



Epsilon Theory

# The Long Now, Pt. 2 – Make, Protect, Teach

September 11, 2019

---



Peter Paul Rubens, *Saturn Devouring His Son* (1636)

Every three or four generations, humanity consumes itself with the fang and claw of fascism and collectivism. Every three or four generations, we eat our own.

This is that time. This is the Long Now.

In politics it takes the form of a widening gyre, where the center cannot hold against the onslaught of polarizing political entrepreneurs who eliminate the political promise of the future, replacing it with the Long Now of constant political fear. In economics it takes the form of a market utility, where those same illiberal political entrepreneurs eliminate the economic risk of the future, replacing it with the Long Now of constant economic stimulus.

The first note in this series was about my personal response to the Long Now. [Tick-tock.](#)

Today's note is about my political response to the Long Now. [Make – Protect – Teach.](#)

My question is not how we prevent or avoid the Long Now. Sorry, but that ship has sailed.

**No, my question is how we keep the flame of small-l liberal thought and small-c conservative thought alive through the Long Now, so that it can light the world again when this, too, shall pass.**

My question is ... must we ALL become rhinoceroses?



**Berenger:** And you consider all this natural?

**Dudard:** What could be more natural than a rhinoceros?

**Berenger:** Yes, but for a man to turn into a rhinoceros is abnormal beyond question.

**Dudard:** Well, of course, that's a matter of opinion.

- Eugene Ionesco, *Rhinoceros* (1959)

Eugène Ionesco's masterpiece, *Rhinoceros*, is about a central European town where the citizens turn, one by one, into rhinoceroses. Once changed, they do what rhinoceroses do, which is rampage through the town, destroying everything in their path. People are a little puzzled at first, what with their fellow citizens just turning into rampaging rhinos out of the blue, but even that slight puzzlement fades quickly enough. Soon it's just the New Normal. Soon it's just the way things are ... a good thing, even. Only one man resists the siren call of rhinocerosness, and that choice brings nothing but pain and existential doubt, as he is utterly ... profoundly ... alone.

**Yay, rhinoceroses!**

Ionesco was born in Romania in 1909, spent most of childhood in France, and returned to Romania when he was 16. He got married and had a kid, pursued a career as a poet and playwright, but ended up fleeing Romania in 1942 for Marseilles. He wrote *Rhinoceros* in 1959 to describe the rise of the fascists in his homeland, a particularly nasty crew of Eastern Orthodox ultranationalists who went by names like the Iron Guard, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, the Greenshirts, and the National Legionary State.

The Iron Guard didn't seize power in some bloody putsch, and they didn't rise to ascendancy overnight. No, it took 13 years for them to come to power, contesting parliamentary elections all the way along. They

got 0.4% of the vote in 1927, 1.1% of the vote in 1931, 2.4% of the vote in 1932, got themselves banned in 1933, returned with a new name in 1936, and won 15.8% of the vote in 1937. They were banned again in 1939 following the dissolution of parliament, but struck a deal with strongman-general-turned-politician Ion Antonescu and became the only legal political party in 1940.

And then the pogroms began.

Like the Bucharest pogrom of 1941, where – per the US attaché report to Washington after visiting one of the many massacre sites – “sixty Jewish corpses were discovered [in the meat-packing plant] on the hooks used for carcasses. They were all skinned ... and the quantity of blood about was evidence that they had been skinned alive.” Their guts were hung around their necks and they were labeled “kosher meat”. Yes, some were children. A five-year-old girl is mentioned, flayed alive.

You know, I almost didn’t keep that last paragraph. Too harsh, I thought. Takes away from the flow of the larger argument I’m trying to make here, I thought. Some readers will get distracted, I thought, and some will get angry. Some will not recover or read beyond that paragraph, I thought.

I mean ... there are no massacres in Ionesco’s play. There’s a lot of property damage. A few people trampled to death by the rampaging rhinoceroses. But there are no ritualistic mass murders. No butchery of five-year-old girls. Ionesco’s play is kinda cool, by which I mean it is not hot. Not emotional. *It’s one long allegory*. And yet he lived within 50 miles of Bucharest. He saw the 1941 pogroms with his own eyes!

**Ionesco wrote about the PROCESS of the widening gyre and the Long Now, not the OUTCOME.**

Why? Because he didn’t have to write about the outcome. Hell, his audience had LIVED the outcome.

