this is what we need collectively: a deepening of our relation to history, so that we understand better the salient differences between our postmodern world and the social and cultural worlds of our distant ancestors.

In the modern world, the story of human value, and of equality, liberty, and solidarity, was emerging and spreading, and this made slavery untenable and unconscionable. Unfortunately, it remained economically profitable and advantageous for slave owners for a period of time after the notions of universal equality became widespread, so new justifications needed to be made. This juxtaposition of competing values and incentives is what led to the notion of whiteness, and to the demonization of Africans (and of all 'non-whites,' by extension). Modern proponents of slavery needed a new justification. As has been well documented, slavery did not arise from racism; racism emerged as a cultural justification for modern slavery, and the concept of race, as it was constituted and propagated in the modern world, was tethered to the binary of white/black, as the concept of whiteness became an ever-expanding social category that enabled and justified economic inequality and racialized oppression throughout the modern world, initially as a way to justify (through tortured and contradictory illogic that would not stand the test of time) the ongoing practice of slavery in the Americas.[31]

Now that we are coming to historical awareness of how the story of race has been constructed in recent centuries, many are coming to the realization, and making the argument, that an understanding of race and racism demands a refutation of the concept and the category of race itself.[32] The construction of whiteness and blackness that emerged from modern slavery was inherently racist. The origins of these forms of racialization are rotten to the core, and the propagation of this racialized grouping of people inevitably perpetuates us/them and good/bad dynamics between racialized groups, while erasing the actual ethnic and cultural diversity that lives and breathes between and within these broad categories. If we actively keep these labels and categories alive in our culture, then we are perpetually co-constructing racialized identity groups in ways that are fundamentally unnecessary and unhealthy. Of course, and importantly, this does not mean or imply the erasure, denial, or failure to appreciate the importance of ethnicity or culture. Nor does it mean that we cannot express contextually appropriate feelings of group belonging and solidarity; and we may continue to use the language that has been given to us for some time (e.g., 'white' and 'black'). But culture is in flux, and language will continue to change, and we can develop collectively toward reducing the reification and reinforcement of unhelpful language and concepts over time. Ethnic and cultural uniqueness and diversity do not depend on the social construction of race—at least not in the way it has been constructed around the concept of whiteness in recent centuries. Nor does this understanding imply a denial or bypassing of the ongoing social impacts of whiteness and race. Racism and its underlying bias of ethnic prejudice is a real and persistent feature of intergroup relationship, but it is resolved in various real and meaningful ways along the arc of human growth that we all can experience for ourselves. Importantly, seeing through the concept of race—making it diaphanous, or transparent— is a way of disempowering and counteracting the ongoing problems and traumas of race and racism.[33] It can also be a way of enabling healthier developmental environments for multi-cultural and multi-ethnic communities.

Culture can be defined in many ways; I will highlight two. There is the general and widely agreed upon notion of culture as the shared, learned patterns of behavior of any group. This definition of culture, while usually applied only to humans, does meaningfully apply to other animals as well; we can easily observe and describe the culture of apes and other animals.[34] Typically this is what we refer to when we refer to any culture or subculture: a group that has distinctive, shared, learned patterns of behavior (that include shared beliefs, stories, language, etc.). This notion of culture, while inclusive of behavior, can also be seen to rely on and refer to what can be thought of as

the 'shared interiors' of a group; the intersubjective space of shared meaning and communication.

A second definition of culture has to do with what is particularly and quintessentially human. Human cultures are constituted in part by the systems of justifications that we make to each other about our beliefs and behavior.[35] When we look at what is distinctive about people, we find that the evolutionary leap that constitutes humanity manifests significantly in the domains of language and technology, and in the linguistically-mediated arena of communication, which is where we negotiate and co-create our shared human culture of meaning—and we do so in part through the process of having to justify or explain what we think and do to others. Human culture is a social reality of meaning, communication, and justification, which exists in conjunction with the behaviors, beliefs, and values that we enact and justify to each other, and which leads to the ongoing development of ever-changing forms of behavior, language, and technology.

Defining human culture in reference to systems of justification is a meaningful move. It enables us to see the importance of this ongoing process we are engaged in—the process of perpetually expressing, questioning, challenging, and explaining to each other what we do and why. This process of dialogical interaction helps to perpetuate the dialectical process of cultural evolution. We are collectively engaged in a process of questioning, explaining, and refining our actions and beliefs, and this is ultimately an engine of progress; not necessarily progress in the sense that things always get better, but progress in the sense that there is an ongoing progression; it is a process that does not stop, and keeps changing, and over time we can discern the qualities and characteristics of how and why changes have happened.

There is much more to say about this, but for now the takeaways are that human culture is a very broad category that describes patterns of thought and behavior; that human groups are inevitably engaged in processes of cultural refinement and change, through the ongoing mediation of disagreement and justification; that different ethnic groups have evolved cultural practices over time; and that the concept of race, as we understand and use it in the early 21st century, is a relatively recent cultural idea that arose as an attempt to justify the practice of slavery in the modern world. From this combination of principles and historical facts, we can see that the construction of race that continues to be employed as a social category is no longer adequate to the cultures that have evolved around it, nor is it adequate to the global culture that we can aspire to construct together moving forward. In fact, we can see that it was never well-justified to begin with! *The*

creation of race as we know it was a desperate attempt to continue a practice that was no longer justified according to the dictates of the modern values that emerged in the era of democracy. And just as the practice of slavery, and even more generally, the reality of group-based prejudice and violence, does not belong to any one culture or society, so too do the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice belong not to anyone, but to all. With all due respect to Audrey Lorde: the master's tools never belonged to him in the first place.[36]

