

Unenlightened Wisdom Project

Journeying from Brain Health to Democracy

THE WHITE PAPER

Kirk D. Sinclair, PhD

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PREFACE

From May 2011 - May 2012 my wife Cindy and I walked 5,000 miles across the country along the American Discovery Trail (ADT). We intended to reboot Cindy's life and brain health after she was let go from work due to cognitive decline. Five doctors ruled out the possibility of dementia because of Cindy's age, but they offered no alternative diagnosis. We assumed she must have been dealing with an anxiety disorder and resorted to our stress reducing passion of long distance hiking.

To publicly disguise the primary purpose for uprooting our lives, I observed and promoted the ideals of kindness and community across America. As an academic with knowledge about how systems work, I understood how declining community engagement for decades caused systemic problems. As a modern nomad walking across the country, I supplemented this understanding with the lessons in kindness and community that long distance journeyers experience. As a caregiver for a spouse with early onset dementia, I learned what is good for brain health and right for humanity are related. The combination of this understanding was a humanitarian creed encapsulated by the tagline on my [Humanity Hiker](https://www.humanityhiker.com/) website:

"Love kindness. Build community. Believe in humanity."¹

Humanitarianism refutes the overall worldview of the Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, which champions civilized materialism and individualism. To this day western civilization wears Enlightenment tinted glasses that views being civilized as a means to prevent humanity from mucking things up. [The Unenlightened Wisdom Project](https://www.unenlightenedwisdom.com/)² removes these tinted glasses to uncover the civilized addictions, delusions and/or oppression from hierarchical mass societies that muck up humanity. "Unenlightened wisdom" turns out to be humanitarian wisdom, the type of wisdom that starts with living well for the sake of brain health and journeys to the collective wisdom achieved from the will of the people in a democracy.

Cindy's condition improved as we walked across the country, leaving me wondering idly whether we could continue hiking off into the sunset, but a civilized world makes such endeavors difficult. She regressed again after the journey was over, which began my research into brain health, intertwined with knowledge about how civilized systems work, culminating with this project. The release of this White Paper (2026) coincides with my fifteenth year of being her 24/7 home caregiver. She has beaten the odds for a dementia patient's will to live and I have beaten the odds for a dementia caregiver's brain health.

The White Paper is freely available to all, but if you received this without subscribing to the [Unenlightened Wisdom Project](https://www.unenlightenedwisdom.com/) first, please click the link or Google the phrase and go to the website to do so. Cartoons provided by Dave Coverly add a touch of levity to many of these

¹ Sinclair, K. (2011). Humanity Hiker. <https://www.humanityhiker.com/>

² Sinclair, K. (2025). The Unenlightened Wisdom Project. <https://www.unenlightenedwisdom.com/>

essays. I am ecstatic and grateful that the acclaimed **Speed Bump** cartoonist chose to contribute his award winning cartoons to these collections. As a former philosophy major Dave also provided my first meaningful testimonial when he emailed me early on: "This is just great. I am honored to be a part of this."



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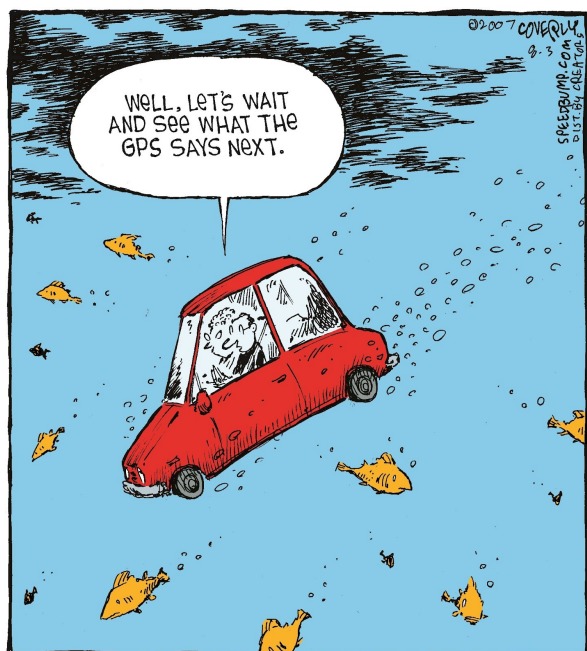
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Section A. Hikers on Haystack

Words of Wisdom

We navigate life through some combination of our own autonomy and/or guidance from authorities.

"This is Sara calling from the barracks," the voice announced over our landline. "Two hikers on Haystack Mountain are lost. I'm patching you through to them."



I understand why the resident state trooper contacted me, the local mountain man with years and miles of experience navigating in far off wilderness areas. Much of this experience occurred before GPS or cell phones; much of this experience was on unfinished trails or in areas with no trails. In the midst of wilderness landscapes, I was an expert at navigation.

Yet any local native could have been called to the rescue; for that matter no local native should have been needed. Haystack Mountain is more of a hill than a mountain, shaped just as the name implies, with roads surrounding all sides less than a mile from the peak. I kept the conversation efficiently short, since I did not need to know their precise location:

"Go downhill on the trail you are on until you reach the road."

Wisdom aggregates and filters knowledge to best guide thinking, feeling and acting.

Autonomy is the self control over this process; **authority** is the external influence over the same.³ The Haystack hikers trusted in my authority rather than their own autonomy to guide their way. My authoritative guidance did no harm to the lost hikers, but that is not always the case when we forsake the autonomy to navigate our journeys.

