

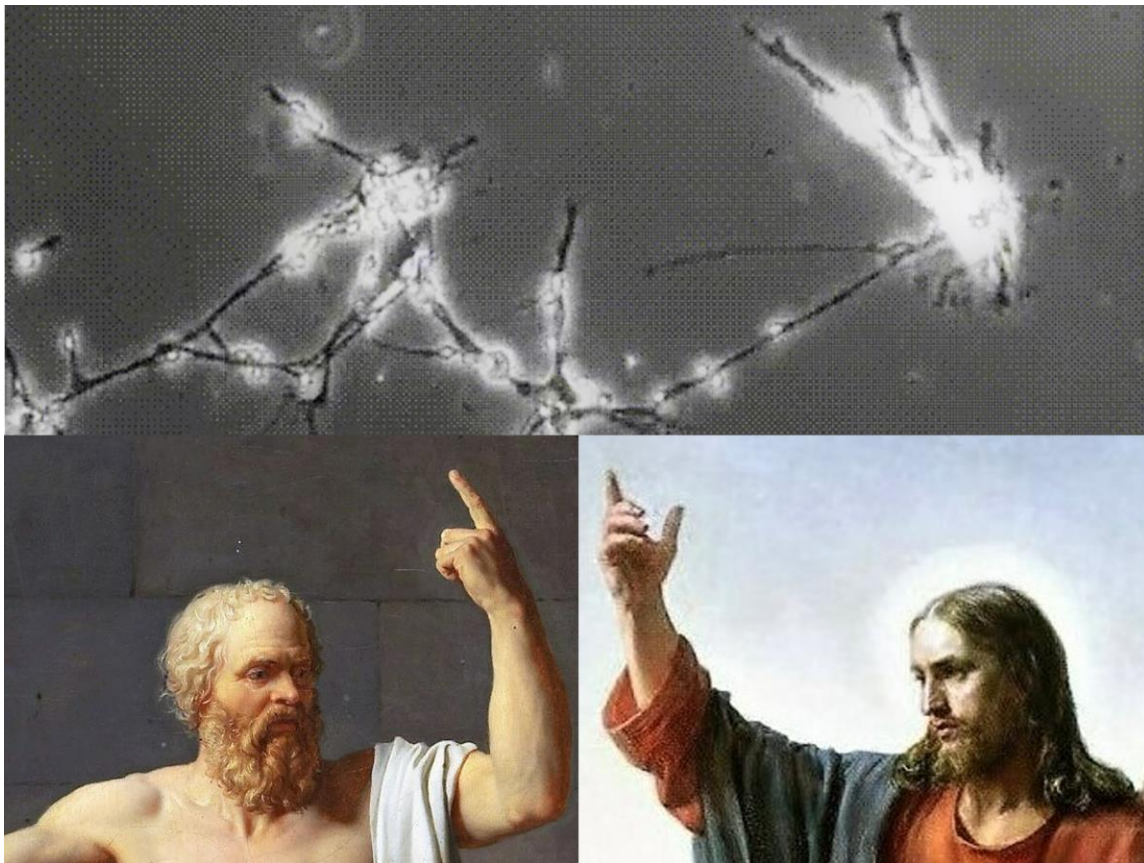


Epsilon Theory

Narrative and Metaverse, Pt. 1

The Living Word

January 17, 2022



Horatio: *O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!*

Hamlet: *And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.*

I've spent a thirty-five year professional career spanning academia, technology companies, and Wall Street studying "linguistic patterns in unstructured data" ... or what are more commonly known as narratives. After all these years of probing this invisible world of stories and memes and scripts and tropes and archetypes, I've come to an inescapable conclusion that excites me to no end and also scares the hell out of me.

NARRATIVES ARE AS REAL AND AS ALIVE AS YOU AND ME.