I don’t have that luxury. All we know of mass murder is what we see on *Criminal Minds*.

So I’m keeping that paragraph. Because Central Europe. Because Biafra. Because Cambodia. Because Rwanda. Because (I suspect) Xinjiang. This is what it looks like when Things Fall Apart. I need you to be aware of the stakes.

I need you to be aware of what can happen – of what ALWAYS happens – when we become rhinoceroses.

But now I need to pull you back from the emotion and horror of the OUTCOME of the widening gyre that was Romania in the 1930s, just like I need to pull you back from the OUTCOME of the widening gyre that was Nigeria in the 1960s or Cambodia in the 1970s or Rwanda in the 1990s. Because otherwise I can’t bring home the Big Point that Ionesco was making about the PROCESS of the widening gyre and the Long Now. Which is this:

**It wasn’t just the bad guys who became rhinoceroses.**

Sure, the local brutes and rightwing martinets are some of the first to become rhinoceroses. But soon enough it’s the scientists and the academics and the logicians who turn. They are the worst of the lot. Not

because they're the biggest and baddest rhinos. *But because they know better.* Because they make a conscious and deliberate choice IN THEIR HEADS to lie to themselves and embrace a real and palpable evil IN THEIR HEARTS.

*“All cats die. Socrates is dead. Therefore, Socrates is a cat.”*

THIS is the syllogism of the logician turned rhinoceros. It's nonsense. It's logically *wrong*. But THIS is the lie that a rhinoceros scientist can convince himself is truth. THIS is how an intelligent, educated academic who loves his family and his dog can witness a pogrom. And look away. Ehh ... gotta break a few eggs.

Romanian politics in the 1930s was a classic widening gyre, spread out over a *decade*, and policy followed the classic Long Now formula – more and more economic stimulus, more and more political fear-mongering. This was true of the fascists, for sure. IT WAS ALSO TRUE OF THE LIBERALS.

By February 1938, when King Carol II dissolved the parliament, nothing mattered anymore in Romanian politics. There was no “truth”. There was only narrative. There was only spectacle. There was only the naked exercise of power and the *celebration* of that naked exercise of power. You didn't just seize control. You seized control, *and then you threw yourself a big parade for doing it.* This was true of the fascists, for sure. IT WAS ALSO TRUE OF THE LIBERALS.

That's the kicker of *Rhinoceros*. It wasn't just the bad guys who turned. It was everyone.

**Just like it's not just the bad guys who are becoming rhinoceroses in America today. It's *everyone*.**

*How does THAT happen?*

Through the embrace by ALL political actors of the idea that NOTHING MATTERS beyond that which accretes power, that power is to be sought for power's sake and that once attained, power must be USED. Used for draining the swamp. Used for unmasking the corruption of the Trumps or the Clintons or (and here's where I make a clever connection with 1930s Romania) the Hohenzollerns or the Bratianus. Used for undoing the obscene legislative influence of the Democrats under Nancy Pelosi or the Republicans under Mitch McConnell or (and here I go again) the National Peasant Party under Armand Calinescu or the Everything for the Country Party under Corneliu Codreanu.

It has all happened before. Many times. It is all happening again.

You will hear that the danger at hand is so great, so existential, that NOTHING MATTERS other than combating that danger, that you must sacrifice your most precious possession – *your autonomy of mind* – to believe in the necessity of these political actions. You must not only think that it is *possible* for  $2 + 2 = 5$  if the political exigency is urgent enough, you must believe that it is *necessary* for  $2 + 2 = 5$ . Orwell called this “collective solipsism”. I call it political nihilism. Either way, THIS is the politics of the Long Now.

**And once you believe that NOTHING MATTERS ... poof! you have *chosen* to become a rhinoceros.**

So you vote for Bob Menendez. You vote for Roy Moore. You excuse your party's lies and your politician's thuggery and moral corruption as necessary to prevent some greater evil.

Here's the kicker.

There's not a damn thing that you or I can do to stop this.

There's only one thing that you or I can do. Luckily, it's the most important thing.

## We can refuse to become rhinoceroses ourselves.

Am I saying that we don't fight against iniquity and evil? Am I saying that we just cede the field to the rhinos who are already running amuck?