Section B. The Journey of Life

Words of Wisdom

A way of life is like a journey.

³ Glossaries are provided with the **Unenlightened Wisdom Project's** publications to reinforce the definitions of bolded concepts.

Journeys pursue a purpose within a context.

A humanitarian journey seeks to: "Love kindness. Build community. Believe in humanity."

Civilization adds the increased complexity, chaos and confusion of mass societies to the context of journeys.

I hiked over 20,000 miles via long distance wilderness journeys, taking up to a year to complete. Sometimes I followed well-defined trails, sometimes I used a map and compass to pioneer cross country routes. Thousands of miles of experience determined the routes I chose and the wisdom I gathered along the way.

To those who commented over the years that my journeys sounded like recreational fun, I cautioned that even a well-defined trail can provide challenges related to terrain and weather, not to mention the challenges that one's own physical or mental conditions impose. Navigating cross country with map and compass introduced additional challenges, such as finding oneself immersed in an oppressively dense spruce and fir forest, or looking down a formidable cliff not fully revealed by the contour lines on a 1:250:000 scale topo map. I considered none of those experiences as recreational fun, though in the end they provided wisdom, satisfaction and great stories to tell.

To those who believed only masochists endure the inconvenience, discomfort and pain of having to hike every day, regardless of environmental or personal conditions, I pointed out that every way of life has challenges that must be endured. At least wilderness journeys provide simple, unbiased challenges to be met. The rainstorm does not care who you are and sheltering yourself from the storm is a simple matter if you are experienced. The grand diversity of humanity means we find joy in different activities; but for me no other way of life matches the joy experienced during a wilderness journey.

For years I compared these journeys to a way of life for inquiring minds who were curious or mistaken, filled with the rewards, challenges and routines that all ways of life involve. Now I am struck by how life resembles a journey. With both our lives and journeys we seek to explore, learn and grow along the way.

My long distance journeys brought me into frequent contact with strangers who turned into instant friends. The kindness strangers extended to me, the kindness communities provided to their own and the belonging I felt with other long distance hikers during these journeys shaped the mantra that guides my journey of life:

"Love kindness. Build community. Believe in humanity."



Civilization features the presence of mass societies. The challenges of a journey in mass societies exceed the challenges of a journey in a wilderness landscape. The inherent complexities, chaos and confusion of mass societies increase dependence on authorities to guide us. Authorities, representatives and many academics tend to favor materialism and individualism. If we instead seek a humanitarian journey in civilized society, a wise place to start is with our own brain health.

Section C. Virtues and Vices

Words of Wisdom

Our society has health issues that compromise our life journeys.

Our life journey depends first and foremost upon our brains.

Practical virtues benefit both brain health and humanity.

Civilized abnormalities create vices bad for brain health and wrong for humanity.

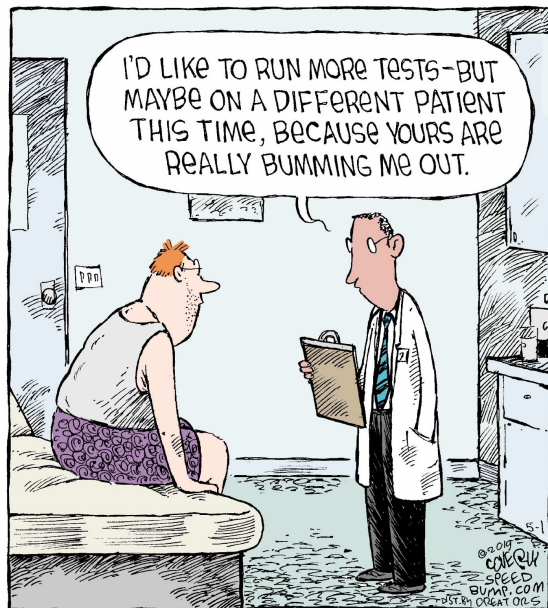
Greatness and good health are different destinations that lie in different directions.

The United States has health issues that compromise our journeys through life. A 2018 study done by the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), [as reported in the journal Lancet](#),⁴ ranked our life expectancy in 2016 as 43rd in the world. We are the worst out of high income countries and trending towards the life expectancy of authoritarian countries. The same study

⁴ Foreman, K.J., et al. (2018, November). Forecasting life expectancy, years of life lost, and all-cause and cause-specific mortality for 250 causes of death: reference and alternative scenarios for 2016-2040 for 195 countries and territories. *The Lancet*, 392(10159), 2052-2090.

projects that we will fall further to 64th in the world by 2040. [The Covid pandemic changed these projections for the worst, decreasing life expectancy in the US by around a year.](#)⁵

Our life expectancy problem does not lie with modern medicine. We lead the world in research universities, pharmaceuticals and biotech firms. [Our success rates at treating the most lethal diseases humanity faces, such as cancer, consistently ranks among the best in the world.](#)⁶



Ah, but there are other diseases for which we have comparatively high mortality rates. [For dementia we are the 8th worst country in the world.](#)⁷ [For death by drug use, related to both mental and societal health, we are by far the worst in the world, despite being considered the greatest nation by civilized standards.](#)⁸

Our life journey depends most of all on the brain. You could accept a transplanted heart or liver and continue your journey. You might accept a prosthetic limb, or do without a limb, to continue your journey. Yet a new brain eliminates the very thoughts, feelings and identity that were your essence. Without the function of your brain your journey is over, even if every other cell in your body continues to live.