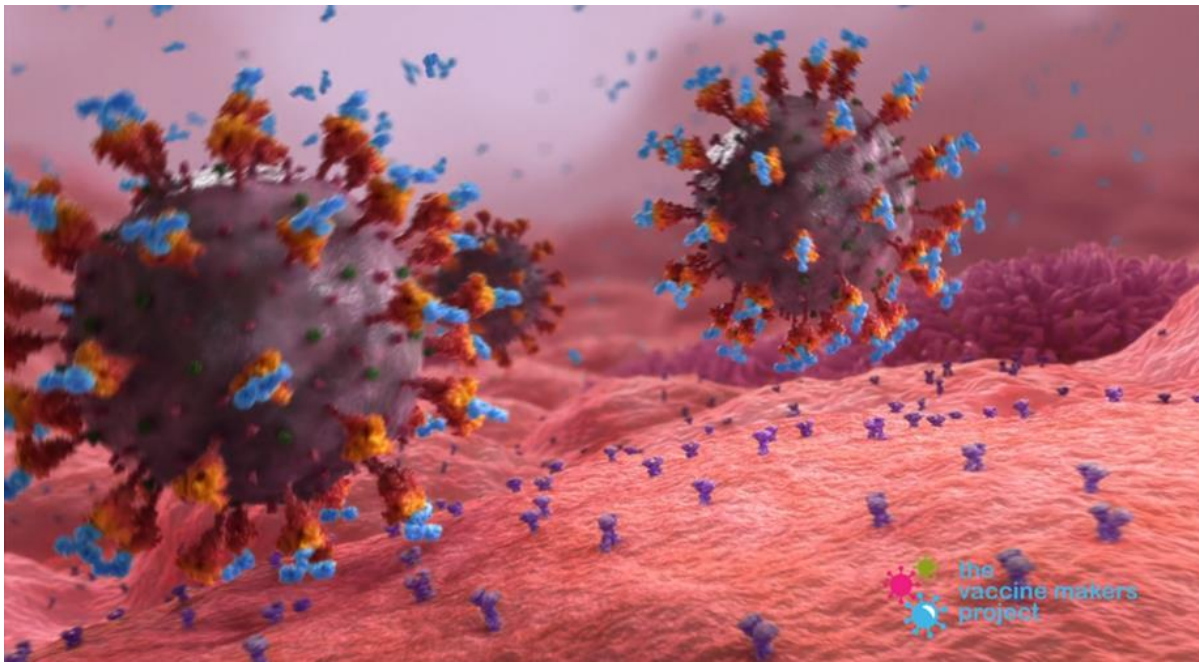
When I say that narratives are alive, I don't mean this as a metaphor. I truly believe that narratives are an alien lifeform in exactly the same way that viruses are an alien lifeform. Neither is directly observable or easily comprehensible within the human-scale **macroverse** – the familiar world of Newtonian physics and multicellular DNA-based organisms where all us humans, past, present and future, live out our lives. But there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in the macroverse.

Both narratives and viruses have a lifecycle of *purpose* and *intention* – they are born, they grow, they respond to their environment, they reproduce and they die – all in service to preserving the existence of their kind. Both can be organized and understood through the same principles of species taxonomy as any organism in the macroverse, and both are subject at the species level to the same forces of natural selection as any species in the macroverse. We can't see them. We can't hear them. We can't feel them. They are not even made of the same building blocks as you and me. But I tell you that both narratives and viruses are alive, each a dominant lifeform within its respective world.

The world of viruses is the **microverse**, an invisible and completely alien world of infinitesimal scale.

A note on the use of the word 'alien' here, which is the most ruined word in the English language. We've turned the word into a joke, into the common usage for little green men or anthropomorphic 'alien races' that are non-human mostly by declaration, but in truth are *intensely human* and *perfectly familiar* to us in intentionality and behavior. The only science fiction writer today who gets close to preserving the true meaning of the word – and I am convinced it's because he doesn't write in English – is Liu Cixin.

When I use the word 'alien', I mean it in its true sense. I mean it as something that is profoundly non-comprehensible on its own terms, that is – like the microverse – only comprehensible through the use of human-scaled and macroverse-familiar objects like bouncy balls and suction cups and bright colors and hunter/prey animations.