So here's where I'm going to lose a lot of you ...

Yes, there will be a time to step boldly into the public political arena and help write a new set of rules, help re-establish political institutions that allow for cooperative gameplay and shared notions of the good life, and help instantiate small-l liberal and small-c conservative principles in a top-down manner.

But that time is not now.

Now is the time when the political institutions that allow for cooperative gameplay and shared notions of the good life are being shattered, and now is the time when they will continue to be shattered. Now is the time of the widening gyre, and you can no more command it to stop from the top-down than King Canute could command the tides. No, it's precisely the opposite, where everything from the top-down will be devoted to rewriting the *history* and the *narrative* of the tides, intentionally moving us farther and farther into [the Sea of Nudge](#).



Once you start looking for sharpies, you will see them *everywhere*.

That's true for Trump today, and it will be true for whoever is in the White House in 2020. That's political nihilism. That's the way this ALWAYS plays out.

The Long Now is going to get worse before it gets better. A lot worse. Yes, that means more and more economic "stimulus", more and more **financialization and propping up of financial asset prices**. You think there is a snowball's chance in hell of a recession before the November 2020 election? LOL.

It also means more and more political fear-mongering and gyre-widening and nihilism-embracing. You think there's a snowball's chance in hell that either the Democrat or Republican party will ever again represent *anything* other than the accretion of power for power's sake? Also, LOL. The Republican party is already all MAGA all the time. It is already 100% rhinoceros. By the time the primary season is over, the Democrats will be the same. Look at our **Election Index analysis** ... the narrative center of this election is almost entirely race and gender identity memes. It's like a pure SJW rhinoceros-inducing potion.

Should you vote in 2020? Sure. **But as a statement of your personal identity**, not out of some misplaced notion of efficacy or consequentialism.

Should you engage in national politics with more than your vote at this stage in the widening gyre? I mean ... if you must. But when you give your heart to the rhinos, you become one yourself. Or you get trampled.

My advice? ***Abandon the party as your vehicle for political participation.***

My alternative? ***The Epsilon Theory Pack.***

My platform? ***Make – Protect – Teach.***

We had our first "Pack Meet-up" last Saturday at Rusty's house ... about 30 Premium and Professional subscribers from all over the East Coast.





The barbeque was Rusty's labor of love. Four beef briskets, three pork collars, three slabs of pork ribs. There was no vegan option. Sorry, not sorry. Enough food to feed an army, but somehow it was inhaled. Everyone brought a bottle of something to share with the group. That – and a commitment to an evening of full-hearted conversation – was the only admittance fee. Age range was 23 years-old to 75 years-young. Was there a lot of money around that table? I guess. You'd never know it from the utter lack of conversational alpha-dog-sniffing ... unique for any Fairfield County dinner I've ever been to.

Know what we talked about? The political.

Know what we didn't talk about? NOT AT ALL? Politics.

What is the political if not politics? It's how we lead our lives as social animals. It's how we understand small-l liberal and small-c conservative virtues as they play out in our lives. It's what we want to SAY to the world through our efforts to Make, Protect and Teach.

THIS is where we stand our ground. Not on some national political scale where we are either turned into rhinos ourselves or trampled into the mud. But on the personal scale. On the scale of our families and our communities. A scale where we can recognize *ourselves* once again, not as a means to some grand Statist end, but as members of a clear-eyed and full-hearted Pack.

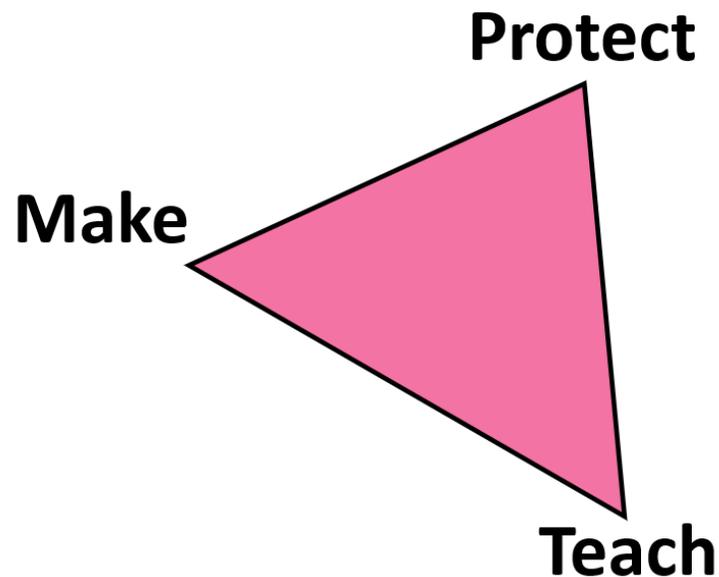
**The way through the Long Now is a social movement, not a political party.**