[The SuperAgers Family Study by the Institute for Aging Research at Albert Einstein College of Medicine defines SuperAgers as anyone over 95 with healthy cognitive abilities.](#)⁹ They concluded that lifestyle factors were the most reliable way to maintain brain health. The factors they cited were: a strong social network; being positive and adaptable; having hobbies and maintaining healthy habits. [The Northwestern University SuperAging Program defines](#)

⁵Andrasfay, T., & Goldman, N. (2021). Reductions in 2020 US life expectancy due to COVID-19 and the disproportionate impact on the Black and Latino populations. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118(5), e2014746118. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2014746118>

⁶ Ratini, M. (2024, July 02). Cancer: Sarcoma, Carcinoma, Lymphom, and Leukemia. *WebMD*. <https://www.webmd.com/cancer/understanding-cancer-basics>

⁷ World Life Expectancy (2020). Alzheimer's and Dementia Death Rate per 100,000 Age Standardized. *World Health Rankings*. <https://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/cause-of-death/alzheimers-dementia/by-country/>

⁸ World Life Expectancy (2020). Drug Use Death Rate per 100,000 Age Standardized. *World Health Rankings*. <https://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/cause-of-death/drug-use/by-country/>

⁹ Mikhail, A. (2024, April 11). What is a superager and can you become one? *Fortune Well*. <https://fortune.com/well/article/how-to-be-a-superager/>

[superagers as people over 80 with the cognitive abilities for people decades younger](#).¹⁰ They determined similar lifestyle factors to be the most pertinent for superaging as well.

Lifestyle factors such as being positive, social and active make for a better society, thus benefiting brain health also benefits humanity. The [Unenlightened Wisdom Project](#) considers habitual practices that are both good for brain health and right for humanity as **virtues**.

Wellness on the journey of life essentially means to practice living virtuously for the sake of brain health and humanity.

Habitual practices that are either bad for brain health or wrong for humanity are **vices**. If we consider healthy living to be naturally and normally adaptive for any species, vices resulting from being civilized are **civilized abnormalities** that are maladaptive. If our desire to be civilized leads to greater social isolation, that is a civilized abnormality. If our desire leads to greater stress, that is a civilized abnormality. If our desire leads to a more sedentary lifestyle, that is a civilized abnormality. Can there be any belief more maladaptive for life on earth than to think our salvation depends on colonizing other planets, rather than addressing these abnormalities?

Oppression occurs when forced into civilized abnormalities, such as unhealthy work conditions.

Delusions occur when we fool ourselves into thinking such abnormalities are actually good for us, such as greed. **Addictions** occur when we succumb to abnormalities despite knowing better, such as lack of exercise. Each of these result from the civilized consequences of mass societies and hierarchies, often influenced by civilized authorities.

Evidence suggests we are becoming less social, less positive and less active within the context of a more civilized, authoritarian society. Civilized delusions and addictions that make us less social, positive and/or active can lead to other addictions that further harm the brain, such as substance abuse. Civilized abnormalities such as chronic stress can be manifested as anger, cruelty or narcissism that harms others.

By customary greatness measures such as wealth, power and influence we remain the greatest nation, yet we are among the worst out of high income countries for our brain and societal health. At best, the virtues that benefit brain health do not contribute to greatness as a nation; at worst, the desire for greatness contributes to civilized abnormalities that undermine our virtues, and thus our health. One destination does not lie in two different directions, nor can two different destinations be reached by the same direction. Our society as a whole navigates towards greatness and leads us away from practical virtues for brain health and humanity.

¹⁰ Northwestern Medicine (2023, October). 4 Habits of 'SuperAgers.' HealthBeat. <https://www.nm.org/healthbeat/healthy-tips/4-habits-super-agers>

Section D. Enlightened Reasoning

Words of Wisdom

The biased reasoning of Enlightenment philosophy reflects the lack of experience and wisdom of scholars regarding early nomads and neuroscience.

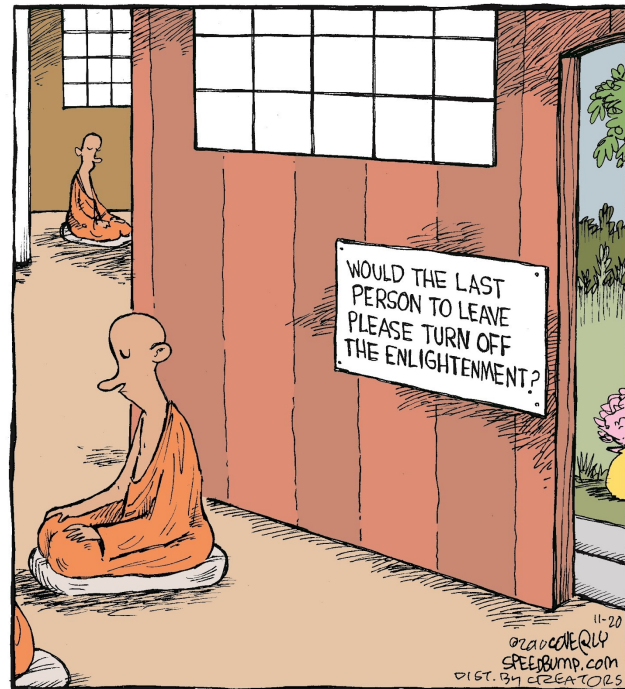
Limited experiences reinforce bias; diverse experiences enhance wisdom.