Nurturing the Evolution of Gender
Our striving for justice should be oriented toward the meaningful and healthy integration of all people, without exception. This includes all transgender, nonbinary, and queer identities, and all sexualities. There is no room for transphobia or homophobia, just as there is no room for racism, in the more beautiful world we can co-create together. But in order to create that more beautiful and healthier world, we need more clarity and maturity regarding how to discern and ascertain what each individual's unique path is, in the context of their evolutionary story and cultural context. This is why shared modern values are so important. The trinity of liberty, equality, and solidarity offers us a balance of values that enables everyone to find their way to truth, beauty, and goodness. If we engulf children in totalitarian indoctrination of any kind, we violate their liberty, and if we immerse them in a cacophony of confusion and mixed messages, with no grounding in shared stories of value and purpose, we diminish and deteriorate their potential to experience mature solidarity and empathic equality with others.

There are interesting similarities and differences in the ways that race and gender have been constructed in human cultures, historically across time and place, and within our current milieu. With race, it is necessary to distinguish the concept from ethnicity and culture, precisely because the way we think and talk about it is particular to our time and place. There is an ongoing evolution of ethnic groups and cultures, but the concept of race as we use it is more specific to a particular cultural justification that arose in the era of modern slavery (and then continued to mutate and persist into the present day, in ways that are both understandable and unfortunate; and whose impacts have been almost completely negative, and detrimental to the development of a healthy human environment for cross-cultural harmony and mutual regard). With gender, the situation is quite different.

We can define gender as the culturally determined roles, norms, and expectations for men and women in a given group. It is therefore important to acknowledge that gender is distinct from yet inevitably and inherently coupled with sex. Humans reproduce sexually,

and like almost all animals, we are therefore constituted by males and females (and we can easily define males and females with reference to our means of reproduction: males produce sperm and females produce eggs).[37] The cultural diversity of gender roles does not in any way alter the universally human fact that human bodies have evolved according to the evolutionary processes of a dimorphic sexual species. As is widely acknowledged and documented, the cross-cultural presence of specific, well-established, contrasting gender roles for men and women is one of the most consistent and universal findings in all of anthropology.[38] It is safe to assume that every society (past and present) includes people who do not fit neatly into the masculine and feminine roles and norms of their culture, and this can include people who are gay, lesbian, trans, etc. It is also a given that cultural norms and roles change over time. Every culture has their own way of responding to gender diversity and/or nonconformity. Unfortunately, it is often through forms of suppression, repression, or oppression, as our shared history is filled with the subjugation and scapegoating of social minorities. The failure to integrate diversity in a healthy way is the historical norm (though it seems this is improving over time, as noted above). Some cultures have found ways to create social niches for more than two categories of gender, but this never changes the reality of sexual dimorphism or the fact that those cultures also have clear roles and norms for men and women. Cultural diversity is prominent, and it is important not to overgeneralize, oversimplify, or romanticize different cultural norms, but in every culture each individual human is still either male or female.[39]

The fact that gender norms are tightly coupled with the sexual differences between males and females means that they are also tightly coupled with the ways in which males and females relate differently to the means of production, labor, and technologies of each society. Gender norms look different in different societies because men and women have different roles in those systems based on a complex combination of physiology, culture, choice, and power dynamics that manifest physically, socially, politically, and economically. But even with all those factors and more, we can still see distinctive cross-cultural patterns in relation to different organizing structures of civilization and technology. I do not think we can reduce all gender role differences to the means of production, but it would be foolish to deny or dismiss such clear influences and patterns, especially if we see them recurring across different societies (and it seems that we do). Broadly speaking, foraging societies tend to be more matriarchal (where women are responsible for most of the food production); agricultural societies tend to be more patriarchal (where men are responsible for most of the food production); and industrial/ modern societies have tended toward a rebalancing and reshuffling of gender roles

(where women re-entering the workforce has led toward an ongoing increase in women's rights and social power, growing out of the patriarchal legacies of the pre-industrial, pre-modern world; and where we see modernization lacking is precisely where we see the progress of women's rights lacking, into the 21st century).

It is important for us to establish this big history, evolutionary framework for our inquiry into the topic of gender, because as noted above, we cannot understand what is happening today if we do not understand how we got here, how things have changed, and where we may be going (or where we would like to go). The context of our shared human history enables us to see recent changes in gender politics in light of the broader characteristics of postmodernity noted above, while also being enveloped in an even deeper reality of cross-cultural patterns that relate fundamentally to our evolutionary human biology.[40] Ultimately, we have to find a way to acknowledge and integrate all of these major contexts and influences, which overlap and impinge upon our current lifeworld: the deep, evolutionary matrix of sexual biology, which has not changed significantly in recent millennia; the still-changing influences of the modern world, which have coincided with rapidly changing gender norms and expectations since the emergence of industrial societies, enabling the spread of gay rights movements and multiple waves of feminism; and the postmodern currents of fragmentation and disorientation that currently coincide with digitally-mediated social worlds in which young people engage the all-important process of self-formation while being bombarded with incessant and ubiquitous messages of identitarian sensationalism, aimed to capture and degrade their attention in order to sell advertising. To repeat: I am not saying that things are all better now than in the past, but they certainly are more complex.