A social movement based on resistance and refusal. A refusal to vote for ridiculous candidates. A refusal to buy ridiculous securities. A refusal to take on ridiculous debts. A refusal to abdicate our identity and autonomy of mind.

And it's more than refusal. It's more than just saying "Homey don't play that", more than just turning the other cheek. There is also *action*. But it is action in *service* to our Pack, not action in self-aggrandizement and the celebration of power itself.

I believe that a decentralized and service-oriented social movement at scale can thrive in the age of social media technology. I believe that a decentralized and service-oriented social movement can both inoculate our hearts from the top-down Nudges that push us into rhinocerosness, as well as fill us with a positive energy that reverses the pervasive alienation that creates [the Neb Tnuhs of the world](#).

It's a social movement for a revitalized foundation of citizenship. It's **Make – Protect – Teach**.



There's no primacy to these three rightful objects of political power and the citizenship which drives them. Put Teach at the top of the triangle. Spin everything 90 degrees. Marry two of them. Take them independently. Change the colors and the font size. I'm not trying to be symbolic here.

**I'm trying to be Real.**

**I'm trying to provide an alternative to the [abstracted world of narrative and cartoon](#) that rules our mindfulness from the top down, in favor of a concreted world of actual human beings making things and protecting each other and teaching each other, where we act as Stewards of our children's future rather than as Managers of our personal now.**

*What does it mean to Make?*

It means you are an inventor. A manufacturer. An artist. A craftsman. A kid at a Maker Fair. A farmer. An engineer. A home builder. A coder. It's the creation of some THING through the application of some creative IDEA.

*What does it mean to Protect?*

It means you are a soldier. A policeman. A fireman. An EMT. A nurse. A doctor. It's a Neighborhood Watch. It's a mechanic fixing a car. It's also a unionization drive. It's also a fiduciary managing a portfolio.

*What does it mean to Teach?*

It means you are a teacher, of course. Or a writer. Or a researcher. Or a priest. Or a home-schooling mom. It means you've got something to say to your Pack, and you've got the guts to say it.

*What is NOT some form of Make – Protect – Teach?*

Basically, if you are in the *business of money* (and that includes you, Crypto Bro) or in the *business of business*, then you are neither a Maker nor a Protector nor a Teacher. The sole exception to this – and it's why this job is my universal suggestion to people who say they want to work in finance but in an authentic, socially-supportive way – is the *fiduciary financial advisor*. A fiduciary is a Steward. A fiduciary is a Protector. It is unlike any other role in financial services, and it's the only role I'd want to have.

Management, both in the private and public sphere, is out. Banking is out, both investment and commercial. Corporate lawyering. Consulting. Trading. Sales and Marketing. If you are using your time and brains to make more money for a profit-seeking organization, or if you are using your time and brains to manage the time and money of a non-making, non-protecting, non-teaching government organization ... then you're outside the Make – Protect – Teach framework. There are no hard and fast rules here, and I mean to be more inclusive than not. But I think you understand the distinction.



Let's just say that *zero* of the Forbes 100 Innovative Leaders list would make my list of Make – Protect – Teach. Neither would our professional political "leaders", including 99% of current Senators and Representatives. As for current and recent residents of the White House ... don't make me laugh.

And yes, I realize that the vast majority of people reading this note would not be practitioners of Make – Protect – Teach, at least not in their day job.

**But it doesn't have to be your day job. It just has to be your *Identity*.**

This is a social movement for people who are IN the world-as-it-is but not OF the world-as-it-is. I'm not saying that your success IN the world, financial or otherwise, is either laudable or damning. I'm just recognizing that it is. I'm saying that your success IN the world, financial or otherwise, does not DEFINE you. *Unless you let it.*

Everyone can Make – Protect – Teach.