Our social natures lead us to live up or down to the self-fulfilling prophecy of our society.

Enlightenment and NeoEnlightenment scholars conform to civilized groupthink.

The Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, advocated dialectical reasoning for navigating the meaning of life. This is a process of arguments and counterarguments, thesis and antithesis, that draws scholars closer to a synthesis of the truth. Reasons may be filtered from experiences but also can be and have been based on untested and untestable assumptions, in service to the persuasive prowess and biases of academics and authorities.

The erosion of health and virtues in the greatest of civilized nations undermines the Enlightenment scholarship that implies humanity needs to be rescued by civilized reason, order and/or progress. Negative assumptions about humanity ignore the chaos and corruption created by mass societies. This dim view of flawed humanity provided the rationale for colonialism, one of many clues that the great Enlightenment thinkers might have been biased during the Age of Reason.



[Enlightenment scholars such as Thomas Hobbes thought government needed to maintain order because of our flawed nature;](#)¹¹ [scholars such as John Locke advocated sacrificing some of our natural freedom in consent to be governed by representatives.](#)¹² [John Stuart Mill maintained that freedom included the freedom to make](#)

¹¹ Hobbes, T. (1651). *Leviathan or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill*. Project Gutenberg Ebook 3207. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3207/3207-h/3207-h.htm>

¹² Locke, J. (1764). *Two Treatises of Government (Hollis ed)*. Liberty Fund Network. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/hollis-the-two-treatises-of-civil-government-hollis-ed#Locke_0057_222

[mistakes, with one telling caveat](#).¹³ We had the paternal right, the colonial obligation one could say, to correct the mistakes and improve the lives of “primitives” whose societies had not been civilized. Even Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the very scholar who viewed human nature most favorably, claimed our natural state as a “noble savage” to be solitary,¹⁴ a conclusion echoed by other Enlightenment scholars.

Limited experiences and knowledge reinforce bias; diverse experiences and knowledge enhance the potential for wisdom. The experiences Enlightenment scholars had with nomadic tribes were limited to nonexistent. Void of such experiences, Enlightenment reasoning was incapable of filtering them into wisdom about humanity’s social nature. Some made extrapolations from the lower classes of the Industrial Revolution as a substitute for this experiential shortcoming, perhaps the furthest thing imaginable from the actual lifestyle of an early nomad.

Neuroscience reveals we are biochemically wired to benefit from being altruistic and joyful. Cultural anthropology reveals that small band societies were more social than us civilized folks. Though such research was not available to Enlightenment scholars, explorers during the Age of Reason were making observations such as [“savages pride themselves on being hospitable to strangers.”](#)¹⁵ The humanitarian conclusion to be drawn from this experiential observation escaped most Enlightenment scholars during the Age of Reason.

Just as the attributes for brain health are also right for society, so too does a healthy society provide better conditions for brain health. When being civilized makes us less social while we expect the opposite, the misplaced blame lowers our expectations for humanity, [a phenomenon known as the self-fulfilling prophecy](#).¹⁶ This provides both the reasoning and excuse for a downward spiral of antisocial behaviors. The acolytes for the Age of Reason suffer from civilized groupthink, confident that being civilized overcomes the antisocial problems and lowered responsibility caused by being civilized.

Section E. Civilized Biases

Words of Wisdom

Depending on which authorities you choose to trust, the more educated you become the more you might be misinformed by selection bias.

Dialectic reasoning cannot arrive at truth when all sides share the same bias.

¹³ Mill, J.S. (1859). *On Liberty*. Project Gutenberg EBook 34901.
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/34901/34901-h/34901-h.htm>

¹⁴ Rousseau, J. (1913). *On The Social Contract*. Innovative Eggz LLC.

¹⁵ Sahlins, M. (2017). *Stone Age Economics*, Essay 22. Taylor & Francis.

¹⁶ Ackerman, C.E. (2018, May). Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Psychology. *PositivePsychology*.
<https://positivepsychology.com/self-fulfilling-prophecy/>

History presents the selection bias of mass societies. Historical bias often misinforms, “educates” and indoctrinates humanity towards civilized abnormalities.

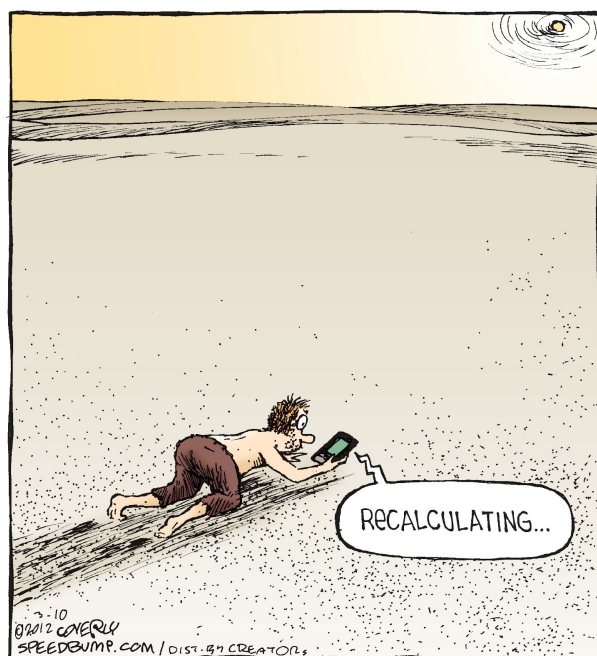
Biases favoring materialism and individualism often contradict humanitarian goals.