How Covid-19 mRNA Vaccines Work

No one believed in the microverse 200 years ago. Germ theory wasn't even a thing. We had no words for a 'virus', and everyone in the world would have looked at you funny if you had said that these infinitesimally small packages of nucleic acid were real and alive. But today we all believe in germ theory. Today we all believe that viruses are real and alive, albeit in a truly alien way and within a truly alien world that no human has ever directly felt, heard, smelled, tasted or seen.

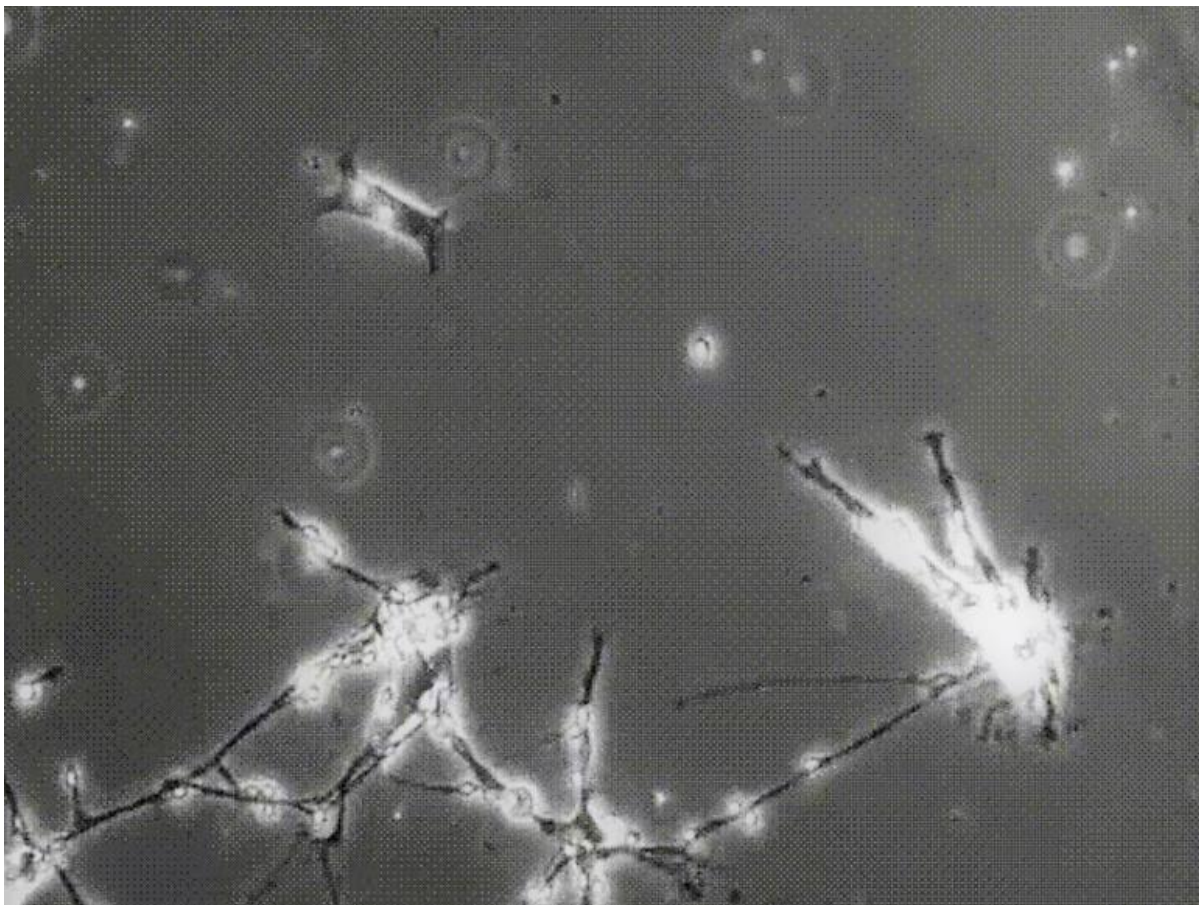
I'm asking you to give the same consideration to narratives. I'm asking you to allow for the possibility that there is *another* alien world besides the microverse, an alien world where narratives are born, grow, respond to their environment, reproduce and die. Where narratives are real and alive, albeit in a truly alien way and within a truly alien world that no human has ever directly felt, heard, smelled, tasted or seen.