If we limit our scope a bit to just look at the recent history of gender in the USA, we can see that the changes we are experiencing are quite significant, but they didn't come from nowhere. If we look at the history of gender and gender nonconformity, we can see that the late 20th century witnessed an unprecedented hyper-gendering of childhood, in which prior norms and expectations (such as the assumption that childhood was not sexualized, and that boys and girls did not require radically different clothing or toys) gave way to novel and very questionable new norms (such as the assumption that young children should be expected to act, look, dress, and play according to particular gender patterns) that now appear so ubiquitous as to appear 'natural' or 'normal'.[41] As others have argued, a primary driver for these changes can be found in the economic incentives of diversifying the market. Emphasizing the gender identity of children means the creation of new markets for economic growth. And by extension, the more identities that

proliferate in society, the more market niches there are to sell to (and sell advertising for).[42]

The creation and proliferation of the concept of gender identity, and what many are referring to as gender identity ideology, has arisen at the nexus of these very powerful forces—the market forces that drive niche production; the cultural forces that continue to unravel shared and stable stories of identity and objectivity, and produce ever-smaller memetic tribes; and the technological forces that distort and mediate processes of self-development within manufactured and ersatz realities of digital/social media.[43] And yet, there is also a deep human urge toward freedom, liberty, and liberation that should not be denied--especially in the modern world! The gender roles of any culture can be experienced as limiting to any given individual, and the modern and postmodern emphasis on individuality and individualism also plays a big role in enabling and encouraging people to resist, defy, or alter the gender norms of their society. This can be a healthy feature of human development; it all depends on the unique situation of the particular individual and their combination of biology, psychology, and cultural context. It is also one of the primary ways that cultures change over time, through individuals pushing against and beyond cultural norms to create new ones. But seen in the aggregate and in the present, and with clear signs that increasing numbers of people are not experiencing the process of gender differentiation and integration in a healthy way, current trends and changes related to gender identity should also be understood in relation to the broader dynamics of deconstruction and dissociation that constitute the postmodern turn away from stable, universalized conceptions of self and world.[44]

We are currently witnessing a marked proliferation of new tribes and identities, all demanding not just equal rights, or equal value, but ultimately, in a world where all truth claims are relative and everyone is expected to be engaged in battles of power over others, the right to demand that others conform to what we want, based solely on how we feel. This is a complex and nuanced situation to navigate, related to the existential struggles for recognition and authenticity that permeate our striving for self-actualization in postmodern society, reflected in what Charles Taylor calls 'the ethics of authenticity.'[45] But in the absence of objective truth, and in the absence of an evolutionary context of development, we can feel that we are left with nothing to trust or ground our experience except for our feelings—and if the world does not reflect back to us how we feel and what we want, we are liable to feel like a victim of injustice (and to scapegoat villains in the process), even if our overall situation is relatively privileged. These emergent

characteristics of victimhood culture have been well-documented and discussed, and are a big part of what we need to address and heal as a society.[46]

At the foundation of the evolutionary story of human gender lies the deep and important insight that people and environments are co-constructed. We influence and change our environment over time, and we are also profoundly influenced by our (cultural and natural) environment. We are not completely determined, but our freedom has constraints, and even more importantly, the developmental pathways that we can take to actualize our potential freedom and agency are significantly impacted by the cumulative effects of our culture (parenting, family, society, education, media, etc.). In short: children are very impressionable! The wide range of what humans can become and how we can live is a testament to how malleable we are. This is one of our evolutionary gifts—we are a uniquely neotenous species, meaning we have an exceptionally extended period of childhood, in which we learn what it is to be human (whereas other animals generally know what to do and become mature in a much shorter amount of time). This is crucial to acknowledge and remember when we consider how we are responsible for the myriad messages that we send to our children about what it means to be human—and what it means to be a man or woman.

In the light of this evolutionary context, it should be clear that we are indeed responsible for how we teach our children about sex and gender, and that they (and all future generations) are depending on us to enculturate them in a way that will enable their healthy development and self-actualization. Our children are resilient and reliant mirrors; they will always reflect back to us the state of our own family, culture, and society, while adding their own progressive twist to whatever status quo we offer them. So if we take this developmental background as a given, and zoom in on current trends in sexuality and gender, we can see that our children are becoming increasingly confused and distressed in part because we are not providing adequate clarity and reassurance regarding what it means to be human. They are getting mixed messages, to say the least, and are developing their identity within media ecologies that are predatory, materialistic, partisan, and disorienting in ways that are completely unprecedented in the scope of human history. *TikTok is not a campfire or a dinner table. Instagram isn't grandma.* The fact that the former now has more of an influence than the latter on most children represents an almost unimaginable degradation of human culture which has taken place in just the past few decades. The stakes are high and the environment is toxic. It is our responsibility to protect our children and to nurture their development, and this means enabling their construction-of-self-in-relation-to-the-world to be as healthy and reality-based as possible

—and this means not mediated by screens or influenced by advertisers and influencers. If we can get the environmental influences under control, and oriented more toward human development, health, and emotional well-being, I think the confusion and dysphoria around gender roles will largely sort itself out (assuming that we remain a sexually dimorphic species of earth-based mammals for the time being).[47]

It is sad but true that some prevalent features of social justice activism have moved out of alignment with the orienting principles and aims of social justice in general, and I've tried to outline some of the causal and explanatory relationships above. It is also the case that transgender activism has exceeded the scope of its potentially pro-social purpose; we have moved far beyond the inclusion of transgender rights, and deep into the terrain of othering, scapegoating, demonizing, and attempting to silence or cancel anyone who questions gender identity ideology in good faith.[48] When we acknowledge this, and remain in solidarity to the principles of free speech and civil discourse, the agenda for re-establishing balance in the domain of gender can be relatively straightforward: stay grounded in science and biology (ensuring that the differences between males and females, and between sex and gender, are not erased or blurred); ensure equal rights for all individuals, regardless of group identity, and protect individual freedoms regarding gender expression and identity; and protect children from harm by ensuring that any decision that will impact them long-term is handled slowly, carefully, and with parental involvement as much as possible. This means we protect sex-based laws and rights for women; we do not presume or project gender identity onto anyone who appears to be gender nonconforming, allowing for as much individual freedom and expression as possible (while not violating the rights of others); we help children understand and accept themselves as they are, for who they are, as much as possible; and we offer grace, forgiveness, and love to anyone who misunderstands us or is confused about any of this. This last feature is clearly the most important of all!