The selection biases of authorities favors the conformity of groupthink towards their views.

All reasoning is biased by the experiences of the reasoner. I am biased; you are biased; every authority and academic is biased. The biased reasoning of Enlightenment and NeoEnlightenment scholars has not navigated civilization towards the habitual practice of virtues that benefit brain health, placing faith instead in medical progress to overcome health problems caused by civilized vices. The fault lies not with scholars having unavoidable biases, but rather with scholarly biases conforming to Enlightenment worldviews of materialism and individualism, reinforced by a lack of experiences outside of hierarchical, mass societies. Dialectic reasoning cannot arrive at truth if all sides share the same bias.

Enlightenment claims about our original nature are not the only way we have been misinformed, nor is being misinformed about our original nature the only way in which we have been misdirected. We know things, we become educated, based on either what we experience or who we trust for news. Consider that industry funded studies often differ in their conclusions

from publicly funded ones. Both are about science, conducted by scientists, using the scientific method. Both seek reliability in their claims through objective measurements.



[Industry funded studies differ from publicly funded ones in their conclusions because they value, select and incorporate different experiences into their research.](#)¹⁷ Which experiences (or experiments) are used in studies affects the relevance of the research for an intended destination of truth. Both objectivity and relevance are important in the pursuit of knowledge, but only relevance navigates us in the right direction. Relevance without objectivity calls for caution, humility, further verification. Objectivity increases certainty while decreasing caution about the direction in which we are headed. Objectivity

¹⁷ Fabbri, A., Lai, A., Grundy, Q., & Bero, L. A. (2018). The Influence of Industry Sponsorship on the Research Agenda: A Scoping Review. *American journal of public health*, 108(11), e9–e16. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304677>

without relevance to the real world, a common affliction of economic models, heads us confidently in the wrong direction.

You could trust either industry or publicly funded studies and become highly educated. You also could be misinformed by the type you trust because of selection bias. Depending on which scholars or authorities you choose to trust, the more educated you are the more misinformed you could become by their selection biases. The more you blindly trust these authorities, the more you empower their authority and ability to misinform further.

Speaking of selection biases, this relates to history, another normal characteristic for civilizations. A popular saying is that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. The saying infers and implies that being civilized involves progressive learning, but the authorities making decisions for mass society tend to be well-educated. If corrupted they will use the lessons of the past for corrupted ends.

Learning and being misinformed by historical bias perpetuates a society heading in the wrong direction. Considering that even scientific studies have biases, imagine the selection bias inherent in the winners of mass societies creating their own historical record. While favoring materialism and individualism, the biases of western civilization often contradict humanitarian goals.

We might believe from history that some abnormalities such as being antisocial are due to our nature, when instead they result from being civilized. We might believe some civilized abnormalities such as economic models based upon greed and scarcity are good for everyone, despite empirical evidence and simple logic to the contrary. We might believe the civilized means used by the "winners" of history are justified because of the civilized ends achieved, such as colonialism. Learning and internalizing historical biases will cause us to actually repeat tragic chapters of history.

Methods exist for filtering the diverse experiences of humanity to neutralize bias and produce wisdom, such as the scientific method, but authorities thrive if they can secure obedience and/or conformity to their reasoning. Unfortunately, authoritarian agents and agencies use aspects of being civilized to exploit aspects of being human for achieving the groupthink that destroys collective wisdom.

Section F. Paternalism and Groupthink

Words of Wisdom

The complexity, chaos and confusion of mass societies create dependence upon authorities and conformity to groups.

We are paternally misinformed and misdirected only by the authorities we trust, while resist being informed by the authorities we distrust.

Interest groups combine the influences of paternalism and group conformity.

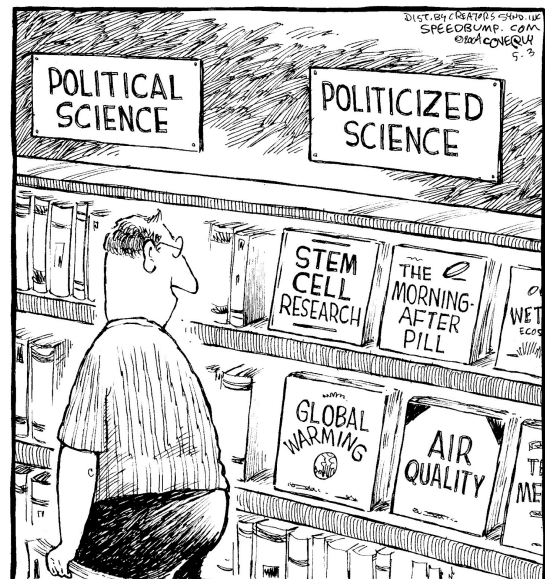
The dialectic reasoning of opposing interest groups resorts to hyperbole, false narratives and other dubious means of creating groupthink.