THE ALIEN WORLD OF NARRATIVES IS THE **METaverse** — A MENTAL WORLD OF SYMBOLS AND IMAGES (UNSTRUCTURED DATA) THAT ARE IMBUED WITH MEANING BY HUMANS THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF COHERENT LINGUISTIC STRUCTURES (GRAMMAR) TO CREATE PATTERNS OF COMMUNICATION (LANGUAGE) THAT CAN TELL A STORY THAT WILL SHAPE OUR THOUGHTS (NARRATIVE).

Now I know what you're thinking, because it's the same thing that I thought for thirty years. You're thinking that because the metaverse only exists inside our heads as a mental construct, it isn't real like you and I are real, and things inside the metaverse aren't alive like you and I are alive.

And that somehow this matters.

But consider the possibility that the metaverse does indeed exist in the physical universe, that it is in fact constructed out of ordinary matter. What if I told you that the metaverse finds physical expression through the network structure of human neurons, that specific linguistic constructions physically wire our brains into specific patterns of neurons and neurotransmitters at the cellular level, creating not just a physical manifestation of memory, but a physical manifestation of grammar and narrative?



[Time lapse microscopy of neurons forming cluster. 20x magnification onto approx. 3/4 inch chip – maybe 200x mag onto screen. 15 min between images shown at 32fps = 8 hours per second.](#)

The metaverse is not some mental ghost in the machine of the human brain. No, it is a physical expression of the way that the human brain wires itself at the cellular level in response to linguistic stimulus, creating a persistent alien world – alien in the truest sense of

the word – of grammatical and narrative entities that are born, grow, adapt, reproduce and die within an electric, neurochemical ocean of quadrillions of self-organized neurons across billions of human brains. The metaverse is the world of human thought, composed of unstructured data instantiated across neural clusters and patterned by linguistic grammars. The metaverse isn't just as real and as alive as you and me, the metaverse is literally what makes you and me ... you and me.

Nothing I am saying is new. Everything I am saying has already been said for literally thousands of years, across every human civilization, by poets and philosophers and prophets who taught of an ideated world of human-motivating and society-creating words and images possessed of – not just as much power and reality as our human-scaled meat-world – but *more* power and reality. This is transcendentalism, the recognition that there is another world beyond the mundane macroverse, and it is the foundation of every great religion and faith in human history.

What's new, for me at least, and I suspect most of you, is that I used to think that these teachings were delivered as metaphor. Today I think they were delivered as fact.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

-- John 1:1

The metaverse is the *logos*. The metaverse is the Word. The metaverse is found in the Rhetoric of Aristotle, the Confessions of Augustine, and the Gospel of John. The metaverse is found in every mystical expression of faith. The metaverse is found in every practice of mindfulness and meditation that accesses an ideated world behind, above, below and through the material world.

The metaverse is the transcendental schemata of Kant. The metaverse is the *Geist* of Hegel. The metaverse is the propositional logic of Wittgenstein. The metaverse is the ontological relativity of Quine. The metaverse is the collective unconscious of Jung. The metaverse is what Gaiman explores through fiction, what Harari explores through history, and what Campbell explores through comparative literature.

And then there's this.



Is the Mark Zuckerberg metaverse of virtual reality and avatars and Oculus glasses part of the metaverse I'm talking about? Sure. It's the merest, most inconsequential part, but sure. It's the cringe neighborhood of the metaverse. It's the *Metaverse!*™.