One way to facilitate better sense-making in this domain is to reorient our language toward clarifying the differences between sex and gender. One of the most diffuse and detrimental influences of our postmodern milieu has been the creation of a climate of confusion regarding the use of language; the insights of some academics have been badly misunderstood, misapplied, and overgeneralized in popular discourse, and we have come to accept as normal the strategic use of language to deceive, manipulate, and distort reality in service of whatever goal one is trying to achieve. In the realm of sex and gender, this has meant a deepening conflation of the two, with 'gender' rapidly replacing 'sex' in both popular and professional discourse, as though they are interchangeable

terms, which has led to a failure of language in reflecting sexual/biological difference, and the emergence of the idea that sex/gender is reducible to identity, which is reducible to how one feels—which completely ignores and effaces the co-constructed reality of how individuals (and especially children) are influenced by their cultural/linguistic environment, as well as by their biology. So by conflating sex and gender in a culture where the objectivity of biology and science is suspect, and where the malleability and sensitivity of children is denied, we have ended up feeding a self-fulfilling prophecy: if we conflate sex and gender and believe that both are equally a matter of choice along a spectrum, then we will have increasing numbers of children exploring various choices that have long-term *physical* implications as they progress through their developmentally appropriate periods of *identity* exploration and discovery.[49] If we were clear about the distinction between sex and gender, and this exploration was happening in the creative cultural arena of gender construction, that could be healthy and progressive; but because gender identity is now widely confused with sex (and one's identity as male or female) it is now becoming harder to determine who will be better off going through a medical transition and who will not—and this is an injustice to both those who should and those who should not transition (as can only be judged by their own future selves).

As many trans-identified people have noted, transition is not something to take lightly or promote, and if it were simply a matter of choosing a gender identity, it would make no sense to medically transition.[50] The very real experience for actual transgender/ transsexual people is more than a feeling that can be assuaged by performing stereotypes; it is a deep and probably physiological and/or neurological condition that leads them to be better off and more self-actualized after they transition to live as the opposite gender.[51] There are various ways to explore gender expression and gender identity, and we can create cultures that allow healthy exploration in this domain, but we should not lose sight of the very real differences between sex and gender because sex denotes physical/ biological life, grounded in objective reality, and pursuing hormones and surgeries is not something that should be included in the identity exploration of children, unless medically necessary. Adults who want to transition may pursue whatever medical pathways they desire, and we can strive to create cultures that do not judge or discriminate against those individuals. This is unequivocally 'pro-trans.'

We can create space for nonconformity and individuality in the name of liberty, and we can hold open the possibility that new forms of gender expression will continue to emerge and adapt to new social and cultural environments, but we should do so while striving to make those environments as healthy and developmentally nurturing as

possible, and that means that we find ways to integrate the fundamental and essential realities of the past and present, not denying, negating, or suppressing them. This means that we stay connected to and meaningfully grounded in our physical and biological realities as human beings, and do not allow patterns of dissociation, fragmentation, or alienation to become normalized and pervasive in society. The future is open, but the past needs to be integrated, not denied. Integration is the path of health and healing, and our long transition from matriarchy to patriarchy to new possibilities of gender balance and expression need not end in our current state of confusion. Indeed, the path cannot and will not end here; it will continue to change and evolve. The question is: how will we co-create the culture of the future, and how consciously will we do so?

Moving Toward Shared Goals, Shared Identity, and Cultural Evolution in a Field of Value

I have tried to lay out a vision for where we are coming from, where we are, and where we want to go if our intention is to create a global culture of shared humanity that is able to cooperate and collaborate to (re)solve the planetary metacrisis.[52] We come from a shared history of violence, war, and intergroup conflict, inclusive of widespread practices of slavery, mass slaughter and sacrifice, and sexual oppression. We also come from an all-inclusive process of multi-ethnic cultural evolution, through which meaningful values and ideals have been established and spread across the globe. We are living in an epoch of confusion, disruption, possibility, and accelerated change. It is a liminal time; a time between worlds. The world we are living in is already very different from the world we grew up in, and this rate of change continues to accelerate and destabilize cultural continuity. The rate of technological change that impels the rate of social and cultural change is overwhelming our established modes of intergenerational transmission and education. The pressure of evolution has become overwhelming, but we can't stop it. Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing, and unpredictable innovations in technology will continue to emerge, and we must figure out how to cultivate our humanity in a way that enables us to be stewards, guardians, and caretakers of the earth—and of each other.

The many causes and conditions that have led to the establishment of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as a social force to be reckoned with are best understood in the fractal light of cosmic, planetary, and human evolution. DEI is one paragraph in one chapter of a grand story of human purpose and meaning, but it carries within it a plotline that predates the modern world, and that will continue to stretch far beyond the biographies of our distant descendants. It is the plotline of justice, harmony, and right relationship.

To summarize as simply as I can, in light of what I've written above (and informed by the broader conversation that is pointed to in the endnotes): diversity is indelible. It is important, it is beautiful, it is an expression of the radical and fundamental creativity of the cosmos itself. We must embrace diversity; there is no meaningful alternative.