My undergraduate psychology course required students to serve as guinea pigs for a variety of experiments conducted by graduate students. I signed up for and dutifully attended a session that was alleged to be about learning. A subject in another room was presented with a simple learning task and I was to administer a mild shock if the subject got the answer wrong. If the subject kept getting the answer wrong the researcher allegedly increased the shock level. I quit after administering a few shocks, partly because I felt I was crossing a moral line, partly because the task the learner kept messing up was so easy I started becoming suspicious about the intent of the experiment.

I discovered afterwards that I participated in a replica of the [Milgram experiments on authority](#).¹⁸ In reality I was the test subject and the experiment determined how far I would go in obeying authority, in this case an academic authority. The norm in the original experiment was for subjects to shock others in obedience to authority past the point of (faked) agonizing screams. In the absence of civilized authorities we trust, torturing people who have done you no harm is grossly abnormal behavior.

Trust also leaves us vulnerable to persuasion by a group. In the [Asch experiments on conformity](#)¹⁹ a test subject sat among confederates instructed to give the wrong answer on the comparative lengths of lines on a piece of paper. The test subjects conformed to the group's erroneous estimation about half the time. The results were not as disturbing as the Milgram experiments, but nevertheless revealed a potential to deny what our own senses tell us in order to conform with those in our group.

In a naturally social context our trust in neighbors enhances belonging, kindness and happiness. In a civilized context, trust turns towards the authorities



¹⁸ McLeod, S. (2025). Milgram Shock Experiment. *SimplyPsychology*.
<https://www.simplypsychology.org/milgram.html>

¹⁹ McLeod, S. (2023). Solomon Asch Conformity Line Experiment Study. *SimplyPsychology*.
<https://www.simplypsychology.org/asch-conformity.html>

and interest groups who decipher the complexity and confusion of mass societies. Trust that can lead us to shock strangers or deny our senses are civilized abnormalities.

Combine the trust inherent to group conformity with obedience to authorities and you have what is called groupthink, the polar opposite of informed, collective wisdom. The most influential interest groups in American society that create groupthink are the two major parties. Their paternal authority in governing provides a striking example of how a dialectic process, in this case policy and counter policy, controverts collective wisdom. One can fairly assert that this is not the dialectic reasoning Enlightenment philosophers had in mind, but often becomes the dialectic reasoning and groupthink destined to form in the civilized hierarchies and complexities of mass societies.

Seeds of hope lie in the otherwise depressing experiments on authority and conformity. A majority is not a totality, our civilized need to trust authority does not amount to a social compulsion, such as with ants or bees. A group of unknown confederates differs from a neighborhood of known friends. Post war Germany reveals that at least in hindsight we are capable of identifying when obedience to civilized authority and groupthink has gone too far. The key is to apply at least a small amount of skepticism, instead of certainty, even to the same authorities we trust most, particularly when our own personal experiences raise questions.

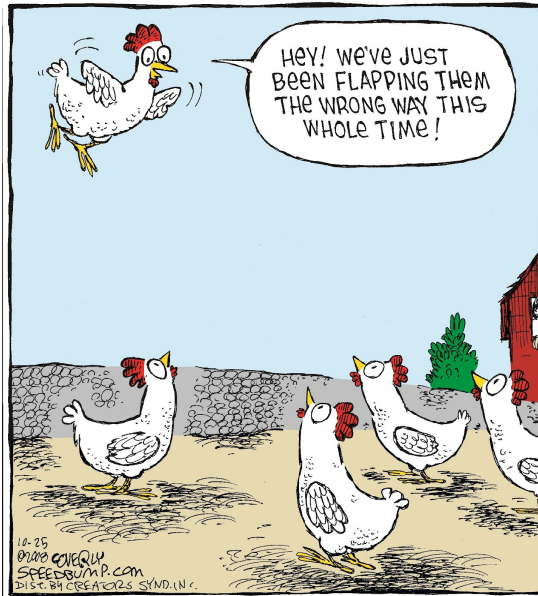
Democracy seeks governance “by the people.” A republic provides rules for leaders to be representatives of those they govern. A federation enables hierarchical governance to enable some identity and control at lower hierarchies. Our current brain and societal health status relative to other developed countries suggests our democracy, republic and/or federation needs tweaking. Perhaps with more autonomy over our journeys in life we can minimize being fooled or misinformed by the authorities we otherwise trust for paternal guidance.

Section G. Personal Responsibility

Words of Wisdom

The ultimate responsibility for any journey of life lies with the journeyer, not with paternal authorities, not with civilization.

Admittedly, accepting responsibility for our own health and happiness has disadvantages. Responsibility includes holding ourselves accountable, rather than blaming authorities or others for what goes wrong. Choosing autonomy means a greater investment of our own time and effort. So what if the alternative leads to corruption? In a cynical age many feel that corruption is an unavoidable consequence, a necessary evil, for achieving goals in a complex and confusing world featuring flawed humanity. Authorities we trust may be corrupt but so what? All authorities are, yet we still need them for paternal guidance.



In addition to corruption, an insidious danger exists from trusting authorities over our own experiences, even when authorities are not corrupt, or at least present no evidence of being so. Had we the perfect republic, democracy and/or federation, we still should embrace the personal responsibility to guide our own life journeys. Another anecdote about literally getting lost in the wilderness provides the ultimate cause for such responsibility. This one made national headlines.