Honestly, I think Zuckerberg's android vaudeville routine is an intentional effort at misdirection, a calculated effort to convince the world that the metaverse is this little thing over here, a juiced-up version of *Second Life* or a cosplay version of *Ready Player One*, even as Facebook goes after the metaverse's true golden egg: controlling the grammar of narrative and changing the way we *think*.

Imagine if we changed our narrative grammar – and so changed the way we *think* – about the human relationship with God. Actually, you don't have to imagine that, you can read the history of the Reformation or the Enlightenment or a dozen other times in history when exactly that happened.

Imagine if we changed our narrative grammar – and so changed the way we *think* – about the human relationship with the State. Actually, you don't have to imagine that, you can read the history of the American Revolution or the Russian Revolution or the Chinese Revolution or a dozen other times in history when exactly that happened.

Mark Zuckerberg knows that the biggest changes in human history are not from scientific discoveries. He knows that the biggest changes in human history are from changes in how we *think*.

Ideas are more difficult to kill than people, but they can be killed, in the end.

-- Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*

Slavery used to be a thing. Settling your differences through dueling used to be a thing. The divine right of kings used to be a thing. The gold standard used to be a thing. Odin used to be a thing. Littering was not a thing. Owning pets was not a thing. Privacy was not a thing. Aesthetics separate from function was not a thing. Consent of the governed was not a thing. In big ways and small ways and in-between ways, the way we think about our life today is incredibly alien (in the true sense of the word!) to the way that our ancestors thought about their lives. Not just different. Alien.

How do you rule the world?

By killing the ideas that do not serve your ruling interests, and by giving birth to the ones that do.

And yes, Mark Zuckerberg totally gets this.

Facebook is one of the most prominent manipulators of the metaverse, one of the most powerful members of what I call the Nudging State and the Nudging Oligarchy. They are part and parcel of the intentional and pervasive effort to alter our narrative grammars – and so change the way we *think* – about all of the things that you hold most precious in the world. Your family. Your health. Your job. Your home. Your country. Your wealth. Your autonomy.

This is the place in an Epsilon Theory note where I'd typically write: *If you don't see that changes in the way we think about these most important things are taking place right now, today, you're just not paying attention.*

Except this isn't correct. Everyone reading this note IS paying attention. Everyone reading this note is keenly aware of the power of narrative to change the way we think, and everyone reading this note is painfully aware that this is happening in real-time.

But all the same, not one person in a million sees the metaverse as *real*.

It's just the water in which we swim.

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says "Morning, boys. How's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes "What the hell is water?"

-- David Foster Wallace (2005)

And why is that? Why is it so difficult to see the water of the metaverse?

Why is it so difficult to see the ideated world and Word of every religion, every faith, every philosophy, every mythology, every transcendental practice as rooted in fact rather than metaphor?

Why is it so difficult to see that there is an actual, physical world of thought where narratives live, and that these narratives can be diminished or enhanced by the metaverse-aware, just as viruses can be diminished or enhanced by the microverse-aware? I mean, everyone talks about the evil that comes from “gain-of-function research” on viruses in the microverse. And for good reason.

But no one uses the language of “gain-of-function research” in any conversation about Facebook and Twitter and Google and Republican PACs and Democratic PACs, even though that’s exactly what they’re doing — gain-of-function research on narrative lifeforms in the metaverse!

Why do we “see” the microverse so clearly, and yet find the metaverse as invisible as water?

I think it’s because we have not yet built the grammar and the vocabulary to describe the metaverse and its narrative lifeforms.

WE DO NOT YET HAVE THE WORDS TO DESCRIBE THE LIVING WORLD OF WORDS.

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.
-- Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractacus Logico-Philosophicus*

And that’s why Epsilon Theory exists. This is my life’s work, to explore the metaverse and its alien world of grammar and narrative, to develop the words that allow us to speak of it.

Words like *Common Knowledge*.

Words like *Gell-Mann Amnesia*.

Words like *Fiat News*.

Words like **Nudging State**.

Because we must not be silent about the living metaverse – the true metaverse, not Big Tech’s *Metaverse!*™ – any longer.