Equity can signal fairness, and that is important. But in the convoluted language games of the 21st century metacrisis, the word equity is being used in ways that increase confusion about the nature of equality, and justify a deep human impulse to control and manipulate others to conform to predetermined standards and outcomes, and that is not good. What we need is more empathy and compassion.[53] Whereas the demand for equal outcomes leads to the repudiation, denial, or suppression of diversity, empathy embraces it. Diversity includes and implies diversity of perspective and diverse outcomes for diverse reasons in diverse contexts. Empathy ensures that fairness is maintained as a goal and ideal in all contexts, and that the multiplicity of pathways is cherished and appreciated in the light of the unique attributes of unique people. Diversity and empathy go well together.

Inclusion, like equity, is generally well-intended in principle but also falls short of the mark as an ideal. We are not looking for one group to include another. We do not want to privilege a dominant majority in which others can be included. Ever-expanding the category of whiteness, for instance, which has been happening for over 200 years, is certainly not the answer. One way to nuance and improve our conceptual orientation is to aim for integration, individually and collectively. Integration denotes a dynamic state of psychological and relational health. We have many facets and layers to our individual and collective psyche, and ultimately we can seek and strive for the healthiest possible balance and expressions of these different parts—of ourselves, and of our society. We want to find the right relationship between the various aspects of ourselves, and we want to find the right relationship between individuals and groups. This notion of integration also points to the dialectical holism of development: as different parts find dynamic balance, new wholes are created, emergence happens, and evolution continues.[54]

So diversity, empathy, and integration, in harmony with liberty, equality, and solidarity— these are the underlying values that we can rely on to get us where we need to go, together.

There is no pre-determined ideology or script to adopt, and there is no 'good' group of 'us' who will finally overcome the 'bad' group of 'them.' There will continue to be

polarities and spectrums and ignorance and imperfection and various stages of growth, and the health and goodness of the communities to come will be determined by the degree to which they are able to orient individuals and groups toward their own self-actualization, in harmony with others. And in order to do this, we will need to liberate ourselves from the circular and repetitive patterns of disharmony and discontent that entrap and limit our potential.

We will need to find a way out of the vicious cycle that currently ensnares so much of ostensibly progressive culture, where any attempt to move forward is seen as a failure to acknowledge and understand the past. We cannot move forward if we do not acknowledge, understand, and integrate the past, but we should not stand in judgment of those who attempt to heal and grow and enable real progress. In our current moment, it often happens that any attempt to offer constructive solutions or goals is met with skepticism, and those who try to strive for a post-postmodern, transracial, and transpartisan future are accused of denying the suffering, trauma, and inequality of the present. In our zeal to affirm and honor the pain and injustice of the past and present, we can unwittingly deny ourselves very real opportunities and possibilities for actual healing and progress. In order to enable and enact the real resolutions we so desperately desire, we have to believe it is possible, and allow ourselves to move from the places where we are stuck in our current perspectives, identities, and ideologies.

However advanced we become and however much we change, polarity and paradox will remain as fundamental features of our world. The masculine and the feminine, the conservative and the progressive, the left hemisphere and the right hemisphere, the yin and the yang—all are indelible and dynamic facets of our amazing world of human experience. The individual and the collective are expressions of a singular, dynamic process of unfolding, and we find ourselves here, *in medias res*—always already right in middle of an infinite saga of meaning, purpose, and value. Will we find our way? Will we become the balancing force that transcends and includes essentialism and relativism, fundamentalism and nihilism, determinism and freedom? Time will tell, and who is there to tell the time, but us?

[1] For an eye-opening look at the recent history of human conflict, read *Conquests and Cultures* by Thomas Sowell. Also: *The Goodness Paradox* by Richard Wrangham.

[2] The term modern evokes many problems of periodization, which I grant but to not have adequate space to explain here. For the sake of this essay, a common-sense understanding of modernity should be sufficient, and I do extrapolate some below. For a deeper inquiry into the meanings of modernity (and postmodernity), see: *Metamodernism* by Jason Ananda Josephson Storm; *Metamodernity* by Lene Rachel Andersen; *The Secular Age* by Charles Taylor; *Postmodernism* by Frederic Jameson.

[3] The conflation of whiteness with qualities and values that could be understood as modern, but are better simply understood as human, is happening often and is being perpetuated by people and institutions that should know better. For example, The Smithsonian displayed a poster that referred to the nuclear family, hard work, rational linear thinking, and politeness as 'white culture,' and these associations are very widespread in the DEI community. (https://www.newsweek.com/smithsonian-race-guidelines-rational-thinking-hard-work-are-white-values-1518333).

[4] See *In Praise of Cultural Appropriation* by Amod Lele. https://loveofallwisdom.com/blog/2021/02/in-praise-of-cultural-appropriation.
Also: *Migrations and Cultures* by Thomas Sowell; *The Silk Roads* by Peter Frankopan; *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* by Jack Weatherford.

[5] The cross-cultural pollination of modern values, and the strong presence and development of these values in the Americas, prior to Europeans and with an influence on Europeans, is explored in *The Dawn of Everything* by David Graeber & David Wengrow. See also *African Founders* by David Hackett Fischer.

[6] Which is *not* to say that these values and principles did not exist prior to the modern world. Exceptional individuals and small groups have brought forth these values at different times and places, but they were not widespread and nearly universal until they spread in the modern world. For a fuller explanation of 'leading edges' vs 'centers of gravity' of culture, see *Up From Eden* or *A Brief History of Everything* by Ken Wilber.