Even Jeff Bezos. I guess.

Today our system of social rewards and political power is based entirely on MONEY, not just in our laws and in our practices - which is bad enough - but even more so IN OUR HEARTS.

*Yes, there's a town full of rhinoceroses there, too.*

It was not always so. It is not ordained that it must always be.

What's at stake with the Make – Protect – Teach movement? Well, in some distant day, when we do in fact remake the rules and institutions of society, you'll need to be a Maker, Protector or Teacher to be a full citizen. You'll need to be a Maker, Protector or Teacher to vote. It will never be the route to making the most money, but that's a feature, not a bug. I think the answer to teachers' pay scales isn't to pay them like a corporate lawyer or an investment banker, but to reward their superior social participation through superior political representation.

The American revolution was founded on the slogan "No taxation without representation". That direct link between taxation and representation was severed long ago, and NOT to the advantage of the people who deserve it the most – the middle class and the working poor. I mean, if you think the middle class and the working poor are represented AT ALL in Washington ... once again, LOL. It's time for a new American revolution, and my slogan is "No representation without making, protecting or teaching." Okay, maybe that doesn't sing. How's this: "No representation without real participation." Yeah, I like that.

It used to be commonplace to think of military service as a prerequisite for citizenship, and by commonplace I mean universal in the societies where the small-l liberal virtues of democracy and the small-c conservative virtues of citizenship were actually invented. Today we get an occasional watered-down version of this floated in a half-hearted way by Grumpy Grandpas who want those darn kids to spend two years in some national service program. Well, it's not two years, it's a lifetime. And it's not those darn kids, it's all of us. And it's not public service to the *national government*, for god's sake, but private service of Making and Protecting and Teaching to whatever level of community sustains us ... and we them. That's how a pack *works*.

It will start small. It will start with your family. And over time it will grow to include your community, especially your physical community. Over time it will spread fractal-like *everywhere*.

## **As Below, So Above.**

One day.

In the meantime, we evaluate our current crop of gyre-widening political candidates and policies on the basis of how little damage they do to a society based on Make – Protect – Teach. I'm not expecting any of them to get this. And I'm keeping my emotional distance from all of them. But I'll talk with anyone.

Also in the meantime, this is how we change the structure of OUR social conversation, from "politics" to the political. Here's my offer:

**Put together a group of 20+ people who want to have a full-hearted conversation about Make – Protect – Teach, who want to think and act *differently* in their political lives. Let me know when you're getting together with some advance notice, and I'll be there.**

I can help publicize and organize. We are 100,000 strong, all over the world. If you can find a sponsor to pay direct expenses, great. If you can't, we'll make it work anyway.

Dinner by dinner. Handshake by handshake. Conversation by conversation. That's how we do it.

To paraphrase Margaret Mead, never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed Makers, Protectors and Teachers can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has!

---

## DISCLOSURES

This commentary is being provided to you as general information only and should not be taken as investment advice. The opinions expressed in these materials represent the personal views of the author(s). It is not investment research or a research recommendation, as it does not constitute substantive research or analysis. Any action that you take as a result of information contained in this document is ultimately your responsibility. Epsilon Theory will not accept liability for any loss or damage, including without limitation to any loss of profit, which may arise directly or indirectly from use of or reliance on such information. Consult your investment advisor before making any investment decisions. It must be noted, that no one can accurately predict the future of the market with certainty or guarantee future investment performance. Past performance is not a guarantee of future results.

### **Statements in this communication are forward-looking statements.**

The forward-looking statements and other views expressed herein are as of the date of this publication. Actual future results or occurrences may differ significantly from those anticipated in any forward-looking statements, and there is no guarantee that any predictions will come to pass. The views expressed herein are subject to change at any time, due to numerous market and other factors. Epsilon Theory disclaims any obligation to update publicly or revise any forward-looking statements or views expressed herein.

This information is neither an offer to sell nor a solicitation of any offer to buy any securities.

This commentary has been prepared without regard to the individual financial circumstances and objectives of persons who receive it. Epsilon Theory recommends that investors independently evaluate particular investments and strategies, and encourages investors to seek the advice of a financial advisor. The appropriateness of a particular investment or strategy will depend on an investor's individual circumstances and objectives.