An experienced Appalachian Trail hiker was lost in the Maine woods. Part of the reason she was considered experienced was because she stayed put to make the job of finding her easier for search and rescue teams, effectively the authorities in this situation. Unfortunately, they failed to find her until

three years after she perished. The Boston Globe article on the tragedy, published on 2016/06/01, was titled: "Hiker's decision to stay put in the Maine woods was the right one ... at first."

Some of the details confirmed this assumption of a hiker that knew what she was doing. There was evidence of fire used as a signal. There was evidence of the hiker going uphill to get better cell phone reception. These were educated efforts to help the search and rescue teams find her.

Us long distance hikers from a different era have a different perspective on such a tragedy. We are used to getting lost in the wilderness on unfinished trails, before the age of cell phones or GPS, yet finding our way regardless. Or imagine the perspective of a "primitive" Native American. They would regard abdicating personal responsibility for navigating out of a forest wilderness as foolhardy and dangerous.

Like the hikers on Haystack Mountain that I once "rescued," the woman who perished in the Maine woods should have gone downhill, not uphill. Eventually she would have come to water, which she would continue to follow downhill. An alternative strategy would be to go north, as a journal entry revealed that she knew a woods road was in that direction. This can be done even without a compass ... or a cell phone ... by an experienced navigator on a clear day.

Going uphill to be saved by search and rescue teams metaphorically represents trust in paternal authorities. Search and rescue teams do not deliberately misinform us. They do not contribute to oppression, delusions or addictions. They need not hinder our life journey in any way; they have in fact saved or recovered people. Search and rescue teams are a prime example of how civilized progress and trust in paternal guidance can benefit humanity. Yet the tragedy of the

lost hiker in the Maine woods underscores how the ultimate responsibility for navigating our own life journeys should still lie with us.

Section H. Unenlightened Practicalities

Words of Wisdom

The practicality of being uncivilized provides optimal behaviors for brain health.

The practicality of being unenlightened provides optimal beliefs for humanity to improve civilization.

The practicality of autonomy provides optimal responsibility for helping each other attain healthy and humanitarian goals.

The practicality of public servants provides optimal means for the humanitarian flow of information in a diverse society.

The practicality of enabling the people's will provides optimal means for a humanitarian democracy that limits corrupting power and wealth.

A grassroots sequence of practicalities starting with brain health is more feasible than a top down approach starting with democracy.

[In his *Nicomachean Ethics*](#),²⁰ Aristotle claimed that “eudaimonia,” roughly translated as the highest state of happiness, was achieved through reason and virtue. Reasoning sets humans apart from other animals, while virtues enable the soul to flourish. [In a debate with John Mearsheimer, arranged by the Institute of Arts and Ideas, Steven Pinker stated a NeoEnlightenment ideal](#):²¹ “We should use reason to improve human flourishing.” [Pinker seems to echo Aristotle's virtues, but his general body of work associates human flourishing with civilized developments such as nations, judiciaries, commerce and media as examples of reason bringing out our better angels.](#)²²

Like the Enlightenment scholars before him, Pinker [mischaracterizes small band societies](#)²³ for the purpose of defending his thesis, a consequence of the historical biases from being civilized. The empirical discoveries of neuroscientists and ethnographers challenge the dialectic

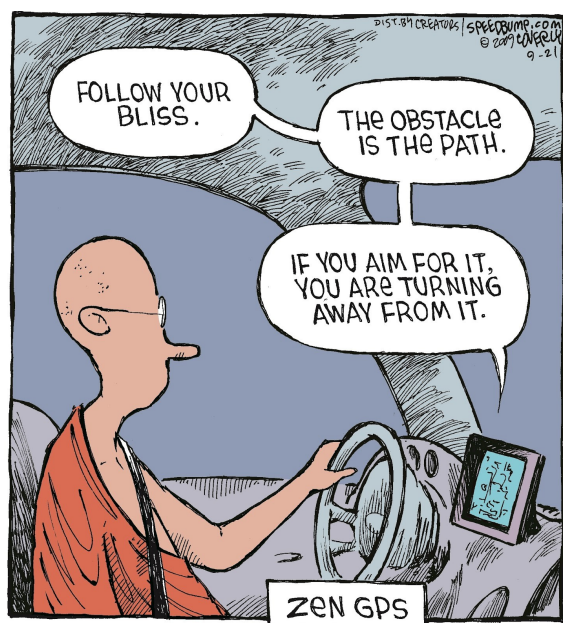
²⁰ Aristotle (350 B.C.E.). *Nicomachean Ethics*. The Internet Classics Archive. <https://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html>

²¹ Scott-Brown, S. (2024). Steven Pinker vs John Mearsheimer debate the enlightenment, Part 1 of full debate. *The Institute of Art and Ideas*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SA-tCQJEzqk>

²² Pinker, S. (2012). *The Better Angels of Our Nature*. Penguin Publishing Group.

²³ Ferguson, R.B. (2013). Pinker's List: Exaggerating Prehistoric War Mortality. In D. Fry (ed.) *War, Peace and Human Nature* (112-131). Oxford Academic. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199858996.003.0007>

reasoning of these great thinkers. They align the view of human flourishing more with Aristotle's earlier emphasis on humanitarian virtues.



The Enlightenment worldviews of materialism and individualism are biased by the absence of “uncivilized” experiences and knowledge. A humanitarian worldview flows from the lifestyle factors that benefit both brain health and humanity. If we consider brain health as the “furnace” and broadening experiences of humanity as the “fuel” for wisdom, a humanitarian worldview that maximizes both amounts to the optimal pursuit of wisdom.