[7] I cannot weave together all these threads adequately here, but will try to do so more fully in later writing, and I highly recommend the following resources on these topics: *Surveillance Capitalism* by Shoshana Zuboff; *Stolen Focus* by Johann Hari; *The Coddling of the American Mind* by Greg Lukianoff & Jonathan Haidt; *The Way Out* by Peter Coleman. And I highly recommend *The Consilience Project* for a collection of in-depth essays that explore these overlapping topics: https://consilienceproject.org.

[8] E.g., The "Sanskrit Cosmopolis" that Sheldon Pollock describes in *Language of the Gods in the World of Men.*

[9] For an understanding of Big History and cultural evolution, see: *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* by Ken Wilber; *The Ever-Present Origin* by Jean Gebser; *The Evolution of Civilizations* by Carroll Quigley; *Nonzero* by Robert Wright; *Evolution's Purpose* by Steve McIntosh; *Evolution's Arrow* by John Stewart; *Metamodernity* by Lene Rachel Andersen; *The Universe Story* by Brian Swimme & Thomas Berry.

[10] *Breaking Together* by Jem Bendell offers an up-to-date critique of the financial, philosophical, and governmental failures of Imperial Modernity that have landed us in a profound climate crisis.
For an even deeper and more philosophical inquiry into the problems and pathologies of the modern psyche, see *The Matter With Things* by Iain McGilchrist.

[11] For an incisive explanation of the connection between postmodernism and the negative ramifications for our culture, see: *Trump and a Post-Truth World* by Ken Wilber. See also: *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* by Huston Smith.

[12] The term *metamodern* is being used in different but overlapping conversations and networks to describe this emergent post-postmodern world/culture/period. I am not centering the term here, only because I do not want or need it to become a focal point of the essay, but I am personally enmeshed in a network of people who are leading voices in the nascent metamodern movement, and I resonate with many of their projects and uses of the term, as I think they are all pointing to different aspects of our overall evolutionary situation and trying to move it forward in a good way. See *The Listening Society* by Hanzi Freinacht; *Metamodernity* by Lene Rachel Andersen; *Metamodernism* by Jason Ananda Josephson Storm; *Dispatches from a Time Between Worlds* by Jonathan Rowson & Layman Pascal; and *The World We Create* by Tomas Bjorkman.

[13] Troubling data about the mental and emotional state of our youth is easy to find. E.g.: https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/12/05/crisis-student-mental-health-is-much-vaster-than-we-realize/; https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2023/p0213-yrbs.html; https://open.substack.com/pub/jonathanhaidt/p/social-media-mental-illness-epidemic?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web; https://www.genderexploratory.com/2021/04/30/example-post-2/.

[14] Examples of DEI impact and ideology:
https://compactmag.com/article/a-black-professor-trapped-in-anti-racist-hell?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email; https://musaalgharbi.com/2020/09/16/diversity-important-related-training-terrible/; https://freeblackthought.substack.com/p/abridged-six-unsettling-features; https://loveofallwisdom.com/blog/2022/06/tenets-of-a-new-movement/;
On the difference between the modern left and postmodern left:
https://www.clearerthinking.org/post/understanding-the-divide-between-social-justice-advocates-and-the-left-leaning-anti-woke-community; https://fairforall.substack.com/p/then-and-now?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&utm_source=;
Other long-term effects of our current climate in education:
https://reason.com/2023/02/28/40-percent-of-liberal-professors-are-afraid-theyll-lose-their-jobs-over-a-misunderstanding/; https://www.chronicle.com/article/yes-dei-can-erode-academic-freedom-lets-not-pretend-otherwise.

[15] The polarization around these topics is so strong that most people who identify with the good intentions of DEI do not allow themselves to acknowledge the very real problems that are being pointed to, while critics of DEI and critical race theory typically fail to acknowledge the good intentions and partial truths of those who are fighting for social justice. But some are trying to thread the needle and really address the situation without increasing polarization. See:
https://open.substack.com/pub/freeblackthought/p/colorblindness-and-racial-essentialism?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web; https://open.substack.com/pub/andrewsullivan/p/removing-the-bedrock-of-liberalism-826?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web; https://musaalgharbi.com/2020/05/15/definition-racist-actions-actors/; https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/actually-color-blindness-isnt-racist?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web; https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/17/opinion/dei-trainings-effective.html?smid=url-share; https://fortune.com/2022/06/20/data-first-diversity-equity-inclusion-careers-black-workers-gender-race-bias-dei-roland-fryer/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email.

[16] A few resources to unpack a bit of what I am pointing to:
Healing Collective Trauma by Thomas Hubl; *Deep Diversity* by Shakil Choudhury; *Justice by Means of Democracy* by Danielle Allen; *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality* by Darcia Narvaez; *Sand Talk* by Tyson Yunkaporta.

[17] For insights into our deep human history and patterns of power, see: *Hierarchy in the Forest* by Christopher Boehm; and *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* by Rene Girard.

[18] More examples: https://thehill.com/opinion/education/3718803-what-do-we-really-mean-by-diversity-equity-and-inclusion/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email; https://open.substack.com/pub/persuasion1/p/owolade?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web; https://open.substack.com/pub/chloevaldary/p/the-problem-with-overfitting-to-the?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email; https://fairforall.substack.com/p/dei-can-be-good?r=3v6p7&s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email

[19] The Free Press has done a series of articles on this topic of institutional capture. Even if there are more nuanced views of what is happening and why, these are important trends to be aware of. https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/how-dei-is-supplanting-truth-as-the?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web; https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/how-ideologues-infiltrated-the-arts?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web; https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/how-americas-obsession-with-dei-is?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web

[20] Example critiques: *America's Cultural Revolution* by Christopher Rufo; *Race Crazy* by Charles Love; *Woke Racism* by John McWhorter.
Potentially more constructive responses: https://open.substack.com/pub/persuasion1/p/why-we-created-harvards-academic?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email ;
The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression: https://www.thefire.org/

[21] https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/ethnic-studies-diversity-consultants-schools-sean-cooper?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=c65bdeb4-bcb4-4c19-95d8-0e3f091ea3b9;

[22] While I will not spend precious paragraphs in this essay to lay out many examples of DEI overreach, contradictions, and ineffectiveness, I am assuming that most readers are familiar with the terrain, and I offer many examples in the endnotes above. My purpose here is not to document, as many others have done; my purpose is to help explain what is happening in a way that can help us actually resolve the underlying tensions and contradictions that impede our collective learning and growth.