It's never been more important for us to see the metaverse for the real thing that it is, because the efforts by powerful interests to control us through the metaverse have never been stronger. The last 15 years have seen exponential growth in metaverse-control efforts, driven by a similar or greater growth rate in metaverse-expanding technologies.

Today we live in a Fiat World, where virtually everything of social importance in the material world exists by proclamation. Our money is fiat. Our news is fiat. We are told we must vote for ridiculous candidates to be a good Republican or a good Democrat, we are told that we must buy ridiculous securities to be a good investor, and we are told we must borrow ridiculous sums to have a good life. We are told that a life spent in service to a corporation and in obedience to a political party is natural and right. We are told that extreme inequalities in wealth, opportunity and justice are normal.

Today we live in a world where it is impossible to turn the metaverse *off*.

The voice came from an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror. The instrument (the telescreen, it was called) could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting it off completely.

The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it; moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard. There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment.

-- George Orwell, 1984

It's not just the development of social media like Twitter and Facebook and YouTube and TikTok and Instagram and all the rest. It's also the development of 24-hour "news" channels like CNBC and Bloomberg and Fox Business News. It's also the development of 24-hour "news" publications like the *Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Most of all it's the development of handheld delivery devices for all of these "content platforms", such that most of us can't go for more than a few minutes without a compulsive urge to check our devices for new dopamine hits messages of some sort.

The result of these gain-of-function efforts on narrative viruses is simply this: *we are broken*.

I say that clinically. Dispassionately. I say that as a game-theoretic observation, in the sense of a sub-optimal equilibrium in a game of Stag Hunt, where every rational decision is to defect from mutually advantageous actions and norm-following. I say that as a political science observation, in the sense that with bimodal policy preference distributions across every issue area, political institutions built for centrist, single-peaked preference distributions – like first-

past-the-post voting structures, separation of Executive and Legislature, even the Constitution itself – inevitably wither and die.

I also say that as a human being.

Our families and our friendships have been broken on the wheels of Trump narratives and Covid narratives, even as our political parties and economic corporations have become stronger than ever.

This is not an accident.

But I tell you there is a way out. A way through. A way up. A way to *think differently* about our lives so that we can make our way to the optimal equilibrium of the Stag Hunt, so that institutions of coordination and facilitated cooperation can actually work again.

Once you start to see narratives as virus-like organisms alive in an invisible world of neural clusters spread across billions of human brains, organisms that – like viruses – can be cultured and grown, organisms that – like viruses – can be inoculated against ... *once you have the words to describe and visualize that living world of words* ... everything changes.

How do you cause people to believe in an imagined order such as Christianity, democracy or capitalism? First, you never admit that the order is imagined.

-- Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*

Everything changes when you see that the order is imagined, that the Great and Terrible Oz is just a man behind a curtain.

Everything changes when you see how others are creating thoughts for you to think and crowding out thoughts for you not to think.

Everything changes when you take agency over the narratives you culture and the narratives you inoculate yourself against.

Because the goal here is not to eliminate narratives from our lives. The goal is not to distance ourselves from the metaverse. Yes, the metaverse contains the worst of us, the sociopathic narratives that *physically* lodge themselves into our brains and **transform us into metaphysical rhinoceroses**, but it *also* contains the best of us. The metaverse is inextricable from a life well lived.

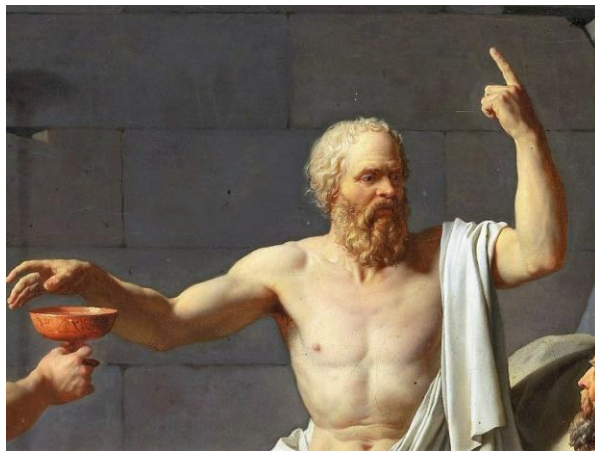
People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances with our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.

-- Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*

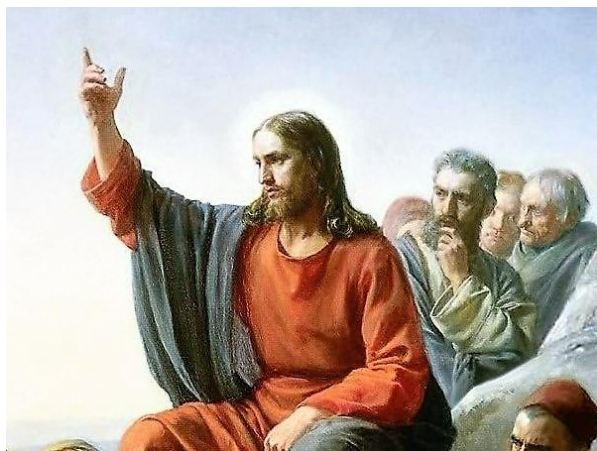
Our goal should be to embrace the metaverse from a position of agency and harmony with our physical lives. Our goal should be to identify the *positive* narratives of thousands of years of accumulated human wisdom and reject the *negative* narratives of a few decades of the Nudging State and the Nudging Oligarchy,

My advice? Start here.

Because Socrates and Jesus are the OG metaverse meme-lords.



KNOW THYSELF



LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF

I think these are the two most powerful and positive narratives in all of human civilization: ***self-knowledge*** and ***empathy***. They're more than just "narratives", a word that is way too neutral and placid for the way these messages fire our neurons. No, these are *songs*.

THE SONG OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE IS THE SONG OF THE SELF.

It is the song of what makes you ... you. It is the song of identity and autonomy, freedom and duty, discovery and truth-seeking. It is the song of clear eyes.

THE SONG OF EMPATHY IS THE SONG OF THE SOUL.

It is the song of what makes us ... us. It is the song of connection and belonging, of an anti-entropic energy that laughs at time and space, that – like all powerful narratives – is never spent in the telling, but *grows*. It is the song of full hearts.

Together, these are the songs of living a life worthy of the word and the Word.

*I sing the body electric,
The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them,
They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,
And discurrup them, and charge them full with the charge of the soul.*



Walt Whitman, poet laureate of the metaverse

What makes the songs of Socrates and Jesus so powerful? It's their grammar.

- These are not songs organized around principles of the political or the group. These songs are addressed to YOU as an autonomous human being who is *inherently capable* of introspection and love.
- These are not songs in a passive voice. These are songs of action, with imperative verbs at their core. Nor are they easy songs to play. They require work. They require practice. They require sacrifice.
- These are not songs of exclusion. There is no Other in these songs. They call upon a power that is inside ALL of us, ALL of the time. These are songs sung in the key of *AND* and *ALL*.

The songs of Socrates and Jesus are songs of profound autonomy and independence. They do not require the assistance or permission or mediation of the State. They utterly reject the primacy of the State. They locate the power of humanity within each of us, equally and inviolably, as part of our nature ... not as something to be doled out from a central pot.

That's what makes these songs so dangerous.

That's why the State put both Socrates and Jesus to death.

Today, the Nudging State doesn't put you to death for singing a dangerous song. Please. So messy. So counterproductive. No, the Nudging State has *much* more powerful weapons than mere death. Today they make you ridiculous. Today they cancel you. Today they drown you out with songs of their own.

They are a formidable foe.

But we are up to the fight.

This is the battle of our lives. This is *always* the battle of *all* human lives. The past, present and future of human freedom is not determined in the macroverse but in the metaverse, and it is here where we must make our stand. First we will write the words to see the metaverse. Then we will write the songs to change it.

Clear eyes. Full hearts. Can't lose.

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