Similar to Aristotle’s claim about virtues, wisdom fails at guiding life journeys unless put into practice. The [*Unenlightened Wisdom Project*](#) defines the efficient practice of humanitarian ideals as a **practicality**. An “Enlightened” lens considers being practical as doing what may be

suboptimal yet achievable. An “unenlightened” lens considers being practical as doing what has been empirically established as both optimal and achievable for brain health and humanity. Five practicalities manifest what is good for brain health and right for humanity, while journeying on a path towards democracy.

The practicality of being uncivilized

Civilized abnormalities in behavior inhibit positive social interactions benefiting brain health. Uncivilized behaviors are those inherently natural and common for humanity before we became civilized. The practicality of being uncivilized provides optimal behaviors for brain health.

PThe practicality of being unenlightened

Nation states and interest groups believe in Enlightenment ideals for improving humanity through materialism and individualism. Unenlightened small band societies such as neighborhoods believe in the humanity of their neighbors. The practicality of being unenlightened provides optimal beliefs for humanity to improve civilization.

The practicality of autonomy

Civilized indulgences encourage us to be dependent on the systems and leaders that provide them. Autonomy instead requires us to be dependent upon ourselves. The practicality of autonomy provides optimal responsibility for helping each other attain healthy and humanitarian goals.

The practicality of public servants

Political pandering, media punditry and party platforms conform citizens to authoritarian or representative driven groupthink. Public servants instead seek to inform and be informed by the diverse public. The practicality of public servants provides optimal means for the humanitarian flow of information in a diverse society.

The practicality of the people's will

Centralized power and consolidated wealth creates a will for maintaining existing systems.. The will of the people stands overwhelmingly against the corruption enabled by those systems. The practicality of enabling the people's will provides optimal means for a humanitarian democracy limiting corrupting power and wealth.

This sequence of practicalities matters, for authoritarians and representatives will not change systems to lessen centralized power and consolidated wealth. They need not be a dastardly doer of deeds, they might be as well-intentioned as a search and rescue team, but their beliefs and behaviors have been corrupted by the enculturated biases held by even well-intentioned authority. What happens at best are claims of democracy that fits neither the structure nor the function of abiding by the will of the people

A system requiring public service as the motivation for leadership provides a remedy for corruption, but electing genuine public servants requires being better informed, in a system where political pandering and mainstream punditry reinforces the status quo. Being better informed outside of the political mainstream requires the autonomy to learn from the local, experiential realities that most affect our lives.

The extent to which we interact directly with each other improves our lives more than belonging to interest groups (broadly defined) or interacting online. A brain health journey focusing on being positive, social and active requires involvement with our fellow neighbors. Thus journeying from brain health to democracy is more feasible than journeying from democracy to brain health.

Over a period of ten years the [Unenlightened Wisdom Project](#) will provide five volumes of essays corresponding to each practicality, five guidebooks for a humanitarian journey. You will be challenged to trust in experiences with your own physiology and each other to rely on the virtues of being human to improve civilization, rather than hoping and expecting that being civilized improves humanity.

THE WHITE PAPER GLOSSARY

Confusion in the meaning of terms and concepts presents a barrier to collective wisdom. Sometimes black becomes white. Sometimes words take on so many meanings as to become meaningless. The essays for the Unenlightened Wisdom Project define important terms and concepts for the journey from brain health to democracy. They differ at times from conventional usage, particularly when that convention turns black into white, but they adhere to a logical consistency within the scope of humanitarian wisdom.

Entries are listed in the chronological order of when they are defined in the text. In parenthesis is the letter for the section that introduces the meaning of the word.

Wisdom - filtering aggregated knowledge to best guide thinking, feeling and acting. (Section A)

Autonomy - self control over thinking, feeling and acting. (Sec A)

Authority - an external influence over thinking, feeling and acting. (Sec A)

Virtues - habits that are good for brain health and right for humanity. (Sec C)

Wellness - living virtuously for the sake of brain health and humanity. (Sec C)

Vices - habits that are bad for brain health or wrong for humanity. (Sec C)

Civilized abnormality - maladaptive vice caused by being civilized. (Sec C)

Oppression - abnormalities that are forced. (Sec C)

Delusion - abnormalities mistakenly believed to be good or right. (Sec C)

Addiction - abnormalities acquired as habits despite knowing better. (Sec C)

Practicality - the efficient practice of humanitarian wisdom. (Sec H)

UNENLIGHTENED WISDOM VOLUMES

The [*Unenlightened Wisdom Project*](#) follows a sequence of practicalities that proceed from brain health to democracy. Each one of five volumes reinforces the premise that we need the naturally adaptive, humanitarian virtues to overcome civilized abnormalities, in contradiction to the worldview that we need the materialism and/or individualism from being civilized to overcome human flaws.

Volume 1: Brain Health and the Practicality of Being Uncivilized

Projected release: Late 2026

Volume 2: Humanity and the Practicality of Being Unenlightened

Projected release: Late 2029

Volume 3: Responsibility and the Practicality of Autonomy

Projected release: Late 2032

Volume 4: Information and the Practicality of Public Servants

Projected release: Late 2034

Volume 5: Democracy and the Practicality of the People's Will

Projected release: Late 2036