[23] It was also the fundamental mistake and misguided goal of the most abominable historical examples of totalitarianism, Communism, eugenics, and fascism (Hitler, Mao, Pol Pot, Stalin, Lenin, KKK, etc.).

[24] Just one of many examples of this argument being made very explicitly in the context of schools: https://youtu.be/FDHooq9mDt8?t=1573 Start watching at 26 minutes.
This is not unusual; it is common. I have heard very similar things in DEI presentations.

[25] This is a consistent and repeated refrain of Ibram Kendi. It is truly amazing, and a testament to how incredibly passive and accepting we can be when we want to be seen as good, that so many go along with this demeaning, reductive, and racist line of thinking.

[26] Just a few examples: *Racecraft* by Barbara Fields & Karen Fields; *It's Not So Black and White* by Kenan Malik; *Self-Portrait in Black and White* by Thomas Chatterton Williams; *Theory of Racelessness* by Sheena Mason; *The Arc of a Bad Idea* by Carlos Hoyt. Others contributing to the conversation include Chloe Valdary, Coleman Hughes, Greg Thomas, John Wood, Daryl Davis, Angel Eduardo, Olufemi Taiwo, and Amiel Handelsman.

[27] See note 7; and on the topic of our current social construction of race, see: https://manhattan.institute/article/the-social-construction-of-racism-in-the-united-states

[28] On the topic of color-blindness, see: https://open.substack.com/pub/freeblackthought/p/colorblindness-and-racial-essentialism?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web; https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/actually-color-blindness-isnt-racist?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web

[29] There have been prior conceptions of social inequality that mirrored our notion of race (e.g., the caste system in India), with very similar dynamics at play, but those ideas can be well explained by the realities of ethnic and cultural difference combined with economic and political inequality. The conception of whiteness, which is a focal topic in DEI work, and which has conjoined with an appropriation of the term "people of color" as a contrast, is what we need to understand and explain here. See: *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson.

[30] See: *Race and Culture* by Thomas Sowell.
The Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism offers a helpful introductory video series about slavery – FAIRStory #6-9: https://www.fairforall.org/videos/#
Also: https://aeon.co/essays/the-idea-of-precolonial-africa-is-vacuous-and-wrong;
https://open.substack.com/pub/freeblackthought/p/was-american-slavery-unique?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web;
For a poignant look at some of the aspects that were unique to the transatlantic slave trade and its legacy, see *Blues People* by Amiri Baraka.

[31] *The Meaning of Race* by Kenan Malik; *Mistaken Identity* by Asad Haider; *The History of White People* by Nell Irvin Painter; *Race* by Thomas Gossett; *Race* by Jacques Barzun.

[32] *The Arc of a Bad Idea* by Carlos Hoyt; *Against Race* by Paul Gilroy; *Theory of Racelessness* by Sheena Mason.

[33] *Seeing Through Race: Towards Diaphanous Anti-Racism* by Ryan Nakade. https://greenteaji108.medium.com/seeing-through-race-towards-diaphanous-anti-racism-4842b3d2a662

[34] *Different* by Frans de Waal.

[35] Gregg Henriques develops this notion culture as part of his Unified Theory of Knowledge. See: *A New Synthesis for Solving the Problem of Psychology* by Gregg Henriques. Or: *How do you Define Culture*? https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/theory-of-knowledge/202307/how-do-you-define-culture

[36] Jason Ananda Josephson Storm uses a similar quip in his book *Metamodernism*.

[37] There are other ways to define the sexes, e.g., chromosomes, but this binary biological definition is a simple, elegant, and simply true definition that need not be problematized. And note that it is binary; there is no third category in addition to sperm and eggs. One of the reasons not to define sex with reference to chromosomes is that there are various developmental anomalies that lead to different chromosome combinations other than XX and XY —but every possible chromosomal combination still falls into one of the two binary categories of human bodies: those designed to produce eggs and those designed to produce sperm. Being able to produce eggs or sperm is a separate question. There are various reasons why an individual may not produce sperm or eggs, but the present ability to produce eggs or sperm does not determine whether one is male or female. E.g.: https://www.theparadoxinstitute.com/;
https://www.britannica.com/science/sexual-differentiation;
https://www.realityslaststand.com/p/sex-is-not-a-spectrum; https://open.substack.com/pub/naturalselections/p/whatdogirlsdo?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web

[38] David Graeber & David Wengrow make this point in their book, *The Dawn of Everything*.

[39] Much has been made of cultures that have third genders, or more, but it is unfortunate that this is often portrayed in a way that obfuscates the fact that those same cultures still have clear roles for men and women, and that those third genders are often marginalized in some significant way; some examples refer to a class of male prostitutes whose social status is determined by the fact that those cultures do not accept homosexuality. This is a pattern that continues to this day—cultures that do not accept male homosexuality can create social pressure for gay men to identify (and behave) as women. I think we do not want this, and if we could improve our conversations about this, most would agree. We want to accept gay men as men and lesbians as women, and allow transgender people to be normalized and integrated, not split off into a separate class, so I think we should stop romanticizing that.
In some cultures, 'two-spirit' people may be more likely to be healers or shamans. That could be a healthy way to integrate diversity while serving the whole community, and should be honored and appreciated.
And, we should acknowledge that all third genders and two-spirit people are still either male or female, in the sense that their bodies are designed to produce sperm or eggs. I am not aware of any exception to this. See note above.
See: https://www.newsweek.com/stop-imposing-western-lgbtq-identities-non-western-cultures-its-gender-colonialism-opinion-1705785?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email;
https://quillette.com/2023/05/04/fictionalizing-indigenous-history-in-the-name-of-gender-activism/;
https://open.substack.com/pub/andrewsullivan/p/the-queers-versus-the-homosexuals-cfd?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web.

[40] For a helpful summary of implications of evolutionary biology, see: *A Hunter-Gatherer's Guide to the 21st Century* by Heather Heying & Bret Weinstein.

[41] For the history of gender nonconformity in the USA, see *Tomboy* by Lisa Selin Davis.

[42] *Surveillance Capitalism* by Shoshana Zuboff.

[43] Some helpful books that explore these overlapping influences: *Trans* by Helen Joyce; *Material Girls* by Kathleen Stock. *The End of Gender* by Deborah Soh; *Gender Dysphoria* by Susan Evans & Marcus Evans. See also: note 7.

[44] As with my arguments about DEI as a whole, I am choosing not to belabor examples here, or fill my text with documentation to prove that there is a problem. I am assuming that anyone interested in this topic is either well aware of many examples or in some form of denial about them, as they are very prevalent. There is plenty of content and documentation in the endnotes for anyone who is unconvinced or unaware that there is a serious problem with how we are approaching gender dysphoria, youth transition, and identity politics, with children at the center of our cultural battle. E.g.:
https://4thwavenow.com/2017/12/07/gender-dysphoria-is-not-one-thing/;
https://open.substack.com/pub/persuasion1/p/why-we-need-a-serious-debate-about?
r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web;
https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/i-thought-i-was-saving-trans-kids?
r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web;
https://fairforall.substack.com/p/trans-people-not-a-monolith?
r=3v6p7&s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web;
https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/07/when-a-child-says-shes-trans/561749/;
https://www.skeptic.com/reading_room/trans-matters-overview-debate-research-policies/;

[45] *The Ethics of Authenticity* by Charles Taylor; *Redistribution or Recognition?* by Nancy Fraser & Axel Honneth.

[46] E.g.: https://lisamarchiano.com/depth-psychology-can-tell-victimhood-culture/;
www.persuasion.community/p/the-illusion-of-a-frictionless-existence?
r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web;
Trigger warnings:
www.persuasion.community/p/the-futility-of-trigger-warnings?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web;
Concept creep of trauma: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1047840X.2016.1082418?
journalCode=hpli20;

[47] It does occur to me, and it should to you, that other trajectories are possible. Indeed, there is much to be said about the possibilities of transhumanist futures. Personally, I am committed to a future that enables the health and well-being of the planet earth and all life forms here, and I see humans as crucial stewards of that process. But not everyone wants or expects that, and some transhuman possibilities and intentions do coincide with new visons and vistas for human sexuality and reproduction. See: *From Transgender to Transhuman* by Martine Rothblatt for a radical yet alarmingly influential version of another worldview.

[48] In particular, there are many examples of liberal women being attacked for refusing to deny that transwomen are not literally the same as women. See: *The Witchtrials of J.K. Rowling* by Megan Phelps-Roper. https://www.thefp.com/witchtrials.

[49] For evidence and accounts of widespread demographic changes: https://www.sfexaminer.com/archives/opinion-when-it-comes-to-trans-youth-we-re-in-danger-of-losing-our-way/
article_833f674f-3d88-5edf-900c-7142ef691f1a.html;
https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0202330;
https://cspicenter.org/reports/born-this-way-the-rise-of-lgbt-as-a-social-and-political-identity/;
https://lisaselindavis.substack.com/p/an-update-on-youth-gender-surgeries?
r=3v6p7&s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web.

[50] E.g.: https://fairforall.substack.com/p/trans-people-not-a-monolith?
r=3v6p7&s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web;
https://open.substack.com/pub/lisaselindavis/p/buck-angel-im-a-trans-elder-trans?
r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email.

51 There are different ways to look at this terminology. Some trans-identified people insist that sex cannot be changed. Others think the term transsexual makes more sense because it denotes an actual physical change via hormones and/or surgery, and not just identity, dress, etc. But popular discourse conflates sex and gender and refers to transgender in contradictory ways—sometimes as a choice to change identity, and sometimes as a process including hormones and surgeries, and there are rarely adequate distinctions made between these very different phenomena.
For more info, see: https://genspect.org/to-help-trans-identifying-kids-follow-the-science/;
https://segm.org/;
https://rethinkime.org/.

52 See: *Tasting the Pickle* by Jonathan Rowson for a helpful reflection on our overall predicament, which we refer to as the metacrisis. https://systems-souls-society.com/tasting-the-pickle-ten-flavours-of-meta-crisis-and-the-appetite-for-a-new-civilisation/

53 In this essay I am using the word empathy to be roughly synonymous with compassion. I am aware of ways to distinguish these words, and I think that compassion is probably the better word to use. I am compromising to stick with the DEI acronym.

54 For more on integration, evolution, and psychological health, see *Integral Psychology* by Ken Wilber. Also see my essay, *Hope as Process: Being and Becoming in the Great Integration.* https://integrallife.com/hope-as-process-being-and-becoming-in-the-great-integration/